

**WHERE'S ALBANIA? STAKING OUT THE POLITICS OF THE
REAL AND REALITY IN DOCUMENTARY CINEMA**

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Table of Contents

<i>Abstract</i>	ii
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	iii
Introduction: Situating Reality in the Postmodern Age.....	1
Chapter One: Realism. Its Proponents and Discontents.....	19
Chapter Two: Blurring Boundaries. The Hybridization of Documentary.....	41
Chapter Three: Welcome to Reality?.....	63
Chapter Four: Hoaxes, Fakes, and the Real Deal.....	92
Conclusion: New Directions in Documentary, Representation, and Reality.....	120
Filmography.....	128
Bibliography.....	131

Abstract

This thesis, entitled, “Where’s Albania? Staking Out the Politics of the Real and Reality in Documentary Cinema,” charts the documentary tradition’s path from its first incarnations, as filmed travelogue or ethnographic study, for example, right through to its development as a form acting as an objective observer, reflexive commentator, and finally, as a postmodern hybrid. This thesis begins by locating the documentary tradition’s origins in realism. Foregrounding documentary cinema as a realist style is important in that it is a contention that spans this entire study. After working through the numerous modes of documentary as outlined by Bill Nichols, I suggest the documentary is often best understood as a hybrid form drawing on numerous modes and conventions. This argument permits my study to make a shift into postmodern theory, wherein I examine postmodernism’s relationship to the documentary both as being influenced by it, but also as subsequently forcing documentary cinema to look back at itself and re-evaluate the claims it has made in the past, and how postmodernism has drawn these claims to the surface of debate. My thesis concludes with a study of the mockumentary. This analysis confirms the link between postmodernism and documentary, but perhaps more importantly, this analysis investigates postmodernism’s critique of the image and representation in general, two elements historically linked to documentary cinema’s success as “truth teller.”

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Introduction

In Jean Baudrillard's, *The Spirit of Terrorism* (2002), the French philosopher argues that on September 11th, 2001, the world's "strike" on events, a strike spanning the 90s, was officially "resolved." According to Baudrillard, "the strike is now over. Events are not on strike any more. With the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York, we might even be said to have before us the absolute event, the 'mother' of all events, the pure event uniting within itself all the events that have never taken place" (2002: 4). For Baudrillard, this "event" was inevitable, as "it is the world, the globe itself, which resists globalization" (2002: 12), and representing globalization is the leader of global economic and military supremacy, America. In a sense then, and as Baudrillard suggests, America itself committed suicide that fateful day, a grandiose attack on the very power it created for itself: "At a pinch we can say that they *did it*, but we *wished for it*" (2002: 5).

Baudrillard states in defence of his claim that "the fact that we have dreamt of this event, that everyone without exception has dreamt of it – because no one can avoid dreaming of the destruction of any power that has become hegemonic to this degree – is unacceptable to the Western moral conscience" (2002: 5). And for Baudrillard, everyone includes Americans as "allergy to any definitive order, to any definitive power, is – happily – universal, and the two towers of the World Trade Center were perfect embodiments, in their very twinness, of that definitive order" (2002: 6). Further, it is entirely possible that those who flew the two planes into the towers did not expect the total collapse of the building, satisfied with the decapitation of the two massive structures (2002: 7), and thus, and as Baudrillard states, "when the two towers collapsed, you had the impression that

they were responding to the suicide of the suicide-planes with their own suicides” (2002: 7). Contemplating the disaster, it becomes evident that the tragedy was not segregated within the parameters of the obvious, but rather, the collapse signified the ultimate clash of ideology: colonialism and capitalism directed by a hegemonic power, and the Other, those victimized by this hegemony. For Baudrillard, death and capitalism came to meet on 9/11 (2002: 17), resulting in capitalism committing suicide before our eyes, and the 3000 citizens in and around the towers, the victims of circumstance and spatial proximity.

Both cinema and television have, predominantly in the last five years, attempted to “capture reality,” to provide the viewer with an un-mediated event in order to witness reality unfold, unscripted and “real.” For example, *Survivor* in the summer of 2001 maintained a stranglehold on network television, providing CBS with a ratings boom each Wednesday evening. More recently, an onslaught of reality programming has come to dominate the television ratings with early reality shows like *COPS*, *Rescue 911* and *I Witness Video* giving way to shows like *Survivor*, *The Apprentice*, and celebrity reality shows such as *The Simple Life* and *Newlyweds*, all drawing impressive viewer ratings, season renewals the norm. Similarly, mainstream film also began blurring the boundaries between reality and fiction, perhaps starting with the immense and unforeseen success of *The Blair Witch Project* (Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez, 1999), a mockumentary, or fiction film spoofing a “real” documentary, that convinced many spectators they had witnessed reality captured live and unfiltered. Unlike Christopher Guest’s unofficial mockumentary trilogy, *Waiting for Guffman* (1997), *Best in Show* (2000), and *A Mighty Wind* (2003), films starring many of Guest’s repeat muses such as Eugene Levy and Parker Posey, *The Blair Witch Project* avoided using name actors, allowing the

anonymity of the actors to increase the reality effect shaping the spectator's response to the film. Moreover, documentaries such as Michael Moore's *Bowling for Columbine* (2002) and *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004) have resulted in a newfound interest in the documentary form, both films enjoying a success defined as, if nothing else, "popular," perhaps because both films purport to report on reality or maybe because they just "look real" and include "real" people, as opposed to actors playing a character: for example, George W. Bush in *Fahrenheit 9/11* and Charlton Heston in *Bowling for Columbine*. Spectators have fallen prey to, or been seduced by, the presumed integrity of the "real" image, the aesthetic of that which looks as though it is really happening or has happened, the footage we see thought to be "the real thing."

For example, while watching the news reports of the attacks on the World Trade Center buildings, I noticed that many people who witnessed the attacks, as well as many who watched footage of the attacks on television, offered comments such as "it was just like the movies," "I felt like I was watching a movie," or "I couldn't believe it was real, it looked like a scene from *Die Hard*." It became evident then, through interviews with people who either watched the attacks on the news or witnessed them in person, that what they had watched, or witnessed, was "unbelievable," the type of event more commonly associated with a Hollywood blockbuster than with something "real." These responses to 9/11, and the noting of the similarity between the footage of the attacks to Hollywood cinema, suggest that the distinction between the commonly understood "real" image (the news footage of the attacks) and the "fake" image (Hollywood fabrications of "disasters") has been blurred, the integrity or truthfulness of an image is no longer stable and without contestation.

The contestation of the image, in this case, visual evidence, resulted in the riots that gripped Los Angeles in 1992. The riots came as a result of the acquittal of a group of white police officers in the beating of Rodney King. Key evidence in this trial was the “home” video footage shot by civilian George Holliday who captured “live” the four LAPD officers badly beating King. So compelling was this capture of reality that prosecutor Terry White “would repeatedly urge the jurors to ‘believe’ the ‘most objective piece of evidence’ available to ‘your own eyes’” (Rabinowitz 1994: 209). Subsequently, the Society for Cinema Studies issued a statement following the verdict declaring, “the verdict to acquit four white Los Angeles Police Department officers contradicts powerful visual evidence – video evidence of excessive police brutality seen globally” (Hess et al 1992: 2). These reactions confirm that cinematic or television spectatorship has blurred the boundaries between fake and real but has also called into question the authenticity of the “real” image. For example, the questioning of compelling visual evidence, such as the Holliday video, begs a more nuanced examination of how and why the integrity of seemingly accurate and objective visual evidence is contested, a problem which surely did not confront Alan Resnais whose horrific and telling documentation of the Holocaust in *Night and Fog* (1955) seemingly, save for Holocaust deniers, confirmed the authenticity of the image as visual evidence.

Moreover, the acquittal of the police officers, despite compelling visual evidence suggestive of, if not proving, guilt, raises questions surrounding the role of the viewer, or witness. Antithetical to the questioning of the image in the LAPD case, the footage of 9/11 has been virtually accepted without question, the images gazed upon believed to be true and real. The jurors witnessed the beating yet acquitted the officers, just as the

witnesses to the WTC disaster saw the tragedy with “their own eyes,” yet had difficulty rationalizing the truth -- or reality -- of the disaster, the event more closely resembling the fictive scenes marking films like *Die Hard* (John McTiernan, 1988) or *Armageddon* (Michael Bay, 1998) than anything in the “real world.” Technology and special effects have muted the spectator’s ability to distinguish between the “real” world and the fabricated “real” world. It is telling that the 9/11 disaster followed the initial popularity enjoyed by reality television programs. For example, the reality the viewers of *Survivor* were voyeuristically gazing in on was now a lot closer to home. The horror of death though, was this “program’s” -- 9/11 -- premise, and the reactions of those witnessing the events either in person or via the news confirm this blurring of boundaries, the collapse between the tangible and the virtual, and the inability to distinguish between reality and fiction, the staged and the un-staged.

Introducing Documentary:

Whether it is the violent footage captured by Halliday, the footage of the riots after the officers’ acquittal, the clever cinematic trickery of *The Blair Witch Project* or the ubiquitous television footage of the 9/11 tragedy, what is now evident is the instability of the image within a media-saturated society. Michael Renov has written on the believability and authenticity of images and asserts that although it was once assumed that images “spoke for themselves,” that is no longer the case (1993: 8). More specifically, my study uses Renov’s idea as an introductory marker, a starting point from which a number of independent, yet mutually aligned, studies work to determine a greater understanding of, firstly, how the instability of the image has come to challenge film studies’ cognizance of documentary cinema and the “believability” of the “reality”

documentary cinema often purports to capture. Secondly, this challenge in turn has compelled film scholars to revisit documentaries of the past in order to review or rework previously accepted arguments as well as examine closely more contemporary non-fiction films, documentaries employing new strategies, as well as mockumentaries, fake documentaries often tricking viewers into accepting the events they watch as true. This last cinematic device, a cinema ruse perhaps, compels scholars to again look to the past, to re-examine the possible strategies or reflexivity marking earlier films, for example, Luis Buñuel's surrealist documentary, *Las Hurdes (Land Without Bread)* (1932).

Central to an unpacking of documentary film is an examination of numerous elements that often define documentary, including filmmaker objectivity/subjectivity, “reality” and the “real,” and the responsibility and role of the spectator. For example, theorizing on filmmaker objectivity/subjectivity enables a multifarious investigation of a film's reality, an inquiry into how a film's reality is captured, mediated, manipulated, distorted, and finally (re)presented to us, the spectators. Central to this study is John Grierson, the Scottish sociologist first to refer to a film as a “documentary,” namely, Robert Flaherty's *Moana* (1925), and the one to define documentary cinema as the “creative treatment of actuality,” perhaps in reference to the Lumière Brothers, who in 1895 made the first films, short vignettes known as “actualities” (Giannetti and Leach 2001: 310).

Chapter One of this thesis provides a detailed examination of cinema realism. Realism is important to a study analyzing cinema and reality due simply to “film's extraordinary power to imitate reality” (Lapsley and Westlake 1988: 156). Realist film, in eschewing what were referred to as “entertainment movies,” instead strove to form a

relationship with reality (Williams 2000: 32), offering a seemingly objective rendering of an event or circumstance, going so far as to use only non-professional actors, natural lighting and “real” on-location settings such as city parks, bus or train stations, or busy city streets. Moreover, and importantly, Chapter One also makes clear and examines, the link between expository and ethnographic modes of documentary and realism, a connection vital in investigating films such as, for example, Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North* (1922), a film central to Chapter One’s analysis of cinema realism, or Robert Gardner’s *Dead Birds* (1963).

Following the expository and ethnographic modes chronologically, cinéma vérité demonstrates how realism’s conventions, namely the rendering of the appearance of reality, are employed in an effort to “capture reality” not merely to naturalize a recreated aesthetic doubling for reality. As explained in Chapter Two, cinéma vérité seeks to film reality as it occurred, free from filmmaker intervention or explicit subjectivity, and devoid of recreations or staged events. Following my investigation of cinéma vérité, an analysis that also distinguishes between cinéma vérité and direct cinema, Chapter Three introduces the mockumentary. This chapter examines how the mockumentary works to expose the limitations of cinéma vérité, much like cinéma vérité had undermined realism before it. Also referred to as pseudo-documentary (Jacobs 2000) or mock-documentary (Roscoe and Hight 2001), the mockumentary is in debt to at least two film traditions -- narrative and documentary -- and takes the shape, content and formal components of traditional documentary but is scripted and acted in the manner of a fictional film (Jacobs 2000:1).

Chapter Three also provides a case study in which *Don't Look Back* (D.A. Pennebaker, 1967) and *Bob Roberts* (Tim Robbins, 1992) are set up in a binary contestation, the latter a mockumentary deriving much of its inspiration from the former, a film often considered a hallmark of cinéma vérité. Chapter Four remains focused on the mockumentary, examining how the sub-genre restricts itself to fictional texts while appropriating various documentary codes and conventions (Roscoe and Hight 2001: 2), and exploiting the seductive nature of the documentary aesthetic.

Further, I also scrutinize the ideological and political ramifications surrounding the capturing of reality and rearticulate the politics surrounding realism and the various modes of documentary cinema and each style's various claims of recreating, representing or capturing reality. The assertion that documentary cinema, in claiming to capture reality, is in fact a political practice is fundamentally supported by Jean-Louis Comolli and Jean Narboni's claim that "*every film is political*, inasmuch as it is determined by the ideology which produces it (or within which it is produced, which stems from the same thing)" (1976: 24-25). The politics of reality and realism is examined by Lapsely and Westlake who argue that "once an epistemic mode makes a 'truth' claim it will find such a claim being considered critically, and as Brecht recognized, realism's representations of said 'truths' transforms 'realism' into a 'major political, philosophical and practical issue'" (1988: 156). Truth, however, must also be disengaged from reality or the real, for the concepts, while often used interchangeably, are, as Jacques Derrida argues, not the same. For example, and as Michael Renov argues, "Derrida for his part, disengages 'truth' from 'reality': 'What is neither true nor false is reality'" (1993: 7). Derrida's distinguishing between truth and reality has proved indispensable to this study and his

assertion that “what is neither true nor false is reality...reality simply is” (quoted in Renov 1993: 7) has acted as the philosophical foundation governing this study.

Other films considered in this study include *Primary* (Robert Drew, 1960) and *Gimme Shelter* (Albert and David Maysles and Charlotte Zwerin, 1970) in Chapter Two, and a small group of films in Chapter Four, including *Forgotten Silver* (Peter Jackson, 1992), *Wag the Dog* (Barry Levinson, 1997), and *Drop Dead Gorgeous* (Michael Patrick Jann, 1999). These films have been selected for two reasons: firstly, each film directly applies to a specific section of my study, and secondly, each film retains a political or ideological context that I am able to scrutinize in relation to its documentary form and aesthetic. For example, *Nanook of the North* is the first film analyzed closely as it “marks a moment before the distinction between documentary and fiction was set” (Rothman 1998: 24). *Gimme Shelter* not only captures a stabbing death at the infamous 1969 Rolling Stones concert at Altamont, California, on camera, but also includes a sequence of the band watching the footage of the murder backstage on video, a scene not only self-reflexive in practice, but more importantly one capturing the band’s unrehearsed, real response to the footage, a response in stark contrast to a pre-prepared statement delivered to the media. *Don’t Look Back* and *Primary* are canonical films of the cinéma vérité movement and thus their inclusion is essential here. Moreover, *Don’t Look Back* provides at least some of the inspiration for Tim Robbins’ clever satire, *Bob Roberts*. A mockumentary, *Bob Roberts* parodies many of the scenes in *Don’t Look Back*, and the film’s “star,” Bob Dylan, a rebellious, left-wing 60s folkie, is replaced by Bob Roberts, the title character, and a right-wing politician playing folk music while on the campaign trail as a “crypto-fascist,” Pennsylvania senatorial candidate. *Wag the Dog*

is a political satire that chronicles a sex scandal involving an unnamed U.S. President and the cover-up created to divert attention away from the scandal and onto a fake, staged war directed by a Hollywood producer. Both a biting examination of politics and the way in which alternative realities are produced to deflect negative attention, *Wag the Dog* manages to examine the majority of the issues pertinent to my study.

Revealing the persuasive influence of the documentary form, the mockumentary satirizes cinéma vérité conventions, and just as *Bob Roberts* satirizes *Don't Look Back*, *This is Spinal Tap* (1984) sends up or parodies rock-documentaries, or “rockumentaries,” such as *Gimme Shelter* and *Woodstock* (1970), *Spinal Tap* director, Rob Reiner going so far as to hire cinematographer Peter Smokler, the director of photography on *Gimme Shelter*. Employing the aesthetic devices normalized by cinéma-vérité as those whose presence signifies reality, such as a hand-held camera or shaky and occasionally disorienting camera work, the mockumentary works to disclose the spectator’s inability to distinguish between fiction and non-fiction. Finally, *Wag the Dog* is also examined in order to further analyze the constructed nature of reality as exemplified by *The Blair Witch Project*, but also to aid in unpacking the direct political agenda of *Bob Roberts*, which serves to critique the constructed, artificial reality often found within the political arena.

Film theorists drawn on in my study include André Bazin, Jean-Louis Comolli, Jean Narboni, and Colin MacCabe, all of whom contribute significantly to Chapter One’s investigation into cinema realism. Chapters Two and Three employ the work of documentary theorists David Macdougall, Bill Nichols, Carl Plantinga, and Michael Renov. Nichols, in particular, has proven indispensable to this study in not only sparking

my initial interest in documentary cinema, but also in providing the historical documentary schema or framework that acts as the jumping-off point for my examination into documentary cinema as a hybrid form often *blurring the boundaries* between convention and experimentation, and a form that ultimately provides the inspiration for its postmodern counterpart, the mockumentary.

Chapter Four expands on Chapter Three's examination of mockumentary and endeavours to bracket an analysis of documentary "truth," mockumentary, and concepts such as parody, satire, irony and pastiche, around the work of postmodern theorists such as the aforementioned Baudrillard and Derrida, as well as Frederic Jameson, Jean-François Lyotard and Slavoj Žižek, who all reflect the interdisciplinary nature of the study. Moreover, Jacques Lacan, who provides a working definition of the "real," as well as Baudrillard, Žižek, and Catherine Belsey, all help in distinguishing "the real" from "reality," a distinction vital in examining documentary cinema.

In speaking of Bazin, Robert Bresson once remarked, "he had a curious way of taking off from what was false to arrive ultimately at what was true" (quoted in Bazin 1967: 4). Bazin's writing, however, has not been immune to criticism, and according to Hugh Gray, translator of Bazin's *What is Cinema?*, Bazin often found himself in disagreement with scholars challenging his claims. Jean Mitry, for example, challenged Bazin's position on the image and maintained that despite the camera's ability to register or record a "reality," this "reality" does not signal an objective truth (cited in Bazin 1967: 6), but leaves open to analysis, the notion of subjective truth. Instead, writes Hugh Gray, Mitry argued that "what the camera reveals is not the reality in itself, but a new appearance correlated to the world of things – what indeed one may call a camera-

perception which, irrespective of the will of the cameraman, produces a certain 'segregation of space,' that is to say, a restructuring of the real so that it can no longer be considered 'objective and immediate'" (1967: 6). Whereas Bazin equates the photograph with objectivity, Mitry, in recognizing the role of the photographer in framing and controlling the object and camera, maintains the captured image remains a subjective one. As a result of its perceived "telling of the truth" and ability to represent reality, Bazin's realism invites critique.

As noted in *Sight and Sound*,

at the heart of Bazin's strictures on cinematic realism lies the conviction that the movie camera, by the simple act of photographing the world, testifies to the miracle of God's creation...Throughout the ages, Bazin argues, mankind has dreamed of being able to see the surface of the world faithfully copied in art ('The Ontology of the Photographic Image', 1945)...For Bazin, a photograph holds an irrational power to persuade us of its truth because it results from a process of mechanical reproduction in which human agency plays no part. A painting, however lifelike, is still the obvious product of human craft and intention, whereas the photographic image is just what happens automatically when the light reflected from objects strikes a layer of sensitive chemical emulsion (Matthews 1999: 23).

I have included this passage because it captures the optimism of Bazin's desire to believe cinema and the photographic image can faithfully reproduce or document reality. In particular, Peter Matthews points out Bazin's differentiating between photography and painting and how each is able to document an image, and while Bazin notes the objectivity of the mechanical process of a camera's documentation, he pays less attention to the subjective properties present during the same documentation such as bias, political motivation, or even the angle at which a photograph is taken. Matthews' position is borrowed from Comolli and Narboni, who, in their essay "Cinema/Ideology/Criticism,"

explain that “what the camera in fact registers is the vague, unformulated, untheorized, unthought-out world of the dominant ideology” (1976: 25).

In their essay, Comolli and Narboni examine the ideological implications linked to the captured and mediated image, and the essay provides a sound theoretical foundation to rely on as a stabilizing device, as well as numerous starting points from which to embark on further study. According to the pair, “because every film is part of the economic system it is also a part of the ideological system, for ‘cinema’ and ‘art’ are branches of ideology” (1976: 24). As noted earlier, for Comolli and Narboni, “*every film is political*” (1976: 25). For the pair, film is always political and thus bound by an ideological framework that determines its production. They conclude that, as a product within an economic system involving monies and labour, film represents the system allowing its production, capitalism (1976: 24). While this is true, it is too simplistic to criticize a film as being a product of capitalism solely on the ground that finances were required in its production. Moore’s *Fahrenheit 9/11*, for example, has proved to be both a commercial, or popular cinema, success as well as a festival circuit hit, having been a triumph at the 2004 Cannes International Film Festival. A film examining George W. Bush’s presidency, *Fahrenheit 9/11* proves an unrelenting indictment of, among other issues, capitalism in America. Of course a film relies on capitalism to a certain extent (it must be made after all), but, while capital and labour are necessary in the production of a film, it is not always *just* a cog within a profitable venture.

It is evident, then, that films are political, and thus I examine closely where and how politics can shape or influence documentary cinema. For example, does a film’s reliance on capital and labour immediately make the film political or does the treatment

of the material or the subjectivity of the director or producers politicize the film?

Moreover, and as noted in reference to Bazin and the camera operator, the role of the filmmaker is a significant area of study offering insight into the political function of film. If it is the film production itself determining a film's political nature, does this suggest the filmmaker, as Althusser, as well as Comolli and Narboni maintain, perhaps even unbeknownst to him/herself, is an accomplice of capitalism based solely on his/her role in its production? It is this last notion I will examine most closely here, the role of the filmmaker in the flushing out of a film's politics and the ideology shaping them. Further, I relate the politics and ideology of a film's production to a dissection of the cinema as a "reproducer of reality." The connection between the filmmaker, the production itself, and the "reality" produced is inextricably linked with politics. If, then, the production is inherently capitalist, and the filmmaker is (un)knowingly an agent of this system, is the filmmaker actively serving up a film whose political objective is predetermined, and, moreover, inundating viewers with a skewed image of reality influenced by those principally concerned with profit and capital gain?

Politics is not ideology, but like reality and the real, the two terms are often mistakenly used interchangeably. As the many competing definitions of ideology suggest, ideology itself is continually changing, in flux and being altered (Cormack 1995: 11). Moreover, ideology has often been defined in a variety of ways. For example, Louis Althusser distances his understanding of ideology from the ideology Marx conceived of in his early works, primarily Marx's notion of false consciousness (Sturken and Cartwright 2001: 51). For Marx, the ruling class naturalized its dominance to appear as

normal and natural to the proletariat; the ideology of the dominant class was made to seem like “common sense.”

Althusser, though, argued that the subject’s active collusion with the dominant class, its agreement to subordination, gives meaning to ideology (Storey 1993: 117). For Althusser then, “ideology interpellates individuals as subjects” (quoted in Hayward 1996: 182), subjects are effects of ideology, constructed by it, and as cinema is an ideological apparatus, film, by way of its seamlessess, becomes ideological as well, the subject, or spectator, unable to control how cinema produces the meaning the spectator consumes. As Susan Hayward suggests, “mainstream or dominant cinema, in Hollywood and elsewhere, puts ideology up on the screen” (Hayward 1996: 182). Ideology, in seeming natural or normal, allows one to theorize on the relationship between the subject or spectator and their relationship to, or negotiation with, that ideology.

Often, and mistakenly, used interchangeably with ideology, hegemony is a concept devised by Italian political theorist, Antonio Gramsci. According to Stuart Hall, Gramsci is “*par excellence*, the theorist of the political” (quoted in Landy 1994: 75). Explaining hegemony as the winning of the consent of the masses by the ruling class, Gramsci explains the way in which hegemony “make(s) sense of the institutions through which they govern those not in power by showing that they (as elites) are but representatives of those institutions that govern us all” (Hayward 1996: 172). Hegemony oversees realism’s naturalizing of dominant culture and its institutions. A counter-hegemonic reading of a text may inflict a crack in the system, but the persuasive nature of hegemony often “results in a victory for the culture’s dominant positions” (Turner 1993: 147). However, hegemony’s allowing of a challenge to the dominant position legitimizes the

importance of ideology in this context in that marginalized groups are at least afforded a voice in testing hegemonic norms.

To revisit an earlier suggestion, while noting that both China and Russia have long maintained state-sponsored film industries, it is troublesome to inextricably link the cinema with capitalism solely based on film's reliance on capital to sustain itself.

Considering this, is a non-political cinema, or one not only interested in capital gain, possible, or is cinema a by-product of an anti-politics, and thus inevitably political?

Although Comolli and Narboni's contend that it is not possible to remove politics from film, it is important to consider whether it would be positive if it were. Film acts as a public discourse, offering up for debate various considerations and assertions regarding the world surrounding us. As Comolli and Narboni argue, "the majority of films in all categories are the ingrained instruments of the ideology which produces them. Whether the film is 'commercial' or 'ambitious', 'modern' or 'traditional', whether it is the type that gets shown in art houses, or in smart cinemas, whether it belongs to the 'old' cinema or the 'young' cinema, it is most likely to be a re-hash of the same old ideology" (1976: 25).

The "same old ideology" is of course the dominant one, but the pair manage too account for a challenge to this ideology and argue that although the content of a film may not be explicitly political, through a spectator's "reading against the grain," or rejection of, and re-reading of a film's dominant message, the same content is able to become political through criticism and critique (1976: 26). The concept of "reading against the grain" is one in debt to Stuart Hall's highly influential Encoding/Decoding model.

Examining audience responses to texts and the construction of those texts themselves,

Hall's model is of particular relevance here in that, according to the model, viewers are not only passive spectators who blindly consume and endorse texts, but often savvy spectators who allow their own perspectives and ideology to direct their spectatorship. That is, whereas a traditional expository or "Voice of God" documentary may present a specific point or bias, viewers, according to Hall's model, can respond to that text in one of three ways: from a preferred, negotiated or oppositional position. For example, a preferred reading of the text signifies a viewer who is complicit with, or agrees with, the text's perspective. A negotiated position signals a viewer who may endorse some points made by the text, but question or reject others. Finally, an oppositional reading one in which a viewer rejects outright, a text's position and bias (Hall 1980: 130-36). As is illustrated throughout this study, the role of the spectator plays an intrinsic role in any study of documentary cinema, and whereas Althusser saw viewers as victimized by film texts, Hall, as well as the British School of Cultural Studies, recognized in spectators an active viewing that permitted at least an engagement and negotiation with a text, and not only a victimization at the hands of it.

It is evident that documentary cinema has not found itself paralyzed by stagnation or complacency, and it is not a rigid, unchanging form, but a dynamic mode continually in flux. Whether the challenges to its claims of objectivity, truth or reality have been internal (the reflexive mode) or external (mockumentary), documentary cinema finds itself changing and adapting as both practitioners and critics demand it do so. Moreover, and as Hall suggests, and this study concurs, viewers are not passive and/or blind in their spectatorship, but often engaged viewers who think critical about a documentary text, regardless of the mode employed by that text. Finally, and as I have outlined,

documentary cinema plays a crucial role both politically and ideologically, and as a form of social discourse or commentary, the documentary is an important form of communication, criticism and education within society.

Chapter One

Realism: Its Proponents and Discontents.

This chapter examines realism, its limitations, and its proponents' celebration of its ability to compellingly recreate a facsimile of the past through a (re)construction of a historical moment. For advocates such as André Bazin and Siegfried Kracauer, realist film was always objective in that its means of image documentation was realized through the mechanical reproduction capabilities of a camera. As Bazin states, "the objective nature of photography confers on it a quality of credibility absent from all other picturemaking...Photography enjoys a certain advantage in virtue of this transference of reality from the thing to its production" (1967: 13). Bazin's thoughts on photography recall the mid-nineteenth century when developments in photography were challenged by a stylistic shift in painting. As photography developed so changed painting, and whereas photography focused on the mimetic, painting's focus became more reflexive, now examining its own production or formulation. Realist painting was replaced by Impressionism, a movement led by Renoir and Monet that stressed the surface of the painting, the work no longer a window on reality but a personal response to it, marked by chalky light, soft colours and elaborate brush strokes (Johnson 2003: 598). It was a notable departure from the realist style that predated it.

Almost simultaneously, photographers began theorizing on the possibility of introducing motion and movement into the photographic image. Whereas photography was able to harness only a moment of reality through automatization, film was now able to capture a sequence of moments, an event (Cook 1981: 14-15). This development is evidenced by the Lumière brothers' actualities. Moving pictures first shown in Paris in

1895, these actualities were filmed recordings of real events as they actually occurred, and included the Lumière brothers' *Workers Leaving the Factory* and *Arrival of a Train at La Ciotât Station* (1895).

In order to unpack the varied and competing theories and arguments surrounding realism, this chapter is divided into two sections. A theoretical section outlining the discordant ideas on realism is followed by a shorter, second section wherein realism is theorized as a hybrid style, mixing documentary modes, including expository, ethnographic and poetic, with conventions, for example, narrativity, typically linked to fiction. Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* is argued to belong to this hybrid school, which brings out, and allows me to work through, the debate about documentary realism, reality and cinematic objectivity. A dialectical argument identifies the central tenets of the competing theoretical frameworks surrounding realism, and confirms both documentary and fiction film's relationship with realism. Corroborating realism's link to both modes ostensibly, and perhaps uncomfortably, positions realism between assumed binary opposites, the conventionally understood "reality" of documentary cinema and the "make believe" of fiction film.

As raised in this study's introduction, both classical Hollywood and realist cinema's seamless, their naturalization or masking of their own technical production (and their production of meaning), delineates cinema as an ideological apparatus.

According to Robert Stam, Althusser saw the dominant style of realism as inevitably expressing "only the ideology implicit in conventional bourgeois notions of reality" (2000: 140). Further, Jane Gaines remarks that any reality claim made by cinema "is a highly ideological move to begin with" (1999: 2). Ideology acts as the foundation of this

examination of realism with disparate arguments put forth by realism's advocates, such as John Grierson, Bazin and Kracauer, its critics like Andrew Tudor and Colin MacCabe, as well as Lapsley and Westlake, who consider both realism's limits and possibilities.

Situating Realism:

Although Bazin recognized Flaherty and Stroheim as realist filmmakers working before the 1930s, the cinematic realist tradition gained prominence in France in the 1930s in concert with the rise and fall of the Popular Front, a movement joining left-wing political parties (Cook 1981: 378). Influenced by both the nineteenth-century realist literary movement and a shift in France's political climate, French poetic realism, like Italian neo-realism, focused on the plight of the working class. While not as famous or revered as the Italian neo-realist movement it predated, French poetic realism remains a key site of study in realist cinema.

The French school differed aesthetically from neo-realism. For example, whereas canonical neo-realist films such as *La Terra trema* (Luchino Visconti, 1948), *Rome, Open City* (Roberto Rossellini, 1945) and *Bicycle Thieves* (Vittorio De Sica, 1948) are marked by obvious realist conventions, namely working-class malaise, non-professional actors and on-location shooting, poetic realist films were largely studio-based endeavours where interiors or facades of Parisian apartments were painstakingly rebuilt in studio warehouses. As its name suggests, poetic realism combined the realistic with the emotional or psychological, but for the Italian school the aesthetic was paramount, on-location shooting, for example, was considered integral to a film's verisimilitude.

Using symbolism or psychological strategies, such as lighting trickery, to augment a film's reality effect was not a new strategy but rather one in debt to German

Expressionist filmmakers. It was during the aftermaths of the two World Wars that filmmakers and artists worked to harness or represent the reality of the horrors of war. Much as post-war realism developed in the wake of World War II as filmmakers sought to, as Cesare Zavattini said, “discover the value of the real” (quoted in Stam 2000: 70), following World War I German expressionist filmmakers began to make highly formalist films in order to capture the psychological horrors of war. For example, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Robert Wiene, 1919) used a formalist (or formative) style to capture the psychological horrors of war, and to, as Kracauer argues, “expose (through film) physical reality as it appears to individuals in extreme states of mind” (Kracauer 1960: 58).

Realism then is a foundational concept with disparate styles and applications; for example, there are different kinds of realism such as, and as was mentioned previously, French poetic realism and Italian neo-realism. Never an entirely objective or unmediated experience, realism employs strategies such as a narrative structure or non-professional actors to increase its verisimilitude. In order for an experience to be represented (or presented), logical aesthetic decisions are made which shape a viewer’s consumption of the image or event. Where the different types of realism meet, however, is at the site of influence or prejudice. Whether it was French poetic realism of the 1930s and Italian neo-realism of the 1940s or the British and French New Waves of the 1950s and 1960s, what all forms of realism shared was an ability to generate debate surrounding their relationship to ideology and politics. For example, the French school’s association with the Popular Front and neo-realism’s response to Italian life under a fascist dictatorship signaled an explicit political subjectivity governing their style. Conversely, however, and despite the arguments posited by Colin MacCabe, Jean-Louis Comolli and Jean Narboni

that all films are political, both the British New Wave's "kitchen sink" realism and the French New Wave's response to the domineering star system of the 1930s and 1940s were interpreted as avoiding a political position.

As Bertolt Brecht suggested, realism is an interdisciplinary mode of representation, key to film and literature alike, and "it is a major political, philosophical, and practical issue" (quoted in MacCabe 1974: 7). As a critic of realism, MacCabe recognizes realism as film's dominant aesthetic and argues it was hegemonised in Hollywood following technical developments in film sound and production (1976: 8). MacCabe's critique of cinema realism begins with his earlier work on literature and the classic realist text (1974: 10), and he links the two through the process of narrative. For example, MacCabe notes the authoritative role of a narrative in the classic realist text and queries as to whether this authority carries over into film. For MacCabe, it does, and he argues, "the (literary) narrative prose achieves its position of dominance because it is in the position of knowledge and this function of knowledge is taken up in the cinema by the narration of events" (MacCabe 1974: 10). MacCabe then sees realism as always linked to dominant culture, but Grierson and Kracauer – as well as Bazin - represent a very different view of realism, distancing it from Hollywood and dominant culture, and instead arguing that it is a social tool.

Focusing on the *ordinary* lives of *ordinary* people, realism, according to Grierson and Kracauer, was to be used socially, to bring to the conscience of the viewer, the lives of the downtrodden, to establish a presence over an absence, and to represent the people dominant culture often failed to notice. For Kracauer, cinema was the perfect device for this endeavor in that it reproduces or captures, maintains even, what is already there, the

camera giving the image a dynamism, a continuity that the photographic image is not able to offer (quoted in Lehman 1997: 99).

Kracauer, in illustrating the link between film, photography and the captured image, recalls Bazin, who in “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” examined the importance of photography to the development of film. As a development born out of photography, film capitalized on what Bazin called “the objective character of photography” (1967: 13), the world captured automatically by the still camera before it, captured in the same manner but only now captured with a camera able to record movement and motion. According to Bazin, the only intervening act in both was the “instrumentality of a nonliving agent” (1967: 13), and as a result film and photography were able to be objective. For Bazin then, much as photography (seemingly) eliminated subjectivity through the perceived objectivity of the camera, a mechanical apparatus, film documentation capitalized on the development of this new (objective) medium.

Kracauer, in agreement with Bazin, writes that the basic properties of film “are identical with the properties of photography...Film...is uniquely equipped to record and reveal physical reality” (1960:28). Moreover, as photography was able to “embalm time” (Bazin 1967: 15) to preserve, to use Kracauer’s term, the *physical reality*, of the photograph, cinema was now able to not only preserve the image but preserve movement or actions as well. That is, whereas photography improved upon painting, cinema improved upon photography in being able to record movement and motion, as opposed to only a still moment.

Kracauer, though, also distinguishes between the basic properties (the automatic nature of the camera) and the subjective properties (human intervention) of film and

photography and reasons that without some of the technical properties, or “special effects” exclusive to cinema, some films may suffer from, for example, awkward lighting or uninspired editing (1960: 99). Seemingly then, and as Andrew Tudor vehemently attests, Kracauer begins to account for aspects of realism that do not coincide with the basic tenets, yet he manages to include them anyway (1974: 96). It is then, here, at this place of contention, that an examination of realism is able to move forward, to push beyond its simple governing elements and move towards a new understanding wherein realism becomes recognized as a hybrid style drawn on by both documentary and fiction film. As Gaines asserts, to study documentary is “to return again to cinematic realism and its dilemmas” (Gaines 1999: 1).

These dilemmas surrounding realism, as it was endorsed and theorized by Bazin and Kracauer, prompted the response by the *Cahiers du Cinéma* critics of the 1970s who argued that realism may have constructed the appearance of reality but did not “reproduce” the real (Gaines 1999: 2). Realism must convey reality to the viewer through an increase or heightened reality effect, and must be able to create the sense that “‘reality’ is found as well as constructed” (Gaines 1999: 4). The primary hallmarks of realism, on-location shooting, natural light, (often) non-professional actors, long takes and eye-level shots all combine to increase the film’s reality effect, avoiding techniques disassociating the spectator from the images, such as soundtrack music. Although soundtrack music may provide viewers with a heightened emotional connection to a film, it is in opposition with realism’s desire to deny its own devices and “deemphasize the process of its construction” (Nichols 1985: 270). For example, realism, as cinema’s dominant form of representation, seeks to assemble a readily recognizable world, a world

that viewers are able to engage with, become sutured with, before returning to their real world.

Documentary cinema draws on the conventions and strategies of fictional realism, and may be understood as a mode that employs realism in order to produce a greater, or more tangible, representation of the world. For example, as Nichols argues that fictional realism endeavors to make a plausible world seem real (1985: 262), documentary cinema employs realism's strategies in efforts to make the real world seem real. In recognizing realism's ability to render the plausible real, documentary works to capture the actual real through the same conventions.

A basic differentiation between documentary and fictional realism may read like this: in seeking to *depict* real objects and experience in the real world, fictional realism bolsters its reality effect by locating its characters (or subjects) and action in what Bazin considers a determinate social and historical setting (MacCabe 1976: 9). Documentary, though, endeavors to *capture* the real world in a real setting. The terms and objectives meet, however, at *representation*. That is, despite the intentions of documentary (or photography for that matter), each relies on representation to depict a scene or capture an act. For example, Jacques Derrida, to recall his theory on deconstruction, demonstrates the pliability of language. When someone says "camera," one envisions the physicality of a device that captures an image on film, but one may also associate the term, "camera," with this image. Derrida points out that there is no tangible reason for the association of a word with an image; it is an arbitrarily determined connection, a strategy of language (Storey 1993: 86-87). Visual representation works in a similar manner to language-based representation. Sturken and Cartwright, in borrowing from Michel

Foucault, provide an example using a painting by the surrealist, Rene Magritte, in which a near-photographic painting of a pipe is underscored by the text “Ceci n’est pas une pipe” (“This is not a pipe”). What Magritte demonstrates, Sturken and Cartwright argue, is the arbitrary relationship between words and objects; the painting does not include an actual pipe, but rather a representation of a pipe, a rendering of an object (Sturken and Cartwright 2001: 15). Magritte’s painting demonstrates the way in which a viewer must accept the conventions of a text or image in order for the representation of that text or image to be accepted as plausible.

It is here, then, at this point of ostensible complicity between text and viewer, that realism becomes vulnerable to critique. As de facto co-conspirators, realism and spectators cooperate in permitting realism’s naturalization of the cinematic apparatus. The viewer, in being unable to critically disengage from the text, allows the realism to render a reality made “more real by the use of aesthetic device” (MacCabe 1976: 9). Moreover, and as Lapsely and Westlake maintain, “the pleasure of the realist text depends in large part on its delivery of the anticipated verisimilitude and plausibility” (1988: 178).

Verisimilitude and plausibility, as has been noted, are central to realism’s success, and Noël Carroll, who suggests that Kracauer discerns two trends in photographic realism, the realist and formative (1997: 117), examines the different ways in which verisimilitude and plausibility are sought after. The former is demonstrative of photography’s *essence*, that is, to record reality. The latter recognizes subjectivity over objectivity, the photographer, according to Carroll, “inevitably involved in creatively shaping her or his subject matter through the process of selectivity” (1997: 117). Carroll

points out that “the way to coordinate the two conceptions that Kracauer proposes is to say that it is the nature of photography to record and to reveal physical reality. The recording component of this formula evidently respects the realist conception of photography, while the revealing component acknowledges the claims of the formative conception, since revealing reality involves the creative activity of the photographer” (1997: 117).

Kracauer’s conception opens the door to numerous theoretical possibilities and foregrounds the notion of realism as a hybrid style steeped in verisimilitude and home to the many conventions that are drawn on by both documentary and fiction film. Moreover, while Carroll pointedly critiques Kracauer, the latter’s missteps do prove a jumping-off point for a further analysis of realism. For example, while Gaines argues that reality claims are ideological, once a spectator recognizes that realist film is reliant on subjective constructing devices, the viewer is then able to engage with a film critically, and be cognizant of the conventions working to keep the viewer within the filmmaker’s desired specific context.

Realism and Ideology:

According to Lapsley and Westlake, discourse on realism shifted after 1968 as politics and ideology became increasingly prominent within film studies (Lapsley and Westlake 1988: 156). The politics of representation became an acute site of study for post-1968 film scholars and, as a result, debates surrounding realism and representation continued. Realist advocates such as Bazin and Kracauer were challenged by critics such as MacCabe, Jean-Louis Comolli, and Lapsley and Westlake, who argued that realist works, whether literature or film, with a “remarkable power to effect belief in their

constructions, have political ramifications” (Lapsley and Westlake 1988: 157). Although the realist text may endeavor to represent things as they are and may claim to tell the truth, they also argue that, “since the realist text advances a truth claim in saying how things really stand, and since truth claims cannot be established by the text that makes them but can only be true in relation to something else, then an analysis of realism entails making reference to a ‘beyond-the-text’” (Lapsley and Westlake 1988: 157). The “beyond-the-text” refers to what Susan Hayward calls realism’s desire to represent “life as it *really* was” (1996: 298), the “beyond-the-text” a reality unable to be constructed or mediated, a reality existing outside the film text, or what Tudor calls a reality “out there” (1974: 85).

Therefore the truth, located outside the text, may be found in the social world, the *real* world, but its representation can only be coloured by judgment. *Screen*, in the 1970s, argued that realism is governed by “an inherently conservative mode of representation, incapable of embodying a progressive politics” (Hallam and Marshment 2000: x), thus confirming realism’s parallel function to ideology in simply naturalizing a construction determined by dominant culture. The real world may be the subject of a film, but it can be argued that the real world’s representation is compromised when governed by dominant culture. As Lapsley and Westlake maintain, “any complete account of the functioning of realism would have to consider not just its textual practices but the social practices within which these are situated” (1988: 157). Realism then, must be doubly unpacked, understood and consumed through its textual practices, but also through its construction as dictated by dominant culture.

As Brecht stressed, realism, in being a significant political and philosophical issue, is a deceptive form able to seamlessly reproduce dominant ideology (MacCabe 1974: 19). Tied to ideology, realism is implicitly encumbered with a social agenda or directive. As this study's Introduction notes, for Comolli and Narboni "*every film is political*, inasmuch as it is determined by the ideology which produces it (or within which it is produced, which stems from the same thing)" (1976: 24-25). The pair further state that the filmmaking process, "from the very first shot...is encumbered by the necessity of reproducing things not as they really are but as they appear when refracted through ideology" (1976: 25). The suggestion that realism's 90-degree-angle, eye-level shots suggest objectivity is rejected, ideology permeating every shot, regardless of angle, degree or distance.

Establishing a link between realism's representation of the world and the role ideology plays in this representation of truth confirms the social, cultural, and political importance of realist cinema. A primary problematic for cinema is its propensity to make assertions as to the "way of the world," socially, politically, and economically (Lapsely and Westlake 1988: 157), despite not being a mirror image of that world. Instead, realism is reliant on those spectators recognizing their world in the world articulated by realism, thus rendering the constructed world plausible and realistic. This recognition of a reflected work is not unlike Jacques Lacan's mirror stage only, whereas with Lacan a child verifies his/her existence through the mother's returned gaze (Lacan 1977: 2), with realism viewers are able to recognize their own world in the reproduced reality realism offers.

Understanding cinema's role in providing a representation of the world hastens the critical thinker to examine the role of the filmmaker, the agent responsible for the representation of the subject(s), and, essentially, the one claiming to "tell the truth" through the conventions instituted by realism. Realism's ability to reproduce a visible facsimile of reality does not prevent the raising of social or ethical questions concerning its reproduction of reality, namely its inability to question its own motives and ideology's role in its construction. Realism naturalizes that which it represents and, as Stuart Hall would describe it, encodes its text with a preferred reading (Storey 1993: 200). As the realist text strives to represent reality, self-reflexivity would critically impair its legitimacy in that realism is dependent on the spectator seeing "realism" as reality, and questioning itself would derail the "authenticity" realism seeks to produce. However, while recognizing, or conceding, that realism is bound up with ideology, Lapsley and Westlake maintain that realism remains able to generate sound knowledge and documentation about a past social world. They suggest that "an authentic realism...although focused on the particular and therefore unable to produce the abstractions of science, could nevertheless yield a kind of knowledge, could still furnish an understanding of social and historical reality" (1988: 163). And it is here, where Lapsley and Westlake detect an optimism in realism not recognized by Comolli and Narboni, that *Nanook of the North* becomes a pertinent area of study.

Introducing...Flaherty and Nanook:

Considered a landmark achievement in documentary cinema, the opening credits of a later, revised version of *Nanook of the North* declare that the film is "generally regarded as the work from which all subsequent efforts to bring real life to the screen

have stemmed.” This statement signifies the importance and influence the film has retained. Despite the non-reflexive bravado of the statement, it remains nonetheless a claim worth theorizing. Critical thought has since re-conceptualized the claim, employing it as a foundation from which to embark on a critical analysis of the film, an analysis that examines the ambiguous distinction between documentary and fiction. For example, William Rothman astutely recognizes *Nanook* as marking “a moment before the distinction between documentary and fiction was set” (1998: 24).

This decisive moment refers to the traditional binary opposing documentary and fiction: the style commonly understood as equaling truth – documentary – and the style exploring the untrue – fiction. *Nanook* then, in occupying a space straddling but not committed to either side of this binary, remains fertile ground for an investigative study. Drawing on a wealth of documentary and fiction film conventions alike, *Nanook* can be theorized as a hybrid film. This is a position supported by Richard Barsam who argues that “[Flaherty’s] films resist generic classification, and the conventional terms –realist, ethnographic, documentary – do not altogether apply” (1988: 33) and that, as a result, Flaherty created a non-fiction genre all his own (1992: 46). Similarly, the wealth of disparate writing on *Nanook*’s generic status confirms the film’s resistance to classification. For example, David Cook calls the film “a narrative documentary” (1981: 66), a point Michael Renov agrees with in noting the film’s “suspense-inducing structure” (1993: 2). Flaherty’s use of close-ups, reverse angles, a third-person point of view, and his directing of *Nanook* in the enacting and re-enacting of specific scenes and events, associates *Nanook* with a fiction film, the filmmaker going so far as to follow a loosely conceived script. Lapsley and Westlake recognize similarities between *Nanook*

and *Birth of a Nation* (D.W. Griffith, 1915) and *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, 1941), three dissimilar films, yet each demonstrative of realism. (Lapsely and Westlake 1988: 158). Further, David MacDougall argues *Nanook* is “one of the earliest and most important ethnographic films” and “one of the most valid and effective summations of another culture yet attempted on film” (1976: 137).

MacDougall’s summation of *Nanook*, however, does acknowledge the criticism Flaherty’s direction is prone to invite and acknowledges that *Nanook* contains numerous “fabrications which ethnographic film-makers would now probably avoid” (1976: 137). MacDougall, though, accounts for the problem by arguing on behalf of Flaherty’s much celebrated social consciousness. For MacDougall, it is “noteworthy that Flaherty restrained himself as much as he did, for it attests to his fundamental commitment to revealing the essential reality of what he found” (1976: 139). The claim recalls those made by Bazin who argues that the realist text is “any system of expression, any narrative procedure which tends to make more reality appear on the screen” (quoted in MacCabe 1976: 9). The discord involving filmmaker intervention and subjectivity is, perhaps, best understood when applied to Kracauer’s theory of the realist and formative conceptions of recording reality. For Kracauer the recording and revealing of reality are mutually aligned yet mutually exclusive practices (1960: 41). *Recording* an act or event respects the realist component while the *revealing* of the act or event is a formative component (Kracauer 1960: 41). Bazin and Kracauer are in agreement here, allowing the recording and revealing (or molding) of reality to co-exist in order to present to the viewer the physical reality of the recorded event.

The revealing of reality MacDougall speaks of, when coupled with Bazin's note on strategies resulting in "more reality," is dependent on episodic narrative structures (Lehman 1997: 112) guaranteeing the result of more reality appearing on the screen. MacDougall is free to lend credence to the notion that Flaherty was restrained in his filmmaking, but, to recall Turner, and also Althusser, ideology is pervasive, infiltrating the entire filmmaking process. The narrative strategies ensuring the revealing of "reality" are implicit in the film's ideology, which lies not only in the narrative and the cultural context in which it was conceived but also in the film's images, myths, conventions, and visual styles (Turner 1993: 150). It is, then, important to consider Flaherty's perceived restrained nature of filmmaking alongside the narrative strategies present in *Nanook*. Moreover, Flaherty's willingness to allow his own attitude to influence his work demands further investigation into the representation of *Nanook* and his family. Flaherty's desire to reveal the reality of *Nanook*'s life, coupled with his efforts to, as MacDougall claims, be restrained in his capturing of a world outside his own, are suggestive of direct cinema and its efforts to allow events to unfold "naturally" before the camera. That is, Flaherty, in recognizing he was participating in a culture outside of his, sought to be restrained, allowing the events he witnessed to unfold free of directorial influence. However, the narrative structure, acting as the film's textual engine, fails to adhere to the strict restrictions on filmmaker intervention associated with direct cinema and suggests that the film should be reclassified as a hybrid realist/ethnographic film, as Barnouw and MacDougall propose.

Erik Barnouw provides a thorough summary of Flaherty's quest and includes numerous quotes from the filmmaker (1993: 45). Flaherty, in speaking of his goals and

ideological position, himself undermines the credibility of MacDougall's claims by recognizing the constructed nature of the film and the way his attitude towards Nanook affected the production and ultimately the film's ideology. An admirer of Inuit culture, Flaherty, in explaining his desire to make the film once wrote, "the urge that I had to make *Nanook* came from the way I felt about these people, my admiration for them; I wanted to tell others about them" (quoted in Barnouw 1993: 45). Flaherty's desire to represent "these people" captures the admiration he had for Nanook and his community, and is also illustrative of realism's claims to historical integrity in documenting "a hero whose life reflected the historical currents of the time" (Lapsley and Westlake 1988: 163) through a series of strategically organized narrative structures. A study of Flaherty's filmmaking determines that ideology influenced and affected the filming and, moreover, affirms Terry Lovell's belief that "all realisms rely on a conception of how things really are (an ontology) and a procedure for disclosing or representing them (an epistemology)" (quoted in Lapsley and Westlake 1988: 162).

Flaherty's reliance on realism's ontological and epistemological directives is demonstrated by his enlisting Nanook, a respected hunter of the Itimiviut tribe (Barnouw 1993: 36), to be his subject or "star." Emblematic of Flaherty's difficulty in capturing this truth was the possibility the film would ultimately come to allegorize what Dagmar Barnouw calls "Nanook's nostalgically heroic self-perception" (1994: 217), or find itself practicing what Fatimah Tobing Rony calls "ethnographic taxidermy" (quoted in Renov 1999: 7). Rony defines this term as "the use of artifice [to seek] an image more true to the posited original" (quoted in Renov 1999: 102). For Rony the notion of a (re)created past reality, or historical moment, constructed through artifice is troubling in that it is

simply a series of memories compiled to portray a duplicate or imitation of life as it once was (from Renov 1999: 102).

Flaherty often relied on what Paul Rotha called “slight narratives” (quoted in Barnouw 1993: 98). Rejecting fictional incidents or “cameos,” Flaherty claimed “a story must come out of the life of a people, not from the actions of individuals” (quoted in Williams 1980: 101). Michael Renov, however, notes that the employment of narrative strategies often resulted in the construction of a character as hero (1993: 2), a point made also by Barnouw in reference to Nanook’s self-perception. Both Renov and Barnouw’s points are corroborated by Nanook having suggested to Flaherty that he reemploy a long since abandoned style of walrus hunt, the traditional style using a spear, as opposed to the guns the Itimiviut were using since discovering they could trade pelts for them with other traders (Barnouw 1994: 215). Nanook’s suggestion begets scrutiny on two fronts. Firstly, would this reenactment accurately represent the Itimiviut life or would it be little more than bravado on Nanook’s behalf? The second query asks whether Flaherty’s agreement to this method is anything other than an additional opportunity to romanticize a marginalized people. For example, filming the Itimiviut killing walrus with guns would do little in the way of explicitly distinguishing this group from dominant culture, or the traders from whom they obtained the guns. Flaherty, in his words, sought to capture “the former majesty and character of these people while it is still possible – before the white man has destroyed not only their character, but the people as well” (quoted in Barnouw 1993: 45). This goal, although perhaps in an effort to resolve past prejudice, is contradictory to the film’s revised opening credits and claims of representing “real life.”

According to Richard Barsam, in this film and in others he directed, including *Man of Aran* (1934), Flaherty exposed his subjects to dangerous conditions presumably in the interests of a product, or film, rich in realism (Barsam 1992: 50). Similar to *Nanook*, *Man of Aran* chronicles the lives of the people of Aran, a small group of Irish islanders, and as in *Nanook* Flaherty positions his subjects in dangerous situations in order to produce a greater, more compelling realism. For example, in *Man of Aran*, Flaherty has an expert teach the Aran islanders a type of shark hunt long since discontinued, a hunt subsequently subjecting the islanders to danger. Such strategies led to Flaherty being criticized by fellow filmmakers, including John Grierson and Paul Rotha. As Barnouw notes, Rotha took particular issue with the film, deeming it “a reactionary return to the worship of the heroic” and likening the Aran islanders to “waxwork figures acting the lives of their grandfathers” (quoted in Barnouw 1993: 98-99).

Defenders of Flaherty argue that, although Flaherty subjected Nanook and his people to danger, it was Nanook who “urged the most perilous sequences” (Barnouw 1993: 43) such as the seal hunt, and that the Aran islanders, while in danger, welcomed it, exulting, “God bless the work” (Barnouw 1993: 98). Moreover, and as Erik Barnouw argues, Nanook “may well have sensed in the aggie (what the Inuit called the camera) a kind of immortality for the Inuit and himself” (1993: 43). Nanook’s bravado and Flaherty’s complicity recall Bazin’s argument that the key element when debating realism is the constructing of reality through the use of aesthetic devices (MacCabe 1976: 9), devices used to produce a “more real” reality, and confirming the formative (subjective) role of the camera operator.

Flaherty, then, permits the viewer to enjoy this “more real” reality. In this case, the viewer bears witness to the exotic, or the other, as they engage in perilous acts such as the traditional seal hunt. According to Bazin, “what matters to Flaherty, [when] confronted with Nanook hunting the seal, is the relation between Nanook and the animal: the actual length of the waiting period...Flaherty confines himself to showing the actual waiting period; the length of the hunt is the very substance of the image, its true object (1967: 27). Bazin, then, understands the recreating of the past in that the qualitative or subjective determines the degree to which the genuine essence of the object represented is grasped” (MacCabe 1976: 9). The spectator, astonished at witnessing the traditional hunting style, authenticates the “more real” Bazin suggests, and he notes that although a montage style of filming could adequately convey the length of time of the hunt, documenting the actual length generates a great verisimilitude (1967: 27).

Flaherty takes advantage of an aesthetic device and this, coupled with a spectator longing to experience the exotic or other, enables Flaherty to promptly produce this event or experience. The experience (the “more real”) realism yields, such as the walrus hunt, is dependent on subscribing to the Bazinian notion that the real and the aesthetic are inseparable (Turner 1993: 35), but also on a notion that fails to consider how the aesthetic device can compromise reality during the creative process, despite Kracauer’s arguments otherwise. MacCabe recognizes this problematic and states, “what must be hidden by the ‘author’ is the process by which this ‘greater reality’ is arrived at, for, of course, on this account the ‘greater reality’ is there all along just waiting to be seen” (MacCabe 1976: 10).

Ideally, realism signifies historical truths (Turner 1993: 157), but, as MacCabe demonstrates, realism is ideological and based on manipulation and deceit. Recalling Flaherty's earlier claim that his urge to make *Nanook* was a result of his great admiration for the Itimiviut (Barnouw 1993: 45), in turn compels the spectator and critic to reach a conclusion about Flaherty's proclamation. Is it understood as a genuine interest in a marginalized group, or are we to understand Flaherty, as member of a group within dominant culture working to exoticize the other, and further the cultural gap between dominant and subordinate societies? If the former, then Flaherty's ideological responsibilities are echoed by Bill Nichols, who, in reference to ethnographic film, argues, "filmmakers seek out those who 'naturally' reveal or expose themselves, allowing their performance to engage a viewer's curiosity and empathy while masking the filmmaker's own fascination or attraction" (1991: 72).

Nichols acknowledges the words of Flaherty, who admits to this strategy, stating, "we select a group of the most attractive and appealing characters we can find, to represent a family, and through them tell our story" (quoted in Barsam 1992: 50); Flaherty, consciously using his subject to tell his story, is representative of the fascinated filmmaker Nichols examines. Moreover, Flaherty's claims of admiration are affirmed by Barnouw, who believes Flaherty's objective "was not to produce an exposé, but to celebrate what he valued" (1993: 47). Flaherty is, then, and according to Barnouw, not complicit with the ethnographic filmmaker as set out by Nichols because he "unmasks" his admiration for the group (1993: 45) as opposed to the "masking [of] the filmmaker's own fascination or attraction." *Nanook* therefore, finds itself reclassified as a hybrid film,

drawing on, but not restricted to, the conventions of ethnographic documentary and fiction film – conventions tied to realism.

According to Barsam, “Flaherty realized that filmmaking is not a function of anthropology or even archeology, but an act of the imagination; it is both photographic truth and a cinematic rearrangement of the truth” (1996: 52). When confronted with charges that the film’s manipulations were detrimental to its legitimacy, Flaherty was haughty in retorting, “sometimes you have to lie. One often has to distort a thing to catch its true spirit” (quoted in Barsam 1994: 52). Flaherty’s distortion and the constructed nature of realism allow the form to provide compelling representations of the past. Realism is a style based more on recreations, imagination and narrative structures informed by memories and history than a capturing of reality on film. These criticisms compelled filmmakers to explore new styles, working to avoid the numerous difficulties realism provoked. These new film styles sought to capture a non-manipulated, spontaneous reality free of the manipulations and reenactments realism relied on.

Chapter Two

Blurring Boundaries and the Hybridization of Documentary.

This chapter outlines and examines Bill Nichols' historical schema of documentary cinema and considers a number of his books, including, *Ideology and the Image* (1990), *Representing Reality* (1991), *Blurred Boundaries* (1994) and his most recent study, *Introduction to Documentary* (2001). Documentary cinema often finds itself falling victim to the generalized belief that "a documentary is a documentary is a documentary." Much like fiction film, however, documentary cinema is a mode, but one too vast to be segregated into one singular section at the local video store, and one that includes many genres under its umbrella. For example, fiction film is divided according to various genres, including action, horror, drama, film noir and comedy; this is a breadth all too often not afforded documentary. This generality concerning documentary is addressed by Nichols, if not video stores, firstly in his much anthologized article, "The Voice of Documentary" (1985), and subsequently in revisits beginning with his *Representing Reality* and finally *Introduction to Documentary*, wherein he includes a documentary framework. Understood as a framework of genres, or modes, to use Nichols' terminology, within the documentary tradition, Nichols identifies six genres, or modes, of representation: poetic, expository, participatory, observational, reflexive and performative.

As a significant scholar and recurrent contributor to film studies, Nichols has devised an important and influential framework. This framework is, perhaps, best employed as a starting point for documentary studies as the schema endeavors to, according to Nichols, historically trace documentary's evolution to what he considers a

“greater complexity and self-awareness” (1991: 33). This is how the framework functions here, as a foundation, a site to return to in order to chart the simple evolution of documentary. It is, however, also examined in order to demonstrate the dynamic nature of documentary, or to be more precise, to act as evidence of the way in which documentary has shifted and altered amidst the numerous technical and theoretical developments that have occurred since Nichols first conceived of the framework.

In recognizing the social, technical and theoretical importance of documentary then, Nichols provides an engaging case study, because his writing, much like documentary, has proved resilient and open to change and criticism. His writing’s resilience, though, is predicated on its recognition of history and change, and Nichols is careful to note this, beginning with “The Voice of Documentary.” Here Nichols astutely notes that it is “worth insisting that the strategies and styles deployed in documentary, like those of narrative film, change; they have a history...the comfortably accepted realism of one generation seems like artifice to the next. New strategies must constantly be fabricated to re-present ‘things as they are’ and still others contest this very representation” (1985: 259).

This chapter, then, acts as both a summation and a preface. Examining Nichols’ influential documentary framework and his subsequent alterations made in *Introduction to Documentary*, this chapter works through each mode to establish any links the modes may share. For example, Nichols’ expository and ethnographic modes are linked firstly to Chapter One’s examination of realism and objectivity, and then recognized as precursors to Nichols’ observational mode. The observational mode gives way to the reflexive mode, the two as a hybrid acting as a theoretical precursor to mockumentary,

the focus of Chapter Four, while also setting up Chapter Three's comparative reading of *Don't Look Back* (D.A. Pennebaker, 1967) and *Bob Roberts* (Tim Robbins, 1989). *Don't Look Back* provides at least partial inspiration for *Bob Roberts* (Tim Robbins, 1989), a clever mockumentary that relies on satire, intertextuality and an engaged spectator to reference many scenes from the documentary on Bob Dylan, as well as *Primary* (Robert Drew, 1960). Once Nichols' framework has been unpacked, linked back to Chapter One, and situated so as to set up Chapters Three and Four, a greater understanding of the fluidity of documentary modes will foreground the second half of this study's examination of documentary cinema as a hybrid form as in debt to fiction film as it is to its own tradition.

In his book, *Rhetoric and Representation in Non-Fiction Film*, Carl Plantinga recognizes Nichols' typology as an important and useful study offering a historical and descriptive framework that thoroughly and chronologically charts the genre's development, but also argues that despite the schema's validity numerous problems within the framework leave ample room for additional studies of documentary (1997: 101). Nichols' *Introduction to Documentary* responds to this criticism and offers a modified framework recognizing the hybrid nature of documentary. Nichols' argues "a reflexive documentary can contain sizable portions of observational or participatory footage; an expository documentary can include poetic or performative segments. 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" (2001: 100). This latitude is a point shared by David MacDougall, who, in "Beyond Observational Cinema," argues documentary

modes are not rigidly contained within the structure of mode-specific conventions, dispelling belief in the strict adherence to a single documentary mode during filmmaking. MacDougall, instead, recognizes shared attributes (and shortcomings) of ethnographic, observational and reflexive cinema (1985: 283), ultimately calling for an alternative participatory mode marked by the conventions of observational and ethnographic film.

MacDougall's article, then, marks a shift in documentary theory where its possibilities as a hybrid form are recognized, each mode in debt to the other, sharing a wealth of conventions while staking out new developments in documentary cinema. Nichols recognizes the chronology of documentary cinema, and his framework is structured to follow suit, the order of the modes corresponding to the chronology of their development, but the chronology itself is "imperfect" (2001: 100), demonstrative of one mode trying to improve on the mode preceding it but ultimately continuing to be tied to it (at least historically). The historiography of documentary permits the hybrid form MacDougall advocates, drawing on conventions of different modes in hopes of establishing a superior one. The difficulty in segregating documentary modes categorically – seeing them remain positioned within fixed boundaries – suggests their association with postmodernism. As both Nichols and Plantinga attest, the framework Nichols conceives of is not fixed, and moreover, and as the title of Nichols' book attests, the boundaries of documentary cinema are *blurred*, and the *blurring* is postmodern.

Nichols notes the evolution of documentary cinema was not born solely out of technological advancement, such as innovation in sound and camera equipment enabling filmmakers to use improved 16mm stock instead of bulky 35mm or the advent of synchronous sound, but also out of an existing understanding of various social issues, and

a desire for a filmmaking mode that could address these issues. Nichols states that “what works at a given moment and what counts as a realistic representation of the historical world is not a simple matter of progress toward a final form of truth but of struggles for power and authority within the historical arena itself” (2001: 33). Simply accepting a film’s preferred reading acquiescently promotes an agreement with the film’s truth claims and is insufficient in failing to consider the ideology shaping its construction.

Nichols’ above claim is important in that he notes the futility of a fixed film truth and instead directs his analysis to examining the way in which ideology works to shape a specific reading of a film after having already governed the production of the text. Ideology is pervasive, and Nichols acknowledges representation as not solely intent on determining film truth but as indicative of the socio-economic sites of contention involved in the shaping of a specific history. More specifically, Nichols binds representation to ideology in that Marxist theories of ideology claim the ideas of the ruling class are the dominant ideology, and for Nichols, the socio-economic apparatus dictating the construction of a representation needs to be considered alongside any truth claims the same film may advance.

Nichols’ synopsis of documentary modes is useful in that it outlines the ideological catalysts driving the form’s evolution, recognizing the way in which modes of representation organize texts in relation to the society within which the texts are interpreted. The dynamism of society must be matched by an ever-changing documentary community and, in recognizing this, Nichols states, “new modes convey a fresh, new perspective on reality. Gradually, the conventional nature of this mode of representation becomes increasingly apparent: an awareness of norms and conventions to

which a given text adheres begins to frost the window onto reality. The time for a new mode is then at hand” (1991: 32). Nichols, in his efforts to track closely the tirelessly changing culture representing the subject(s) of the documentary text, lists his six modes.

The poetic mode of documentary may be aligned with the artistic avant-garde, because while it is a mode concerned with relaying information from film to viewer, it is also interested in developing alternative forms of address. According to Nichols, the poetic mode does not practice a “straightforward transfer of information,” but instead “stresses mood, tone, and affect much more than displays of knowledge or acts of persuasion” (2001: 103). The poetic mode draws its source material from the historical world but sought to convey that material in a new manner. Often abstract by comparison to other modes, composed of fragments and overtly subjective, the poetic mode, as a part of modernism, marked a break from traditional or conventional forms of narrative, representation and realism. Nichols uses Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí’s surrealist film, *Un Chien andalou* (1928) as an example of the poetic mode and states the film “gave the impression of a documentary reality but then populated that reality with characters caught up in uncontrollable urges, abrupt shifts of time and place, and more puzzles than answers” (2001: 104). Providing answers or didacticism was not the paramount objective with the poetic mode as experimentation, abstraction and new directions in representation began to have an increased importance to filmmakers, subsequently seeing an early form of hybridization take place as many poetic films found themselves classified concurrently as experimental and documentary films.

For Nichols, the expository mode, seemingly in direct opposition to the poetic mode, assembles its visual evidence drawn from the historical world with an emphasis on

rhetoric and argumentation (2001: 105). Whereas the poetic mode paralleled modernist painting in seeking new forms of representation, including abstraction and incoherence, the expository mode positioned aesthetics beneath persuasion in its address which saw narrative, continuity editing and a constructed argument become the primary mode of address. As Chapter One explained, the expository mode addressed the viewer directly, and used a voice-of-God commentary or titles to advance its argument.

The expository mode was the dominant documentary mode in the United Kingdom in the 1930s and was championed by John Grierson who produced films in which the voice of God was a lone, deep and authoritarian male voice meant to, as Ken Beattie describes it, “anchor meaning and construct authority” (2004, 21). The voice of God punctuating the expository documentary advanced its argument from a position of authority as this mode left little room for counter-discourse or contesting voices. The all-knowing narration naturalized the film’s ideology and its illusionist, or transparent, discourse positioned the viewer as a passive spectator, looking to be taught or informed, not watching to critique or counter. The mode advances the impression of narratological objectivity by securing a commentary “distinct from the images of the historical world that accompany it” (Nichols, 2001, 107). As Nichols maintains, the narration seems “literally ‘above’ the fray” (2001: 107), confirming the narration’s philosophical alignment with God and its position of authority.

Nichols uses the terms observational and interactive documentary to differentiate between what he argues are separate modes of documentary. However, these modes are often classified solely as *cinéma vérité*, and because *cinéma vérité* is often used as a blanket term, it is important here to clarify Nichols' position in defining and

distinguishing between the terms. Nichols notes that for Erik Barnouw observational documentaries refer to direct cinema, the “fly-on-the-wall” style of filmmaking practiced by, among others, D.A. Pennebaker and Frederick Wiseman (1991: 38). The American direct cinema practitioners outlined a series of rules, including “thou shalt not rehearse; thou shalt not interview; thou shalt not use commentary; thou shalt not use film lights; thou shalt not stage events; thou shalt not dissolve” (Macdonald and Cousins 1996: 248). These filmmakers, also including Drew Associates founder Robert Drew (*Primary*, 1960), believed this mode to be best understood as “a theatre without actors,” opposed subjects being interviewed, and proposed that “film crews were so unobtrusive and mobile that they could record ‘reality’ without influencing it” (Macdonald and Cousins 1996: 248), the camera simply a “fly on the wall.”

Although the term “cinéma vérité” would eventually be adopted by American practitioners of observational cinema, such as Pennebaker and Wiseman, the initial defining characteristics of the mode were not in concert with the tradition of the mode practiced by American filmmakers. Instead, the mode encouraged a more interactive or participatory role for the filmmaker, and Nichols, in distinguishing between the occasional confusion in defining the modes, categorizes the French form of cinéma vérité, for example the style practiced by Jean Rouch, as interactive, or as he does in *Introduction to Documentary*, as participatory.

Cinéma vérité, a direct translation of Dziga Vertov’s *kino-pravda*, permits, in its original French form, the documentary filmmaker to actively intervene in the production of the film. Both Rouch and Vertov believed the camera was able to reveal a deeper level of truth than the “imperfect human eye” (Macdonald and Cousins 1996: 250). As

Macdonald and Cousins note, both Rouch and Vertov “interviewed their subjects and intervened constantly in the filming, using the camera as their tool and the filmmaking process as a means in itself to explore their subjects’ preoccupations” (1996: 250).

Rouch’s *Chronique d’un été* (1961), for example, is demonstrative of this strategy.

Collaborating with sociologist Edgar Morin, Rouch hoped to gain an understanding of the thoughts and feelings of Parisians through simply approaching people on the street, first to ask how they felt, and then in a follow-up interview, asking them to reflect on how they felt about the first encounter and about their feelings towards the world (Jacobs 1979: 379). According to Nichols, *Chronique d’un été* includes scenes that demonstrate the collaborative interactions between Rouch and Morin and their subjects, and they encouraged the interactive and collaborative nature of the film by screening parts of the film to the film’s subjects and then filming the ensuing discussion (2001: 118). This active collusion with the film’s subjects results in Nichols’ classification of the film as interactive or participatory.

Admittedly, Nichols’ classification system feels convoluted and confusing at times, but he does neatly distinguish between his observational (direct cinema) and interactive (cinéma vérité) modes. Nichols reserves observational documentary for the “fly-on-the-wall” style of filmmaking, such as Wiseman’s *Titicut Follies* (1967), *High School* (1969) or *Model* (1980), and uses the term “interactive” to describe interventionist filmmakers such as Rouch. Nichols also classifies *Primary* (Robert Drew, 1960) as observational cinema, believing the filmmakers, who travel along the campaign trail of presidential hopefuls John F. Kennedy and Hubert Humphrey during the 1960 Wisconsin primary, adequately endeavored to simply record the events as they occurred, the

camera's presence and recording of events being as unobtrusive as possible (1991: 38).

Macdonald and Cousins note the intricate manner of discriminating between direct cinema and *cinéma vérité* and note that "in many respects *cinéma vérité* and direct cinema were very different, but they did have vital features in common: they both valued immediacy, intimacy and 'the real'; they both rejected the glossy 'professional' aesthetic of traditional cinema" (1996: 249-50).

Having differentiated between both observational and interactive documentary and direct cinema and *cinéma vérité*, as well as having recognized the sometimes confusing manner in which each mode was identified, it is important to note that for *this study* then, the term "*cinéma vérité*" is used in referring to not only the original practitioners such as Rouch but also to the American documentary filmmakers making films after him, such as Pennebaker, Drew and Wiseman. Further, the American school sought to remain true to their belief that the filmmaker must remain a passive spectator in the filmmaking process, eschewing any active interference in the pro-filmic event.

Vertov's Kino-pravda philosophy, translated as "film-truth," sought to capture "life unawares," positioning the camera so as not to disrupt the natural course of events during the shooting (Petric 1987: 70). Kino-pravda advocated banishing from cinema anything not taken from real life and, along with neo-realism's desire for accurate and truthful presentation, provides at least the theoretical impetus for *cinéma vérité*. Like Kino-pravda, *cinéma vérité*, in purporting to be a pure, more truthful cinema, observes and records reality while claiming to avoid organizational or persuasive strategies such as controlling, staging or reorganizing the material or subjects the camera captures on film (Issari and Paul 1979: 13). It also rebuffs the "artificial reality" that realism produces in

films such as Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (Rothman 1998: 24). Cinéma vérité, like Flaherty, explores and seeks to discover the truth, but, unlike Flaherty, cinéma vérité abandoned strategies that distorted the integrity (truth) of an event, and thus Flaherty's staged scenes are rejected as cinematic constructions. Flaherty's staging of scenes he could not capture free of directorial manipulation surprised Richard Leacock when Leacock worked with Flaherty on *Louisiana Story* (1948). Leacock, a future Drew Associate, recognized that "many documentarists of the past were not really interested in presenting un-manipulated reality but rather in manipulating that reality to make a polemical point through editing or narration" (quoted in Allen and Gomery 1993: 219). Of paramount importance to Leacock's point is the notion of voice. Whereas expository voice-of-God films had seen fit to speak for or on behalf of a subject or subjects, the new mode sought to return to the subject his or her voice, consequently allowing the subject's position to be conveyed through his or her actions, comments or arguments. The filmmaker had to be in agreement with this strategy, however, and a film's verisimilitude had to reflect or augment the film's voice through the organization of text and editing. Voice then came to be more than simply the act of a subject speaking, but rather the relationship between the filmmaker, subject(s) and the film itself.

Despite the evidence suggesting otherwise, some continue to maintain that true cinéma vérité is possible: John Wasserman, for example, celebrates *Don't Look Back* as "pure cinéma vérité" (quoted in Hall 1998: 223). Chronicling Bob Dylan's 1965 English tour in support of his third album, *The Times They Are A-Changin'* (1964), *Don't Look Back*'s success as a hallmark cinéma vérité film is reliant on the filmmaker, Pennebaker, who remains off-screen, "lugs his 16-mm camera into any available cubbyhole, lurks

until he blends into the background, waits for a moment of vérité, then rolls” (Wasserman quoted in Hall 1998: 10). In describing a vérité moment, Patricia Jaffe states, “people are doing something or talking in the ordinary, disjointed, inarticulate way. Then...a movement bursts upon the screen so true, so real that it is greater than any theatrical recreation could ever be (quoted in Issari and Paul 1979: 16). Jaffe conveys cinéma vérité’s desire to capture an unmediated moment or event, the camera capturing an instance free of manipulation or directorial influence. This un-manipulated act is concerned more with capturing the spontaneous act as opposed to recreating it. While still representing an act through its documentation, cinéma vérité sought to increase the reality effect of that representation by avoiding any directorial influence or manipulation.

According to Nichols, “in pure cinéma vérité films, the style seeks to become ‘transparent’ in the same mode as the classical Hollywood style – capturing people in action, and letting the viewer come to conclusions about them unaided by any implicit or explicit commentary” (1985: 260), a strategy demonstrated by Pennebaker’s lurking in a corner of a room, a “fly on the wall” permitting the camera to capture whatever occurred before it.

For Issari and Paul, cinéma vérité’s aim is to present the truth, and the pair believe the camera should strive to capture life as it is lived rather than as it is represented through re-enactments or staged scenes (1979: 3-5). Further, they argue “pure cinéma vérité is the observing, recording, and presenting of reality without controlling, staging and reorganizing it...and unlike producers of theatrical films, cinéma vérité filmmakers are not interested in entertaining, nor do they try to teach, inform, influence, or show, as is the case with the makers of documentary films; their underlying motive is to convey

the truth as they observe it, rather than merely to present the facts” (1979: 13). Cinéma vérité filmmakers sought to avoid making judgments and worked to remain neutral in the recording of events and actions, but, as Issari and Paul disclose, filmmakers recognize that the truth they are presenting is a truth recorded as “they observe it,” in a sense opening the door in order to account for the argument maintaining that “true” cinéma vérité is impossible.

— Critics have long differed in their understanding of cinéma vérité, offering disparate views of the style. For example, Jaffe calls cinéma vérité “one of the most revolutionary developments in recent film history” (quoted in Issari and Paul 1979: 9) while, conversely, Peter Graham states, “cinéma vérité, by postulating some absolute truth, is only a monumental red herring. The sooner it is buried and forgotten, the better” (quoted in Issari and Paul 1979: 11). Filmmakers, though, restrain their comments on the argument and instead offer explanations more philosophical than their critics. For example, Rouch believed “cinéma vérité means that we have wanted to eliminate fiction and get closer to real life. We know that we must only pose the problem of truth, to arouse questions in the spectator” (quoted in Issari and Paul 1979: 11). Rouch, in opposition to Graham, who criticized cinéma vérité's efforts to present the “absolute truth” (Issari and Paul 1979: 11), suggests the movement was in response to fiction film's inability to rouse the spectator despite cinéma vérité also seeking to become “transparent” much like classical Hollywood (Nichols 1985: 260). Fiction film allows the spectator to leave the story on the screen once the film ends, understanding the events witnessed were fiction, and thus able to be left behind, in the film world. Cinéma vérité, though, purports to encourage more spectator participation, compelling the spectator to think further about

the film and its subjects after leaving the theatre. Richard Leacock echoes these sentiments and suggests the audience is as important as the filmmaker, an outlook shared by Nichols, who asserts *cinéma vérité* often failed the spectator in not being able to provide the sense of history, context and perspective the spectator sought (1985: 260). According to Leacock, “the closest I can come to an accurate definition is that the finished film – photographed and edited by the same filmmaker – is an aspect of the filmmaker’s perception of what happened. This is assuming that he does no directing. No interference. In a funny sort of way, our films are the audience. A recorded audience. The films are a means of sharing my audience experience” (quoted in Issari and Paul 1979: 12).

According to Nichols, “the observational mode stresses the nonintervention of the filmmaker. Such films cede ‘control’ over the events that occur in front of the camera more than any other mode. Rather than constructing a temporal framework, or rhythm...observational films rely on editing to enhance the impression of lived or real time” (1991: 38). In noting the role of the editing process, Nichols destabilizes the central premise of observational cinema/*cinéma vérité*. MacDougall echoes Nichols’ sentiments and states, “observational cinema is based upon a process of selection. The filmmaker limits himself to that which occurs naturally and spontaneously in front of the camera” (1985: 281). Additionally, in specifically addressing objectivity, MacDougall states, “they [observational films] are, nevertheless, evidence of what the filmmaker finds significant” (1985: 275). MacDougall, in noting that the finished, edited product remains representative of evidence the filmmaker finds important, exposes a difficulty in Nichols’ claim. That is not to say, however, that Nichols has erred in his scholarship, but rather

that as studies of observational cinema and cinéma vérité evolved, further arguments have reshaped and altered previous claims. For example, Nichols recognizes this issue and notes, in regard to filmmakers, “very few seem prepared to admit through the very tissue and texture of their work that all film-making is a form of discourse fabricating its effects, impressions, and point of view” (1985: 261).

Nichols would have found an opposition in James Lispcombe, who, in writing years before Nichols, argued that in reference to filmmaker objectivity, “probably no cinéma vérité filmmakers think that they are totally objective, and these critics who enjoy blasting at the impossibility of complete objectivity are bravely destroying strawmen” (1964: 62). Lispcombe seems to echo the opinions of both Rouch and Leacock in acknowledging the futility of evaluating cinéma vérité based on its subscription to “total objectivity.” To argue that the presence of the camera does not influence the subject(s) to some degree is a difficult position to support; instead, an approach recognizing that the camera is always a factor, always an influence, allows for film criticism to acknowledge the futility of the objectivity argument. A degree of subjectivity is present once a shot is set up or readied, and, as Mamber notes, only in the case of hidden cameras can camera influence and objectivity be skirted, and hidden camera is a strategy generally rejected by cinéma vérité filmmakers (1974: 184).

Ultimately working to “present the truth,” cinéma vérité’s theoretical debt to realism is apparent as all documentary modes ultimately draw on realist conventions, and its conception as a style sidestepping the criticisms directed at the expository and realist conventions positions cinéma vérité as a mode which challenges traditional documentary conventions. A rejection of the numerous manipulations and inconsistencies detrimental

to the “reality” of other forms of realism, cinéma vérité is also indebted to, and derivative of, neo-realism, the post-war, Italian movement which strove toward a more truthful presentation of film content (Issari and Paul 1979: 4). While the two movements have similarities, they remain aligned more by analogy than by an explicit kinship (Issari and Paul 1979: 44). For example, neo-realist films such as Vittorio De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves* and Luchino Visconti's *La Terra trema* are linked with cinéma vérité in that both movements sought to fundamentally represent reality, but they differ in that neo-realism was a fiction mode whereas cinéma vérité remains a mode seeking to capture spontaneous reality.

Issari and Paul provide a neat synopsis differentiating between the two: “cinéma vérité advocates no reconstruction of reality, whereas the aim of neo-realism is to provide a completely faithful artistic and dramatic reconstruction of reality. Neo-realism makes no effort to seize the event as it actually happens, while the whole philosophy of cinéma vérité revolves around this aspect” (1979: 44-45). Cinéma vérité used neo-realism as a springboard, acknowledging the movement’s desire to be “true” but seeking to break away from the older filmmaking generation (Issari and Paul 1979: 4). The new generation of filmmakers “vigorously preached that cinema should aim at capturing life as it is lived rather than as it is re-enacted or re-invented in the old traditional way” (Issari and Paul 1979: 5).

Cinéma vérité promised an increased engagement between spectator and subject(s), removing the authoritative and directorial voice previously assigned to the filmmaker; cinéma vérité demanded the viewer participate in the textual analysis, encouraged the viewer to be no longer content with an unchallenged digestion of “facts.”

The new mode promised a captured reality, not a manufactured facsimile, but the spontaneous documenting of reality as it occurred before the camera, whether or not the filmed subject was aware of the camera's presence. There were to be no actors in cinéma vérité, and instead filmmakers replaced them with social actors, one of the most famous being Dylan. The basic philosophy governing cinéma vérité is summarized by Wiseman, who states, "the whole effort in documentary is to capture certain aspects of reality and not manipulate it. If you are interested in telling people how to act, then you should work with actors" (quoted in Plantinga 1998: 37).

The interactive or participatory mode has been explained as Nichols' choice when categorizing filmmakers such as Rouch. Nichols, in describing the participatory mode, suggests that "the researcher goes into the field, participates in the lives of others, gains a corporeal or visceral feel for what life in a given context is like, and then reflects on this experience, using the tools and methods of anthropology and sociology to do so" (2001: 116). Nichols' synopsis certainly recalls the methods employed by Rouch and Morin in their *Chronique d'un été*, and as the mode is described by Nichols, it also recalls Flaherty and his filming of *Nanook*. Nichols argues the mode "gives us a sense of what it is like for the filmmaker to be in a given situation and how that situation alters as a result. The types and degrees of alteration help define variations within the participatory mode of documentary" (2001: 116). Whereas observational cinema stressed minimal filmmaker intervention and an aversion to acting or performance, the participatory mode permitted the engagement of the filmmaker with his/her subjects which allowed for the possibility of the filmmaker acting as mentor, critic, interrogator, collaborator, or provocateur (Nichols 2001: 116), and this description again recalls Flaherty. As

MacDougall states, “Flaherty’s work, for all its reflection of his own idealism, was rooted in the careful exploration of other people’s lives” (1985: 276). As MacDougall describes Flaherty exploring the lives of others, ostensibly, he also positions *Nanook* within the parameters of the participatory mode, further confirming *Nanook* as a hybrid film. MacDougall, in recognizing Flaherty’s immersion within Nanook’s culture, suggests a participatory cinema in which “the filmmaker acknowledges his entry upon the world of his subjects and yet asks them to imprint directly upon the film their own culture” (MacDougall 1985: 282).

Nichols’ reflexive mode bears particular importance to this study in that the mode not only recognizes the cinematic apparatus but also shares characteristics with mockumentary cinema. Self-conscious of itself and aware of its own artifice, the reflexive mode may be commonly understood as a postmodern mode of documentary. For Nichols reflexive documentaries “ask us to see documentary for what it is: a construct or representation” (2001: 125).

The reflexive mode takes aim at the preceding three modes. Challenging and destabilizing the hegemony of seamless or transparent documentary cinema, the reflexive mode asks the viewer to recognize documentary film’s mode of production and to see it as a construct or representation. The commentary marking the expository mode is replaced here with a sort of metacommentary whose existence as a “commentary” compiled in order to advance an argument is not disguised or naturalized within the film’s diegesis. Instead, and as Beattie states, “reflexive documentaries are concerned with exposing objectivity by revealing the filmmaker as a subjective authorial presence willing to provoke action and to reflect on the results of that provocation” (2004, 23).

Similarly, Nichols addresses reflexive documentary's relationship to realism and declares reflexive documentary a mode that challenges realism's attempts to "provide unproblematic access to the world" (2001: 126). The reflexive mode endeavors to demystify this access to the world, to make known the role of the cinematic apparatus in naturalizing the images and events a film records and represents. Revealing, not disguising, according to Nichols, the reflexive mode, at its best, "prods the viewer to a heightened form of consciousness about his or her relation to a documentary and what it represents" (2001: 128).

The performative mode may be understood as an extended version of the poetic as its representational nature relies less on the referential or tangible and instead emphasizes style and expression. This mode is interesting in that Chapter Three's examination of *Don't Look Back* suggests the film incorporates the performative mode as a result of Bob Dylan's "performances" for the camera, arguing that his demeanour and candour altered accordingly, depending on whether the camera was recording or not. Although performative documentaries retain a bond with the socio-historical world, these works tend to be more avant-garde in their aesthetic. For example, as Nichols suggests, here the text itself will perform, attention is drawn to itself, not unlike the reflexive mode, and its argumentation is delivered through visual expression (1994: 97). All documentary modes share a desire to represent, but there obviously also exist discordant ideas on representation. The seemingly straightforward and benign representation strategies of the expository mode, where an authoritative voice-over presides over the film's representation, are replaced here with a more subjective, theatrical representational style. Couched in personal expression, subjectivity and rhetorical devices, the performative

mode allows memory, experience, value judgments and beliefs a voice within the subject representation.

Often considered an experimental or outsider mode, performative documentary includes Marlon Riggs' *Tongues Untied* (1989), a film exploring the complexities (and dangers) of negotiating culture as a young black gay man. Making use of poetry and prose as a mode of address, Riggs enacts a series of personal experiences that, while often abstract and intensely personal, allow the viewer to form a bond with the representation. Although *Tongues Untied* has little relevance to this study in a specific manner, the alternative forms of address are relevant in that both *Don't Look Back* and *Bob Roberts* also employ a similar strategy. For example, Dylan's music video for "Subterranean Homesick Blues" uses a series of cue cards matched synchronously with Dylan's singing. That Dylan's lyrics are both personal and political links his mode of address in the video with the performative mode. Moreover, Bob Roberts re-enacts Dylan's video, but substitutes Dylan's leftist lyrics with the polarizing, yet markedly, political lyrics of his own.

This chapter's final section re-contextualizes the documentary modes as arranged by Nichols. Plantinga, although at times critical, credits Nichols with dispelling any notion his six modes were rigidly independent of each other and, acknowledging each mode's transgressive capabilities, states, "Nichols does not present these modes as strictly-defined categories with clear boundaries...and specific non-fiction films can and often do mix modes" (1998: 101). As the linking of Dylan and *Don't Look Back* to the performative mode and *Tongues Untied* demonstrates, it is plausible to now recognize the dynamic and hybrid nature of documentary cinema. While Nichols has provided a useful

schema outlining the various modes and highlighting the specifics assigned to each, it has become increasingly reasonable to understand documentary cinema as an often hybrid form, borrowing from, and in debt to, a varying number of the modes Nichols lists. Chapter One, for example, argues *Nanook* is a hybrid film marked by a clear narrative structure which includes a “hero” and a conflict, climax and resolution, but remains marked by early documentary conventions such as commentary titles, and the impression of filmmaker objectivity. Further, Rothman endorses this position, and argues that *Nanook* is “poised between documentary and fiction” (1998: 27), a point that ideally sets up the theoretical framework examined in this chapter that explores the idea of documentary hybridity.

According to Matthew Bernstein, “academic discussion has acknowledged that defining the documentary is difficult, whether documentary is understood in terms of its formal features, its assumptions about the construction of knowledge, its approach to narration, its assertion of authority, the expectations it evokes in the audience – or all of the above” (1998: 398). Beginning with his essay, “The Voice of Documentary” (1985) and continuing with his “Documentary Modes as Representation” in *Representing Reality* (1991), and finally culminating in his most recent book, *Introduction to Documentary* (2001), Nichols has, not unlike this chapter, and perhaps as a result of being criticized by Plantinga for not recasting his schema, recognized the documentary form as being hybrid in nature and regularly in transition, responding and reacting to criticism and new understanding of modes of representation.

Ken Beattie offers a contemporary and highly relevant reconstruction of Nichols’ framework and presents a case for recognizing the hybrid nature of documentary cinema,

where documentary boundaries are blurred and where a new mode emerges equally in debt to numerous modes preceding it (2004, 24). This chapter's investigation into intersections at the base level of documentary modes works to enable the following chapter's comparative examination of *Don't Look Back* and *Bob Roberts*. Drawing on this chapter's contention that a series of slippery boundaries and pliable conventions results in hybrid documentaries, Chapter Three confirms this, and enters these two films into evidence. *Don't Look Back* is often argued to be a high-water mark of cinéma vérité (or observational cinema, to return once more to Nichols' term) while *Bob Roberts* is considered a clever and capable mockumentary, which not only sends up many scenes from *Don't Look Back*, but acts as an investigation itself into the credibility of visual evidence, photographic truth and the believability of documentary.

Expanding on the argument recognizing the hybrid nature of documentary, Chapter Three focuses on the truth claims posited by cinéma vérité. Through this examination, and considering the formal features of cinéma vérité and mockumentary, and the manner in which they circulate within the text, a new perspective on documentary is offered. Buttressing this new reading with both visual and textual evidence from a mockumentary works to foreground this new idea on documentary and cinema truth.

Chapter Three

Welcome to “Reality?”

This chapter draws on Chapter Two’s argument that all documentary modes are interdisciplinary and vulnerable to critique if their central purpose is objectively to access reality and make truth claims. The previous chapter argued that documentary modes often borrow conventions typically associated with fiction film, such as narrative structures driven by a crisis/resolution framework and character development. It was also argued that both fiction films and documentary are in debt to realism, drawing on the conventions literary and artistic realism set forth before them. This point was initially demonstrated in Chapter One via a dialectical examination of *Nanook of the North* in which the film’s narrative structure and its use of the “hero” saw it re-classified as a documentary hybrid film, as much in debt to fiction filmmaking as to documentary. This position was expanded on in the preceding chapter, as Nichols’ documentary framework was unpacked to articulate the hybrid, multi-dimensional nature of documentary.

This argumentation acts as a precursor to this chapter’s examination of *Don’t Look Back* (D.A. Pennebaker, 1967) and *Bob Roberts* (Tim Robbins, 1992). Moreover, this chapter is at least partially born as a result of Matthew Bernstein’s belief that it would be beneficial to the study of documentary “to explore films that exemplified transitions between – or modifications within – modes, as examples of competing documentary practices and rhetoric” (1998: 400). Further, Michael Renov addresses the relationship between fiction and documentary and asks a key and pertinent question: “how do we begin to distinguish the documentary performance-for-the-camera of a musician, actor, politician (*Don’t Look Back*, *Jane*, *Primary*) from that of a fictional

counterpart (*The Doors, On Golden Pond, The Candidate*)?” (1993: 2) Renov then presents a plausible answer to the question and suggests, “the ironies and cross-identifications these examples invoke ought to suggest the extent to which fictional and nonfictional categories share key conceptual and discursive characteristics” (1993: 2). This study, though, takes Bernstein’s comment and Nichols’ earlier argument that all modes are intertextual, transitional and reject strict nomenclature, and examines the mixing -- the blurring -- of documentary and fiction film conventions and strategies to ultimately culminate in the mockumentary.

Roscoe and Hight describe the agenda of mockumentary as “ultimately to parody the assumptions and expectations associated with factual discourse, to ‘mock’ the cultural status of documentary’s generic codes and conventions” (2001: 47). The two provide an exhaustive examination of the mockumentary suggesting “at the margins of documentary are also a growing body of fictional texts which, to varying degrees, represent a commentary on, or confusion or subversion of, factual discourse” (2001: 1). After acknowledging the various terms used to describe this style of subversive documentary, including “pseudo-documentary” (Jacobs 2000: 1), “faux-documentary” (Francke quoted in Roscoe and Hight 2001: 1) and “quasi-documentary” (Neale and Krutnik quoted in Roscoe and Hight 2001: 1), Roscoe and Hight settle on the term “mock-documentary”. I have used the term mockumentary in this study because, much as the mockumentary is seamless in its execution of a pre-existing form, the term “mockumentary,” without a dash suggesting a separation, also remains seamless.

A mockumentary may mock, imitate, parody, or satirize an established and pre-existing documentary form and/or text, and jointly appropriate and subvert customary

documentary codes and conventions in order to do so. This reflexive appropriation is especially important in that documentary cinema has long been recognized and accepted based on a series of established stylistic codes and conventions, and in order to adequately destabilize these codes, the mockumentary must first employ them, essentially setting up spectators by providing them with what they want or what they know. In ostensibly duping the viewer, mockumentary, through the employment of parody, “works by raising expectations around a particular text (such as documentary) then disappoints (when we realize it is not a documentary), but still produces a non-factual text that can be engaged with in new and complex ways (the mock-documentary)” (Roscoe and Hight 2001: 30).

Having, in the previous chapter, examined and linked ethnographic and expository documentary to *cinéma vérité*, direct cinema, and to an extent, fiction film, this chapter, via a comparative analysis, now examines how the mimesis of film conventions can disrupt and challenge spectatorship. The mockumentary relies on mimesis in its co-opting of documentary conventions, yet its imitation often has ulterior motives. These include the aforementioned challenge to spectatorship, to practice reflexivity, to mock the seductive and persuasive nature of film conventions and, for some mockumentaries, to simply be clever. A mockumentary may copy or replicate a pre-existing form – the documentary – in order to provide the viewer with an aesthetic that looks familiar: this strategy is both meant to destabilize the notion of documentary objectivity and to undermine the “teachings,” the Voice of God, which became an entrenched convention of documentary. Mockumentaries, though, like documentaries, are not confined to one style and can differ depending on the manner in which they are

governed, through parody or satire. Much like cinéma vérité and direct cinema, satire and parody are similar concepts that are occasionally, and mistakenly, employed interchangeably.

Linda Hutcheon has written extensively on parody and satire, and in her book, *A Theory of Parody* (1985), she examines how despite occasionally being considered overlapping concepts, parody and satire, in fact, have different meanings. According to Hutcheon satire works to ridicule its target, while parody avoids devaluing its target and can even celebrate and pay homage to it (1985: 30-45). As Del Jacobs suggests, “compared to satire, parody is a gentler application of humor. Satire...exposes the shortcomings of its subject, most often society and its institutions...and employs a more mischievous use of irony than parody” (2000: 13).

This distinction is examined in this chapter with *Bob Roberts* recognized as a parody of vérité style rockumentaries, such as *Don't Look Back* and *Gimme Shelter* (Albert and David Maysles, 1970), but also as a satire on the U.S. political system and its media-based spin doctoring. This is a strategic duality employed earlier by Rob Reiner, whose *This is Spinal Tap* (1984) also parodies the rockumentary, including *Don't Look Back*, while also satirizing the masculinity and misogyny of heavy metal music and its culture. As Carl Plantinga notes, the primary function of satire is couched in politics and critical social commentary, for example, the critique of the U.S. political system in *Bob Roberts* or the ridiculing of misogyny in *This is Spinal Tap*, while parody most often employs humour to draw attention to a pre-existing form or text (1998: 320-22).

This chapter begins with an examination of *Don't Look Back* and investigates the roles of the filmmaker, Pennebaker, and his subject, Dylan. This investigation considers

Pennebaker's role as alleged impartial spectator, his job simply being to operate the camera, and Dylan's role as the filmmaker's subject, aware of not only the influential nature of media, but also cognizant of his position as being able to show the filmmaker what he, Dylan, wants the viewer to see. Following this, *Bob Roberts* is factored into the study, and the two films are comparatively examined. This chapter, then, provides, firstly, a direct examination of two obviously different, yet inextricably linked films, and secondly, contextualizes Chapter Four's examination of the mockumentary alongside mimesis and simulation. Moreover, allowing *Don't Look Back* to first stand on its own before being unpacked alongside *Bob Roberts* permits the reader an increased cognizance of the influential nature of the conventions marking the documentary, in this case, cinéma vérité. Further, a comparative analysis flushes out both the limitations restricting cinéma vérité's engagement with reality and the ways in which the mockumentary exploits these limitations through a series of explicit strategies calling into question the veracity of cinéma vérité's truth claims.

The conceptual underpinnings of the mockumentary may be linked to Nichols' reflexive mode. According to Nichols, "reflexive documentaries ask us to *see documentary* for what it is: a construct or representation" (2001: 125), and he further situates the reflexive mode by using as an example, Dziga Vertov's *The Man with a Movie Camera* (1929). Nichols explains that Vertov "demonstrates how the impression of reality comes to be constructed by beginning with a scene of the cameraman, Mikhail Kaufman, filming people riding in a horsedrawn carriage from a car that runs alongside the carriage. Vertov then cuts to an editing room, where the editor assembles strips of

film that represent this event into the sequence we have, presumably, just seen” (2001: 126-27).

Vertov’s strategy for calling attention to the construction of a film is overt, he literally *allows* us to bear witness to the process. This directness reminds of Buñuel’s *Las Hurdes*, a film earlier considered in Chapter Two. Whereas Vertov permitted the viewer to witness the editing process by *showing* the process to us, Buñuel took a different approach, yet one similar in objective. Buñuel’s inclusion of a scene in which the commentator remarks goats are occasionally killed when they accidentally fall over the side of a steep cliff is disrupted by a distinct cloud of smoke -- from a shotgun -- that appears beside a goat the moment it tumbles down a cliff. Buñuel’s caustic humour aside, what remains is a definitive commentary on the constructed nature of film, a peeling back of a façade to declare that in film, even ones commonly assumed to be truthful such as documentaries, constructions, recreations and set-ups abound. As Nichols declares, and to briefly return to Chapter Two, at their best, “reflexive documentary prods the viewer to a heightened form of consciousness about his/her relation to a documentary and what it represents” (2001: 128), and Vertov and Buñuel are two examples of filmmakers whose films include the prodding that Nichols suggests.

Returning briefly to the reflexive mode aids in foregrounding a clearer understanding of motives behind mockumentary, but also in establishing a precedent for a sub-genre that challenges cinéma vérité’s claims to accessing and recording spontaneous reality. In examining this contestation between the limitations of cinéma vérité’s and the mockumentary’s exploiting of them, cinéma vérité is now examined through a new lens, a lens which questions cinéma vérité’s conventions, understanding

them as formulaic and thus unable to spontaneously capture the unmediated reality cinéma vérité claims to possess.

Showing What's There. *Don't Look Back* and Cinéma Vérité.

Working through the persuasive nature of documentary conventions enables a greater understanding of why spectators of documentary cinema have historically been regarded as passive in their spectatorship. Understood as assigning truth to any documentary so long as it provides the specific markers designating documentary status, such as the voice-of-God commentary, or a shaky and/or hand-held camera, viewers have accepted a tone permeated by the documentary that positions spectators as uninformed students, and the film as the all-knowing teacher. As the Introduction explained, Stuart Hall considered the assumption that viewers are passive and uninformed to be an incorrect one. Hall concluded that to assume this of viewers was to consider “the people” as “cultural dopes” who are “purely passive” (1981: 232). Cultural Studies, initially developed at Birmingham’s Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies during the 1970s, a group of which Hall belonged, offered a similar critique. As Andy Willis informs, “they stressed that different audiences make different responses on the basis of their specific cultural competences and dispositions” (1995: 184). This position on spectatorship sees viewers afforded a critical competency, as opposed to simply being relegated to the status of “dopes,” and it is enacted here in couching cinéma vérité as more “spectator friendly” than the modes that preceded it. Cinéma vérité, however, was subsequently destabilized through the active spectatorship it endorsed, and found itself questioned by firstly, the reflexive mode, and secondly, mockumentary.

In aspiring to give viewers the impression that “they are there, *in* the screen,” cinéma vérité responded to, and improved on, ethnographic and expository documentary’s “showing what was there” to the spectator. As noted in Chapter Two, cinéma vérité, in seeking to be a pure and truthful cinema, observes and records reality while claiming to avoid the organizational or persuasive strategies such as controlling, staging or reorganizing the material or subjects the camera captures on film that earlier documentary modes relied on. As Mamber suggests in his book, *Cinéma Vérité in America*, early practitioners of the cinéma vérité style worked to eliminate the barriers between subject and audience, increasing the film’s verisimilitude and naturalizing the viewer’s association with the events occurring on the screen. The viewer no longer just watched the events or subject on screen, but now stood alongside them (1974: 4).

Don’t Look Back “stars” a young Bob Dylan during his first British tour in 1967 and has been hailed as the film from “which all subsequent attempts to capture the real have stemmed” (Hall 1998: 223). Jeanne Hall has linked *Don’t Look Back* with *Primary*, considered a landmark film in the aesthetic development of cinéma vérité (Allen and Gomery 1985: 224). *Primary* was considered “a revolutionary step and breaking point in the recording of reality in cinema” (*Film Culture* 1961: 11), but *Don’t Look Back* was also important to the development of the tradition as Pennebaker’s style came to help define and solidify the conventions of the American cinéma vérité movement (Allen and Gomery 1985: 224).

Pennebaker uses a “fly on the wall” filmmaking style that demands the camera remain as unobtrusive as possible, the camera simply (allegedly) an impartial documenter of any action as it unfolds. For instance, the principles governing cinéma vérité forbade

the filmmaker from asking anyone to repeat an action or statement, and any events recorded had to occur without any intrusion or scene reconstruction. The camera's neutrality is aligned with the filmmaker's objectivity, acting solely as the device used to capture what occurs before the camera. Through a series of conventions, coupled with audience expectation and passivity, the film comprises a series of vignettes edited together to create a representation of reality. For, example, Mamber states, "Dylan is a performer, and the film itself is a performance in the sense that it is clear that Dylan is establishing a persona, reacting to the insistent camera in deliberate ways" (1974: 182). Although Pennebaker refrains from treating Dylan as a traditional "documentary subject" in the expository sense in that he avoids prefacing Dylan's entrance with any introductory information (Mamber 1974: 178), instead choosing to only record the events, Dylan nevertheless uses Pennebaker's camera to help define a public image he deems satisfactory.

The presence of a camera affects a subject's actions, but, although the camera itself is implicated in this process, Pennebaker himself is not (Mamber 1974: 183). Pennebaker's camera affects Dylan, but Dylan is left to perform to his liking, free from any guidance or direction from Pennebaker. As Mamber states, "there is the refusal to direct people, to suggest in any way that one action is more desirable than another. The subject remains free to a considerable extent – he's not told what to do or how to respond" (1974: 183). It is this very freedom that permits Dylan to recognize the opportunity to use the filming process to shape his image, and, as Mamber asserts, it is difficult "to argue that Dylan isn't 'acting' for the camera" (1974: 180). Pennebaker drew attention to the freedom Dylan was afforded and said, "I don't feel that because I'm

there with a camera I have any special privileges, and I don't feel I should exert any" (Mamber 1974: 183). It is left then up to the viewer to draw a conclusion about the camera's influence on Dylan, and the degree to which the star is simply "being himself" or consciously performing for the ubiquitous camera.

Pennebaker, in seemingly recording events as they occur¹, manages to capture Dylan in numerous private, and thus, conceivably, real situations. For example, the spectator is permitted to watch as Dylan types lyrics in a hotel room while Joan Baez, his companion on the tour, sings and plays guitar. Dylan, alert yet clearly concentrating on his lyrics, subtly nods his head as Baez plays beside him. This scene permits the viewer to engage actively with the events as they unfold, to question how Dylan is able to write his lyrics amidst Baez's singing and playing beside him? Or is Dylan simply ignoring her, his comment, "that's a good song," as Baez finishes, more an automatic response to recognizing the song is over than an expression of any actual admiration for her work? This engagement allows the viewer to locate Dylan's acting. For example, Pennebaker also captures Dylan's response to hotel-room guest's adulation of young British musician, Donovan, with a rendition of his "It's All Over Now, Baby Blue" an earnest performance but seemingly performed only to upstage his young, blue-eyed rival. Advocates of *Don't Look Back* as a hallmark of the vérité movement, such as Hall and Rothman, for example, often cite this crisis moment as one representing the authenticity of the film's vérité.

¹ Within the diegesis of the film the viewer is not given any indication as to when or what or at what time Pennebaker filmed. As far as the viewer can surmise, Pennebaker simply lets the camera record Dylan, but what footage is not included in the film's final cut or when or if Pennebaker decided not to film Dylan in a particular instance is not relayed to the viewer.

The rivalry between Dylan and Donovan, whether real or contrived within the film's narrative by Pennebaker, is introduced to the audience in a manner indicative of an editing strategy working to establish a narrative within the diegesis of the film.

Immediately preceding Donovan's introduction, for example, the film's shaky hand-held camera tracks Dylan, and he and his entourage snake through a series of staircases and narrow corridors. Pennebaker's camera closely trails Dylan and his handlers as they eventually emerge on the street, piercing a fan-filled street before finally finding safety within a limousine. Dylan's limousine quickly disappears, and a cut then reveals a poster on the street, the headline reading, "Donovan!" Pennebaker's astute use of a found cultural artifact acts as a device to introduce a new character, and the next shot shows Donovan himself smiling brightly inside Dylan's hotel room.

In one of the more important sequences in the film, Pennebaker is allowed inside Dylan's hotel room and captures two incidents which both provide evidence to support cinéma vérité advocates and critics alike. Firstly, there is Dylan's response to Donovan's room-pleasing performance, and secondly, his tirade concerning a glass having been thrown out of the hotel room window onto the street below. As Dylan begins his tirade off camera, Pennebaker captures Donovan, sitting plaintively in a room full of people, as he suddenly turns toward the door where a commotion involving Dylan is taking place. Irrate that someone has lobbed a glass out the window, Dylan demands, "Who threw that glass in the street? If somebody don't tell me who did it, you're all going to get the fuck out of here and never come back. I don't care who did it, I just want to *know* who did it." The spectator is left to determine the source of Dylan's anger. Is he upset because he

finds the act itself immature and foolish? Is he upset because his reputation may be tarnished as a result of the incident?

Concern for his image is plausible on three fronts. Firstly, Dylan was aware he was a burgeoning star in England, acutely aware of the English media and cognizant of how the incident may play out in the press. Secondly, Dylan is the subject of a feature-length documentary, one that will eventually gain a wide release, and he may thus have been reluctant to have incidents recorded which portrayed his tour as involving just another group of rambunctious rock stars. At this stage of his career, he was considered a humanitarian, a “folky” concerned with society. For example, his benevolence and generally polite manner is demonstrated in the film when he is interviewed by the African Service of the BBC despite the negative experience he had a year earlier when working on the interviewer’s friend’s play. Incidentally, Pennebaker later acknowledged Dylan had asked he edit out the tirade, not wanting the public to believe he was prone to such fierce diatribes (Rothman 1998: 185). Dylan’s request concedes his concern about his public image. Further, his later apology to the suspected glass breaker suggests a star aware of the camera’s presence and keenly aware of his opportunity to rectify the incident with an apology, with a performance.

A third possibility, and an issue raised by William Rothman in his exhaustive reading of the film, suggests the viewer can interpret Dylan’s tirade as a response to Donovan’s presence in the hotel room. For example, Dylan and his entourage routinely ridicule Donovan before the young pop star appears on camera, both privileging the viewer with Dylan’s opinion, and foreshadowing Donovan’s impending importance to a crisis moment Pennebaker captures soon thereafter. Before meeting him, Dylan inquires,

upon seeing a Donovan headline, “who’s Donovan?” Dylan’s companion, Alan Price, formerly of the Animals, replies, “a young Scottish bloke.” Dylan then proceeds to further enunciate “bloke” until it becomes a vomiting sound (Rothman 1997: 184). Next, Dylan reads the headline, “Is Donovan deserting his fans?” and responds, “‘Is Donovan deserting his fans?’ He’s only been around for three months! Well that’s what I call a loser!” After learning the British press has an award for him, Dylan quips, “tell them to give it to Donovan.” Dylan debases himself when he comments on Donovan’s relatively recent entrance into pop stardom in that he *does* know who Donovan is; he is not as detached from popular culture as he may have us believe, and understanding this, the spectator can conclude that Dylan may have realized that Donovan was a tangible threat to his stardom, let alone to the film in which he is the star. Thus, Dylan’s tirade and his later his response to Donovan’s performance are meant both to impress and to intimidate him. Dylan, in act that can be surely interpreted as passive-aggressive and meant to intimidate, refuses Donovan’s offer to help with the broken glass by way of providing no response at all, let alone a thank you.

The tension in the room is eased when Dylan, upon hearing someone playing guitar, exclaims, “he plays like Jack [Elliott], man” (Rothman 1997: 186). It is Donovan playing, though, and playing well. Dylan, compelled to listen further, investigates and sees Donovan, adorned with a room full of admirers, serenading the room with his hit, “I’ll Song a Song For You.” Dylan, like the others in the room, is impressed, impressed enough to comment, “Hey, that’s a good song, man!” This compliment, an endorsement of sorts, compels Donovan to play on, entertaining the room with two more verses before a round of applause greets him. Dylan responds to Donovan’s performance with a

searing rendition of his own song, “It’s All Over Now, Baby Blue,” that speaks as much to Donovan, he of blue eyes and a baby face, as it does to the song’s original inspiration. Although Donovan himself requested the song, surely Dylan took a moment to consider the additional consequences of the song, and this recognition, coupled with an omnipresent sarcastic smirk throughout the performance, signals Dylan’s competitive nature. Dylan’s shy laughing that peppers his performance acknowledges his awareness of Donovan’s adulation of him and Donovan’s understanding that Dylan is the star, he merely the youngster. Tellingly, and certainly a moment worthy of strict *vérité* categorization, the song’s final stanza and the reactions that follow indicate Donovan’s subjugation to Dylan. As Rothman notes, Dylan, looking at Donovan, who (instinctively?) turns away, sings,

...The vagabond who’s rapping at your door
Is standing in the clothes that you once wore.
Strike another match, go start anew.
And it’s all over now, Baby Blue.

Rothman sums up the scene immediately following the song’s end and states,

Dylan smiles and laughs as he finishes. When the applause dies down, Donovan says, “Great, Dylan. That was nice, Bob. I used to...” But just as Donovan seems about to suggest another number he might perform, Dylan cuts him off. “You want to hear another song?” “Yes.” There is a quick fade-out, the quickness seeming to underscore the deft, gentle way Dylan has just asserted, and Donovan acknowledged, his superiority (Rothman 1997: 188).

Acutely aware of the filmmaking process, Dylan reacts to what he understands as negative publicity and rectifies it by overshadowing his rival and resituating himself as the “star.” On the immediate surface then, *Don’t Look Back* appears to capture, objectively, a “real” occurrence, but these claims are imperiled when the notion of myth-making is addressed. Myth presents itself as an authoritative, factual account of a person or incident (Ponech 1999: 230), and *Don’t Look Back* demonstrates occasions of the making of the “Dylan myth.” Pro-filmic events occur in unspecified time and Dylan’s status rapidly approaches “Godliness” as the film progresses. Moreover, Dylan becomes involved in myth-like events, extraordinary circumstances that are reserved for those with a largely unattainable status. For example, Dylan is invited to the home of the Lady High Sheriff, a scene later parodied in *Bob Roberts*. He also becomes the subject of an intense bidding war between British television networks and finds himself in a cab that a fanatic clings to as it negotiates busy London streets.

Often critical of the status quo and the mainstream media, Dylan, in this film, uses these criticisms for his own ends as he actively works to create the myth of “Dylan the God.” He recognizes the media’s infatuation and in turn uses the media to help him create the myth. In his critiques of the media, Dylan situates himself as the “unattainable God.” To that end Dylan berates British music journalists after being informed of his impending award for the best-selling rock record. Dylan, though, failing to recognize the award is based on units shifted, not critical acclaim, threatens to refuse the award, dismissing it by stating, “I don’t want it man. I don’t even want to see them [the awards show]. Tell them to give it to Donovan.” This is understood peripherally as a rejection

of mainstream media, but is also understood as Dylan's using of the media to create his own status, his own myth.

Pennebaker's camera often seems innocuous and attempts to be neither critical nor supportive of Dylan's outbursts and diatribes, and instead works to simply record these events as they unfold. Mamber examines the role of Pennebaker's camera, exploring how neutral the camera could be, how incidental its presence is, and how it may affect Dylan whether or not Pennebaker and Dylan want it to. As Mamber notes, "the film appears to adhere rigorously to the irrelevant, refusing to treat Dylan as a 'documentary subject,' someone whose past must be explained, whose present motivations must be explored, and whose significance must be established" (Mamber 1974: 178). Instead, Pennebaker, as Mamber sees it, chooses to allow Dylan to provide this information to the viewer as he sees fit, and Pennebaker, merely recording events as they occur, is left to edit the material into the final product, a product allowing Dylan's input, but ultimately at Pennebaker's discretion. For example, and to revisit Dylan's tirade at the guest who had drunkenly smashed a glass: Dylan requested the tirade be edited out of the final cut, but Pennebaker instead chose to include it, considering it crucial to the film's tone and essential in capturing events "from the inside." Including these privileged moments aids in providing the viewer an experience tantamount to "being there," to being witness to the myth, the unattainable.

Don't Look Back's stylistic construction of Dylan acts allegorically as an argument suggesting Dylan, in his sullen and hostile glory, is justified in his critiques of the press and Pennebaker is merely fortunate enough to be there to record them. For example, it is the press that probes the star in regards to his artistic integrity and whether

his musical progressions, those signaling a move away from the “folkie speaking for the people,” will alienate his fans who have come to expect a specific Dylan archetype. The press questions him repeatedly about his folk roots, asking him to define the term, asking what it means to him, and essentially, contributing to the construction of his identity. This involvement by the press in contributing to the public understanding of his identity and social politics compels one to wonder: does he change his style as his musical progressions dictate or does he remain within the stringent parameters set out by “folk music” so as not to upset his fans? For example, Dylan’s role as a socio-political messenger is affirmed when a reporter, clearly smitten with him, and playing with her hair, asks, “Do you think young people will understand what you’re saying?” Pennebaker allows the spectator to unpack this conflict independently, but in doing so also legitimizes Dylan’s diatribes against the media, capturing for the spectator, the large amount of press the star must endure. Dylan’s conflict with both the media and disgruntled fans is illustrated when Pennebaker captures Dylan gazing into a guitar store admiring the electric guitars. This scene’s importance is found in the knowledge that the film documents Dylan’s last acoustic tour, and Pennebaker further implies this when he then includes footage of a young fan questioning Dylan’s “Subterranean Homesick Blues,” a “plugged in” song resulting in the girl suggesting, “It didn’t even sound like you. It sounds like you were having a good old laugh.”

The questioning of the film’s objectivity and its role in the myth-making process is a result of Warner Bros. and Dylan’s manager Albert Grossman’s involvement in its production. The film did not originate with Pennebaker, but rather with Dylan’s eventual wife, Sara, an employee at Life magazine and someone familiar with Pennebaker’s career

(Rothman 1997: 133). Assuming that Sara, in working in the media, had discussed with Dylan issues such as media-based subjectivity, representation, manipulation and identity, it becomes rational to ask whether Dylan would allow his “true” self, that is, his off-screen, off-stage, or non-celebrity self, to be recorded? Or would he instead, being leery of the media, only posture and play a role, offering less insight into his private, genuine self, but still working to solidify his public, performative myth?

It is interesting to speculate as to Dylan’s collusion with, or rejection of, a documentary discourse that is defined as objective and able to record reality. In what proves a sequence with an interesting double meaning, Dylan’s interview with a young, unnamed science student confirms his ability to let someone engage him in an intimate setting, but also reaffirms his tendency to occasionally embark on obtuse diatribes that keep both the interviewer and spectator at bay. There is a Dylan the viewer is able to engage with, but a Dylan, also, who remains closed off and inaccessible to fans and media. Nichols considers one of the negative elements of performative documentary to be excess, including the excessive use of style (1994: 95). Here Nichols is referring to the performative mode, but if we simply apply this criticism to a film subject we are able to access an understanding of Dylan’s performance, his stylized theatrics, as excessive as well.

Provided then with only limited access to Dylan, viewers are compelled to fill in the blanks in speculating as to who the “real” Dylan is. For example, if questions are raised then a spectator will often seek answers. If these answers are not provided, the spectator will piece together an answer through what evidence is provided. Prominent in the film is folk singer Joan Baez. She sings for Dylan in his hotel room and appears at a

press conference with him, but no explanation is given for her reason for accompanying him on the tour. Pennebaker offers no evidence of a romantic involvement with Baez, yet curiously he also decides against including footage of Dylan's marriage to Sara even though the two had eloped to Paris during the tour (Rothman 1997: 134). The omission confirms Pennebaker's ensuring that a critical distance remains between viewer and subject.

At its simplest, we can recognize Pennebaker's omission of the elopement as demonstrative of filmmaker subjectivity and decision making -- a filmmaker cannot possibly capture and include everything -- but in correlation to the film, Pennebaker's exclusion of both the event and the news of the event further suggests, albeit not to the viewer, Dylan's mistrust of the media and his calculated refusal to let the spectator witness "it all." And perhaps that is the point for Dylan; the viewer is unable to corroborate Dylan's mistrust of the media and his desire for privacy because Dylan protects himself from "showing too much," and thus the viewer remains kept at a distance. We are privy to many moments, private and distressing moments even; for example, Dylan's scathing exchange with the young interviewer from Time magazine. Dylan, though, is wise enough to temper, or distract from, these moments with less intimate and more social moments, in a sense to substitute the important -- his attack on the interviewer -- with the blasé or safe -- his typing lyrics at a desk.

The inclusion and exclusion of a specific event or incident naturally has a purpose or a reason behind it. For example, Pennebaker includes Dylan's diatribe towards the Time reporter, but does not include his responses to questions posed by Pete Myers, a black journalist working for the African Service of the BBC. Failing to include Dylan's

responses, Pennebaker instead cuts to archival footage of the star performing years earlier during a predominantly black Mississippi voter-registration rally.

This cut is interesting on a number of levels. Firstly, the cut takes place after Myers broached the topic of Dylan's involvement in a play directed by Myers' friend, a play that proved a negative experience for Dylan. Instead of allowing the viewer a privileged moment capturing the response to this potentially contentious question, Pennebaker instead cuts to a scene illustrating Dylan as the "deeply humanitarian" star, as Myers had earlier referred to him. Secondly, beyond this obvious example of filmmaker subjectivity, the cut is also out of place within the film's adherence to the principles of *cinéma vérité*. Ideologically, the cut is sympathetic to Dylan's persona or reputation as a humanitarian and pillar of social conscience. Difficult to dismiss, however, is the exclusion of Dylan's response to Myers. Was it in the form of the earlier diatribe? And further, is the cut compensatory, an edit working to compel the viewer to reaffirm the Dylan myth?

Looking Real. Truth and Fiction? Truth or Fiction?

Documentaries are similar to fiction films in that both are edited constructions dictated by the filmmaker's subjectivity. Although documentary film can capture real people in real situations, what is investigated here is whether this documentation is "more real" than a fiction film, or whether documentary cinema's truth claims are based as much in realism's conventions and ability to replicate the appearance of reality as in reality itself.

Don't Look Back is an important film in the history of documentary cinema, yet despite the film's perceived objective capturing of reality, it is one also effectively

parodied by Robbins' oft-clever *Bob Roberts*, a fiction film which "looks" like a documentary through its appropriation of certain documentary codes and conventions, in this case, the conventions of cinéma vérité. A "landmark text" in the development of the mockumentary (Roscoe and Hight 2001: 140), *Bob Roberts*' critique is primarily executed on three fronts. Firstly, the film challenges the documentary tradition, and in particular undermines the conventions of cinéma vérité. Secondly, the film critiques the conservative, right-wing politics that shaped the U.S. in the 1980s, but also, thirdly, the passive, mainstream American media which broadcast and blindly endorsed the modern conservatism marking the Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush presidencies. *Bob Roberts* then, as a complex critique, not only destabilizes the veracity of cinéma vérité's central claim, to capture reality, but also works doubly in that it also employs this mode in order to critique both the American political system, or more specifically, the players and spin doctors who influence it, as well as the media and their role within the political system. Lastly, and importantly, the film also calls attention to the passive spectator who blindly endorses or believes a media report simply because it arrives through the media and their institutions.

Bob Roberts' success as a mockumentary is contingent upon the viewer's ability to recognize the film's referencing of Dylan, both the singer and the myth, and *Don't Look Back*. Further, and as was maintained earlier, *Bob Roberts*' success as a mockumentary is also foreground by those viewers who recognize that the text works as both a parody and satire. The "knowing viewer" is positioned so as to develop a critical stance towards the object of parody or satire, and in a sense be "in on the joke." Whereas Plantinga notes that expository films are often patronizing in their "'teaching' from a

position of authority (1997: 102), mockumentary's can be seen as challenging from their inclusion of the viewer into the text. That is, the critical agency the British school of cultural studies assigns viewers is often required here in that a mockumentary may rely on the viewer's cognizance of its critique in order to succeed in its fullest form. This additional awareness is addressed by Jacobs who argues that mockumentary "raises the stakes of audience involvement" (2000: 54), a position applicable to *Bob Roberts* in that viewers need to be aware of its status as both parody -- of rockumentaries -- and satire -- of the U.S political system -- in order to retrieve full meaning from its text.

That the film's "star," Pennsylvania senatorial candidate, Bob Roberts, is representative of a sort-of-mutant Dylan, in line with Dylan's folk music, but every bit a binary opposite of Dylan socially and politically, only reinforces the film's omnipresent critique of right-wing politics in America. Robbins recognizes the conservatism of the 1980s as employing the same tactics as Democrats of the 1960s whose leftist politics championed itself as being in line with basic values of "the people." Here, Robbins reinvents this strategy through the use of one of the 1960s' most recognizable figures, Dylan. According to Roscoe and Hight, "Bob Roberts directly inverts the stance and music of Bob Dylan, in sequences which epitomize this transformation in American political discourse. Bob Dylan's album *The Times They Are A-Changin'* becomes here an attack on the 1960s called *The Times Are Changin' Back*. Every slogan used to mobilize anti-establishment movements from that decade is reinvented by Roberts as a call for a revitalized conservative politics" (2001: 142). Robbins' reinventing of a 60s folk icon as a 80s neo-fascist is a clever satire allowing for humour, anger and critical reflection of the state of the political landscape in an increasingly conservative U.S.

Moreover, Robbins' also reveals the ease with which Dylan's posturing, as well as the strategies of cinéma vérité, were able to be appropriated and subverted.

Bob Roberts replicates many scenes from *Don't Look Back*, in an effort to elicit laughter from the knowing viewers a parody or satire relies on, but also to destabilize the security of the cinéma vérité tradition. Pennebaker's tracking of Dylan from his dressing room, through a corridor and finally to the stage is sent up by Robbins when Roberts' journey from dressing room to stage is a near duplicate of Dylan's similar journey 20 years earlier. While *Bob Roberts* explicitly references *Don't Look Back* in this scene, it is important to note that *Primary*, released seven years prior to *Don't Look Back*, also uses a lengthy tracking shot. In this case, then-presidential hopeful John F. Kennedy is trailed closely by the camera as he moves from the street to the auditorium and eventually onto the stage during the 1960 Wisconsin primary election. Hall notes then, that these tracking shots had become "*de rigueur*" (her italics) and subsequently a target for filmmakers like Rob Reiner who preceded Robbins in his parodying of the same scene years earlier in *This is Spinal Tap* (1998: 224).

For *Bob Roberts*, this theatricality is the source of its parody. While the film is multi-layered, and its parody of rockumentaries makes up only a portion of its content, *Bob Roberts* exposes, through parody, the theatricality of the rockumentary and the performative nature of the subject on or off stage. For example, the aforementioned parodying of Dylan's traversing of a maze of corridors on way to the stage is only the first in a series of similar replications *Bob Roberts* employs in order to expose performance. *Don't Look Back*'s capturing of Dylan at work at his typewriter composing lyrics while Baez sits beside him playing guitar and singing is also parodied by *Bob*

Roberts. Robbins, though, elevates his critique to include an additional element of reflexivity that acts as an acknowledgment or consciousness and awareness of the omnipresent camera. Replacing Dylan's typewriter with a laptop, Roberts sits aboard his campaign/tour bus typing lyrics, as Dylan had done earlier in *Don't Look Back*, and here Baez is replaced by Roberts' companion, Clarissa, who, not surprisingly to the knowing viewer, plays guitar and sings much in the folksy tone of Baez.

This parody is a direct citing of its source, but Robbins' adds an additional element of reflexivity when Roberts turns and acknowledges the camera. After he turns and waves to the camera, and ostensibly, to the viewer, one of Roberts' assistants turns and does the same. On one level this is simply a reflexive act recognizing the cinematic apparatus. It is also, however, a subtle, yet telling critique of cinéma vérité in general, in particular its claims to the invisibility of the camera and/or a subject's ability not to be affected by a camera's presence. Performance is again addressed when Dylan's meeting with the "High Sheriff's Lady" is parodied by Robbins. The overtly polite state Dylan falls into while visiting with the woman and her three teenage sons is cited in *Bob Roberts* when Roberts meets the wife of a high-ranking member of the Christian right. Upon meeting the woman and her three teenaged sons, Roberts also transforms into a polite gentleman, charming the woman while pretending to be interested in the sons' overt admiration of him.

In parodying scenes from a film that was, as earlier noted, often considered the one from which all attempts to bring real life to the screen stemmed, *Bob Roberts* offers an astute critique of the documentary tradition. The film, however, also takes on an additional critical function: the satirizing of the contemporary U.S. political system. On

it own, *Bob Roberts* stands as an indictment of radical right-wing politics, an investigation into corruption, scandal and the role of the church within the state. The film also functions as an investigation into the persuasive nature of cinéma vérité. For example, the believability or reality of cinéma vérité finds itself, through some its practitioners' claims to veracity, targeted by postmodern filmmakers who question the mode's declarations.

Parody works by imitation, intertextuality, and irony, all the while dependent on a critical viewer cognizant of its motive. It is theoretically logical then, for a filmmaking process steeped in parody to be applied to a critique or send-up of cinéma vérité. For example, Roscoe and Hight note that "parody works by raising expectations around a particular text (such as the documentary) then disappoints (when we realize it is not a documentary), but still produces a non-factual text that can be engaged with in new and complex ways (the mock-documentary)" (2001: 30). When this rationale is applied to a comparative analysis of *Don't Look Back* and *Bob Roberts*, it becomes evident that *Bob Roberts* is a parody whose critique of cinéma vérité is thoughtfully realized and theoretically taut in its application and a satire whose critique of the U.S. political system arrives via a systematic subversion of its policies and practices.

Bob Roberts presents itself as looking like a vérité film following a senatorial candidate through the Pennsylvania primaries. The film provides a fictional text posing as a non-fiction text and this duality enables the viewer to engage with the film in a number of ways. On one level the viewer is offered a critical perspective on the role of the media in politics, but, on a more fundamental level, the film also makes use of parody and irony in enabling, compelling even, the viewer to reexamine his/her belief in

documentary cinema's claim to truth. In retaining the aesthetic of documentary, mockumentary undermines documentary truth claims. The film, though, foregrounds its fictionality and it does not attempt to trick viewers into believing it to be real; the film instead works to draw attention to the conventions employed by cinéma vérité and offer a critique of the mode. The film's inclusion of numerous left-leaning, Hollywood actors, for example, Susan Sarandon, Helen Hunt, John Cusack, and, of course, Tim Robbins, negates, for most viewers, any sense of reality. The film, rather, appropriates documentary conventions in order to challenge documentary cinema's truth claims. It is, then, imperative to note, that mockumentary does not seek to validate itself through an alignment with documentary via its appropriation of its codes and conventions, but rather, it intends to challenge its claims.

Central to documentary truth is its historical reliance on a viewer's acceptance of photographic truth; the photograph must act as evidence and an index to reality. Much as Bazin argued an image (photograph) as a conduit to reality should be accepted on the grounds that a photograph captures an image through an objective, mechanized process, documentary cinema, beginning with the earliest forms of the expository mode, relied on this same position. Retaining traces of the real world, visual evidence has been historically recognized as an agent of truth and legitimacy. Documentary cinema came to traffic in this authenticity and relied on photographic evidence to support its truth claims.

Given these truth claims, it is not surprising then that the notion of photographic truth has been subsequently challenged by mockumentary. *Don't Look Back* chronicles Dylan on tour, and the film is constructed through the editing together of a series of filmed segments. Commonly, or in a Bazinian sense, these segments are understood as

evidence of Dylan's truth, his reality while on tour. From a theoretical perspective however, mockumentaries are able to capitalize on this evidence and simply replicate the strategy. For example, *Bob Roberts* includes photographic documents – evidence of history – of a young Roberts, pictures from his youth, as well as album covers and news reports from the past. This evidence seemingly legitimizes the truthfulness of the film, as does the film's inclusion of several reference points to recent historical events, such as the Iran-Contra hearings, Panama's Manuel Noriega, and perhaps what would resonate most strongly with a predominantly North American audience, direct references to the Gulf War. This reflexivity is a first-degree form of consciousness in recognizing its place alongside "real" events and aids in consolidating viewers into the film's diegesis, and, in turn, increasing the film's verisimilitude.

The film engages the viewer in a sort of double reflexivity in calling attention to itself as a film, as a part of the cinematic apparatus, and as an example of that apparatus. For example, when Roberts is a guest on a fictional talk show, *Good Morning Philly*, the film exposes itself as a construct by including "behind the scenes" footage of Roberts supposedly used in the television show. Understood as peeling back the veneer or unmasking the naturalization process film and television rely on, this reflexivity has two functions. The film's reflexivity draws attention to itself as being a film, something *cinéma vérité* endeavors to hide, but also allows us to see a fiction happening as a real talk show would. For example, the viewer witnesses an irate Roberts, who, livid that he was taken to task by the host of the program, a black female, asks a handler while pointing to the camera, "is that on?" When assured the camera is off -- and the viewer is no longer able to watch him -- he proceeds to berate one of his handlers for allowing the

woman to challenge him. This is a critique that parodies the claim that documentaries provide “unedited access to a spontaneous reality,” and, in uncovering such manipulations, satirizes the political process. That is, not only does Roberts not want the viewer to witness him berate an employee, undermining the tradition of cinéma vérité as access to reality, but, more specifically, he surely does not want his already confirmed supporters to see it either.

It is here, then, that this study proceeds and moves beyond *Bob Roberts*’ send-up of *Don’t Look Back* and towards to an examination of the fake text without an original, or what Baudrillard calls a “copy without an original” (quoted in Story 1993: 162). This chapter has examined *Bob Roberts* as what can be categorized here as a first-degree mockumentary, a text that draws on and subverts an already existing text -- *Don’t Look Back*. The following chapter’s investigation examines those films we can understand as second-degree mockumentaries, and include films that are not derived from a previous source and are simply “fake” films that look “real.” And it is at this stage that mockumentary cinema moves beyond the reflexive cinema Bill Nichols champions and collapses the boundaries between documentary and fiction even further. For example, Nichols, in his book, *Representing Reality*, explains a reflexive film’s desire to cue the spectator to the film’s systematic questioning “of its own status and that of documentary in general” (1991: 62). It is here that Nichols also lays the bedrock for mockumentary. The second-degree mockumentary takes this one step further, *blurring the boundaries* between documentary and fiction to the point the unengaged viewer or those “not in the know” can find themselves duped into believing the film they are watching is real, or non-fiction.

We are again presented with evidence corroborating documentary cinema's debt to realism. For example, much as MacCabe argued the realist text as producing the illusion of realism, the mockumentary, in particular in the form not rearticulating an already existing text, also produces the illusion of realism, and employs the conventions of documentary cinema in doing so. Chapter Four elaborates on this idea and examines how the mockumentary is able to simultaneously return to the strategies marking realism while further collapsing the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction into the Baudrillardian realm of simulation and hyperreality.

Chapter Four

Hoaxes, Fakes and the Real Deal.

This chapter expands on Chapter Three's examination of *Don't Look Back* and *Bob Roberts* and investigates mockumentaries that move beyond the parodying or satirizing of a pre-existing text and now elucidate a critique through an original text. While *Bob Roberts'* text is, in fact, original in that it is not a remake or adaptation, it often derives influence and inspiration for its critique from *Don't Look Back*. These new films, or original texts, do not offer as explicit an association with another single text and instead rely on the spectator to recognize their reflexivity, their critical motive marked by the mocking of documentary cinema's cultural status as "truth teller" (Roscoe and Hight 2001: 5). As the previous chapter demonstrates, mockumentary increases the demands on the audience, requiring spectators to be familiar with both the techniques traditionally aligned with documentary, as well as the narrative structures evidenced in the fiction film tradition. On one level, these mockumentaries can be seen as symptomatic of the tenuous aspiration to legitimacy that visual evidence, or photographic truth, and by extension the documentary endeavour to retain. The type of mockumentary examined here bears many of the significant signposts of the postmodern: the questioning of truth claims, the suspicious eye cast toward representations of reality and what Jean-François Lyotard calls a search "for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable" (1993: 46).

This body of fictional texts that exemplify a subversion of seemingly factual texts include: *David Holzman's Diary* (Kit Carson, 1967), *Privilege* (Peter Watkins, 1967), *The Rutles: All You Need is Cash* (Gary Weis and Eric Idle, 1978), *Zelig* (Woody Allen,

1983), *This Is Spinal Tap* (1985), *Fear of a Black Hat* (Rusty Cundieff, 1994), *Forgotten Silver* (Peter Jackson and Costas Bates, 1995), *Wag the Dog* (Barry Levinson, 1997), *The Blair Witch Project* (Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sanchez, 1999), *Drop Dead Gorgeous* (Michael Patrick Jann, 1999), and Christopher Guest's *Waiting for Guffman* (1996), *Best in Show* (2000), and *A Mighty Wind* (2003). Although *Wag the Dog* is not a mockumentary, it is included here as being demonstrative of postmodernism's arguing against the historical autonomy of truth claims. Not only does the film provide a sort of "inside look" at the manipulation of truth, and the manner in which these manipulations are constructed, but also offers a shrewd critique of the passive viewer and the seeming complicity viewers often have with the cinematic tricksters who dupe audiences.

Catherine Belsey offers a telling explanation of her first recognition of the postmodern, a moment in 1985 during a screening of Woody Allen's *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (1985). Although the film is not a mockumentary, a short synopsis of Belsey's understanding of its effects and the film's position within postmodernism frames this chapter's investigation into spectatorship and its attempts at distinguishing between truth and fiction in cinema, as well as mockumentary's further blurring of the boundaries between the two. A fantasy love story, *The Purple Rose of Cairo* centers on the astonishment of Cecilia, a maligned wife, who having been charmed by the hero of a film she is watching in the cinema, sees that film's hero, Tom Baxter, come down off the screen and into her life, her reality. Allen demonstrates additional reflexivity with this trope in that not only does he examine the relationship, or the imagined relationship, between a viewer and a character, but he also collapses that boundary by permitting the relationship to be experienced by both parties: the hero from the "film world" and the

viewer from the “real world.” The film feeds and thrives on a fantasy moment that viewers may have actually dreamed of at some stage of their lives watching films, providing them with an escape from reality. For example, Cecilia finds solace in the world of movies and comes up against the need to decide which is better - the perfect world of the movie or reality where things are never certain and fadeouts do not exist.

Since *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, Belsey claims, “any number of films have put exploratory pressure, in different ways and to varying degrees, on the fine line between illusion and reality” (2005: 6). Films such as *Last Action Hero* (John McTiernan, 1993), *Pleasantville* (Gary Ross, 1998), and *The Truman Show* (Peter Weir, 1998), all, to varying degrees, also offer investigations into the blurring of reality and illusion, fact and fiction, and the representation of the unrepresentable. This chapter recognizes the disparate ways in which these dichotomies have been examined and exploited in cinema and media but remains focused on the mockumentary, a sub-genre that remains inextricably linked to the documentary tradition preceding it and thus the primary source of the sub-genre’s development.

According to Lyotard, “postmodernism is said to signal the collapse of all universalist metanarratives with their privileged truth to tell” (Storey 1993: 159). No longer are absolute and universal claims to knowledge or truth about the social world without opposition. Whereas metanarratives reflected dominant discourses that entrenched the dominant culture’s morals and principles through a structure that banished oppositional discourses and voices to the margins, postmodernism oversaw a fracturing of this hegemony resulting in a “plurality of voices” being heard (Storey 1993: 159). Postmodernism permitted a politics of difference, oversaw the collapse of high art versus

low art dichotomy and resulted in what Susan Sontag considered a “new sensibility,” and what John Storey considered a “new pluralism” (quoted in Storey 1993: 155).

Postmodernism was a response to the elitism of modernism; no longer were positions within the academies, universities and institutions filled entirely by the cultural elite, the dominant, as discourses and voices from the margins resulted in the collapsing of the distinction between high art and mass culture (Storey 1993: 156). Postmodern art is defined as work that undermines representation and operates as a deconstructive act that works to break down or destabilize the autonomy of modern art (McRobbie 1990: 195).

Recognizing one of the motives of postmodern art and linking that motive -- the undermining of representation -- to a discussion of documentary and mockumentary aids in appreciating how metanarratives, or even an authoritative voice or commentary, have traditionally been naturalized as truth within the documentary text. Cinéma vérité is evaluated differently from a postmodern or cultural studies perspective in that we now recognize the fragility of documentary truth claims and the hegemony of the tradition. Understanding the impetus behind postmodernism compels a re-examination of realism, expository documentary and *Nanook of the North*. Flaherty’s privileged and dominant representation of a subordinate group categorizes the film as a metanarrative discourse silencing other voices. This is not to say Nanook’s voice is refused, but rather his voice is controlled and monitored by Flaherty.

As Roscoe and Hight maintain, early documentaries, including *Nanook*, have since been revealed to have relied on more filmmaker intervention and mediation than initially thought (2001: 3). Revelations like this provide my study with a tangible bond with documentary of generations past, films claiming to have recorded reality, yet since

exposed as only partial documentations of truth. Roscoe and Hight also note that, although a film such as *Nanook* is not included in their study of the mockumentary, such films could be described as “increasing the awareness of how fragile is the adherence to the standards demanded by factual discourse” (2001: 3). When cultural studies made a shift from the structuralist study of texts -- *Screen* theory -- to the interpretative exploration of audiences -- the British school -- the idea that it is possible to represent in a naturalistic way the ‘real’ experience of people, as ethnography and reception studies claimed to do, became the subject of considerable criticism. The most telling of these was the poststructuralist inspired critique of realist epistemology and the argument that ethnography is a genre of writing that deploys rhetorical devices, often obscured, to maintain its realist claims. In other words, the products of ethnography are always texts. This leads to the examination of ethnographic texts for their rhetorical devices, along with a more dialogical approach to research so that ethnography becomes less an expedition in search of “the facts” and more a conversation between participants in an investigative process suggestive of an “implicit collaboration between filmmaker and subject” (Roscoe and Hight 2001: 161).

As Chapter Three explained, the spectator’s ability to recognize a mockumentary is often determined by his/her familiarity with both documentary and fiction film codes and conventions. Moreover, the meaning and political significance of film texts are, Willis explains, “not simply inscribed in their formal features, but are defined through their appropriation or rejection by different groups” (1995: 189). The Introduction to this study explained Stuart Hall’s Encoding/Decoding model as a framework that conceived of audiences being made up of different groups and proposed there are three audience

responses to any given text: preferred, negotiated and oppositional. Hall's model is brought to bear on this chapter as exemplary of the active role that the British School of Cultural Studies argues viewers have in interpreting texts. Further, subscribing to this model endorsing active spectatorship permits a more thorough working through of audience relationships with postmodernism and cinema.

Cultural studies worked to fill in the gaps left by *Screen* Theory, in particular the importance of the spectator. In assuming that "cinema contributed to the maintenance of capitalism" (Lapsley and Westlake 1988: vii), *Screen* Theory, in undermining the importance of an individual film's ideological perspective, instead saw one film as indistinguishable from another film, and instead relegated film within the confines of a broader formal category, such as MacCabe's "classic realist text" (Willis 1995: 125). Whereas *Screen* Theory was preoccupied with textual analysis, and the positioning of the spectator by the text, cultural studies argued against this view, and instead maintained that the position the text presented, as well as the viewer's response to that position, permitted disparate readings of the same text by different viewers. For example, Willis states that, "it [*Screen* Theory] is concerned with the ways in which texts construct the position of the spectator, not with the ways in which actual audiences make sense of texts" (1995: 174). Michelle Condit also elucidates the varying meanings any text may possess and argues that all texts "are capable of bearing multiple meanings because of the varying intertextual relationships they carry and because of the varying constructions (or interests of receivers" (1989: 104). In short then, and to reiterate the thoughts of Chapter One, MacCabe and *Screen* Theory saw the viewer as subordinate to and positioned by the text. Willis and Condit suggest, however, that viewers have an individual perspective

that directs their spectatorship, and as a result, texts are polysemic, that is, viewers are able to extract their own individual meanings from them.

David Harvey, in his book, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, provides a schematic charting postmodernism's differences from modernism (Harvey 1989: table 1.1, 43), and sets up a series of binary oppositions. Although postmodernism is often thought of as undermining binary oppositions, Harvey, nonetheless, provides a table which includes modernism's hierarchy against postmodernism's anarchy, as well as critical distance against active participation, creation/totalization versus deconstruction/antithesis, genre/boundary versus text/intertext, and metaphysics versus irony. Putting these binaries into play here allows for a greater cognizance of mockumentary's critique of the documentary tradition by acting as a checklist when working through the visual and textual markers indicating documentary and mockumentary cinema. For example, the "Voice of God" marking the expository documentary is understood as the hierarchy threatened by mockumentary anarchy. Further, fixed documentary styles or genre conventions and/or restrictions, such as those provided by Nichols in Chapter Two, are countered by a postmodern intertextuality, and finally, a totalizing documentary truth is countered by deconstruction and subversion through irony, imitation, parody and satire.

While postmodernism may be viewed by some as revolutionary through its opposition to totalizing truths and metanarratives, as well as its post-structural critique of the construction of text and meaning, to others, however, its relationship with mass culture signals postmodernism as a commercialized modernism. The history of this position may date to 1947 when Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer coined the term "culture industry" (Storey 1993: 100). For Adorno and Horkheimer, the culture industry

referred to the products -- for example, film, radio and magazines -- and processes of mass culture, and through a system assuring homogeneity and uniformity, the goods produced within the culture industry, mass culture, were all identical and produced through mechanical reproduction (Adorno and Horkheimer 1947, trans 1972: 120-21).

What is clear, despite dissenting opinions on the credibility, or factuality, of the reproduced image (photograph) or the represented event (documentary), in short, the dispute surrounding the “worth” of art in the postmodern age, is that the onset of postmodernism marked another shift in cultural consumption. Ways of looking and modes of interpreting texts changed, and with this change came intertextuality where meanings and messages were no longer fixed, and dissenting voices were not silenced. The pessimism MacCabe and *Screen* Theory demonstrated with regard to viewers was replaced by ideas more closely linked with Hall’s active and engaged spectatorship and, as a result, the increased cognizance needed in order to fully appreciate and negotiate some of the conventions marking postmodern cinema, for example, parody and satire. Moreover, although Benjamin sees reproduction as severing art from aura, he also notes that this is not an entirely negative result, and suggests in fact that reproduction democratizes art, that works are now more widely available, available for all in a sense, and therefore less elite and private (1969: 51-53).

A knowledge of postmodernism and its challenge to truth claims and modes of representation enables one to bridge the gap between documentary and fiction film and aids in working through a tension commonly understood as one occurring between the real (documentary) and the fake (fiction film). This tension is important in that documentary’s antithetical nature to fiction film is now transcended by the

mockumentary, a postmodern film style to be sure and one often rigidly adhering to the codes and conventions of documentary cinema, yet only borrowing these conventions in order to subsequently destabilize them. This rupturing works to expose the constructed nature of the documentary, or what Nichols calls “the basic ways of organizing texts in relation to certain recurrent features or conventions” (1991: 32), and also works against the assumption documentary cinema provides a truthful, honest window into the social world through a capturing of that social world’s reality.

The mockumentary is able to penetrate this dichotomy and recognize the importance of both the construction of the text and the spectator’s ability to recognize the text’s polysemy in order to not remain bracketed within the singular fixed meaning that *Screen Theory* saw texts as retaining. Aligning this study with the belief that viewers are not “dopes” but rather engaged and critical, enables a fusion of film and postmodern theories. This fusion, then, allows for an analysis of mockumentary which recognizes the style’s debt to both film and cultural studies and, perhaps more importantly, enables the spectator to better understand the motivation behind the style and its attack on traditional documentary’s reality claims.

Matthew Bernstein, writing on Michael Moore’s *Roger and Me* (1989), includes a quotation from *The New York Times* in which Moore, upon being questioned about the controversy surrounding his “popular” documentary, argues that, “all art, every piece of journalism manipulates sequence and things” (Bernstein 1998: 397). This response was in answer journalists’ queries as to whether his film was a documentary, parody or both. Although neither Moore nor his films figure particularly prominently in this study, he nonetheless helps foreground at least the broad schematic of this chapter: documentary

manipulation, truth, parody, satire and a postmodern culture presiding over an ever-shifting concept of how reality is constituted within a media-saturated society. This chapter examines postmodernism's relationship with cinema and, in particular, documentary cinema and its conceptual nemesis, the mockumentary. This examination works towards providing a more secure understanding of "the reality" of documentary and fiction film, but also to better comprehend the importance of the role of the spectator in this equation, no longer a mere innocent witness to the film but now a possible accomplice complicit in the manipulation of themselves and others. Bernstein notes that, much as viewers recognize fiction films (the stars often give them away), they also recognize documentary films through the deployment of predictable traditions and conventions that signal "non-fiction!" to the spectator (1998: 401).

With the advent of mockumentary then, this equation is further complicated, and the role of the spectator becomes even more critical in distinguishing between fiction film and documentary. Jacobs summarizes this equation and states that mockumentary "blurs the dividing line between genres (fiction and documentary)...and demands collusion between filmmaker and audience, a clear acceptance of reflexivity by both parties" (2000: 54). As Bernstein suggests then, the success of this collusion should not necessarily be expected as spectators are often governed by the conventions they recognize as belonging to one genre or the other. For example, and as this chapter later explains, Bernstein's recognizing of audience tendencies can be brought to bear on *This is Spinal Tap*, *Forgotten Silver*, and *The Blair Witch Project*, three films which successfully duped some viewers into believing "they were real." This understanding of

spectatorship is also demonstrated in *Wag the Dog*, where audience expectations are both recognized and exploited by Hollywood executives and government agents.

As was noted in Chapter Three, a mockumentary is a critique of the assumptions and privileges afforded the “factual” discourses making up the documentary tradition. A mockumentary may mock, imitate, parody, or satirize an established and pre-existing form, and it simultaneously appropriate and subvert documentary codes and conventions in order to do so. In ostensibly duping the viewer, mockumentary “works by raising expectations around a particular text (such as documentary) then disappoints (when we realize it is not a documentary), but still produces a non-factual text that can be engaged with in new and complex ways (the mock-documentary)” (Roscoe and Hight 2001: 30).

This duping or tricking of the spectator establishes the argument that one key area of mockumentary success is dependent on the uninformed or basic spectatorship of the viewer. Where an astute viewer may recognize the parody, the less critical viewer may buy into the film’s truth claims and fall victim to ridicule, signaling a success for the form but also foregrounding the notion that not only is documentary cinema dependent on the complicit spectator for its success, but it has also been able to define its tradition as one commonly understood to “tell the truth.”

As noted earlier, three films that serve as examples of viewers not initially recognizing the parodic intent of a mockumentary are *This is Spinal Tap*, *Forgotten Silver*, and *The Blair Witch Project*. Carl Plantinga notes that *This Is Spinal Tap* initially tricked or confused many viewers, as, although the film was well received by viewers in “sophisticated” cities like New York, Chicago and Toronto, it was also a source of confusion for viewers in cities such as Dallas. As Reiner explains, “a small section of the

audience laughed. The rest asked why we would make a serious documentary about a terrible band they had never heard of” (quoted in Plantinga 1998: 320). In the case of *Forgotten Silver*, the film was originally screened to an audience of viewers thinking the film was a “real” documentary and only later revealed as a hoax (Roscoe and Hight 2001: 116). Costas and Jackson’s recreations of the purported “discoveries” of early and silent film acts as both evidence and archival research, and aids in compelling the viewer to accept the reality of the film. In effect, the filmmakers employ historically established codes and conventions of documentary to, as Roscoe and Hight suggest, “turn a *fiction* into an authentic and plausible *truth*” (Roscoe and Hight 2001: 116).

In returning once more to Buñuel’s *Las Hurdes*, a film Vivian Sobchack refers to as “an extraordinarily searing social documentary” (1998: 70), we are now able to argue that it is an early form of mockumentary. For example, in dislodging the historical authority of the Voice of God from its position as all-knowing teacher, *Las Hurdes* “is deeply political (rather than merely partisan) in that its primary aim is to cause the viewer to question the very bases of perception itself” (Sobchack 1998: 72). As well as providing both photographic evidence and a soundtrack alluding to filmmaker subjectivity and manipulation, Buñuel also includes the one telling scene of a goat falling down -- or rather, being shot down -- a cliff that comments on the believability and truthfulness of documentary. As Sobchack notes, Buñuel has exposed the influential and manipulative agency a documentary filmmaker can exploit through a passive, non-engaged spectator. Further, this scene compels us to mistrust the narrator and consider him unethical and a liar (1998: 74). This critique is directed at another commonplace assertion that “documentary holds a privileged position within society, a position

maintained by documentary's claim that it can present the most accurate and truthful portrayal of the socio-historical world" (Roscoe and Hight 2001: 6), a claim dependent on the belief in a relationship between the image and the social world it endeavors to represent.

The relationship between the physical execution of an act or event and the filmed record of that act or event "is seen as being one and the same, suggesting a strong and direct connection between the cinematic record and 'reality'" (Roscoe and Hight 2001: 6), and it is precisely this connection that forms the basis of the development of the mockumentary movement. Moreover, and as Roscoe and Hight argue, "a defining characteristic of mock-documentary is an (often latent) reflexive stance toward documentary -- a mocking of the genre's cultural status" (2001: 5). Mockumentary is recognized then as a form defiant of the documentary tradition, instead offering a parodic and disruptive challenge to the legitimacy of documentary cinema's assumed privileged, truthful voice.

Mockumentary-Lite: Massaging Spectatorship.

Drop Dead Gorgeous is a mockumentary that appropriates the strategies and conventions of documentary, but the casting of Hollywood actors such as Kirsten Dunst, Denise Richards and Ellen Barkin reveals the film's fiction. Similarly, Christopher Guest's *Waiting for Guffman*, *Best in Show* and *A Mighty Wind* have casts that include numerous Hollywood actors, including Guest, Parker Posey, Eugene Levy and Fred Willard. These films may not operate in the same fashion, or offer as pronounced a critique, as *Forgotten Silver* or *The Blair Witch Project*, but they remain vital to a study of mockumentary. *Drop Dead Gorgeous* and the Guest films offer a more benevolent

critique of the documentary tradition, one determined by a comedic impulse through parody and irony as much as one driven by a theoretical debasing of the tradition. As Chapter Three explained, Hutcheon notes that parody is not always challenging in mode (1989: 103), but while this may be true, parody remains able to use comedy to provide a successful critique. Although parody may not retain the more critical impulse marking satire (Bernstein 1998: 400), it does not offer only a neutered critique.

In accordance with the understanding of satire and parody as explained by Hutcheon and Bernstein then, *Drop Dead Gorgeous*, *Waiting for Guffman*, *Best in Show* and *A Mighty Wind* may be understood as having dual meanings. On one hand, *Drop Dead Gorgeous* and *Best in Show* are recognized as -- at least by those in “collusion” with the filmmaker (Jacobs 2000: 54) -- astute deconstructions of teen beauty pageants and dog show pageantry, respectively, and the employment of documentary conventions enables the viewer easily to recall the strategies and aesthetics of the documentary tradition. Conversely, however, and as Hutcheon argues, “parody is double coded in political terms: it both legitimizes and subverts that which it parodies” (1989: 97). Seemingly in agreement with Jameson’s assertion that postmodernism remains inherently depthless, pastiche, or “blank parody” or “empty copy” (quoted in Storey 1993: 168), Hutcheon maintains that postmodern parody is often seen as a surface art only, value-free and decorative (1989: 90). Hutcheon immediately accounts for this position and summarily rejects it, suggesting that parody need not be devoid of a critical impetus and can actually be “a value-problematizing, de-naturalizing form of acknowledging history (and through irony, the politics) of representations” (Hutcheon 1989: 90).

This is the argumentation surrounding parody subscribed to here; and while Jameson's consideration of postmodern representations as pastiche is acknowledged, there is ample evidence to suggest that postmodern art, in this case parody, may, through the collusion with a critical viewer, indeed succeed as a socio-political act. Hutcheon neatly summarizes her position and states, "postmodern representational practices that refuse to stay neatly within accepted conventions and traditions and that deploy hybrid forms and seemingly mutually contradictory strategies frustrate critical attempts to systematize them, to order them with an eye toward control and mastery – that is, to totalize" (1989: 35).

Drop Dead Gorgeous, then, avoids being categorized as pastiche and instead finds itself positioned under the umbrella of postmodernist critique, not empty or devoid of content, but rather deftly negotiating the demands of mainstream cinema (accessibility) and parody (deconstructive). The film's critique of cinéma-vérité may lean towards the absurdist, for example, when the boom operator falls over and ruins a shot, or when one beauty queen screams as she turns around to see a camera "capturing her reality." In not alienating viewers or risking being labeled elitist or inaccessible, a mockumentary like *Drop Dead Gorgeous* lays its deconstruction out for the viewer, and it remains easy to follow.

Whereas a film like *Las Hurdes* enters into its critique of the documentary tradition through vague, but thinly veiled deconstructions, (such as the obvious cloud of gunshot smoke contradicting the narrator's claim), and a reliance on an intellectually vigorous viewer recognizing its critique, less difficult mockumentaries offer a more easily recognized critique. For example, Plantinga asserts that, for films such as *This Is Spinal*

Tap, *Drop Dead Gorgeous* and *Bob Roberts*, their success is dependent on the viewer not interpreting them as “serious” documentaries. Their parody and satire, as a result, are more readily realized through obvious comic markers such as the clumsy boom operator in *Drop Dead Gorgeous*, the on-going send ups of masculinity and phallic confidence throughout *This is Spinal Tap*, or Roberts replicating Dylan’s “Subterranean Homesick Blues” music video in *Bob Roberts*. In offering parody through comic markers such as parodies of phallocentricism or left-leaning folk anthems, as opposed to conceptual or theoretical deconstructions such as Bunuel’s critique, these films secure the spectator’s recognition of their parody, despite scaling it back or smoothing it over in the process.

Assaulting Spectatorship: *Forgotten Silver* and *The Blair Witch Project*.

Cinema, in particular documentary cinema, is often considered as a window onto reality, an educational tool, even. Peeling back its seemingly innocuous veneer, however, exposes documentary’s constructs and narratives, its manipulative intent, and its, at times, tenuous grasp on truth claims. This revealing of documentary strategies has resulted in studies surrounding the ethics and responsibility of cinema (Roscoe and Hight: 2001: 10). For example, both *Forgotten Silver* and *The Blair Witch Project* have been confronted by questions pertaining to ethics and responsibility. With increased technological ability has come an increased ability to manipulate the referential authority that has historically marked documentary; these new abilities gain further importance when combined with not only humorous or benign gags and jokes but also with hoaxes. As Roscoe and Hight conclude, “documentary originally secured its privileged status as a representational form by promoting its trustworthiness. Recently, that trust has been eroded. Although it is widely acknowledged that documentary is inevitably ‘constructed’

to a certain extent, viewers nevertheless have trouble accepting that it may deliver images of the social world that are not true” (2001: 123).

While the films discussed thus far have, to varying degrees and intentions, worked by duping unsuspecting or less critical viewers into allowing their assumptions of documentary to guide their spectatorship, *Forgotten Silver* and *The Blair Witch Project* are of particular relevance as a result of the scope of their respective hoaxes. Purporting to document the discovery of the work of an unknown New Zealand filmmaker, Colin McKenzie, *Forgotten Silver* incorporates numerous documentary codes and conventions in creating a plausible truth. This plausibility is increased through the inclusion of interviews with various “real” film experts, including Harvey Weinstein and Leonard Maltin, who provide testimonials serving to authenticate the film’s truth. Along with *The Blair Witch Project*, *Forgotten Silver* does not traffic solely in satire and parody, but has been recognized as a hoax as well (Roscoe and Hight 2001: 144-46). As was articulated earlier in this chapter, *Drop Dead Gorgeous* or any of the films making up Guest’s trilogy for example, signal itself as fiction through the inclusion of Hollywood actors. *Forgotten Silver* separates itself from these films in avoiding any easily recognizable sign that may compromise its ruse. Indeed, in much the same manner that the casting of Parker Posey or Eugene Levy denotes Guest’s films as fictions, the inclusion of Weinstein and Maltin in *Forgotten Silver* aids in the success of the film as a hoax, their inclusion as “real” people suggestive of a traditional documentary talking head or expert.

Forgotten Silver created a controversy after it was received as “real” by a significant portion of its viewers. For example, according to Roscoe and Hight, the film’s “success in convincing a large proportion of its audience of the accuracy and

significance of its historical account placed it into the category of a hoax on a par with Orson Welles' radio broadcast of *War of the Worlds*" (2001: 115). The success of deceptive historical facsimiles, either Welles' fake radio broadcast or Bates and Jackson's film hoax, is dependent on the listener or viewer's assigning of authenticity to a set of conventions that signal truth. For example, some viewers may have been duped by *Forgotten Silver* simply because it "looked the part."

The type of critique of the documentary tradition articulated by *Forgotten Silver* is one that is picked up by *The Blair Witch Project*. Creating perhaps an even more substantial frenzy than *Forgotten Silver*, *The Blair Witch Project* resulted in much debate surrounding the reality of the film's content. Internet sites were inundated with speculation and pilgrimages were made to the area where the film was made, rural Seneca Creek State Park in Maryland. Lending itself to the film's deception was the casting of non-actors, providing the viewer with as few fiction signifiers as possible. The film's ruse, however, extended beyond the screen and included a media package distributed before the film's screenings at both the 1999 Sundance and Cannes Film festivals. Included in the media package were fliers with the headline, MISSING. Underneath the headline were photos of the film's three primary subjects, Heather Donahue, Joshua Leonard, and Michael Williams, under which was information reporting the trio's disappearance (Harris 2001: 77). After the fliers were removed following the disclosure that a French television executive had recently been kidnapped, one of the film's producers, Gregg Hale, attempted to explain away the ploy by maintaining the promotion was not intended as a hoax, yet qualified his explanation by stating, "we allow people the illusion it's all real" (quoted in Harris 2001: 77).

The confusion surrounding *The Blair Witch Project* actually began prior even to the film's completion; for example, John Pierson, the host of a cable television show called *Split Screen*, had received an early cut of the film on videotape, an eight-minute trailer, and reportedly "both loved it and was spooked by it – initially believing it really was an 'unsolved mystery'" (Harris 2001: 78). That Pierson later qualified his initial response by stating, "the eerie and compelling quality of the original sample made me suspend my disbelief" (quoted in Harris 2001: 77) may have distanced the host from being categorized as having been duped, but it also spoke to both the aesthetic realism of the film – it certainly looked "real" – and to questions concerning spectatorship, viewer reception, and the disarming ease with which viewers could be tricked into buying into the believability of a faked fictional text.

In many ways the truth of the film's narrative is determined by the spectator's complicity with the text. Although one may cite ethical or moral concerns in permitting a fictional text to pose as truth, especially one investigating missing persons, the film successfully offers an investigation into manipulation executed by media and passivity practiced by viewers. According to the film's directors, Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sanchez, one of the film's objectives was to make a film that signaled a move away from what they considered "recent horror films employing satire as a means to revive the horror genre" (quoted in Harris 2001: 89). For Myrick and Sanchez, *Scream* (Wes Craven, 1996) and *I Know What You Did Last Summer* (Jim Gillespie, 1997) were representative of a new wave of horror cinema that articulated a nostalgic homage to earlier horror films such as *Halloween* (John Carpenter, 1978) and *Friday the 13th* (Sean

Cunningham, 1980) through reflexivity and stylistic imitation and replication (Harris 2001: 89).

Curiously, however, Myrick and Sanchez's sentiments on the new horror genre are redirected back toward them when one shifts direction in analysis. *The Blair Witch Project* does provide an astute deconstruction of new wave horror, calling into question the innovation of films which simply pay homage to past films through reflexivity and imitation. According to Jameson, postmodernism and popular culture are marked by the intermixing, the "hybridizing," of high and low culture "to the point where the line between high art and commercial forms seems increasingly difficult to draw" (1985: 112). And for Jameson, the result is often pastiche, or blank parody or empty copy. As Jameson summarizes, "pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar mask, speech in a dead language: but it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter and of any conviction...pastiche is thus blank parody" (1984: 65). Myrick and Sanchez, in criticizing the satire executed by new wave horror, suggest it should be relegated to this postmodern wastebasket. Moreover, the two, in criticizing these films' imitation of earlier films (Harris 2001: 88), are again on board with Jameson.

Myrick and Sanchez, though, seem to direct their criticism only towards the horror genre and fail to articulate their film through the documentary tradition. Once an analysis of *The Blair Witch Project* is redirected from the horror genre towards the documentary tradition, it is possible to recognize the film's employment of satire, reflexivity and imitation in relation to the documentary tradition before it. No longer is the film understood as one offering the "pure, unadulterated, primordial horror" not seen

since the horror films of the 1970s (Harris 2001: 88), but it becomes a postmodern bricolage mixing the conventions of cinéma vérité with the terror of the horror cinema of the 1970s. In mixing these genres, *The Blair Witch Project* invokes various conventions of each in order to produce a film resistant to categorization, a film indicative of what Lyotard considers an “anything goes culture” (1984:79).

Simulating War: *Wag the Dog* and Plausible Truths.

This understanding of the *The Blair Witch Project* invokes the work of Jean Baudrillard. Whether the film is a “real documentary” or a simulated one is a moot point because, for Baudrillard, reality and simulation are experienced as without difference (Storey 1993: 163). That is, the terror the viewer experiences or succumbs to, alongside the losing of oneself within the diegesis of the film, may compel that viewer to experience the film as if it is reality, and not a mediated experience that remains on the screen, and thus outside of that viewer’s real world.

According to Mark Poster, Baudrillard “appeals to those who would attempt to grasp the strange mixture of fantasy and desire that is unique to late-twentieth century culture” (1988: 2). This culture is suggestive of the postmodern society we inhabit and Baudrillard critiques, one in which the simulated experience of “a day in Paris” while at Los Angeles’ Disneyland is, for some, tantamount to experiencing the “real thing.” The prolific development of technological wizardry, or to summon the title of Benjamin’s influential essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” has impaired our ability to recognize the “truth” or the “real” and culminated in Baudrillard’s simulacrum: “an identical copy without an original” (Storey 1993: 162).

Returning to Baudrillard here is beneficial in that his concepts of simulation and hyperreality are brought to bear on *Wag the Dog* in bracketing the film as one that suitably demonstrates what he sees as a key difference between feigning and simulating. For Baudrillard,

to dissimulate is to feign not to have what one has. To simulate is to feign to have what one hasn't. One implies a presence, the other an absence. But the matter is more complicated, since to simulate is not simply to feign: 'Someone who feigns an illness can simply go to bed and pretend he is ill. Someone who simulates an illness produces in himself some of the symptoms. Thus, feigning or dissimulating leaves the reality principle intact: the difference is always clear, it is only masked; whereas simulation threatens the difference between the 'true' and 'false', between 'real' and 'imaginary' (quoted in Poster 1988: 167-68).

Baudrillard draws a distinction between the real and simulation noting that simulation threatens the distinction between true and false (Poster 1988: 168). "In the realm of the hyperreal, the distinction between simulation and the 'real' continually implodes; the 'real' and the imaginary continually collapse into each other. The result is that reality and simulation are experienced as without difference" (Storey 1993: 163). That is, the threat to the distinction between the "real" and "imaginary" culminates in that distinction's abolition, and the distinction is replaced by a hyperreal where the original and copy cannot be differentiated.

Simulation and hyperreality are brought to bear then in *Wag the Dog* in which the spin tactics employed by an unnamed U.S. President's handlers, after the President is

caught having an affair with an underage girl, are chronicled. Enlisted by the President's handlers, Stanley (Dustin Hoffman), a Hollywood producer, is hired to create a facsimile of a war in order to steer both the public eye and the press away from the scandal and onto a war. Commenting that "you'd need a war" to redirect the attention of the public and the press, Stanley "produces a war" in Albania, far enough away from American soil that the public would be adequately and easily fooled into believing the images of war they see on television are real. When the President's chief handler, Conrad (Robert De Niro) is questioned about whether or not a war is actually occurring he claims it is inconsequential, quipping, "we're not going to have a war, we're going to have the appearance of war." Not only are Conrad's comments symptomatic of media manipulation, but they also illustrate the ease with which filmmakers are able to seemingly duplicate reality, even war, yet are also indicative of the sometimes contradictory faith the public has in the believability of the image and the integrity of the media.

Although *Wag the Dog* is positioned outside the mockumentary genre, it is included here because of its use of satire, parody and reflexivity, as well a result of its demonstration of simulation. The fictitious storyline surrounding an adulterous President is one that Joel Black describes as demonstrative of stories that "uncannily anticipate actual events" (2002:22). The initial crisis in *Wag the Dog* preceded the exposing of U.S. President, Bill Clinton's own alleged affair with a White House intern, Monica Lewinsky. An example of what Baudrillard suggests is the simulation preceding the reality (1994: 6), Connie and Stanley's use of war to distract the public was even credited with giving Clinton the initial idea of ordering overseas military strikes to distract public

attention away from his personal life after the Lewinsky scandal broke in the press (Black 2002: 22).

Whereas the mockumentary, for example, *Forgotten Silver* or *The Blair Witch Project*, often naturalized its deception within the film text, viewers are ostensibly duped into believing what they witnessed on the screen to be real, *Wag the Dog* reveals the mechanisms at work in such deceptions, and exposes how we are tricked. Nicole Matthews, in arguing the merits of parody and reflexive cinema, maintains that by revealing the inner workings of the cinematic apparatus, the mechanism hidden by realism, for example, a film's reflexivity is able to "politically mobilize audiences" (2000: 16). As Chapter One explained, while some argue that realism reveals the world to the viewer, others maintain that realism simply conceals ideology (Lovell 1980: 84). With consideration to this equation, and in agreement with Matthews, it is argued here that postmodern films such as *Wag the Dog*, by revealing the apparatus and the manipulations that are often a result of it, actually reveal realism's concealing of ideology.

The war waged in *Wag the Dog* is a simulacrum of a real war, experienced as without difference, and the simulated war experienced through mediation becomes indistinguishable from a real war resulting in a hyperreal, a concept in which reality is modeled on and confirmed by images (Smith 2001: 1). Not only feigning the threat of war through rhetoric and fictitious newscasts, Conrad naturalizes the effects of war by producing in the country many symptoms of war: fear, disillusion, nationalism and patriotism. As Baudrillard argues, simulation threatens the distinction between the real and the imaginary (1983: 2). In order to foreground this concept, and to briefly return to

the riots following the conclusion of the Rodney King trial, key evidence in the trial was the “home” video footage shot by civilian George Holliday that captured “live” the four LAPD officers beating King. The prosecutor had urged the jurors “to ‘believe’ the ‘most objective piece of evidence’ available to ‘your own eyes’” (Rabinowitz 1994: 209), the videotaped footage. Although the circumstances surrounding the trial focused on whether the officers had responded to King’s alleged aggressiveness within the scope of the law, it is also difficult to ignore “video evidence of excessive police brutality” (Rabinowitz 1994: 213).

What is understood is that mass media, in particular, television and cinema, have blurred the boundaries between the fake and the real to the point that even seemingly authentic “real” images, for example, Holliday’s footage, are now called into question, seen only through skeptical eyes. In *Wag the Dog*, a simulated war mediated to the public becomes believable, the tangible visual evidence supporting, and as a result, substantiating, the truthfulness of the news report’s claim. As already mentioned, Baudrillard argues that reality and simulation are experienced without difference, and the success of the “War in Albania” seems to corroborate this position. The representation of war presented to the public within the film is a mediated one constructed through Hollywood, Stanley remarking to Conrad that the news broadcast of the “war” was produced using the same technology “as the last Schwarzenegger film.” Stanley, in drawing a parallel between Hollywood and reality and illustrating the public’s inability to discern between the real and the fake, confirms Baudrillard’s claim that Americans are “themselves simulation in its most developed state” (1988: 28-29) and that “the cinema and TV are America’s reality” (1988: 104).

Much as realism effaces the signs of its production in order to persuade the viewer into understanding the image as a transparent rendering of the real, Stanley employs technology that produces great verisimilitude in order to dupe the viewer. This strategy recalls Roscoe and Hight's claim that "turn(ing) a *fiction* into an authentic and plausible *truth*" (2001: 12) can easily trick spectators into believing what they see to be real. Making the fake or fictive seem plausible is a strategy derived from realism. Realism worked to produce representations that appeared ideologically neutral, as though the represented event was occurring naturally, and free of influence or construction. In *Wag the Dog*, Stanley and Conrad apply the same strategy. For example, the first footage of the "war" the public sees is a young girl fleeing a burning village; the footage appears real, not unlike what one would see on the "real" news, and thus, it is accepted without question, unproblematised. The image appears ultimately to be, real, and therefore, the public is prompted to identify or sympathize with, the fleeing girl.

Introducing viewers to a "character" suffering hardship sutures viewers into what Ien Ang calls "emotional realism" (Storey 1993: 140). Emotional realism works through a system of denotation and connotation (Storey 1993: 140); for example, the newsreels in *Wag the Dog* denote hardship and war, respectively, but connote human suffering and despair, connotations able to invoke more thoughtful, truthful responses from viewers. Ultimately, however, these benevolent responses are achieved through the viewer -- in the film -- being duped into corroborating the reality of the newscast. Their responses then, in being complicit with the responses the producers hope for, ultimately demonstrate the emotional realism Storey suggests, and beyond that, work toward generating consent for the war effort. Moreover, this analysis also works reflexively in

drawing attention to *the viewer of the film's* spectatorship. That is, while watching the film, the audience witnesses the viewers within the diegesis as they are summararily duped. Ostensibly then, the outside viewer may take heed of this and practice a more critical spectatorship, a change that would confirm that a film's reflexivity is able to politically mobilize audiences.

Roscoe and Hight make two key points in elucidating the influence of news broadcasts used within a film's narrative. The two assert that the broadcasts "'ground' the text in a recognizable social-historical context" and function to "affirm the significance of visual media within the American social-political system" (2000: 95). This second point is especially pertinent when considered alongside *Wag the Dog*. As Baudrillard argues, through simulation the distinction between original and copy has been destroyed, resulting in the experience of a hyperreal wherein reality and simulation are experienced as without difference (Poster 2001: 170-73). Experiencing a simulated war in the same manner as a "real" war, viewers are sutured within the war narrative in *Wag the Dog*, and as a result, unwittingly authenticate the reality of the images seen on the news broadcasts.

At one point in *Wag the Dog*, Winnie (Anne Heche), one of the President's highest ranking aides, expresses surprise on learning that Stanley is *producing* a fictitious war. Remarking that "the people" will not believe it just because it is on the news, Winnie is met with a cursory chuckle from Connie, who quips, "of course they will, they'll have seen it on television." And it is true after all, Connie's retort, or at least it is when examined through the equation Baudrillard offers. The media are clever, and we, the people, are easily seduced, it seems, by images that retain great verisimilitude. If this

reality effect is augmented by an emotional realism we feel a bond with, the seduction becomes even greater. It remains to be seen why compelling footage such as Holliday's is called into question by audiences, jury members, or commentators, whereas images from a fabricated war in Albania or "fake" footage of a group of university students lost in woods is so blindly accepted. Baudrillard's distinction between feigning and simulating aids in solving this equation. Neither *Wag the Dog* nor *The Blair Witch Project* is defined as feigning reality; they do not pretend to be real. Rather, both films simulate their realities for the viewers so as they are experienced as real. While *Wag the Dog* is surely experienced as real by only the diegetic viewers of the newscasts, *The Blair Witch Project* was experienced as real by many in the theatre, by many *in the real world*. Symptoms of war such as, despair, death and a threat are literally placed upon the diegetic viewers of *Wag the Dog*, as are symptoms of fear such as despair, terror, suspense and uncertainty onto viewers of *The Blair Witch Project*. The viewers are displaced, removed from their individual reality and forced to negotiate a new social reality wherein their understood emotions and subjectivities are exploited and manipulated in an effort to channel them into a place of complicity and acceptance.

Conclusion

New Directions in Documentary, Representation and Reality

What's happened thus far?

In recent decades, the writings of such theorists as Lyotard, Jameson and Baudrillard have pointed to the necessity of rethinking the ways in which we engage with media in the postmodern world. The conceptions of modernism and postmodernism have challenged us to reexamine issues of production and consumption. As the Introduction to this study maintained, and as Baudrillard argues, the attack on the World Trade Center buildings can be read as US imperialism, and America in general, committing suicide, and the trauma of 9/11 can be interpreted as an experience of the real. For Lacan the only real we can experience is trauma-based, such as death, and therefore the real cannot be experienced in the sense that it cannot be commented on, related to, or recalled: one who experiences the real is, after all, dead. However, and in this case, Baudrillard suggests we can interpret the 9/11 attacks as an act of suicide, a suicide by America and thus one experienced by the American public.

For example, American ideology demands of its citizens a collective consciousness, a “we,” an “us,” and, as a result, and in a sense, then, Americans watched their own suicide that day. This goes beyond Baudrillard’s concepts of simulation and the hyperreal. It surpasses it. We do not just watch *Armageddon* or *Die Hard* on CNN (watching the footage of 9/11 feeling eerily similar to watching a Hollywood disaster film), but we experience this trauma, 9/11, as real. *Jouissance*, an encounter with the real, is always traumatic (Belsey 2005: 55), and for Žižek, the traumatic encounter with

the monstrous real is but the actualization of our own desire (Žižek 1999: 302), a desire Baudrillard also recognizes.

Žižek's conceptualization of the real differs from Lacan's in that for Lacan, the real cannot be encountered, at any level, whereas for Žižek, one's encounter with the real is traumatic, but ultimately the real remains a myth, "pure imagination," but "imagination at its most violent" (Žižek 1999: 33). In a sense, 9/11 is understood as fantastical Hollywood realism calling its patrons on their spectatorship; where reveling in disaster was once witnessed and experienced from the safe confines of the theatre, 9/11 brought to bear the experiencing of the unexperiencable, the real. Belsey asks, "why was 9/11 so shocking?" She then explains,

perhaps because it represented the momentary incursion of the unknowable real into an increasingly idealist culture. The destruction of the twin towers seemed unheralded, inexplicable, unaccountable, out of control. In the immediate aftermath of the event, sophisticated commentators, including Žižek, delighted in maintaining that 9/11 was first and foremost a media spectacle, reproducing in actuality an already-familiar Hollywood fantasy (Belsey 2005: 60).

Belsey, in consolidating the experiences of the virtual (Hollywood) and reality (9/11), dismantles a former binary that had previously managed to keep separate that which happens "in the real world" from what happens in "the cinematic world." One, the former, has actual ramifications, true consequences, whereas with the latter, the consequences are negligible. For example, one may be upset or sad when leaving the theatre, and viewers often do "lose themselves" within the film world while in the theatre, but that dismay is obviously compounded when the trauma occurs in "the real world."

Baudrillard argues in his article, “The Gulf War Did Not Take Place” (1995), that the Gulf War (1991) was largely a media spectacle, hardly a war at all in that the U.S. military was met with little to zero Iraqi resistance (Baudrillard 1995: 50). Baudrillard also explains that this war was experienced at home, in the U.S., from the safety of the living room; the images on the television were the American people’s channel into the war. Moreover, though, Baudrillard includes much of the U.S. soldiers’ experience within this equation also, arguing that the war was experienced by many soldiers from behind the screens of monitors as they directed laser-guided missiles from launch to target, all the while safely removed from the “guts” of the war, divorced from the bloodshed. The Gulf War for Baudrillard, then, demonstrated hyperreality as the event, the war, seemed to take place exclusively on television, even to those who were there, in Iraq, *fighting* the war.

We can rearticulate this equation into a resulting understanding of 9/11 as being experienced in much the same way. However, now whereas an event’s reality effect arrives courtesy of CNN or FOX NEWS, 9/11’s verisimilitude, its reality effect, was too great, it was real. The images of war, the trauma of war, we had become used to experiencing from a distance, as spectacle -- including explosions, missile strikes and dead bodies -- were now before our eyes in Lower Manhattan, the air strikes from passing fighter jets in Iraq now replaced by U.S. airliners performing the same task.

Night and Fog, Alan Resnais’ horrific and telling documentation of the Holocaust, which seemingly confirmed the authenticity of the image as visual evidence, has another function as well: to allow those who did not witness the horrors of the Holocaust to bear witness to its terror through images acting as -- or representing -- visual

evidence. The footage of 9/11 we watch performs a not dissimilar function. The 3000 people who died on 9/11 suffered as those who were led to the gas chambers during the Holocaust suffered: all were victims. For the rest of us, however, simply watching the attacks on the news -- *seeing* the visual evidence -- confirms the disaster for us, much as the visual evidence Resnais presents confirms the horror of the Holocaust for us as well. This confirmation must be understood alongside the visual evidence we see from wars elsewhere -- “over there,” in Iraq, for example. The horror of those wars is real, and the images disturb, but they are experienced through media, from a critical distance, and are similar to witnessing war through film. 9/11 saw the fantastic illusions created through the Hollywood system escape from inside the confines of the cinema and re-enter outside, and into the reality of the state.

Derrida provides an illuminating insight into the Baudrillardian notion of the virtual over the real, and warns against the “easy inference that war is reducible to a media spectacle” that “leaves us with nothing but the virtual and the fictional” (Belsey 2005: 59). Derrida, as Belsey quotes him, warns against “a denial of events, by which everything – even violence and suffering, war and death -- is said to be constructed and fictive, and constituted by and for the media, so that nothing ever really happens, only images, simulacra, and delusions” (Derrida 1994: 29).

Derrida maintains that not all events are reducible to a media-based interpretation, and the trauma suffered by the public on 9/11 may well confirm this. For example, 9/11 forced the U.S. to experience the irreducible, which is so often reduced to spectacle occurring either in the cinema or amidst war elsewhere. Chapter Four drew an analogy between postmodern culture and a replica of the Eiffel Tower at Disneyland. For many,

Baudrillard believes, the simulated experience of “a day in Paris,” complete with a replica Eiffel Tower, is synonymous to experiencing the “real thing.” For Baudrillard, Disneyland is American culture, and everything is destined to return as simulacrum, including terrorism as the media, and events as television (Baudrillard 1988: 104). Hollywood, then, is a part of American culture as well, and, whereas we can go to Disneyland and experience the reality of Paris without leaving California, Hollywood allows us to experience war without having to leave the theatre. 9/11, however, changed this, and whereas to some survivors 9/11 was a disaster that bore a striking similarity to *Armageddon* or *Die Hard*, to others, namely the dead, it signified what Žižek considers a traumatic encounter with the monstrous real.

Where do we go from here?

An overarching synopsis of Terry Eagleton’s *After Theory* would suggest that Eagleton argues that the age of theory is coming to a close and it is time for us to re-engage with the essential truths that postmodernism has denied, including death and revolution. The postmodern age has resulted in a flood of cultural theory. From Hall’s Encoding/Decoding model to Hutcheon’s work on parody and irony to Baudrillard’s concepts of simulation and hyperreal, postmodernism, and its accompanying theory, signaled the collapse of fixed meanings and metanarratives were summarily dislodged from their position of authority. This collapse also signaled the demise of rigid genre boundaries that were now eclipsed by hybrid styles borrowing from others.

Bob Roberts’ final sequence demonstrates these signifiers of postmodernity, and concludes with a telling scene that reveals Roberts’ confinement to a wheelchair as a ruse, a lie. Supposedly paralyzed as the result of being shot by a “left-wing” radical,

Roberts, while singing and playing guitar for a group of Washington lobbyists, is *captured* by the mock-documentary camera tapping his foot in time with the music. His foot tapping is hidden by a blanket draped over his lap, yet, while the blanket is able to conceal his feet from the diegetic audience, the blanket fails in hiding the ruse from the film's viewer. This subtle gesture, then, this revealing of a concealing, has an ulterior motive that positions the film as not only as an astute parody of the rockumentary and a satire of the U.S. political system, but also as dislodging the documentary tradition from its privileged position as truth teller. After lingering on Roberts' legs, the camera pans up and is met by Roberts' gaze. Looking directly into the camera, Roberts smirks, acknowledging the camera's presence, but also acknowledging his role within the documentary; not the mockumentary, *Bob Roberts*, but the documentary Roberts is a subject of. Of course, this documentary is re-presented to us as *Bob Roberts*, but by having Roberts meet the *mockumentary* camera's gaze -- he is occasionally interviewed by the documentary filmmaker within the film's diegesis -- actually implicates Roberts as a co-conspirator of sorts in the film. For example, his smirk towards the camera suggests, "it's all lies, damn lies," and it compels viewers to revisit their interpretation of the film. That is, viewers are left to ask, was Roberts not the subject of our [the viewers] virile and condescension? Now Roberts is in on the joke, having had his way with viewers and leaving them to figure out whether the documentary tradition and its hallmarks -- truth, representation and manipulation -- really are that clever?

This study provides a historical mapping of the documentary tradition. Chapter One acknowledges that all modes of documentary practice realism, and suggests that the ethnographic/expository modes employ fiction film conventions such as set-ups, narrative

structures and bias in order to present its point of viewer. Chapter Two offers a dissection of Bill Nichols' highly influential documentary framework, including a thorough unpacking of *cinéma vérité*, the mode commonly understood as providing the greatest access to reality, and concludes that documentary modes are not rigid and governed by strict allegiances to convention. The chapter concludes with a calling for an understanding of, and acknowledging of, the hybrid nature of documentary, conceding, as Nichols himself does, that modes often borrow from other modes and thus blur the boundaries between them. Chapter Three's case study of *Bob Roberts* alongside *Don't Look Back* might be understood as the crux of this thesis. It is here that postmodern theory, in particular, ideas on parody, satire, and pastiche begin to bracket this study's shift into an examination of simulation and hyperreality. Finally, then, Chapter Four works through documentary cinema's relationship to postmodern theory suggesting that so long as film's "look the part," often times viewers will be duped into believing mockumentaries, for example, *The Blair Witch Project*, are real.

When Baudrillard suggested that postmodernism was emblematic of "the dissolution of TV into life, the dissolution of life into TV" (1983: 55), it was not evident just how applicable this declaration would become. This equation has not only proven correct, but has acted as a significant guidepost for studies into postmodernism and media. Although we may have difficulty in distinguishing between reality and fiction, they are after all, often visually identical, *Forgotten Silver* looking as like a documentary as *Nanook of the North* does. The onus, then, must remain fixed on spectators to live up to Hall's contention they are active and engaged, and not simply passive and disinterested.

According to Eagleton, “no idea is more unpopular with contemporary cultural theory than that of absolute truth. The phrase smacks of dogmatism and authoritarianism” (2003: 103). Eagleton, like Hall, demands an active spectator, in a sense hails us to interpret, deconstruct and question texts. Perhaps then, Eagleton’s quote can replace Baudrillard’s as a guidepost for the future: we will no longer be seduced by illusion and representation, unable to detect the difference between the actual and feigned simulation; and no longer will we need Bob Roberts’ smirk, Stanely’s fabricated war, or “found footage” of lost students in the woods, to authorize our interpretation or activation of critical thought and spectatorship. Instead, a film such as *Bob Roberts* is now understood as an education tool, much as the early films marking the documentary tradition have been historically accepted as educational as well.

Researching documentary cinema’s relationship to spectatorship is key in that it allows for an understanding of the ways in which cinema, and all media, has made its representational strategies seem normal, and thus, easily accepted. Future work expanding on this thesis’ research would continue to explore the strategies media employs, as well as the responses from viewers. The development of sophisticated mockumentaries such as *The Blair Witch Project* has ushered in a whole new challenge for viewers: how do we know if any film is “real” anymore?

Filmography

A Mighty Wind (Christopher Guest, 2003)

Armageddon (Michael Bay, 1998)

Arrival of a Train at La Ciotât Station (Auguste and Louis Lumière, 1895)

Best in Show (Christopher Guest, 2000)

Bicycle Thieves (Vittorio de Sica, 1948)

Birth of a Nation (D.W. Griffith, 1915)

Blair Witch Project (Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sanchez, 1999).

Bob Roberts (Tim Robbins, 1992).

Bowling for Columbine (Michael Moore, 2003).

Cabinet of Dr. Caligari, The (Robert Wiene, 1919)

Chronicle of a Summer (Chronique d'un été) (Jean Rouch, 1960).

Citizen Kane (Orson Welles, 1941)

David Holzman's Diary (Kit Carson, 1967)

Dead Birds (Robert Gardner, 1963)

Die Hard (John McTiernan, 1988)

Don't Look Back (D.A. Pennebaker, 1967).

Drop Dead Gorgeous (Michael Patrick Jann, 1998)

Fahrenheit 9/11 (Michael Moore, 2004)

Fear of a Black Hat (Rusty Cundieff, 1994)

Forgotten Silver (Costas Bates and Peter Jackson, 1995)

Friday the 13th (Sean Cunningham, 1980)

Gimme Shelter (Albert and David Maysles and Charlotte Zwerin, 1970).

Halloween (John Carpenter, 1978)

High School (Frederick Wiseman, 1968).

I Know What You Did Last Summer (Jim Gillespie, 1997)

Last Action Hero (John McTiernan, 1993)

La Terra trema (Luchino Visconti, 1948)

Las Hurdes (Land Without Bread) (Luis Buñuel, 1932).

Man of Aran (Robert Flaherty, 1934)

Moana (Robert Flaherty, 1925)

Model (Frederick Wiseman, 1980)

The Man with a Movie Camera (Dziga Vertov, 1929).

Nanook of the North (Robert Flaherty, 1922).

Night and Fog (Nuit et brouillard) (Alain Resnais, 1955).

Night Mail (Basil Wright, 1936)

Primary (Robert Drew, 1960).

Privilege (Peter Watkins, 1967)

Purple Rose of Cairo, The (Woody Allen, 1985)

Roger and Me (Michael Moore, 1989)

Rome, Open City (Roberto Rossellini, 1945)

Rutles The: All You Need is Cash (Gary Weis and Eric Idle, 1978)

Scream (Wes Craven 1996)

This is Spinal Tap (Rob Reiner, 1984).

Titicut Follies (Frederick Wiseman, 1967).

Un Chien Andalou (Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dali, 1928)

Wag the Dog (Barry Levinson, 1997).

Waiting for Guffman (Christopher Guest, 1997).

Workers Leaving the Factory (Louis Lumière, 1895)

Zelig (Woody Allen, 1985).

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