sentio, cogito, dictum, video

Richard Blackburn

November 2010

Department of Art History and Communications Studies
McGill University

A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Masters of Arts in Communication Studies.

i| agnitio

gratias tibi ago

To Will Straw for his support and patience, and to Grant McCracken for his encouragement and input in the initial stages of this project.

To Lee Young for the opportunity to develop the metaphor-based poetry exercises in his high-school English classes, which would inspire the use of similar exercises in *SALT*.

Especially to Louise Leroux and Téo L. Blackburn, without whom this thesis would not have been completed.

ii| materia

iii| epitome

This thesis expounds a theoretical framework for the examination of the artistic creation in documentary filmmaking, in which metaphor occupies a crucial role by preserving the emotional integrity of the artist's subjective expression. In the first part, the function of metaphor in literature is studied from the vantage point of Vichian theory. An application of Vico's model of cultural development to artistic production reveals an imaginative basis of art, and a processional dynamic by which an author's subjective reality is directly communicated to his audience. The second part applies this model of artistic creation as metaphoric communication to documentary film. A look at Grierson's first principles of documentary film reveals its imaginative basis, in line with the processional dynamic of literature examined in Part I. Careful consideration of the editorial manipulation at work in documentary film compels its rightful consideration as literature, rather than journalism. A look at the advent of cinéma vérité, and its particular use of technology as a means of eliminating the need for translation, completes and strengthens this analysis. The final part examines the model of the creative process developed by the author in the context of a documentary project entitled SALT, produced by the National Film Board in 2000, which laid bare the use of metaphor in order to preserve the fragile natural perspectives of its author-subjects.

Cette dissertation développe un modèle théorique du processus créatif propre au documentaire. Il propose un rôle fondamental pour la métaphore, qui préserverait l'intégrité émotionnelle de l'expression artistique. La première partie est dévouée à l'examen du rôle de la métaphore dans la littérature, selon la perspective du philosophe Giambattista Vico. Une application à la production artistique du modèle Vichien du développement culturel révèle le fondement imaginaire de l'expression artistique, ainsi qu'une dynamique par le biais de laquelle la subjectivité de l'artiste est communiquée directement à son public. La deuxième partie du texte applique ce modèle au documentaire. L'analyse de ses principes fondamentaux entreprise par John Grierson s'avère signifiante et dévoile un fondement imaginaire au documentaire, évocateur de la dynamique élaborée dans la première partie du texte. L'éditorialisation importante en documentaire suggère qu'il resemblerait à la littérature, plutôt qu'au journalisme auquel il est si souvent comparé. Une étude brève du développement du cinéma vérité et de son usage particulier de la technologie afin de réduire le besoin de traduction envers l'objectif complète et renforce cette analyse. La dernière partie du texte applique le modèle développé par l'auteur dans les premières parties à la production du documentaire SALT, produit par l'Office National du Film en 2000.

0.0|sentio, cogito, dictum…video

introduction

This thesis argues that poetic metaphor plays a formative role in imaginative thought and artistic creation. It examines the unique role of metaphor as a vehicle for direct communication of an artist's subjective reality, given its unparalleled power as an empathetic medium.

In the first part, the role of metaphor in literature is studied from the vantage point of Vichian theory. An application of Vico's model of cultural development to artistic production reveals an imaginative basis of art, and a processional dynamic by which an author's subjective reality is directly communicated to his audience. In order to understand the lived experience of art—of both producer and receiver—analogies to language are unavoidable, but problematic. Whereas conversation involves a translation of subjective realities into an objective entity—Derrida's transformation of *doxa* into *logos* via the *hymen*—metaphor allows for direct communication of an individual's subjectivity. Logically unintelligible, metaphor eludes translation into *logos* and incites in the receiver an analogous emotional state, preserving the emotional integrity of the artist's subjective expression. Art as metaphoric communication, as such, is the nearest humans can come to sharing a subjective reality—and thus overcome what Frye posits to be an inherent loneliness of individuality.

The second part applies this model of artistic creation as metaphoric communication to documentary film. A look at Grierson's first principles of documentary film reveals its imaginative basis, in line with the processional dynamic of literature examined in Part I. Rather than logically translate witnessed realities and communicate them objectively, as a journalist would, a documentary filmmaker creates spatio-temporal patterns out of logically inconsistent realities captured on film. Like metaphor, these juxtapositions defy logic, inciting in the audience an emotional response that emulates the filmmakers' own lived experience of the captured realities. In constructing the narrative treatment of his subject matter the filmmaker thus uses poetic metaphor to convey the essential, inherently subjective, experiential truth. Careful consideration of the editorial manipulation at work in documentary film compels its rightful consideration as literature, rather than journalism. A look at the advent of *cinéma vérité*, and its particular use of technology as a means of eliminating the need for translation, completes and strengthens this analysis.

The final part of this exposition expounds the developed model by way of a case study. It examines the creative process developed by the author in the context of a documentary project entitled *SALT*, produced by the National Film Board in 2000, which laid bare the use of metaphor in order to preserve the fragile natural perspectives of its author-subjects. *SALT* was distinguished precisely by its lack of translation, enabling a direct communication of the subjective realities of its young directors via empathetic identification. As such, it is the culmination of the evolution of *cinema vérite* and serves as a testament to the powerful role of metaphor in artistic communication.

ut pictura poesis

We tend to think that to compare poetry with painting is to make a metaphor, while to differentiate poetry from painting is to state a literal truth.

W.J.T. Mitchell

Throughout the development of this thesis, I was often confronted with the difficulty of writing about a project with which I was so intimately connected, one that I had in fact instigated. Artist and theoretician are mutually exclusive: the first lacks the objectivity vis-à-vis his or her own work to properly assess it and the latter access to the subjective raw material from which art is created. How can one write about one's own art without it quickly devolving into a journal entry?

I had developed a metaphor-based poetry exercise in order to survive—at the age of thirty-two sans high school diploma—university-level English classes, and their ten-page paper assignments about three stanza poems. Several years later, I transformed this exercise for my high school English students, who were faced with substantially the same issue.

Soon thereafter, I was asked to teach the independent course that would become *SALT*. My students, four seventeen-year old girls, agreed to do a documentary film under two conditions: they would have full authorial control and access to the equipment: in sum, creative sovereignty. I turned to my metaphor-based exercises instinctively, in much the same way I had for my English students, as a means of giving them access, of providing them with a gateway to the act of creation. I was astounded by how successful it was as stimulating creative output worthy of far more experienced artists.

I wrote the first twenty pages of this thesis a full two years later, long after the film had premiered and the student-filmmakers had moved on, most of them to non-artistic pursuits. I was inspired by *SALT* because of what it had taught me about the creative process, which until then had unfolded in my work unconsciously. It laid bare and rendered explicit what most artists do intuitively, and which the student-filmmakers had experienced immediately and unknowingly in response to the exercise. And with which they, undoubtedly, would be unable to engage with rationally.

I for my part can do so, simply put, because *SALT* was not my creative output. Writing about it from a third person point of vie was no great leap because I experienced it in the third person. With the introduction of the metaphor-based exercises, and the handing of the creative reins to the student-filmmakers, I moved from manager to consultant in the creation of *SALT*. I then had the somewhat unique opportunity to be the creator of the how rather than the what: a painter watching others paint the poem.

One day a great jazz soloist dies and ascends to the Pearly Gates where he is met by St Peter. Noticeably enthusiastic about his demise, he greets St Peter warmly and in a smoky sandpaper voice asks him:

"St Pete, man. I've been waitin' for today to happen for so long. Where are the cats jammin'? Can you show me the way?"

St Peter nods his head and guides the eager musician to the elysian gathering of jazz greats. They arrive and the musician is awestruck by what he sees. It is just the way he imagined it would be. All the jazz greats are there in the ultimate after hours jam session that would obviously never end. The musician knows them all. Except for one.

Puzzled, he turns to St Peter and says:

"Okay, man, there's Bud, Max, Bird, Billie, Satchmo, Dizz, the Trane, but who is that skinny white cat with the long white beards blowing trumpet?"

St Peter, slightly embarrassed, sighs and replies;

"Oh….well…a …that's GOD, he thinks he's Miles."

1.0|sentio, cogito, dictum

sentio

I remember very clearly the first time I heard jazz. I was fourteen years old. It was a Sunday night. I was alone in my bedroom listening to the radio, when the sultry sounds of a tenor saxophone came barrelling through the speaker. It entered the room with an extraordinary sense of primacy. I had never experienced music like that before. The player was Sonny Rollins. The melodic overtones of his soloing were carnal as he tested the balance between dissonance and harmony, the discourse supported by the unerring pulse of swung eights: the bass and rums kneading the 2/4 of each bar. I was captive. I remember feeling the music washing over me and reaching inside me. It felt as if the music was a hand reaching through my skin to my lower abdomen and took my stomach in its palm and squeezed, causing a churning in my lower belly. The churning was not momentary. It endured. It was as if the music had hijacked my soul, Sonny Rollins was driving the car, and I was in the backseat feeling all the ups and downs and swerves of this musical ride. Although deeply engaged both physically and emotionally, I was at the same time so acutely aware of what was happening to me that I remember asking: "How could the music make my stomach turn?"

As I write about it now, thirty-five years later, I struggle to relate this experience rationally. Legions of poetic modifiers volunteer to describe my perception at the time. One after the other, the prospective descriptors are dismissed as gratuitous and maudlin:

unable to justly convey the spirit of the event, each a crude reduction of how I felt that night. Unable to explain or articulate it, the moment has remained with me, furtively tucked up in a corner of my consciousness as an epiphany.

The memory of the event serves me today as a personal benchmark of engagement for other creative media. As a result, I equate the ability of artistic creation and interpretation to elicit an emotional response with the quality of resonance Rollins displayed to me that night. A look at the imaginative basis of art, and the relationship the creative process has with language and culture, reveal certain dynamic agents that can be combined in a model to understand poetics as a means of empathetic identification.

The predominant image I retain from that night is the sense of primacy the music evoked. Marshall McLuhan referred to song as "the slowing down of speech in order to savour nuance."[1] Music shares its evolution with poetry. Both trace their development to ritualistic forms of religious communal expression, which included chanting and dance.[2] Shakespearean poets insisted they were composing music, and referred to verse as 'songs'.[3] Sonnets of this era were often put to music. Later, the program music of Liszt, Debussy, and Ravel was called 'tone poems', to describe its impressionistic expression of events, concepts, and emotions.[4] Classical Greek theatre was also thought of as poetry. In Poetics, Aristotle examined how theatre emanated from the two main creative instincts of *imitation* and *harmony,* and described its use of 'language embellished', either with

---

[1] Marshall McLuhan, *The Guttenberg Galaxy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963) 200.

[2] Marcel Danesi, *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Semiotics, Media, and Communications* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000) 177.

[3] Northrop Frye, "The Keys to Dreamland," in *The Educated Imagination: The Massey Lectures, Second Series,* (Toronto: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1963) 35-36.

[4] Unlike absolute music, program music is written to sound like something, or give the impression of something else, and in this way like poetry functions as a meta-linguistic expression.

rhythm or song, to achieve its dramatic purpose.[5] He extended his understanding of poetics to include visual art, stating, "it is the same in painting."[6] Aristotle saw poetics in all art as a reflection of the human condition that expressed his concept of *energia*, or movement-of-spirit.[7]

Giambattista Vico, an Italian scholar of the early 18th century, attributed even greater cultural primacy to poetry, and viewed it as "the primordial form of language".[8] He referred to early speakers as poets, and early cultures' conception of their world in terms of gods and heroes as poetic logic.[9] Vico asserted that cultures develop through a cyclic process of knowledge production, dissemination and understanding that he referred to as *verum factum*, or making the truth. In a paper entitled *On the Study Methods of Our Time* (1709), Vico argued that all knowledge was a construct of the human imagination, and that humans can only really understand what they in fact create.[10] He criticized Descartes' contention of *cogito ergo sum*, and cautioned against using only rational logic to understand the world. This proposal did not go over well with early 18th century Cartesians, and Vichian theory languished in relative obscurity until its recent revisit by postmodern theorists in reaction to a similar myopia of Modernism.

The most recent mining of the Vichian renaissance as it applies to cultural theory is contained in volume three of the series *Media, Communications & Culture Studies*,

---

[5] SH Butcher, trans., *Aristotle: Poetics*, ed. Francis Ferguson. (New York: Hill & Wang, 1988) 55-56 & 61.
[6] *Ibid*, 52.
[7] *Ibid*, 10. *Energia* is defined of the three modes of action: *praxia* (to do), *poeisis* (to make), *theora* (to understand).
[8] *Supra* note 2, 177.
[9] *Ibid*.
[10] Marcel Danesi, "Contemporary Persperctives on Giambattista Vico", in *The Imaginative Basis of Thought and Culture: Contemporary Perspectives on Gimabattista Vico*, Marcel Danesi and Frank Nuessel, eds. (Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press Inc, 1994) 1.

entitled *The Imaginative Basis of Thought and Culture: Contemporary Perspectives on Giambattista Vico*, edited by Marcel Danesi and Frank Nuessel. In the first sentence of their preface, Danesi and Nuessel state unequivocally their purpose for the volume: "…to focus attention on the relevance of one of the greatest philosophers of all time, Giambattista Vico."[11] Danesi goes on to describe in his opening essay how Vico inspired some of the century's greatest thinkers. James Joyce wrote *Finnigan's Wake* after reading *The New Science*.[12] Northrop Frye's seminal publication on literary theory, *The Anatomy of Criticism*, applied the Vichian template of cultural cyclicity to literature.[13] Marshall McLuhan's famous compendium, 'the medium is the message', is based on Vico's notion of the intrinsic relation between metaphor and cognition.[14] The title of his last book, *Laws of Media: The New Science* is a tribute to Vico.[15] Danesi, who attributes the paucity of Vichian scholarship to a firewall of Cartesian logic, which only began cracking in 1949 with the publication of Heisenberg's theory of uncertainty, describes the quarrel of principle between Descartes and Vico as *cogito ergo sum* versus *sentio ergo sum*.[16]

Postmodernists seem to embrace Vico's ideas for the same reasons they were initially dismissed. In his 1725 publication *The New Science*, Vico articulated a comprehensive theory of culture as an evolutionary cycle in the stages: The Age of Gods,

---

[11] Danesi, *Contemporary Perspectives on Giambattista Vico*, iii.
[12] *Ibid*, 15-16.
[13] Caterina Nella Cotrupi, "Vico and the Making of Truth," in *Northrop Frye and the Politics of Process* (Toronto: University of Toronto Pres, 2000) 50-75.
[14] *Supra* note 10, 15-16.
[15] *Ibid*, 16.
[16] *Ibid*, 4. *Cogito ergo sum*: I think therefore I am. *Sentio ergo sum*: I feel therefore I am.

The Age of Heroes, and The Age of Equals.[17] In the first stage cultural knowledge is constructed of myth, as early cultures understand natural and societal phenomena through the creation of symbolic representations based sensory experience. According to John O'Neil Freud, Vico and Levi-Strauss all agreed that "symbolism in prelogical thinking is the greatest civilizational bridge between the arts and the sciences, and is the necessary imaginative source of these cognitivist discourses that construct the modern world."[18] For Vico, Homeric epic poetry is a constructed knowledge of Ancient Greece that takes an internal perception of truth, like love, and conceptualizes it externally in the form of a god. The aspects of human behaviour normally associated with love are then built into the character of the representative god—in this case, Eros—and the emotion can be viewed and examined objectively as phenomena. The concept that was once internal and subjective is now external and objective. For Vico this dynamic process was innate to human cognition and an extension of the human thought process, which is pre-wired to produce thought along a subjective to objective axis of understanding.

[17] *Supra* note 2, 177.

[18] John O'Neil, "Vico and Myth," in *The Imaginative Basis of Thought and Culture: Contemporary Perspectives on Gimabattista Vico*, Marcel Danesi and Frank Nuessel, eds. (Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press Inc, 1994) 102.

1.1|sentio, cogito, dictum

cogito

This axis of thought process is also described by Jacques Derrida as a response to the question, *what is literature?*[19] In an essay entitled *The First Session*, he describes literature's history as governed by a relation, or *hymen* that exists between literature and truth.[20] By comparing Plato's *Philebus* and Malarmé's *Mimique*, Derrida describes literature's operative essence as an internal discourse, or 'inward commerce', resulting from a *mimesis* that begins in the human mind at the moment an opinion, or *doxa*, is articulated as rational thought, or *logos*.[21] Derrida defines the *doxa* as an inspired opinion of spontaneous truth and identifies the *logos* as discourse.[22] It is not clear whether Derrida is using discourse to mean the articulation of the idea—i.e., a Platonic use of *logos*, meaning rational thought—or as the sum of the process, in this sense a dialogue between the human imagination and the intellect. Either way Derrida sees literature originating in the mind as a dialectic between the imagined and the articulated. It is simple enough to understand that what Derrida calls the *hymen*, the relational space

---

[19] It appears that Derrida was somewhat of a Vico devotee. He refers to Vico twice in the volume as an inspirational source. The first appears on page 67, when Derrida equates Shakespearean drama as containing 'everything', to Celan, Plato, Joyce, The Bible, Vico, and Kafka. Derrida's second reference to Vico appears on page 280, as he describes the literacy competence and lists Joyce, Plato, Shakespeare, Dante, Vico, and Hegel.

[20] Jacques Derrida, "The First Session," in Acts of Literature, Derek Attridge, ed. (New York: Routledge, 1992) 131.

[21] *Ibid*, 129. Derrida is cautious here in defining *mimesis* and says that literature is created through 'a certain interpretation of *mimesis*', which suggests that he is leaving the inspiration of the act to the subjective understanding of each author's engagement of *mimesis* as a tradition.

[22] *Ibid*, 132.

between truth and literature when the *doxa* becomes *logos*, is the moment the subjective is made objective. It is helpful to conceive of it as a translation from subjective to objective, i.e., from the imagined to the articulated. Unlike in a linguistic translation, however, there is no precise moment of transfer, no point of transformation from one form to the other. It is impossible to precisely locate the moment of the subjective-objective transfer. The translation from subjective to objective along the *hymen* is a gradual process along a continuum on which each point may be subdivided *ad infinitum*.

The exchange must be considered an organic, dynamic process. It is organic because it occurs in the brain, so it is as a result of some biochemical reactive impulse that is never replicated in quite the same way: each musing, each thought, a separate little life, a unique creation. In this way, then, the human imagination is a procreative reflex that operates instinctively to extend the understanding of the human condition by extending it through various abstractions.

It is dynamic because, as Aristotle pointed out, space and time are potentially divisible *ad infinitum*.[23] If movement is the travel between two distinct poles, and there everything is moving, then everything is movement, everything is moving, and everything is in movement between two points of understanding. To push this analogy a little further, if there are an infinite number of points of understanding between *doxa* and *logos*, then it is quite impossible to define any specific one. Like Zeno's paradox applied to the human condition, via the process of understanding our subjectivity we

[23] In *On Generation and Corruption* , as well as in Physics, *Aristotle* discusses the principle of infinite divisibility, a concept expounded by presocratic philosophers of the Eleatic school and notoriously illustrated by Xeno's Paradox. The principle of infinite divisibility holds that, given that the distance between any two points will itself be divisible, there is an infinite number points between any two points on a plane.

simultaneously create more to understand. We are constantly running after a train of thought that reveals itself, at the moment we overtake it, not as seminal but as a multiplex of related inspirations—it's architecture another emotional-intellectual mantra to explore. Any linguistic articulation of the human imagination, as such, is itself inherently deficient, because through its creation sub-sets of other articulations are spawned. The resistance of the human imagination to be accurately expressed through language is what leads poets to employ metaphor as a meta-linguistic articulation of conceptual truths.

Nikki Giovanni describes poetry as "pure energy horizontally contained between the mind of the poet and the ear of the reader."[24] Such linear analogies inadequately describe three-dimensional processional dynamic. The brain is spherical, so is the inner ear. We see and hear in three dimensions. The page is two-dimensional, but not the eye or the senses. A three-dimensional, spherical, model is far more difficult to conceptualize, however, and stubbornly presents itself momentarily, intuitively, and fleetingly. It quickly taxes the mind to conceptualize, and implores it to retreat to the easier intellectual terrain of linear understanding, like geometry or physics. If the human condition is born of the imagination, but limited in understanding to models of linear objectivity, then the importance of understanding poetic logic, as a dynamic of communications, is crucial.

Is the reception of a poem not affected by where it is read? What about smell? I work in the city, but I live in the country. The dominant perceptual difference I encounter each day occurs around smell and sound. I am different in the city than I am

[24] Nikki Giovanni, "Poetry," in *The Norton Introduction to Literature, 4th ed.*, Carl E. Bain, Jerome Beaty and J. Paul Hunter, eds. (New York: WW Norton and Company, 1986) 821.

when at home in the country. The receptive mode is affected by the perceptive mode. If I read a poem while sitting in Philip's Square in the heart of downtown Montréal I receive different imagery than if I do sitting on top of the mountain behind my house, amid the maples, gazing out at a wilderness horizon. My vision is similarly engaged from reading the page, but my nose, ears, and skin receive radically different information. The reception of poetry functions in reverse, as it is presented objectively, contained linear in two dimensions through an act of *mimesis* created from the objective articulation (*logos*) of the poet's subjective imaginings (*doxa*) carried by the *hymen*, or movement of the event to the reader in such a way that the reader reexperiences the poet's *mimesis* subjectively. The plane of understanding is subjective-objective-subjective.

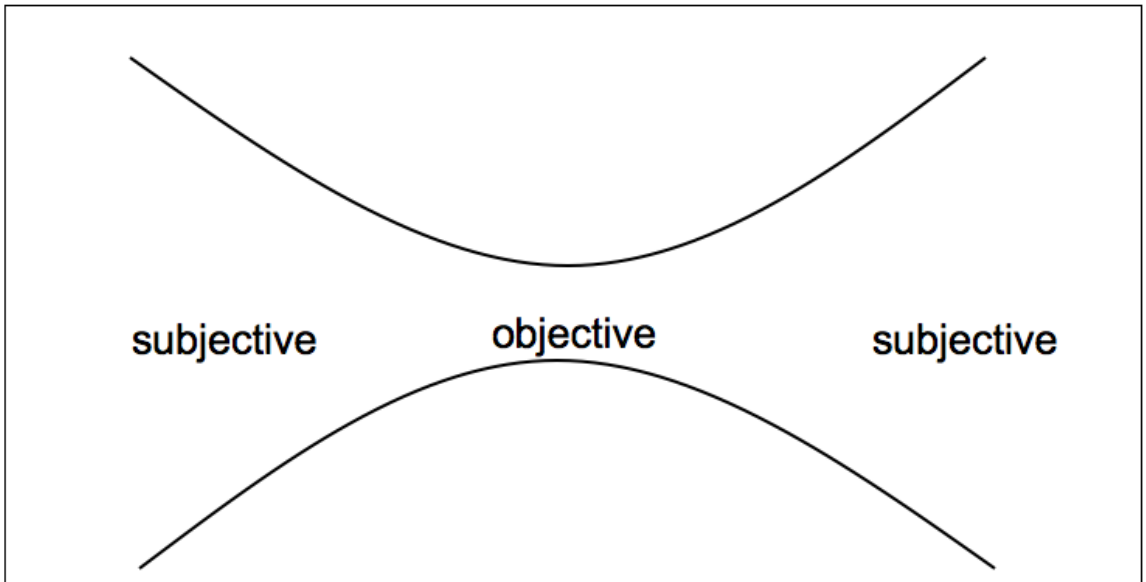

Figure 1.1: The subjective-objective plane of understanding

It is this processional dynamic of 'subjective-objective' reflection and expression, born of the imagination and processed by the intellect, that I propose is innate: functioning as an embryonic process of human communication.

The same process that Derrida describes as an internal thought process manifests itself at the cultural level as humans engage the same subjective-objective dynamic to reflect and understand the world around them. An excellent illustration of this is presented by Northrop Frye in an essay from The Educated Imagination entitles "A Motive for Metaphor", in which he posits a societal purpose and function for poetry through an understanding of language. Using the analogy of being shipwrecked on a deserted island, Frye describes our initial perceptions of this new strange land.

> *The first thing you do is take a long look around you, a world of sky and sea and earth and stars and trees and hills. You see this world as objective as something set over against you and not yourself or related to you in any way. And you notice two things about his objective world. In the first place, it doesn't have any conversation. It's full of animals and plants and insects going on about their business, but there's nothing that responds to you: it has no morals and no intelligence, or at least none that you can grasp. It may have shape and meaning, but it doesn't seem to be a human shape or a human meaning. Even if there's enough to eat and no dangerous animals, you feel lonely and frightened and unwanted in such a world.*[25]

In this rather Edenic analogy, Frye describes the primordial human condition as a loneliness due to an absence of conversation. Like Derrida's 'internal discourse', Frye is suggesting that the basis of language and literature stems from a human predilection for conversation as a combative reflex to loneliness. There is sound on the island Frye describes. In the sky there must at times be wind pushing the clouds. The waves of the sea lap at the shore, and the animals and insects trot and buzz around amongst themselves. But for us it is noise: incomprehensible.

---

[25] Northrop Frye, "A Motive for Metaphor," in *The Educated Imagination: The Massey Lectures, Second Series*, (Toronto: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1963) 2-3.

In response to the noise and in reaction to their loneliness, Frye asserts, humans engage their world on three levels: the conscious, the practical, and the visionary—each with a distinct expressive language. The conscious is the level of observation; the world is seen objectively and rationally. Described using intellect, it is drawn by listing its contents according to the dictates of reason. Emotion cannot be understood, *ergo* is unreasonable, *ergo* is evicted. According to Frye this is the world of pure science, observed and measured using quantitative analysis.

Frye's second level is the practical. This world is the one of adaptation, in which humans modify either themselves or their environment in order to fit into the natural world. Described using verbs, it is the world of 'need be'. The territory of applied arts and sciences, it is the occupation of engineering, agriculture, and medicine. The third level, the visionary, is the world of art. At this level the practical is extended to envision the possible. It is the world of 'could be' and, as such, the main realm of the imagination. Operating at the other end of the continuum, as the opposite of science, the arts follow emotion.

Frye points out an important complication integral to the process of cultural participation. In order to be conscious of the world around us, as in the first level, we must feel separate from it. This sets in motion a cycle of comparison that measures what we see in relation to us. Quantitative analysis, by requiring objectivity, thus separates the observer from the subject, but in doing so simultaneously creates an additional axis of interpretation that is proximate in relation to the observer. This relational proximity, or how we relate to the world, is our primary form of analysis, and is inherently qualitative. Qualitative because, in order to compare, we must accept that we are part of the equation.

We then become a specimen measuring itself, and objectivity is impossible. The only form of analysis is subjective, and ultimately a measure of how we 'feel'. Frye describes this phenomenon as:

> *...the feeling of consciousness or awareness, where you feel split off from everything that's not your perceiving self. Your habitual state of mind is the feeling of separation which goes on with being conscious, and the feeling 'this is not part of me' soon becomes 'this is not what I want'.*[26]

We can try to divorce ourselves from emotion, and this is in fact what pure science and objective analysis strive to do in creating knowledge domains like mathematics and deductive logic, but these knowledges are ultimately constructs of our imagination in a subjective-based response to our relational proximity with the world around us and an expression of what we want.

Viewed as such, all analysis is a qualitative measure of how we 'feel' about something that Frye describes as "the contrast between 'I like this' and 'I don't like this'."[27] If we were at one with the world around us and felt part of it, we neither would—nor could—engage in an objective analysis of it. Therefore, it is this 'feeling' of separateness that allows us our faculty of objective analysis. Are we separate from the natural world? That would not make rational sense. We are a living organism of the earth; comprised of the same elemental components and breathing, eating, and reproducing like other organisms. The fact that we feel separate is an intuitive emotional response to the objective perspective we use to view the world.

Vico would agree with this view, as he believed all knowledge is a construct of the imagination. Frye, a proponent of Vichian theory, ascribes to the human imagination

---

[26] *Ibid*, 4.
[27] *Ibid*.

the same cognitive primacy when he posits that this feeling of separateness with the natural world is the 'habitual state of the mind'.[28] Frye is very clear on this point, adopting an existential position as he advances the concept of separateness as a prerequisite for consciousness. If separation creates, in turn, a proxial dynamic of understanding between the individual and the world, then the human mind is hard-wired irrationally to render emotionally-based qualitative understandings and rational logic is a soft knowledge application in order to articulate the noise around us. The noise is heard, but not understood, and lonely in our ignorance we fight back with understanding.

1.2|sentio, cogito, dictum

dictum

The fight to understand the noise is the primary propeller of culture. In arguing that the habitual state of mind is a feeling of separateness from the world in which we live, Frye is effectively applying Vico's principle of *verum factum* to literature as the source of the act. Derrida supplied a plausible and effective description of the act of literature as internal speech. But why do we do it? According to Frye, it is because we are lonely. While the design of the discourse depends upon the level of engagement, all language operates in reaction to our sense of detachment from the world. At the conscious or scientific level, the language of pure intellect, scientists respond to their solitude by

[28] *Ibid*.

engaging the world through the scientific method: citing problems, proposing methods, recording observations, and articulating conclusions. They gain attachment to the world via their quest to understand the tangible aspects of its nature. The applied arts and sciences display a similar tendency by engaging the world through the possibility of adapting it more to our liking. For example, this paper—as a piece of social science—seeks unity by proposing a model to better understand how we communicate, thus adapting a tangible aspect of the world: a knowledge domain. The arts, operating at the visionary level of unrestrained emotion and pure imagination, seek commerce with the world by recreating the emotional landscapes of primal intuitions of oneness with the world.

To experience oneness with the world defies logic, because it is not objectively observable. In order to even consider the concept of oneness we must shun any sense of objectivity. One with the world, we are unable to distinguish ourselves from it, and our knowledge of it is purely subjective, emotional, irrational. While in that state, we are our *doxa*. There is no *logos*. The existential self at that moment is occupied in the *hymen*, the 'inbetweenness' before the experience is articulated. This is the state of inspiration all artists seek in their muse. It is not a brief glimpse of subjective truth because this implies that we see it, which is impossible for lack of a vantage point. Artists do not see their muse, they feel them. The artistic visions they present for us are emotional abstractions of their inspirations. Their source is intangible and defies logical objectification.

What art endeavours to do is communicate on an emotional level of understanding drawn from the imagination. It strives to reduce the effects of logic's objective prism in

order to preserve the integrity of its source sample, of subjective truth. If objectivity destroys the source sample, then art must pass its message through another medium. A medium that not only allows emotion to remain but incites the audience with the same or similar emotion as the artist's source sample. Western civilization's traditional medium of choice to express this process has been that of *mimesis*, the Platonic concept of human nature that both Aristotle and Derrida identify as basic to the linguistic arts. *Mimesis* also forms the basis of Frye's conclusion that the associative property of art seeks to reunite the individual with the world around him. Frye identifies the two associations possible to the poet: analogy and identity. In prescribing their use he makes obvious his preference:

> *In descriptive writing you have to be careful of associative language. You'll find that analogy, or likeness to something else, is very tricky to handle in description, because the differences are as important as the resemblances. As for metaphor, where you're really saying 'this is that', you're turning your back on logic and reason completely, because logically two things can never be the same and still remain two things. The poet, however, uses these two crude, primitive archaic forms of thought in the most uninhibited way, because his job is not to describe nature, but to show you a world completely absorbed and possessed by the human mind. So he produces what Baudelaire called a 'suggestive magic including at the same time object and subject, the world outside and the artist himself'.*[29]

Baudelaire's 'suggestive magic' of simultaneous subject and object is the relational hymen that Derrida says lies between truth and literature. Art stimulates emotional reunification with the natural. By using metaphors the poet arrests logic by defying it, and thus compels the receiver into the irrational realm of the subjective, which

[29] *Ibid*, 11.

is the imaginative basis of thought and knowledge described by Vico. Metaphor then functions as an antilogic, to express the intangibility of subjective truth. It allows intuitive emotional-based concepts that are perceived as true to be transferred objectively while maintaining their subjective integrity, which would be either distorted, destroyed, or completely unintelligible by rational-based objective interpretation. Metaphor, therefore, is the propulsive agent of poetic expression, its force and velocity the resonance of authority it achieves through its quality of *mimesis*.[30]

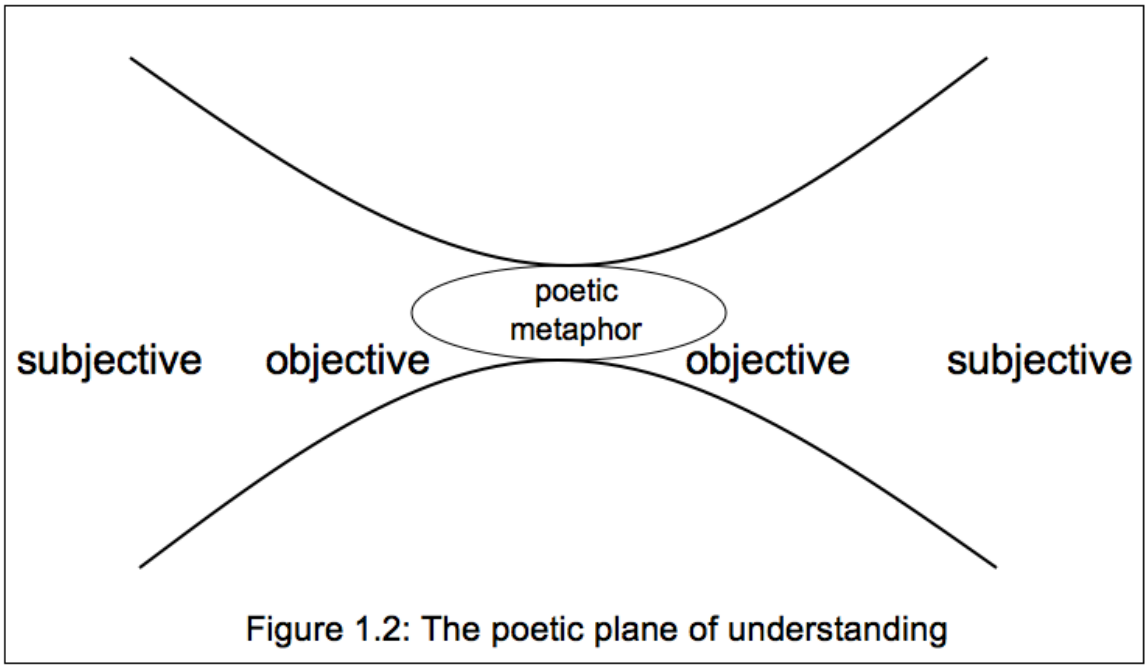

Figure 1.2: The poetic plane of understanding

Whereas poetics is the knowledge domain in which metaphor operates most readily as agent of cultural locomotion, subscribers to Vichian cultural theory ascribe a broader

[30] The model depicted here is inspired and adapted from a model designed by Rick Altman to understand cinema as a cultural event. See Rick Altman, "Cinema as Event," in *Sound Theory, Sound Practice*, Rick Altman, ed. (New York: Routledge, 1992) 1-14.

scope of influence to the mythopoesis tradition as a prototypical form of cultural expression and basis for understanding language development.[31]

In today's logocentric world, it is easy to ignore the cultural primacy of myth and poetry. As science continues to measure its knowledge in amounts of data, and economics to measure value in currency, myth and metaphor of poetry seem to be residual concepts of cultures past. However, emotions continue to behave irrationally and the world's intangible aspects continue to defy logic. As long as these elements of the human condition remain at odds with the rational, we will rely on the irrational expertise of poets to express and reflect them to us in order to better understand them,

> *..if it does not sing discard the ear*
> *for poetry is song*
> *if it does not delight discard*
> *the heart for poetry is joy*
> *if it does not inform then close*
> *off the brain for it is dead*
> *if it cannot heed the insistent message*
> *that life is precious*
>
> *which is all we poets*
> *wrapped in our loneliness*
> *are trying to say*

From Poetry, by Nikki Giovanni

[31] See *Supra* note 18, 99-111and Northrop Frye, *Myth and Metaphor,* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1990).

the poetics of documentary film

The term 'documentary' has always been problematic, functioning as a catchall phrase for documenting on film stock anything and everything observable in the natural world. In his seminal essay, "First Principles of Documentary", John Grierson states,

> *Documentary is a clumsy description, … So far we have regarded all films made from natural material as coming within the category. The use of natural material has been regarded as the vital distinction. Where the camera shot on the spot (whether it shot newsreel items or magazine items or discursive 'interests' or dramatised 'interests' or educational films or scientific films proper or Changs or Rangos) in that fact was documentary. This array of species is, of course, quite unmanageable in criticism, and we shall have to do something about it. They all represent different qualities of observation, different intentions in observations, and, of course, very different powers and ambitions at the stage of organizing material. I propose, therefore, after a brief word on the lower categories, to use the documentary description exclusively of the higher.*[32]

Grierson dismisses other forms of fact-based film genres like newsreels and magazines, because "they avoid on the one hand the consideration of solid material, and escape, on the other hand, the solid consideration of material."[33] He asserts that documentary filmmaking belongs in the arts, and its muse subject to the same standard of creative rigor and artistic voice. By establishing this hierarchy Grierson quite intentionally elevates

---

[32] John Grierson, "First Principles of Documentary, 1932," in *Non-Fiction Film Theory and Criticism*, Richard Barsam, ed. (New York: Dutton, 1976) 21.
[33] *Ibid*, 19.

documentary to the status of fine art, as a hybridic cinematic form that through its use of the "really real" can and should be considered as poetic.[34]

Grierson posits the distinguishing factor of documentary film to be authorship. Documentary film is not distinguished by its composition from raw material (a feature it shares with other non-fiction genres) or its subject matter (a feature might share with fiction) but rather by its particular combination of natural material and creative interpretation.[35] The narrative of the documentary film is driven by intention, which lends a particular quality to the observations conveyed in film.[36] The genesis of a documentary's conveyance is not the natural word captured on film but the subjective impressions of the filmmaker, which find creative imprint in the final product.

Grierson lists three principles governing documentary film, which together solidify its status as art and simultaneously distinguish it from other art forms. The first principle of documentary is its stage: the natural world. Grierson holds that, in "opening up the screen on the real world", the documentary gains access to "the living scenes and the living story".[37] That is, it gains access to the drama of the everyday, which in its comedy and tragedy rivals the staged stories of studio films. In doing so, it complements film's offerings and expounds its potential as a narrative art form.

Grierson's second principle is that of interpretation. He assumes for cinema the objective of creating a "screen interpretation of the modern world" and posits

---

[34] *Ibid*, 25.
[35] *Ibid*, 23.
[36] C Paul Sellors, "Collective Authorship in Film," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 65:3 (Summer 2007): 263.
[37] *Supra* note 31, 21.

documentary's superiority in this regard.[38] The potential of documentary to provide more thorough analysis (of a natural or social phenomenon) than fiction can stems not only from its access to the natural stage but from its power of analysis. The documentary filmmaker is, by way of selection and—according to Grierson, principally—in the ordering of his material, crafting an analysis. The documentary filmmaker does not simply record reality, by his "juxtaposition of detail, [he] create[s] an interpretation of it."[39] As such, documentary film can according to Grierson communicate social commentary in a more nuanced manner than fiction film can.

Grierson's final first principle is that there is an authenticity to documentary story-telling that is unparalleled in fiction film. He ascribes special worth to "spontaneous gesture", which is ripe with emotion in a way that a scripted gesture never can be.[40] The particular strength of the cinematic medium, he claims, is its ability to enhance "movement which tradition has formed or time has worn smooth."[41] As such, it conveys movement with maximum sensibility and finesse. This quality, Grierson argues, is leveraged to its full potential in documentary, which captures spontaneous gestures and natural movement, conveying the emotional power it carries in reality. Documentary film's salience, therefore, derives from a rawness it possesses as a showcase of spontaneous gesture.

---

[38] *Ibid*, 21
[39] *Ibid*, 23.
[40] *Ibid*, 21.
[41] *Ibid*.

Grierson's analysis can be read as an uncited reference to Aristotle's *Poetics*.[42] He argues that the natural world's inexhaustible quantity of material enhances the interpretative potential of characters and scenes. The particular strength of documentary, as such, is that it is by nature *mimetic*. In much the same way as Dionysius praised tragedy for its near absence of artifice, for Grierson documentary's ability to depict real life offers the filmmaker a powerful and convincing medium of imitation. Grierson's call for 'raw' and 'spontaneous' images was congruent with modernistic aesthetics of the time, specifically, neoclassicism—which sought to achieve Aristotelian imitation through candid exposure and naked truth.

From Grierson's analysis, therefore, we understand documentary film to be defined by its immediacy and interpretation. It is immediate because it takes up as its raw material the natural stage, arresting time and replicating movement beyond the confines of isolated subjective realities. It is interpretive because it is a construct. The filmmaker is not only witness but also author. As Grierson states,

> *The artist need not posit the ends—for that is the work of the critic—but the end must be there, informing his description and giving finality (beyond space and time) to the slice of life he has chosen.*[43]

So defined primarily by authorship, documentary film sheds its veneer of objectivity and passivity, is revealed as a subjective construction, and fully enters the realm of art.

---

[42] While impossible on what Grierson based his model, the fact that he graduated from Glascow University with a degree in moral philosophy makes Aristotle not unlikely.

[43] *Supra* note 31, 25.

2.1|…video

mythopoesis

The dramatic effect of the documentary film, as such, is not pregnant in the material itself, anymore than the painting's can be found in the brush, canvas, and paint or the music's in the strings, skin, and partition. Its genesis is the filmmaker himself. How precisely, then, is the filmmaker's subjectivity conveyed?

Firstly, what is it? The greatest triumph of any film is also its greatest conceit, presented in just three words: *a film by*...It is triumphant because the realization of any artistic creation is a personal achievement by its creator, and deserves recognition. It is a conceit because the unique creative process of filmmaking in general, and documentary specifically, is a concert of core singular visions of writer, director, and producer. It is realized collectively with highly skilled department heads of photography, sound and editing, and dependant upon the skills and expertise of the artisans that work in these various capacities. Though film histories are most often catalogued by director's last names—Flaherty, Pennebaker, Perreault, Moore—their work represents the collective and collaborative creations of hundreds of film artists. While successful film directors deserve their fair share of credit, both as visionaries and uber-collaborators, the parasocial

nature of the director/audience relationship is fundamentally mythopoetic, in that the directors occupy a godlike status as the omnificent.[44]

This is not a problem, *per se*, for Grierson's conception of documentary film as art. Auteur theory, and the subsequent developments of models of collective authorship, has dealt with the question of film as a collaborative medium at length.[45] The authorship debate centers around the problem raised by the collaborative nature of film for the classic model of authorship, which ascribes a work of art to be the product of individual agency. It has led to the development of a particular notion of film authorship, less dependent on causal theory and rather focused on the role of intention in creation.[46]

In the *film d'auteur*, with which François Truffaut and his contemporaries were preoccupied, the level of intention and control exerted by one individual—namely, the director—permits the seamless application of the notion of author akin to its use in literature, painting, or music. In large productions—like the *cinema de qualité* films Truffaut was reacting too, and epitomized by today's Hollywood studio films—a more collaborative view of authorship is applicable. The issue of positing authorship in film becomes one of degree: once it is established that the content of the film is attributable to a certain degree of intention and control, the issue becomes to who's purposeful action the content can be attributed. If the film's content cannot be ascribed to any one individual's intention more than to another's, then the collective intention of the

---

[44] Mythopoetic because their last names operate as metaphors, syntheses of multiple creative sources. Parasocial because the mythmaking precludes the inclusion of even the four other creative keys of any film project: writer, producer, director of photography, and editor.

[45] For a comprehensive account of the authorship debate in film theory see David A. Gerstner and Janet Staiger, eds. *Authorship and Cinema*. New York and London: Routledge, 2003, Chapter 2.

[46] Paisley Livingston, "Cinematic Authorship," in *Film Theory and Philosophy* , Richard Allen and Murray Smith, eds. (Oxford University Press, 1997) 132-148.

individuals active in its production is its genesis, and they as a collective agent are its author.[47] In such cases, the film is no less authored, but simply collectively authored.

The collaborative nature of film must inform our understanding of authorship in documentary film, as it does that of fiction film, though it is obviously less problematic in the former case. Smaller crews, smaller budgets, and fewer investors render issues of intention and control far simpler in the case of most documentaries. Nevertheless, references to the filmmaker do not preclude the possibility of collective authorship, nor does the mention of a subjective reality preclude the possibility of composite or multiple subjectivities at work—anymore than talk of an individual's actions precludes the possibility of another's influence being a contributive factor.

For Grierson, the interpretive craft of the documentary filmmaker is almost exclusively in the assembly of the recorded materials, i.e., the montage. It is at the level of editing, claims Grierson, that a non-fiction film passes from a mere "description" of the natural material to a creatively shaped interpretation of it.[48] By selecting and ordering his material, the filmmaker is "creating dramatic effect from the tempo'd accumulations of its single observations."[49] Grierson argues that a careful ordering and interpretation of the material in the editing phase is, "the only reality which counts in the end."[50] Camera placement is vital, he claims, but the lesser half of the poetics of documentary. In fact, he refers to the camera's gate as an "arbitrary rectangle" bracketed towards the natural

[47] *Supra* note 35, 268.
[48] *Supra* note 31, 20.
[49] *Ibid*, 24.
[50] *Ibid*, 21.

stage.[51] His use of the word arbitrary is notable, as it suggests a randomness, a lack of reason and aim in pointing the camera (many directors of photography would no doubt disagree with Grierson bitterly about his use of this word). It provides access to the canvas of reality, but the true raw material of a filmmaker's art is the film stock he loads into the picture head of the Movieola, at which point the film is given "maximum pattern in time and space", reflecting truth and enhancing movement.[52]

The rhythm of creativity in film production, as such, is most clearly achieved in the editing process. It is in this phase of production that harmonics of poetic metaphor are the most present and the most fragile. Grierson was the first to understand and identify this process in the work of Robert Flaherty.

The interpretation through juxtaposition Grierson describes is clearly metaphoric in purpose and operates in documentary film the same as it does in language: semantically. Flagherty staged many of the camera setups in his film *Nanook of the North* and *Moana*: he manipulated the scenes in which his subject 'played' and instructed them on how to 'act', techniques that many at the time thought were deceptive. He was criticized severely by some for doing so. Grierson disagreed with these critics, and argues that by filming in extreme remote locations at a time when most films of the time were shot in studios with actors, Flaherty was already exploring new ground—and that the staging of certain scenes was justified in order to remain true to the film's overall essential truth: indigenous peoples' subsistence lifestyles.[53] Grierson understands that in documentary, as in literature, essential, or subjective, truth is contained in poetic

[51] *Ibid*.
[52] *Ibid*, 23.
[53] *Ibid*, 23.

metaphor and primarily achieved in documentary through the editorial arrangement of juxtaposed images that resonate symbolically to the director and/or editor, and subsequently to the viewer, as they endeavour to reconcile the conflicting symbolism in the images. Like myth, the documentary filmmaker often constructs a reality metaphorically in order to convey the essential truth of the work. In *Bowling for Columbine*, Michael Moore is seen receiving a free shotgun, it is handed to him as a promotion when he opens a new bank account at the branch. This image is ripe with metaphor, and serves well to advance what Moore would argue is the film's essential truth: that gun violence in the US is out of control, due to an over-abundance of affection that Americans have for guns. But, like Flaherty before him, Moore was criticized for staging the scene.[54]

My purpose here is not to argue either for or against editorial manipulation in documentary, but to reveal the abundant use of poetic metaphor in documentary so that it be rightfully considered as literature rather than journalism. By advocating the artistic value of working with an abundance of real world images that were collected through location specific recording and then carefully edited together in a highly interpretative nature, Grierson establishes a basis for documentary cinema as fine art similar in structure and dynamic to poetry, and clearly appreciated as literature.

Locating poetic metaphor in documentary film is fairly straightforward. On one level, metaphor is created in documentary much like it is in photography: visually. Framing, camera angle, composition, colour correction, and exposure all serve the

[54] *Michael Moore Hates America* . DVD. Directed by Michael Wilson, Dallas, TX: MMHA Productions, 2004.

documentary filmmaker to create visual metaphors. A classic example of visual metaphor is Wolf Koenig's infamous pistol shot in *The Days Before Christmas*.[55] At this level, however, the use of metaphor in documentary is no different from that in photography. It does not justify its consideration as literature. Furthermore, this would, according to Grierson, constitute a lesser role for metaphor, as it belongs to the lesser art of the documentary: camera placement.

A second use of metaphor in documentary film is found in montage. Here documentary has access to devices unknown to photography: rhythm, tempo, sound. During the editing phase, spatio-temporal patterns are created out of logically inconsistent realities—by juxtaposing temporally, visually, and audibly distinct realities. Like metaphor in poetry, they affect by association and contrast. The range and complexity of such spatio-temporal metaphors is quite large. Theoretically, any stark jump cut is a metaphor of this sort, as is any scene composed of disparate sound and images. Spatio-temporal metaphors may also be more perceptible, like Moore's reconstruction of the bank's gun promotion in *Bowling for Columbine*, in which the time continuum was shortened for dramatic effect. It is to this kind of spatio-temporal metaphor that Grierson refers to when he posits documentary to be "creating dramatic effect from the tempo'd accumulations of its single observations."[56]

---

[55] *The Days Before Christmas* , VHS, Directed by Stanley Jackson, Wolf Koenig and Terence Macartney-Filgate, The National Film Board of Canada, 1958.
The infamous pistol shot is a tight frame on the pistol of an armed security guard, following him from his armoured car to the the bank to collect bags of money—thus juxtaposing the traditional meriness and goodwill of Christmas preparation and the greed and consumerism that accompany modern day Christmas seasons.

[56] *Supra* note 31, 24.

A reading of Grierson's analysis suggests a third level of operation of metaphor, however, by virtue of which documentary truly becomes a literary genre. The interpretive nature of documentary expounded by Grierson permits an examination of the role of extended metaphor in documentary film. Extended metaphor, also known as conceit, is a literary device in which a metaphor established in one stanza of poetry is repeated in the next, or drawn out for the duration of the poem.[57] Emily Dickinson's *Hope is the thing with Feathers* is entirely comprised of an extended metaphor. Extended metaphor is also used in short stories or novels, where it may span the entire work.[58] The rose in Antoine de St-Exupéry's *Le Petit Prince* is such an extended metaphor. It is an artistic device used exclusively in literature, which alone has a form enabling sustained metaphor. Whereas use of metaphor in photography, painting, and sculpture is immediate, metaphor in literature can be drawn out throughout a work to increase its effect. Much like extended metaphors advance the plot of the literary works in which they are employed, extended metaphors serve the documentary filmmaker in constructing his interpretation of the subject matter.

Grierson's discussion of *Nanook of the North* and its emphatic contrast to the modern life, and the effect of it on the viewer, speaks to the role and power of extended metaphor in documentary. Grierson discusses the juxtaposition of the primitiveness of the *Nanook*'s way of life with the advanced ideals it represents: nobility, self-sufficiency, survival. Flaherty's interpretation, he claims, is constructed by the inherent contrast and

[57] David Mikics, *A New Handbook of Literary Terms*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 67.
[58] Where extended metaphor becomes allegory is very interesting and much-debated issue in literary criticism. Is *Moby Dick* an allegory or an extended metaphor?

alienation felt by the viewer in reaction to Flaherty's depiction, and he compares this means of story telling to poetry and prose.[59]

It is unclear whether Grierson conceived of documentary as a literary genre. He was primarily concerned with establishing documentary as a legitimate art form, in a time when masterful works like Flaherty's were grouped into the same category as newsreels and what would today be considered educational films. He does, however, clearly identify narrative structure as a defining feature of documentary film, and uses the literary vocabulary of authorship, plot, and criticism. A conception of documentary as literature is implicit in his analysis. He vests the documentary filmmaker with the task of "making poetry where no poet has gone before", of telling a story and illuminating a theme.[60] Clearly, he conceived of documentary as a narrative thematic work, which operates like literature. It is unlikely that he would object to our depiction of documentary as a literary genre.

Documentary film is thus best understood as a modern audio-visual medium of the mythopoesis tradition. It is inscribed in the visionary level of Frye's analysis of cultural engagement, as a qualitative analysis that employs metaphor to invite conversation. Much like Frye's description of the role of metaphor in literature, documentary employs metaphor to provoke conversation. Frye's deserted landscape of disparate and disassociated objectivities becomes familiar when Grierson's documentary filmmaker eschews the artifice of the Hollywood studio and seeks out a natural stage of

[59] *Supra* note 31, 23.
[60] *Ibid*, 25 and 26.

drama for his camera and crew. In doing so, he engages the not-I and becomes a part of the previously alien landscape.

Two decades after Grierson argued to take the camera out of the studio and place it on a tripod in the natural world, a group of young *cinéastes,* also seeking the virtue of spontaneity, took the camera off the tripod and onto the cameraman's shoulder and advocated the unscripted documentary, or what has come to be known as *cinema verité*…

2.2|…video

cinéma vérité

Cinéma vérité was born in February 1958, when three young film technicians—Michel Brault, Gilles Groulx and Marcel Carrière—from the National Film Board of Canada, went to Sherbrooke, Quebec, for a weekend to film a newsreel short about a snowshoeing convention that was being held at a local track and field arena.[61] Upon their arrival the three were struck by the unpretentiousness of the racers who, shod in traditional *babiche* and *lampwick* snowshoes, ran along a snow-covered, but firmly packed, asphalt track. The juxtaposition was not lost of the three young *Québécois* filmmakers, who saw the scene as a joyous metaphor of cultural self-determination, devoid of political or economic motives.

By 1958, Michel Brault was the world's most experienced cameraman/director of the 'candid eye' or 'free cinema' style, having shot close to a million feet of film in his intimate observational aesthetic, which became the visual signature of direct cinema.[62] His unique style was to shoot from his shoulder using wide-angle lenses and immerse himself within the event with little or no editorial direction with the subject. That is

---

[61] Telephone interviews with Marcel Carrière, February 4th, 2010 and with Michel Brault, February 17th, 2010.

[62] Others were working in this style in Britain, France, the US, and the English language production unit B of the NFB. None, however, with his experience and time 'in the tube'. Brault and Jacques Giraldeau completed 39 episodes of *Petites médisances* from 1953 to 1954, a series that used the intimate and observational techniques that cinema direct is based on. This predates and far exceeds the output of any of the other early examples of this style like Free Cinema in Britain, the Drew Associates in the US and the Unit B production at the NFB.

precisely what he did that day. What made this day different was that soundman Marcel Carriere had a wind up Maiac wireless tape recorder, which allowed him to record sound at the same time, and from the same location, as the camera was recording images. Sound, plus image. In other words, direct cinema.

This unscripted observational approach was a radical departure from the fixed-camera scripted convention of the period, and was not embraced by NFB production executives. The trio pitched the footage to Director of Production and Assistant Film Commissioner Grant McLean, as a sports segment for the famous *Candid Eye* series. McLean refused it, claiming it wasn't sports, but folklore—and French-Canadian folklore at that![63] The trio was forbidden to work on the film during regular business hours and completed it in a series of late night sessions in Groulx's editing room.[64] The resulting film, *Les Raquetteurs*, was screened a year later at the *Robert Flaherty Seminar* in Santa Margarita, California, and critically acclaimed as the new avant-garde in non-fiction cinema.

The *cinema vérité* moniker was first used as a subtitle to Jean Rouch's 1961 film, entitled *Chronique d'une été, une experience de cinema verité*, probably referencing Russian filmmaker Dziga Vertov and his *kino-pravada* approach. Rouch himself, however, clearly recognized Brault as the originator of the style.

> *It must be said, all that we have done in France in the area of cinéma vérité comes from Canada. It is Brault who brought a new technique of filming that we had not known and that we copied ever since. In fact, truly, there is a "brauchitis" spreading, it is certain. Even the people who*

[63] From a telephone with Barbara Ulrich, widow of Gilles Groulx, February 5th, 2010.

[64] Telephone interview with Marcel Carrière , February 4th, 2010 and with Barbara Ulrich, widow of Gilles Groulx, February 5th, 2010.

> *consider that Brault is a nuisance, or were jealous, are forced to recognize it.*[65]

Brault himself, found it a pretentious term and always refers to the style as *cinema direct*. He claims that there is nothing 'true' about cinema, which is a construct through and through. It is pieced together in the edit suite, and so it cannot possible be called truth, which is objective and to which no man—and certainly to camera—has access. For him, *cinéma direct* conveys the true innovation of the genre, which was the combination of sound and image at the source.[66]

An examination of the severe cultural and linguistic imparities that existed at the NFB prior to the (unofficial) production of *Les Raquetteurs* reveals a compelling ground-level perspective, which explains the exactitude of my birth date for *cinema verité*, its relation to identity and access, and their importance in understanding the use of poetic metaphor in the cultural transport of documentary film.

The extreme level of systemic and institutionalized discrimination towards French-Canadians at the National Film Board of Canada in 1950 is almost impossible to appreciate 60 years and a not-so-quiet revolution later. NFB founder Grierson saw no need to produce French-language films. Upon his departure in 1945, he left a legacy of discrimination, where the vast majority of employees of the Board were anglophones, and most productions were English language films that were only later dubbed into French.

> *"On y apprend que pour des postes égaux, les francophones, memes bilingues sont systématiquement moins payés que leurs collègues unilingues anglophones; qu'ils doivent écrire leurs scénarios en anglais pour que*

[65] L. Marcorelles and E. Rohmer, "Entretien avec Jean Rouch", *Cahiers du cinéma* 144 (1963): 1.
[66] From interview with Michel Brault, Feb 17th, 2010.

> *les cadres les comprennent; qu'ils sont surtout confines aux roles d'assistants ou de traducteurs…"*[67]

In order to produce a French-language film, French-speaking filmmakers needed to get their scripts translated, so that the individuals vested with decision-making power at the NFB—all English speakers—could read and approve their scripts. If the French-speaking directors could not themselves read English, they had no guarantee that the submitted scripts really conveyed their concept. As a result, most French-speaking directors at the NFB were employed in the production of newsreels for French language media outlets like Radio-Canada. Meanwhile, English-speaking filmmakers like Norman McLaren were using the NFB as a springboard to push the boundaries of the medium in extremely creative ways.[68]

It was precisely a newsreel that the three young (Brault was twenty-nine, Groulx twenty-six, and Carrière twenty-two) French-Canadian technicians were meant to shoot when they headed out to Sherbrooke. At the time, film stock was a well-guarded commodity at the NFB. Brault had to submit a requisition, which needed to be signed by an administrator, before he could obtain film stock from the lab. On the way to the lab, he modified his signed request form, adding a zero, so that the trio headed out that day with ten times as much film stock as was allowed them. Once on site, they were struck by the cultural significance of what they saw, and shot the entirety of the film stock they had brought.[69]

What, precisely, did they find so fascinating? More than fifty years later, the film remains a salient reflection on the joyous attempt of its subjects to celebrate and preserve

---

[67] Yves Lever, *Histoire générale du cinema au Québec* (Québec: Boréal, 1988), 143-144.
[68] *Ibid*.
[69] Interview with Michel Brault, Feb 17th, 2010.

their cultural heritage. The three young filmmakers recognized the importance of this event—whereas the programming authorities had written it off as newsreel material—because it reflected their own lived experience and appealed to their sensibilities.

The fact that recent technological advances had rendered such spontaneous filmmaking possible is crucial. Grierson, though praising Flaherty, denounced his exoticism and exclusive concern with remote natural elements.[70] He advocated documentary that offered up a 'slice of life', creating poetry out of the ordinary, daily occurrences of the everyman. With *Les Raquetteurs*, Grierson's ideal for documentary was actualized. Brault carried with him a camera that weighed between thirty and forty pounds, whereas Flaherty shot on a camera weighing over a hundred pounds. It was inconceivable, in Flaherty's day, to shoot a documentary with a three-person crew. Because of technological advances that rendered the crew mobile and discreet, they could capture the action without interfering in it—that is, spontaneously.

As significant as mobility and discretion, however, was the fact that the crew was shooting 'unscripted' documentary. There are two layers of implication of the lack of a script for our analysis. Firstly, in a more technical sense, the lack of a script can be understood with reference to Grierson's 'arbitrary rectangle'. In this sense, the lack of a script would shift the interpretive act of authorship to the editing phase and emphasize the dialectic between natural drama and social commentary posited by Grierson's analysis. The novelty of direct cinema is then understood as the unprecedented level of access it granted to the natural stage. Secondly, the significance of the unscripted aspect can be

[70] *Supra* note 31, 26.

interpreted in light of the socio-political realities of the time, as a means of reestablishing a creative process in documentary film production in which unadulterated authorial intention served as the genesis of the work. For Brault and Groulx, working without a script meant that they regained the control necessary to creatively dictate work and convey the essential, inherently subjective, experiential truth of their chosen subject.

In both senses, direct cinema was a significant step in the evolution of documentary, one that Grierson should have recognized as advancing his model and propelling documentary towards the ideal he had developed for it.

2.3|…video

metaphor

The advent of direct cinema constitutes a vital development in the evolution of documentary film as an art form because it compounded the medium's empathetic impact. It did so by increasing the poetic—read, metaphoric—power of film. As such, the advent of direct cinema can be seen as a breakthrough moment in Frye's model of artistic expression, the moment at which lived experience is conveyed in its most subjective form—an invitation to a conversation far more intimate than documentary film could previously offer.

In *Cinema Verité: Defining the Moment*, Peter Wintonick interviews the originators of cinema direct about their understanding of the significance of the style for the medium. He traces the movement to its respective roots in distinct film traditions:

French, British, American, and Canadian. Each pioneer of direct cinema describes the importance of direct cinema in similar terms, grappling with the notions of truth and identity, and the potential of communicating them to an audience that did not, and could not, experience them firsthand. A consensus emerges amongst these filmmakers through their testimonies: though truth cannot or may not be depicted on film, direct cinema comes the closest to achieving the impossible.

A crucial feature of their description of direct cinema is the notion of emotional appeal. Whereas documentary film was until then distinctly intellectual—providing the viewer access to disparate social realities by means of summary, opinion, and rational analysis—direct cinema offered up what Robert Drew, the founder of American direct cinema, called "a kind of truth that can only be gotten by personal experience."[71] The viewer became a witness to the reality depicted, and the film crew a sort of conduit. Direct cinema provided the viewer unfiltered access to the lived experience of others, as if he or she were witnessing the scene him or herself. This innovation of direct cinema is best summed up by Richard Leacock, the founder of British direct cinema, is his discussion of the craft:

> *"I think my obsession has been, and is still, the feeling of being there. Not of finding out this, and analyzing this, or performing some virtuous social act or something…Just what it's like to be there."*[72]

The power of direct cinema was thus the unprecedented access it gave the viewer, who could engage with the subject on his or her terms.

---

[71] *Cinema Verite: Defining the Moment* , VHS, Directed by Peter Wintonick, The National Film Board of Canada, 1999.
[72] *Ibid*.

Given the primacy accorded by Vico to emotional engagement in human experience, we can conceive of the role of intellect in documentary film as a means of compensating for lack of access. Without a means of conveying the lived experience of another directly, documentary film had until direct cinema relied on explanation to reconstruct the subjective experience of its subject. Like language, it was a rational reconstruction of an *a priori* emotional reality. The ability of direct cinema to reveal the scene stripped away the need for a veneer of rationality, compelling emotional engagement. That is, whereas intellect was called upon before direct cinema to compensate for the artifice of cinema, by combining proximity, sound and image direct cinema conveyed all of the sensory information needed to engage *prima facie* with the depicted reality. Borrowing Pierre Perreault's vocabulary, reality "impressed" the direct cinema viewer, whereas it had until then been explained to them.[73]

The real power granted to documentary film by direct cinema, as such, was heightened empathetic identification. By stripping the filter of rationality to its most diminutive form, direct cinema condensed Derrida's *hymen*, revealing the subjective reality in its purest form. Because of the absence of rational discourse, the viewer was compelled by the lived experience of another—as if he or she were subjectively implicated. We are moved by the *racquetteurs* because we are privy to their minutia of movement, we feel what is at stake rather than understand it because our experience of it is immediate rather than tempered. This intimacy enables what Frye posits to be the primal goal of artistic expression, to feel oneness with a reality from which the individual

[73] *Ibid*.

is disparate. As such, with direct cinema documentary truly becomes, like literature, a means of bridging the loneliness of individuality.

Documentary film achieves this immediacy by operating as metaphor. Spontaneous gesture, by its very nature, cannot be recorded—this is oxymoronic, yet precisely what is achieved by direct cinema. The primacy and authenticity of direct cinema is anti-logical because its depictions are simultaneously real and rationally impossible. It is as if the viewer is there, but by definition he or she cannot be there. The verisimilitude of the scene makes the spatio-temporal patterns created by the filmmaker in montage starker, and thus compounds their metaphoric effect. In this way, documentary film is highly *mimetic*. It is itself artificial, but devoid of artifice. This *mimesis* is achieved by the simultaneous association and contrast of the lived experience of subject and viewer.

As such, like metaphor does in literature, the anti-logic of documentary film arrests the intellect and propels the activity into the subjective, emotional, realm of experience. The reaction of the viewer to the documentary film is thus primal, subjective, and emotional. Like poetry or song, direct cinema offers a respite from the highly rarefied intellectual exercise of objectification. It conveys the essential truth—the one the filmmaker experienced, captured, and then recognized in his film stock—to the viewer. As such, it directly communicates the subjective reality of subject and filmmaker.

Documentary film can thus be understood as metaphoric communication, which—as such—has the power to convey an artist's expression while preserving its emotional integrity. The artist selects and retains moments and gestures that he is moved

by. It is their emotional resonance that keeps these particular images and sounds off the cutting room floor, amongst the hundreds and thousands of other moments and gestures that are not 'porteurs' of the filmmaker's lived experience of his subject. He carefully constructs a narrative, a subjective expression, which via association and contrast emotional affects his audience. As such, poetic metaphor serves as a subjective bridge between artist and audience, providing the latter access to the former's lived experience—and abating the loneliness inherent to the human condition.

3.0|practicum

salt_film

I travel not to go anywhere, but to go. I travel for travel's sake. The great affair is to move.

Robert Louis Stevenson

In June 2001, Michel Brault left for the Banff World Television Festival to teach a *Master Class* on the evolution of documentary film, as witnessed in the fifty plus years of his career. Tucked under his arm was a brand new copy of *SALT*, according to him the best NFB documentary film of the last fifteen years. One of the merits of this project, he claimed, was its success preserving the fragile creativity of the teenaged filmmakers within the imposing institutional context of the NFB. Michel detected a unique creative process in operation and sought to understand its success.

SALT is an English-language feature length documentary film produced by the NFB in 2000. It was born of an independent study I supervised while a student-teacher at MIND High School, an alternative high school in Montréal, and the experiments in youth-directed documentary of the NFB's English Program's Youth Studio. It is comprised of four documentary shorts, each directed by a seventeen-year old MIND students, set within a narrative description of the process and progress of the project as a whole. That is, the film is both about the topics the individual segments explore—alternative education, independent music, self-mutilation, and punk subculture—and the process by which four seventeen-year-old high-school students came

to direct a feature length NFB documentary. I participated in the project, first as a facilitator in its origins as a high-school English independent study, and later as a producer of the NFB documentary. My wife Louise Leroux, a documentary filmmaker with fifteen-years of experience at the NFB, took on the role of supervising director when the project moved to the NFB.

The project was very successful. Not only were we able to complete four documentary shorts and a feature length documentary in accordance with the allotted production schedule and within our set production budget, the final product was well received and critically acclaimed. We were invited to replicate the project in workshop form, the film was selected in numerous festivals and it won several prizes. Yet it remains the only film of its genre ever produced by the NFB and, to our knowledge, the only youth-directed documentary ever produced by a mainstream media outlet.

The success of *SALT*, but also its uniqueness, has led me to reflect extensively on the creative process of which it was born. *SALT* is distinctive because it functions on two levels. Firstly, it is a youth film, i.e., a film for youth about topics of interest to youth. The individual segments, in and of themselves, stand alone as short films for youth. Yet the film also functions as a film for adults about youth. The context of the shorts, the *making-of* footage, and the narrative arc through which they are weaved is an adult-film about the making of a youth film. The most distinctive, and I argue the most crucial aspect of *SALT*, however, is that in weaving between these two levels the film does not shift from perspective to perspective. That is, it is not a youth film interjected in an adult film, nor an adult film punctuated by four youth films. The entire film, from beginning to end, presents a youthful perspective, the young filmmakers' perspective. The narrative is

entirely the young filmmakers' and the film in its entirety can be said to be the culmination of their subjective intention. This is attributable to a unique creative process that laid bare the use of poetic metaphor, and in doing so both protected the authenticity of the youth perspective and enabled its expression.

3.1|practicum

salt_development

Def: the first phase of film production chiefly devoted to the research, scripting and final production financing.

All artists undertake an unmapped and unpredictable journey. The artist makes innumerable choices in the act of creation that define the nature of the work itself and mark it in an indelible fashion. Between its genesis and culmination, a work is imbued with its trajectory and its trials, its successes and its failures—and its ultimate expression intrinsically shaped by its progression. This creative process may be invisible, and is often intuitive, but it is pregnant in the work itself.

In the case of the creation of a documentary film, the journey is never brief, and rarely economical. To collect sound and image technically and to assemble them in a coherent message is the work of several months, if not several years. It requires the use of a panoply of sophisticated equipment, the concert of several technicians, and (without a doubt) travel. A significant investment is required, in both time and money. What's more, in order to wrestle one coherent hour out of the twenty plus shot, the large quantity

of material gathered by the end of a shoot mandates minute organization. For these reasons, and because the final end is a product that must be put to market, filmmakers and producers adopt a rigorous rational approach to documentary creation. By controlling the creative process, they hope to avoid costly impasses that could compromise its production.

This search for creative, technical, and logistic solutions is an integral part of the prep work of documentary film production. It becomes very difficult—read, almost impossible—to structure content without prior reflection about narrative form and organization. This preparatory phase is an inevitable convention, all the more so in the state-sponsored Canadian film industry. It would be irresponsible to spend public money on filmmaking without requiring thoughtful preparation of our filmmakers.

Paradoxically, despite the complexity of documentary production, there is no established technique for organizing, at the outset, the ends of a project. Whereas there exist strict conventions governing the scripting of fiction filmmaking—mandating a definite three-act structure in which protagonist and antagonist face off—there is no universal structure for documentary film. Individual filmmakers are free to construct their interpretation in the manner best suited to their subject. This makes the organizational and creative process all the more important: it impacts, in a critical way, the tone and essence of the end product. The filmmaker cannot rely on pre-established prototypes to communicate his intent to his audience. Coherent documentaries, inevitably, will be those in which content and form meld in perfect osmosis.

> "*I've always said that, to do this kind of cinema, one must cry with one eye and keep the other on the amount of film left in the canister. Half the brain works on emotion, and*

> *the other half on technique, simultaneously. Yet many directors devote themselves exclusively to the content. I've worked with many directors that "had an idea", but had no "idea" how to turn it into a film."*[74]
>
> *Michel Brault*

Transforming an idea into a documentary film, using raw material comprised of multiple realities, is no small task. There is no recipe. After a career spanning over fifty years, Michel Brault knows something about it, and continues to find this creative process fascinating. In *SALT*, he saw remnants of the creative furor that filled the halls of the NFB in its golden years, and compared it to his good friend and colleague Claude Jutra's *À tout prendre*. After attending its premiere at the Festival du Nouveau Cinéma et des Nouveaux Médias, he bombarded us with questions about the creative process—seeking the key, the formula, the dynamic, which enabled us to nurture such a film within the rigid confines of what he considers a sterile institution. Intrigued by his curiosity, we combed the inner workings of our creative process. Finally, we identified a foundational element: the sustained use of metaphor, as a means of locomotion, to journey from the adolescents' world to our own…*"Show, don't tell."*

[74] Bruno Cormellier and Martin Frigon, "L'homme à la camera," *Nouvelles Vues* 1 (Winter 2004).

3.2|practicum

salt_script

Def: the textual narrative base of a film that describes docmentary filmmaker's intentions in two parts : Project Presentation and Scene-to-Scene.

If Michel Brault's NFB of the 1950s was fostered thorough creative exploration of the documentary film medium, prompting surprises like *Les Raquetteurs*, the 1990s institution we knew had long shed its former guise. In order to *greenlight* a project, a filmmaker was required to defend his proposition to a stern programming committee, armed with his or her research, a script, a treatment, and a marketing plan. *SALT* supervising director, Louise Leroux, had been with the NFB for a number of years and had survived this process before. Her experience made her skeptical when I presented her the project one morning. "Rick," she said, "you will never convince the NFB to confide the direction of a documentary film to teenagers…"

We were discussing the negative (if any) representation of youth in media. There was in our opinion a marginalization of youth in society, manifest in its sustained negative representation in mainstream media (drugs, violence, school dropout rates, depression) or, alternatively, by the complete lack of representation. Youth lacked an official voice to refute this criticism and nourish the societal dialogue, and were thus rendered silent, which we felt, came at a great democratic cost.

We wished to react to this injustice by way of a documentary film, no doubt because we felt—albeit to a different degree—a similar generational handicap. An afterthought of the *baby boom* cohort, the most affluent generation in history, members of the *GenX* generation spent their life hankering for the crumbs left by the previous generation. Stifled by the echoes of our predecessors, we *GenXers* received very little societal or media attention.[75]

This generational complicity would prove very useful during *SALT*'s creation, but it did not give us the authority to tackle the subject ourselves. We felt ill equipped to convey with integrity the reality of youth. The process of two adults appropriating their message reinforced the very problem we wished to confront. The only scrupulous option was to give the voice, and the control of this voice, directly to youth—so that they may denounce the injustice themselves, in their own words, in accordance with their lived experience.

At the time, I was a student teacher at MIND, an alternative school in the English Montreal School Board. I had inherited a group of four grade ten students who wished to do an independent study. Amber Goodwyn, Morgan Gage, Bev Brown and Karen Shamy-Smith had approached me to write and stage a play. I had just produced a short film entitled *Kicks*, which had won Best Film, Best Editing, and Best Direction at the KIDS TV International 1998 in Toronto. I proposed that they direct documentary films, and began to toy with the idea of taking the project to the NFB.

---

[75] Ours is a perspective that was articulated by Douglas Coupland in *Generation X*, but which is just now finding mainstream expression with the arrival of Barack Obama, born in 1961, to American politics.[0]

The NFB's English Program's Youth Studio had several years before attempted a similar project, by producing a series of documentary shorts directed by teenagers—which had been an abject failure. The films had little structure and no cinematic quality. We watched the films with their producer, Pierre Lapointe, in the context of a long conversation on youth production. It was obvious to Louise and I that the absence of professional guidance had been a great disservice to the young directors, making them look incompetent. These films reinforced rather than challenged the dominant perception that teenagers had nothing intelligent to say, that they were inarticulate, and that their contribution was of no interest for society.

We knew, by the end of the meeting, that the challenge was two-fold. In order to repeat the experiment, we needed not only to give control and a voice to youth, but we also had to give credibility to their endeavour—that is—to their creative process. We had to provide them with the tools necessary to successfully articulate their vision. We could not expect them to know, intuitively, how to effectively communicate with a large audience. We needed to structure them, support them, and impart them with the creative skills needed to attain their objective. Yet in order to do so, we had to walk the fine line between assistance and intervention, serving as facilitators rather than acting as instructors.

I did not want to impose the arduous process of screenwriting, for which extensive training and experience is a must, on the girls. At the time, I had been using metaphor-based exercises for several years to teach poetry to my high-school students. To help the girls extrapolate and communicate their vision, I proposed the use of both visual and textual metaphors.

When the time came to reflect on the respective subjects of their films, I suggested we reinvent the metaphor exercises in *zine* form. *zines* are handmade magazines with a very small circulation base, popular with young women in the 1990s. They are assemblies of clippings, images, poetry, photos, drawings, and texts about a common theme—generally aimed at defending minority interests. The girls were each to build *zines* inspired by their chosen film subjects.

The girls tackled this task creatively, and the result was impressive. After a week, they submitted improvised portfolios—some bound with string, others stapled—illustrating coherent messages about their chosen subjects. In the place of traditional documentary film scripts, constructed around a well-defined theme, the girls had captured the energy and the essence of their message in a variety of visual and literary forms—from photos to drawings to collage—organized in a spontaneous and very creative manner.

Rather than draft an essay about the evolution of the punk movement, for example, Beverly presented us her *zine* in an anonymous-looking cardboard box. Inside, we found a Barbie, refashioned in the style of the Sex Pistols, and a think binder, full of holes and piercings, on which the word PUNK was etched in large pink letters. The binder was filled with research about different punk sub-groups, the evolution of the movement, a definition of punk—scrawled with symbols, swears, loud and aggressive etchings. Despite, or perhaps via the noise, it showcased a questioning about belonging and identity. Her *zine* conveyed a deep insecurity about her own punk identity, and her doubts about the legitimacy of her place in the movement. The essence of Bev's query was contained between the lines of the metaphoric collage she produced.

Amber, for her part, blatantly expressed her anger towards an education system that betrayed children. Her *zine* shouted: "There is nothing minor about us!" It was filled with pictures of happy children, juxtaposed with prison views and institutional frameworks. It was a collage of revolutionary slogans and non-conformist slurs and had a combative and warrior-like energy. She chose a little boy, pure and carefree, as the central metaphor of her *zine*. Her *zine* contained many references to her brother, and how the education system had failed and injured him. It established an angry and retributive treatment for her film, which would look at the sacrifice of youth in the interests of the economy—and which would pay a particular attention to the fate of boys within the system.

Morgan, very tenderly, fantasized about authenticity and harmony via her fascination for independent music. Her *zine* juxtaposed profound lyrics from independent musicians with the vapid lyrics of contemporary pop hits. In it, she waxed poetic about heartbreak and music as a refuge. She emphasized the accessibility and personal nature of independent music. She included multiple letters she had written to her favourite musicians and, more importantly, their responses—along with a note about how important they were to her. She profiled Julie Doiron, a young, soft-spoken mother of two carving out a living making authentic music—who exemplified the values Morgan was attracted to in independent music and became the central character of her film. Morgan was seeking a meaningful connection, her film was about integrity.

Karen's internal strife was cryptically revealed by morbid metaphors of abysses, disarray, and decay—manifest in a fascination with self-mutilation. Her *zine* was entirely comprised of poetry, some of it depicted in black and white photographs of verses

scrawled on skin. The ink was blood and the paper skin. The importance of the word was evident: her film was about the need to communicate, to be listened to. The self-mutilation and scarification was itself a means of communication, a silent outcry. "Shut up and listen", her *zine* begged.

Non-linear and without prose, the metaphors imagined by the young women bore not only the clearest of intention, but strong identities. The messages, devoid of explanation, were viscerally moving. There was, in the scant pages, the promise of awe-inspiring and captivating films. Their choice of colours, vocabulary, textures, poetry, song lyrics, pictures, clippings, and their collages combined to expound highly subjective vantage points.

Scriptwriting for documentary aims to communicate an author's vision to his collaborators. It obliges the author to reflect about the coherence of his intellectual and artistic pursuit. In general, the script must also specify the cinematic approach—that is—a technical plan for picture, sound, editing, etc. The *zines* created by the girls better satisfied these criteria than many documentary scripts Louise had analyzed to date, and has since. By using metaphor, the four teenagers had succeeded, without exception, to communicate the tone, style, and emotion of their cinematic proposition. They had found their 'voice' without actively seeking it. The *zines* conveyed both form and content without paraphrase. Without explication, they provided unadulterated access to the universe of youth: in all its authenticity, energy, disillusionment, and with all its contradictions. The imagery conjured by the girls was so strong, so powerful, that we bowed at and joined in with their emotional outcry. Their propositions, albeit, were crude, unrefined, and raw, but they transcended the need for polish—they needed no

veneer. They were vibrant, full of life, and simple. There was no judgment to be made about their value. Their very rawness and truth silenced us. We were faced with, in the form of panoply of metaphors—each more powerful than the next—a gateway into a vastly rich subculture: youth, in all its splendour.

3.3|practicum

salt_pitch

Def: an oral sales proposals for the project usually made by the screenwriters and/or the independent filmmaker or producers for studio producers or executives to obtain financial backing

With the school and the girls' parents' permission, we approached the NFB and convinced Pierre Lapointe to join the adventure. Then came the task of convincing the programming committee to finance the project. We knew that the *zines* would be insufficient to this task. The young filmmakers' proposals needed elaboration. A veneer of logos was necessary.

Once again, I called upon metaphor. This time, to enable the girls to identify the themes they wished to broach in their film projects. Their task at this juncture was to research potential characters and locations for their films, each one defined and identified by a metaphor elucidating their theme.

I remember well the hand scrawled lists born of this exercise, filled with characters like: Aidan West, 18 years old, painter, in his studio, *metaphor:* freedom;

Aidan Miller, 24 years old, bookstore owner, in his bookstore, *metaphor:* anarchy. I remember these lists for two reasons. Firstly, I was struck by the characters' ages. All of them were between sixteen and twenty-five years old. What adult filmmaker, I wondered, would think to consult a seventeen-year old on the subject of freedom? The girls' pursuit seeped a genuine youth perspective, which referenced the world on its own terms and from its own vantage point. A perspective according to which it made perfect sense to seek out and rely on the wisdom of an eighteen year old. Secondly, the choice of characters and locations were completely coherent with their chosen subject matters. The resulting lists were the basis of <u>good</u> scripts, not just adequate ones. In fact, most of the initial characters and locations were filmed and made it to the final cut of the four films.

Armed with these metaphor-based exercises, the girls finally wrote. They wrote essays on the themes they had identified by way of metaphor, and descriptions of the scenes they had imagined. They developed their reflections on their chosen subjects, forged their opinions, and articulated their intentions. They wrote page upon page, throughout the creative process, continually revisiting and reformulating their objectives based on the original metaphors. In the opening making-of sequence of the film, Amber relates her experience as such:

> "*I've written a million essays, more than you could ever dream of for this project, this research. We wrote what we call shot descriptions and shot situations, where we write every little shot, every frame, whether we want someone's feet in or someone's concert in or whatever, and we talk about what's their point in the film, their metaphor...*"

The messiness of this process is interesting. Rather than reflect about what they ultimately wished to say, on paper, as we normally do in scriptwriting, the girls worked

backwards. They first extracted their subjective intention of their process, without assessment, using metaphor—the tone, essence, energy, and rhythm of their work—before reasoning about their work, objectively. I am sincerely convinced that this was the only way to proceed in order to extricate, from the imagination of these young women, the core of their project. The girls did not have the necessary tools—at their age—to decode their intuitions. The power of metaphor enabled them to withdraw the content of their reflections without casting them in a Cartesian mold. As importantly, the process enabled their facilitators to understand their intention, and to engage with it, without perverting it.

Our meeting with the programming committee is revealing of our relationship with the institution. While we presented the project as a laboratory, emphasizing the importance of a creative process free from any influence in order to ensure the authentic creativity of our young filmmakers, the committee insisted on a product that could be marketed. This requirement changed the game. Louise's and my involvement became more crucial. In order to guarantee a certain success to our new and powerful employer, we had to transition from facilitators to co-director and producer.

A certain tension emerged from this compromise. This requirement struck us as a desire on the part of the National Film Board to affirm their institutional authority. We had the uncomfortable impression that our experiential approach was an affront to our elders, that it threatened their control, which is a dynamic typical of generational conflicts. Though we conceded to their request—we were in no position to negotiate—we were determined to protect our vision. This tension shaped and fed our attitude. Very quickly, the NFB became the metaphor *par excellence* of an omniscient

generation against which the teenagers—and we ourselves—sought to rebel. This oppositional dynamic transpired through *SALT*. It infused the creative process of the work and governed both its form and content.

With the approval of the programming committee, we obtained a set budget. What had begun as a simple high-school project had become, somewhat in spite of us, a feature-length documentary film project with a (significant) four hundred thousand dollar budget. Our four teenaged filmmakers signed a NFB director's contract, in due form, and became the youngest directors ever hired in the history of the NFB.

> *"Last year, the film board paid Beverly Brown, Karen Shamy-Smith, Amber Goodwyn and Morgan Cage, then students at MIND, to direct and edit a one-hour documentary film called Salt, which explores youth culture through four themes : punk, independent music, self mutilation and education. For the four students, becoming the youngest film directors in the NFB's 60 year history is an enviable coup. They got their own office – with their name tags outside the door just like bona-fide filmmakers – access to sophisticated studio equipment, a supervising director, a couple of producers plus camera and sound crew, a driver and a budget of 400 000$."*
>
> Charlie Fidelman, *The Montreal Gazette*[76]

We had ensured the credibility of the process, the voice, and the control of said voice. Now, we needed to deliver the material at all costs. Louise's and my career were on the line, though we did not have control over the content. We therefore sought control where control could be found without compromising the essence of the project: focusing, organizing, articulating and structuring someone else's creative input without appropriating it, always making sure to fully understand and respect their creative intentions—to such a point that we could make decisions for them, knowing confidently

[76] Charlie Fidelman, "Doc-Makers call the shots," *The Montreal Gazette*, September 13, 1999: E1.

that they would be in agreement with such decisions had they had the knowledge to make those decisions themselves. And we are convinced, in retrospect, that the use of metaphor as a cultural locomotion is what allowed us to walk this fine line successfully.

3.4|practicum

salt_pre-production

Def: the planning stage in a film's production after the financing is approved and before principal photography or actual shooting commences, in documentary films it involves script treatment and textual editing/rewriting, scheduling, crewing, casting, budgeting and financial planning, and scouting/selection of locations; contrast to post-production

A producer friend recently likened shooting a fiction film to an ocean liner leaving port for a very precise destination, the trajectory of which is nearly impossible to change mid-route—which sheds light on the importance of development and screenwriting, i.e., of charting the liner's course.

Only slight modification is necessary to render the metaphor suitable for documentary. A documentary shoot is not an imposing diesel liner with powerful motors, fully committed to its destination, but rather a sailboat undertaking an ocean crossing with a lose itinerary—changing course to benefit from shifting tides and currants, dodge storms and catch winds, and with the luxury of dropping anchor to explore a deserted island on the way. Should the sailboat, at the end of its journey, end up several hundred miles south of its destination, it will be consciously and with the

knowledge that the unforeseen is part of the journey and that it is possible to deviate without veering off course.

With *Salt*, Louise and I were the captains of a school sailboat whose crew was green, in the case of the girls, or novice, in the case of the technicians. The youthfulness of the team granted us a certain seniority on board, bolstered by the fact that we were a real-world couple, and thus the parents of this sea-faring family. The crew's acceptance and respect of our leadership enabled us to steer against wind and tides, to chart the deep and *Salt*y waters and to bring our ship hands to port, under the watchful gaze of their dutiful parents and nervous financiers.

But much like the captains of the fictional liner rely on precise calculations and measurements to stick to their trajectory, we needed calculations just as precise to ensure the opposite. Before production began, we worked the girls' material extensively and knew their subjects thoroughly. The challenge once the preparation was finished was to put in place mechanisms by which to protect this communal vision throughout the production phase.

Camera

When *Salt* was produced, in 1999, the NFB was in the midst of the crucial technological shift from film to video. To this end, it had purchased professional DVCPro cameras, made by Ikegami, with which we had shot our first film, *Stiletto*.

Fully equipped, this new camera weighed approximately twenty-eight pounds, twice as much as the light Aaton Super 16mm that had been the pride of the institution.

The evolution to video thus raised significant challenges for documentary, for which mobility and lightness are crucial, and in our case especially so. It was impossible for our young filmmakers to operate the heavy and intricate new machinery. Though we had always planned to hire technicians, we thought it crucial that the teenagers learn to use cameras and understand their functions.

Salt thus became the first NFB production to be shot in MiniDV format, on a new generation of semi-professional cameras—more precisely, on a Sony PD-100. MiniDV, which came to market in 1995, enabled the recording of an hour of sync video with SMPTE time code on a tape the size of a box of tic-tacs. MiniDV cameras weighed no more than ten pounds. After much negotiation with the technical department of the NFB we obtained permission to purchase one such camera, whose specs proved crucial for our purposes but which they deemed an amateur camera. Newly introduced to market, the PD-100 was not yet available in North America, but we did manage to obtain a demo with menus in….Japanese.

The selection of this camera proved crucial to our success. In addition to the advantages it had by virtue of its lightness and simplicity, we quickly discovered that it, like no professional camera could, left our young characters unfazed. Faced by this tiny technological marvel, barely more complicated than a camcorder, our subjects were never panicked, shy, or mute. When we needed to infiltrate adolescent subcultures, its members barely noticed our presence. It all but disappeared in the hands of our crew and was quasi invisible to a generation that had, evidently, grown up under the watchful lens of their parents' cameras.

Crew

Despite the fact that our camera choice enabled the teens to contribute to the cinematography of the project, we thought it imperative for a team of competent technicians to ensure the quality of the filmmaking. Without them, we risked delivering a product of youth filmmaking, which, like its predecessors at the NFB, did them disservice by making them look incompetent. Documentary filmmaking is an arduous and complex task and the director's energy is usually better spent focused on his subject than on technical aspects. We therefore hired Alex, an assistant-cameraman making the step to director of photography, and Jason, a soundman of the same age and a recent graduate of Concordia's Communications department. The two young men worked with us throughout the entire shoot, which took over five months. Barely ten years older than the teens, they developed a wonderful camaraderie and complicity with them.

Infrastructure

With me serving as producer, Louise as supervising director, and Alex and Jason as technicians, the girls were well chaperoned. We insisted that the NFB provide the girls with their own production office, and encouraged them to decorate the space to their liking. Soon, the walls were covered with sprawling collages of pictures, poems, and slogans that spoke to their films' metaphors—*wall zines*, of sort. A ghetto blaster, a guitar, couches, rugs, a bookcase and a table were provided by their parents and lent the space a familiar ambiance in which the girls, well-outnumbered within the imposing institutional structure, could relax. Complete with a computer, a phone, and name plates

at the door, the girls had the standard NFB director's production office, much like that of their neighbour Peter Wintonick, who was then finishing *Cinéma Vérité*, a documentary on the development of cinema direct.

Approach

Once the crew was finalized, before the camera left the truck, we elaborated a visual signature for each segment, in order to give each film a distinct flavour, colour, tone, and rhythm. Since we were shooting four documentaries simultaneously—and sometimes within the same shooting day—there was a danger of mixing styles and ending up with four segments homogenous in tone.

The *zines*, given their strong textures and elaborate metaphors, enabled us to communicate our stylistic aims very effectively to the technicians. Together, we decided that the comedic and quasi-absurd identity search found in Bev's *zine* called for an irreverent visual signature, disordered, loud, anarchist, and full of movement—distinguished by a heavy reliance on the use handheld camera. The poetic and painful introspection of Karen's segment suggested heavy tripod use and muted colours to achieve a sober look—constructed of suggestive rather than explicit images and a with more experimental feel. Morgan's respect for independent artists inspired a simple and authentic stylistic approach, non-intrusive yet intimate, with warm, textured tones and a classic feel. As for Amber's rage, we found it best expressed by a dual approach, at times raw and journalistic and at times soothing and maternal, to reflect and contrast the two featured educational methods. We also decided that the teenage filmmakers should be onscreen, shouldering their mission. Only Karen refused to be

featured onscreen, which was consistent with and well suited to the secretive, private, and suggestive nature of her film.

The identification of a signature visual style for each of the projects, inspired from the *zines*, was indubitably crucial to the success of the enterprise. Without it, we would undoubtedly have lost the unique flavour of each of the segments, and they ultimately would have melded together in an uninteresting fashion—not too mention strayed from the young filmmakers' subjective intent. Since we were shooting the film out of order, on a schedule aimed at minimizing travel and costs, we would often shoot sequences for two or three of the four segments in one day, switching from subject to subject and director to director without pause. Thanks to the *zines* and the strong visual and poetic metaphors contained therein, we were able to turn each girl's subjective intention into a communal one. To the extent where, after a mere few days of shooting, we could go from shooting one segment to another without any difficulty or confusion.

Storyboard

Def: a sequential series of illustrations, stills, rough sketches and/or captions events, as seen through the camera lens, that outline the various shots or provide a synopsis for a proposed film story

For each sequence, the directors were to provide a metaphor capturing each the sequence, the scene, and the individual shots comprising them. From this metaphor map we would extricate a workflow enabling us to transfer it to the screen.

For example, in Amber's segment on the education system, she criticized the traditional teaching method, which she qualified as a 'banking method' because it

consisted primarily of depositing knowledge into the child's awareness in order to withdraw it, intact and identical, by way of exams and tests. In her workflow, Amber designated the Director General of the English Montreal School Board—who had agreed, somewhat reluctantly, to be interviewed—as the 'head banker'. We found it fitting, therefore, to set the interviewee behind his imposing office furniture, in his imposing office, in the imposing and column-rich school board building. We framed the interview by placing the camera below eye-level, in order to give the impression that the viewer was small and child-like in relation to the Director General, being addressed with authority and condescendence—with which, in any event, his tone was replete. We used a wide-angle lens to make the character, and his surroundings, appear more daunting and impressive. Finally, Amber submitted the questions she wished to ask her character because, for the first and only time throughout the project, she was terrified and would not interview a character herself.

The budding filmmakers, left to their own devices and equipped with a camera, would doubtfully have made such stylistic choices. Had they been asked to articulate their intentions, they surely could not have conceptualized such a cinematographic treatment. However, armed with their metaphors, they were able to communicate effectively to us adults the essence of their vision and—what's more—we could grasp them and give them a cinematic expression without contorting them. The images remained the girls', despite the collaborative execution, because they were clear reflections of the metaphors they had themselves expressed. Their metaphors enabled their subjective intention to become a communal intention, the subjective expression of which could remain as pure an expression of their subjective reality as possible. Their

metaphors enabled the crew, and therefore the audience, an access to their subjectivity that, free from the logos of translation, was unprecedented and unparalleled in documentary.

Call Sheet

Def: the schedule given out daily during a film's production to let every know what, where and when they are shooting

Our budget allowed us twenty-five shooting days. Each fifteen-minute segment was allotted five days of shooting, the remainder being reserved for major events relevant to the production as a whole, such as the girls's graduation from MIND. The graduation sequence became the film's final sequence and its ultimate metaphor, illustrating the incredible accomplishment this project represented for them.

The young filmmakers were finishing their last year of high school when we began shooting in the spring of 1999. We had arranged with the school administration that they would miss no more than two days of school per week. As such, they could not all four be on set every day. We thought it crucial, however, that at least two of them be on set at all times, in order to ensure a youthful perspective and presence. It was established, as such, that each shooting day the young director would be assisted by one of her peers. Since we often shot several sequences per day, the teenagers would often find themselves acting as director in the morning and assistant-director in the afternoon, or vice-versa. We also refrained from hiring an assistant-cameraman in order to provide the girls with maximum exposure to crew work.

We were acutely aware when production began that this was a unique and innovative project. We thus decided to document the girls' learning process—and our own—throughout the production. We purchased a second MiniDV camera, named "camera B", dedicated to shooting *making-of* footage and free for all to use at any time. The only rule was that camera B could not be in use when camera A was operating. For the most part, that day's acting assistant-director zealously took charge of shooting the *making-of*.

This exercise proved invaluable and enriching in the editing phase. The images captured by the girls, in all their imperfections, bore the effervescence of youth. And since no quiet was required when camera B was on, we ended up with a rich and spontaneous soundtrack with which to build a realistic sound mix.

Shooting was spread out over three to four months. Given the subjects and the girls' interests, we shot mostly in the evenings and on weekends. This rhythm led to a general fatigue in the team. Yet despite how ambitious the project was, there were unbelievably rewarding moments, like the ones in which an assistant-director would suggest a brilliant metaphor to her struggling director. Each young director understood and respected the others' approaches and, surprisingly, no film turned out stronger or more interesting than any other. I am convinced that this is due to the fact that the films were well developed and well understood by their contributors, and each reflected the initial and authentic approach of its young filmmaker.

The experience can be likened to a powerful hurricane in which we, the adults, were carried by typhoon to the island of our youth, or kidnapped in a mini-van by a band of adolescents. With Bev, Amber, Morgan, and Karen taking Sonny Rollins's place at

the wheel. The girls had full reign over the inspiration, the ambience, and the weightlessness, and we provided structure, focus, and organization, to enable the capture of this whirlwind on video.

Motto

As a result of the long hours of intense collaboration on a film set a family dynamic quickly develops amongst the cast and crew. More often than not a slogan is coined to describe a unique feature of the particular production, and, in effect, becomes the 'family motto'. The unique feature of the Salt set was the various approaches, work methods, and strategies aimed to preserve the creative vision and, hopefully, protect it from the exigencies of production. In order to make the girls fully understand the importance of the challenge that lay before them, and the power of metaphor in film as a tool for subjective communication, the Salt family motto became *Show, don't tell*. In this way, we insisted and emphasized that the girls present us their arguments visually, and viscerally, instead of couching them in a veneer of logos and explaining them. Their films were to be un-translations.

3.5|practicum

salt_edit

When shooting wrapped, we had over sixty hours of material for a ninety-minute documentary. The end of the summer loomed, the girls would soon go back to class, and

their full participation in the editing process was impossible. To ensure the respect of the youth voice by the editing team, we trained the girls on Avid and gave them each two days alone in an edit suite, in order for them to understand the tools at a filmmaker's disposal. They were asked to edit a clip conveying the style, intention, energy, and tone of their segment.

Much like the *zines*, these audiovisual collages communicated the essence of their film's message by way of juxtaposed metaphors, without a logical structure. Once again, despite the lack of structure of the collages, they clearly showcased distinct intent, tone, intention, emotion, colour, and visual and audio textures indicative of the works they were to become. Karen, whose film explored self-mutilation, was the only young filmmaker unable to build a visual collage. Her profoundly intimate subject was so personal that she could not bear to look at it. Instead, she delivered an audio collage: of poetry, music, sounds, and filled with anguish.

The girls then each received two weeks of editing, with Louise, during which they established the structure, narrative arc, and tone of their respective segments, based on the clips they had provided. The main idea remained to protect the fragile voice of the adolescents from the influence of the professional filmmakers surrounding them, but also to communicate and transfer to Louise the subjective intention of each of the filmmakers, to enable her to complete the editing process. This approach allowed us to get each film off to a good start before the girls returned to school.

Throughout the editing, the clips served the same purpose the *zines* had for production. Whenever an idea needed to be communicated, a doubt was raised, or an approach sought, we returned to the clip and found the guiding metaphor. From it we

discerned the subjective intention of the filmmaker and found its suitable onscreen expression.

The principal metaphor of Bev's film was wardrobe, or rather the search for a punk clothing style, via which Bev's identity quest and insecurity transpired. We therefore built the film around her personal quest, as much about belonging as it was about clothing, with humour and without pretension—and true to Bev's real style.

In Morgan's case, the screenwriting choices proved sound. Julie Doiron was the perfect main character, the perfect incarnation of the authenticity Morgan found so attractive. The issue of money, or lack therefore, in contrast to the myth promoted by the music industry, was resurgent. We thus chose to incorporate this element in the editing phase, in a segment showing Julie in her humble daily reality.

Amber's film was without a doubt the most complex to tie down, because it was at its core an argument. To construct it, we chose to divide the material in two: exposing the perverse effects of the traditional education system, and illustrating the benefits of an alternative system fostering children's potential and taking them seriously as thinkers. The center of this thesis-film was Amber, opposed and seeking truth. To structure her enquiry onscreen, we built the argument around her brother, her principal metaphor and the sacrificial lamb of a deficient education system.

For Karen, who was as yet unable to look squarely at her subject, we built a film with sound. It was structured around her reading of a poem expressing her depth of pain, and spliced with interviews of self-mutilating girls describing their anguish, layered with natural sounds and soothing music. This poetry was paired with sensory images in which life and death were juxtaposed in poignant metaphors: a burst balloon in a puddle, a

sunset in a cemetery, the lichen-filled crevasse in a boulder, rocks in a pool of water, plants taking over an industrial site, words scrawled on skin.

Once the girls headed back to school, Cegep for most, we continued the work with the help of an editor. We then became the keeper of the girls' visions. Only Amber stayed on full-time through to the end of the project, assisting in the many post-production tasks at hand. The other three girls visited the edit suite frequently to discuss the progress of their films.

Within a few months, we had four distinct finished films, each approximately fifteen minutes in length. Each was, in both content and form, an honest vehicle of the filmmaker's original vision. From the creation of the *zine* to the final edit, their visions had been respected, enriched, and communicated. We were thrilled to see that each finished film was indubitably a cinematic version of the girls' *zines*, the result of that initial metaphor-based exercise. We had before us four films made by youth, for youth, and about youth. Mission accomplished.

We might have suggested that the NFB distribute the four films as they were, independently, in short-form, to festivals, ect. However, in our view, as the initiators of the project, there was a greater story to tell: the story of four girls finding their voices, and of their incredible capacity to learn. What's more, we were convinced that these four films would have a greater impact together than separately. Shown together, they conveyed the fact that their individual successes were not attributable to chance, or to unique and exceptional talent, but rather to a skilful approach and a thorough creative process. That youth, if taken seriously, well armed, and given access, did have something to contribute, something powerful to say. Four voices, furthermore, presented

a more vast and realistic depiction of adolescent realities. Finally, the camaraderie and solidarity of the four adolescents was pregnant in the work and, without rendering them homogenous, permeated all four segments. This, the girls chose to reflect in the title of their endeavour. At its outset, I asked them to come up with a metaphor that would capture the essence of the project. They chose the word *Salt*. « *As an essential, a strong mineral, and because we have flavour*. »

With all our *making-of* footage, we had plenty of material to create a narrative and situate the segments within their creative process. We might have used it to create a parallel film, a chronological depiction of the creative process—a sort of adult's guide to the adolescent experience. This approach seemed condescending to us, and counter to the message we wished to impart. Furthermore, the four teenagers wished to showcase their elders' contribution. They didn't want to claim authorship and purport the project as theirs alone. To deny the professionals' input would according to them have been a lie and rendered the project without integrity. They, too, conceived of the four films as a joint endeavour, born of a communal experiment in which we were participants. They wanted this collaboration to be reflected in the final product.

We thus elected to weave the four films within a narrative constructed from the *making-of* footage, emphasizing the inter-generational complicity that developed and the mentoring the girls received. Since this footage was primarily shot by the young filmmakers, it reflected an adolescent perspective of the experience. This allowed the audience to remain in an adolescent frame of mind between segments.

This narrative was our message, of sorts, to other adults, a means of bridging the generational chasm and proving what a great contribution youth could make to our

society, if only we gave them the chance. The title of *Salt* was the ultimate and primary metaphor of the *making-of* segments, by which we wished to honour the girls' strength of character, their capacity to learn, their *saltitude*…

Packaging

Once editing is finished, the next step is polishing a film's audio-visual packaging: colour correction, sound mix, music composition, beginning and end credits, subtitles, ect…We considered each a new opportunity to bolster the girls' creative signature and add to the adolescent spirit of the film.

Since Amber was still with us, we made her an active participant in the process. Firstly, given her singer-songwriter skills, she was the natural choice to compose and perform the film's theme song. Amber recorded it at the Grand brothers Wild sky Studio, where Sarah Mclachlan recorded several of her piano ballads.

Our decision to release the films together, and to do so using the *making of* footage between the segments, resulted in a marked difference between the different parts of the film. The *making of* footage was far less polished than the segments themselves. This was most noticeable in the sound. Whereas the recording of sound in the segments was done using a boom, which drew the ear to a particular place and subject, the *making of* footage sound was recorded using the camera mic,which recorded sound from throughout its surroundings, and even from sources off-camera.

When the time came to incorporate visual graphics in the film, we inspired ourselves from this contrast. The experience of making the film was extremely rhythmic,

adventurous, funny, and we wanted the visual effects to reflect this. We met with the visual effects department at the NFB, which usually took charge of packaging NFB productions. The meeting did not go well. We were accompanied by Amber, and explained the feeling we wished to create using the graphics. We spoke of the frenzy, the spontaneity of production, and how it should transpire via the film's graphics. The team was very condescending, shooting down our ideas and almost ridiculizing our approach.

I therefore did some research and hired a visual artist from outside the NFB, Jean-François Vézina, who was about twenty-nine years old. It would prove to be the best choice we could have made for the packaging of the film, though the NFB fervently disagreed. Jean-François went back to the *zines* and back to the metaphors, and recreated the feel of the *zines* in the visual packaging. Without much instruction, he constructed precisely the organic, un-polished, sporadic feel we wanted. The *zines* served as the ideal metaphor to convey the essence of the project and the energy of the enterprise.

3.6|practicum

salt_reception

So what was it, precisely, that Michel Brault, the most qualified witness of the evolution of documentary film, saw in *SALT*? Why was it SALT, and not any of the countless other documentary films Brault had seen that year, or week, or month, tucked under his arm and on its way to Banff? What could four seventeen year-old first-time filmmakers possibly have to offer the venerated documentaries?

In order to fully understand *SALT*'s appeal to the father of direct cinema, we must turn to Derrida once more. If the genesis of artistic expression is the moment *doxa* begins its trajectory along the *hymen*, before it receives objective expression and becomes *logos*, then the expression is purest, read most subjective, at its genesis—and loses integrity as a subjective expression as it travels along the *hymen* to become *logos*. Artistic expression is most salient when devoid of *logos*. Since we cannot by virtue of our very individuality and subjectivity ever communicate a purely subjective, read *logos*-free intention, then the shorter, or narrower, the *hymen* the most reasonant the expression—and the more "impressive" the respite from the loneliness inherent in individuality. The more we can share in another subjective reality, and the closer we get to "the feeling of being there".

The fathers of direct cinema sought the ultimate access, a means of replicating, reflecting, and communicating, one subjectivity to another without distorting it. They

sought to move the viewer like Sonny Rollins moved me when I was fourteen—transcending time and space and communicating without analysis, straight to the belly. It was the unparalleled access, the potential for intimacy, made possible by technological advances that inspired and drove them. In short, they endeavoured to shorten the *hymen* and make possible a level of poetic communication unprecedented in film.

SALT fascinated Brault because it symbolized the next evolution in this process of heightened empathetic identification in documentary. It was through and through a subjective enterprise, evading all but the bare minimum *logos* necessary for communication. Brault heralded its preservation of the young filmmakers' subjective expressions, which it achieved by harnessing the role of poetic metaphor in artistic communication. It did so in two ways: by using metaphor as a means of extracting the artistic expression from its authors with minimal perversion of its subjectivity, and by maximizing the integrity of the artistic impression, i.e., its reception. Given its unique creative process, and the unique record of it integrated in the work itself, *SALT* expounds the dual role played by metaphor in both the expression and the perception of artistic communication.

SALT is an insightful illustration of the dynamics of poetic metaphor in artistic communication particularly because of the reception it received from its adult audience. Not only was *SALT* a success amongst the peer group of the filmmakers, who could easily identify with the adolescent realities depicted, but *SALT* was extremely well received by adults of all ages, who for the first time watching *SALT* identified with the troubled and ill-perceived post-MTV generation. *SALT*'s target demographic was the

youth market: it was meant to be a film for youth, about youth, and by youth. We knew we would succeed in reaching its target demographic, but its resonance with the adult demographic exceeded our expectations.

Expression

If we recall that the process by which *coax* becomes *logos* can be likened to a translation, by which the subjective reality becomes rationalized to be communicable, then the use of metaphor in the creative process can be understood as a means of reducing the need for translation in communication, allowing a more subjective intention to be transmitted. An artist, like a speaker, must rationalize his or her intention to some extent in order to communicate it. It takes training, experience, and a great deal of self-confidence in order to control the role that reason plays in this equation. The girls did not have the tools necessary to access their subjective intention and communicate it. Metaphor was a means of extracting their subjective intention without compromising its integrity.

Without it, the subjective reality the girls felt was threatened by our very presence. Should the girls have had to explain their subject to their collaborators—Louise and me, the crew, the NFB—it would have been on our terms, a rational appeal to our sensibilities so that we may understand and, hopefully, via a reverse process, engage with it subjectively. Yet any such process would have required some degree interpretation on our part. The girls' realities were too far removed from our own; we had too long ago lost the youthful perspective to which they had immediate access.

Furthermore, given that they were not only outnumbered but unmatched by their collaborators, the risk of distortion of the intention was greater.

Metaphor freed the girls from the need to engage with their subjects rationally in order to communicate them with us. Had we required them to expound their subjects from the get-go, without previously identifying their principal metaphors, their fragile voices would have been lost. Their expositions would quickly have turned into school essays, thorough and clear, perhaps, but not salient. We would then have engaged with their subjects on our terms, in order to apply—rather than lend—our expertise. In the end, the research might have been innovative, the execution quirky and fresh, but the perspective would have been an adult one. Somewhere along the way, even it was in subtle ways, our adult sensibilities would have perverted the work. Because we simply would not have any other means by which to engage the subjects except rationally, given that the essential truths they reflected were not our own.

By using metaphor, we removed the need for the girls to explain their subjects to us. As such, the role of reason in the communication process was reduced to the identification of elements that reflected the essential truths of their subjects.

The notion of identification, as opposed to analysis, is useful in understanding the dialectic between emotion and reason at work in expression. Analysis engages a truth logically, it is a primarily rational articulation. If we imagine the *hymen* as a spectrum from the subjective to the objective, and then back again, then analysis is closer to the objective than the subjective end. It invites engagement on rational terms. Identification, on the other hand, is much closer to the subjective end of the spectrum. It requires minimal rational engagement, and relies far more on intuition, or emotional resonance, to

function as an engine of communication. Or, differently put, far less translation, in order to be understood.

The *zines*, and the clips that the girls edited at the very onset of the editing phase, illustrate the dynamic by which metaphor protected the fragile subjectivities of the teenaged filmmakers. The girls were instructed to be highly subjective when making their *zines* and, later, their clips. Their task was to gather elements that transpired the essence of their subjects. In doing so, they relied on identification rather than analysis, including elements whenever these 'struck' them as being relevant. They selected materials that they related to first and foremost emotionally—and the relevance of which was far from evident in isolation, or at all, to others.

In other words, the girls felt their subjects out rather than analyzing them. When Morgan identified authenticity as her guiding metaphor, and Julie Doiron as a metaphor for integrity, she did so intuitively, and the adult members of the team inherited her perspective. In the absence of a logical alternative, we could only ourselves engage with these truths intuitively. Once we had, they became our own guiding metaphors. Rather than rely on analysis to understand her subject, we too relied on our ability to identify, and thus subjectively engage, with it.

These *zines* and clips were un-translations. Their function was first and foremost to extricate from the girls the essence of their subjects. They were not meant to be coherent, chronological, or have any application in and of themselves. They were, as such, the most subjective expression possible of the essential truth of the girls's subjects, and the most accurate reflection of their unique perspectives with regards thereto.

Once constructed, the *zines* and clips were authoritative. They were the reference point for any discussion of content and treatment that occurred throughout production and editing. As such, they served as a litmus test, of sort, to ensure that the final product was entirely congruent with the initial—and most subjective—expression of the girls' subjects. In so according to the *zines* and clips the primacy we did, we were able to counter the overbearing influence we would otherwise have had by virtue of our age, experience, and authority.

The *zines* and clips could function as such precisely because they—via a process of empathetic identification—resonated with the every member of the team. Once every collaborator had adopted the guiding metaphor of each of the subject as his or her own, it became easy to identify congruent elements and methods, and tailor our approach to match each filmmakers. The above-mentioned framing and treatment of the school board representative in Amber's film is one such example. Because we so intuitively understood Amber's metaphor map, and the role of the character in it, we enabled an artistic treatment of the scene congruent with it—lending our expertise rather than imposing our own perspective upon it. Because of the *zines* and the clips, we—just like the girls—felt out the subjects and, as such, were able to contribute to as subjective as possible an expression of their perceived reality, without distortion.

Perception

Metaphor stimulated empathetic identification in *SALT* in a different way in its target demographic than in its adult audience. For young viewers, whose daily reality more

closely mirrored the adolescent realities portrayed onscreen, the identification was more immediate. The use of metaphor was cathartic; they recognized their own energy, vibrancy, and interests onscreen and were drawn to the film because it signified a shared subjective reality. Metaphor operated at this level in the sense of immediacy and connection youth felt to the filmmakers and subjects of the film. They rarely had a favourite segment, were rarely moved by one film more than another. Their subjective engagement with the film was much more immediate. They seemed to react to the film in its entirety with relief, as if they had finally been understood, and were no longer isolated.

In adult viewers, metaphor served to compensate for rational identification, to stay a logical analysis of the realities depicted in order to create room for and stimulate empathetic identification. The quotidian subjective realities of adult viewers were far removed from those of the teenaged filmmakers; they like us had long ago shed their youthful perspective. The energy and sentiments characteristic of youth were thus more difficult to access for the adult viewers than for younger ones, and harder to convey to them via analysis or explication. Metaphor thus served to establish new associations in the adult viewers consciousness and thereby stimulate empathetic identification and self-reflection. Like the juxtapositions of urbanity and subsistence in *Nanook of the North* provided Flaherty's viewers with unprecedented and unique access to a lifestyle drastically different from theirs, the poetic metaphors in *SALT* propelled the adult viewers into the exotic and long-forgotten reality of their youth. They offered up associations and impressions that were nonsensical to their adult rationales, and with which they therefore were compelled to engage with emotionally.

Karen's film provides a good example of this dynamic at work. Karen's topic was extremely personal to her, it was too close and too current for her to discuss with any distance or disconnect. She could not build an argument film, like Amber's, which would situate the phenomenon within a nuanced context. Nor could she appeal to any pre-established associations about her topic, which was by its very nature dark and mysterious—a taboo completely unknown and inaccessible except to an isolated few. There was with regards to Karen's film the greatest dissonance between author and audience. Not only was Karen's viewer ill informed about her subject, there was a real aversion to it on the part of most anyone watching. The only way for Karen to explore her subject, as such, was to make the viewer feel what she herself, and other self-mutilating teens, felt. In order to do so, and given her inability to articulate her intentions, metaphor was all the more important.

Metaphor-based exercises revealed that, for Karen and the other self-mutilating young women she interviewed, self-mutilation was about release. It was a means of finding an outlet—the only outlet—for the anguish they felt and could not share. Her film, which as aforementioned was a layered sound montage, was constructed to emulate the build up of tension and the release characteristic of the subjective experience of self-mutilation. We built a layered crescendo of sound and evocative images, whose culmination should have been—and threatened to be—an onscreen self-mutilation. The idea of the cut, and the audience's anticipation of it, permeated every frame of Karen's segment, but never came. This created a tension within the viewer, who anticipated and feared the onscreen self-mutilation, and a yearning for release from the discomfort caused by this uneasy eagerness. When Karen's film ends, inevitably, there are sighs of relief.

The viewer's own emotional experience watching Karen's segment is metaphoric of her experience as a self-mutilator.

Karen's film thus successfully conveys its essential truth subjectively, by means of empathetic identification. It communicates the essential truth of her subject without distorting it, and imparts the viewer with an alternative perspective on the subject. Karen's viewer finds common ground with self-mutilating teens, which may have been a completely foreign, disdainful, and impersonal topic before, by way of empathetic identification. Having felt the tension and release laid bare in Karen's film, the topic of self-mutilation becomes familiar and understood on a more primal, read subjective, level by its audience.

This dynamic was pregnant in *SALT* from start to finish. By embracing the subjective at every turn, SALT employed metaphor to provoke conversation. Given the diversity of subject tackled, everyone found resonance in at least one of the girls' enquiries. This initial resonance was leveraged via the extensive use of metaphor, by encouraging emotional engagement and creating a highly subjective viewing experience. The viewer found him or her co-feeling with the authors, also subjects, of the film.

This is precisely the subjective communication Frye posits as a combative reflex to the loneliness inherent to the human condition. By the very fact of being embodied beings and distinct subjects, we are unable to intimately know another's reality. Insofar as we have access to subjectivities not our own, it is via intellect and dispassionate understanding. It is, as Vico suggested, via rational constructs. Yet the use of metaphor to stimulate and encourage emotional engagement enables empathetic identification with a subjectivity that is not our own. Metaphor creates a bridge, of sort, by which we can

engage subjectively with a lived experience that is not our own. It enables a co-feeling, and understanding that is inherently subjective.

As such, the adult viewers of *SALT* for the first time understood the young generation depicted onscreen, in a way and with an immediacy no amount of statistics, data, school dropout rates, or even good adult documentaries on the education system, alternative music, self-mutilation, or the punk subculture could inspire. Young viewers, for their part, immediately recognized themselves in another, i.e., identified with the subject-authors of the film, and thus felt a respite from the inherent loneliness posited by Frye.

SALT did not revolutionize the way human beings create and perceive art, or even documentary film. It is not unique because it exhibits a different dynamic of artistic communication. The process by which an artistic expression was created and received in art is the same one at work in any artistic communication. It is the same dynamic that was at work years ago when I first heard jazz. It is universal. *SALT* is of interest for an analysis of artistic communication because the processes and dynamic at work in artistic communication—which are usually invisible, discreet, subtle, and often unconscious—were rendered evident by pedagogical context and, due to the nature of the project, well-documented. *SALT* is thus an insightful record of the way in artistic communication occurs, a unique window into how art is made and perceived.

4.0|sentio ergo sum

conclusion

To Rick, Louise, the Salt Girls et al:

You've facilitated and created an important work, for a number of reasons : important for the NFB to finally allow fresh blood to be drawn, important as an example of democratizing the digital revolution, important as empowerment and education important, and necessary because so few works are generated from filmmakers of your generation, or if there are exceptions then they are never seen, certainly not in mainstream media. The exceptions being perhaps in nonfictive internet diary, or zines or indie indie short films done by young people in a grass roots, desktop or bedroom style.

Peter Wintonick, comments post screening, May 25 2000

Immediately prior to *SALT*'s release in 2000, we arranged a screening for secondary four students at Massey-Vanier high school, in the Eastern Townships. It wasn't an entirely random selection: one of the *SALT* girls, Morgan Gage, had attended Massey-Vanier before transferring to MIND in grade nine.

Our visit was far from highly anticipated by the students. Many had objected to having to attend 'an NFB movie', and had signed up for the screening largely because it took place at the same time as their gym class. The auditorium filled slowly, the students filing in reluctantly, dragging their feet and talking boisterously. Their discontent was palpable, and made us quite nervous.

It got worse. When the school principal announced that the film and question and answer period would take approximately an hour and a half, eating into their lunch period, a communal groan arose. Many students asked if they could leave partway through. They were given a choice: those who chose to leave midway through had to

elect to do so at they outset, and were asked to put their names on a list so that the lunch lady would know where they were. A good portion of the group did so.

The energy changed drastically when the film started, almost as of the first frame. A rapturous silence set in. Many of the students that had signed the list to leave got up during the screening and removed their names. By the time the question and answer period began, there were only a handful of names left on it. We were peppered with questions, about the segment's characters, the girls' experience, and the possibility of recreating the experience in the future…

One comment kept on coming back. It would become familiar from young viewers at subsequent screenings. "It's like if it's me talking", they would say, "that's exactly what I feel and want to say." At a screening at Dawson College for the Cinema and Communications Studies Program, one student likened the film to a conversation. When the head of the program advanced a series of criticisms of the film, largely artisanal, he was almost booed by his students, who fervently defended the film and rebuffed his concerns as being off point and evidence that the films aesthetic/subject coherence did not resonate for him. Young viewers were amazed by the film's ability to capture their reality, to depict what they until then had never seen onscreen. Its lack of technical polish—like the lack of a traditional harmonic resonance in jazz, and in the pulse of Sonny Rollins's swung eights that evening long ago—did not jeopardize its artistic integrity.

Oneness with others, and with the world around us, is impossible. The moment we begin to contemplate ourselves, we are confronted with the other, the not-I, from which we are

distinct. Philosophers have long wrestled with the dynamics of this initial confrontation with the other. It was, in fact, this initial phenomenon with which Descartes struggled, ushering in an age of rigid rationalism that relegated Vichian theory to the fringes. Understanding of the not-I stubbornly presents itself momentarily, intuitively, and fleetingly. It quickly taxes the mind to conceptualize, and implores it to retreat to the easier intellectual terrain of linear understanding, like geometry or physics. We can describe the other at length, and come to know it rationally, but lack any immediate access to it. Subjectivity, in short, is lonely.

In the face of this primordial human loneliness, the associative property of art seeks to reunite the individual with the world around him. Symbolic pre-logical thinking enables the individual to extrapolate from himself essential truths so that he may know himself, and have others know him. Creative expression can be understood as emotional abstraction of the inherently subjective human experience, in order to understand and be understood at a primal and immediate level. The lived experience of artistic expression is thus a sentiment of oneness, a primal and immediate conversation. It stimulates emotional reunification with the natural and creates a temporary bridge between two subjectivities: the creator's and the recipient's.

The resistance of the human imagination to be accurately expressed through reason is precisely what leads poets to employ metaphor as a meta-linguistic articulation of their subjective truths. By using metaphors the poet arrests logic by defying it, and thus compels the receiver into the irrational realm of the subjective. Faced with a metaphor the receiver cannot but revert to intuition and compassion in order to discern the intended meaning. Metaphor, therefore, allows intuitive emotional-based concepts

that are perceived as true to be transferred objectively while maintaining their subjective integrity, which would be either distorted, destroyed, or completely unintelligible by rational-based objective interpretation. Metaphor functions as an antilogic, to express the intangibility of subjective truth.

In the overwhelming majority of creative expression, including in most documentary filmmaking, this process is indiscernible. Creators do not consciously seek metaphors around which to build their works, like the *SALT* girls did in order to build theirs. They rely on intuition and identification to locate in their lived experience elements with emotional resonance, elements they are moved by. Brault and his crew were not drawn to the snowshoe race in *Les Racquetteurs* because they sought a metaphor for cultural self-determination. Rather, they were moved by the spectacle because it resonated with them, given their own lived experience. They were struck by the lack of politics in the event precisely because their own lived experience as French-Canadians was so politicized.

Similarly, the reception of a creative expression is not a conscious exercise in interpreting metaphor. Much like the creator is moved by elements of the world around him, intuitively, the receiver of a creative communication empathetically identifies with elements that resonate subjectively. This emotional engagement is the recognition of oneself in another. Creative communication thus, via metaphoric association, provides a bridge by which to partake, to the fullest extent possible, in another's lived experience, and thus combat the inherent loneliness of individuality posited by Frye.

The reaction of young *SALT* viewers, the sentiment of release and relief they felt when they recognized themselves in another and, for a brief moment, felt less alone, was

precisely this empathetic identification at work. The fact that older viewers were also moved by the experience speaks to the power of metaphoric communication and poetic association. If we are human, it seems to suggest, than we can co-feel, no matter how rationally disparate our lived experiences might be.

In sum, Descartes got it wrong.

Sentio ergo sum.

5.0| biblio

BOOKS

Altman, Rick. “Cinema as Event.” in *Sound Theory, Sound Practice*. edited by Rick Altman. New York: Routledge, 1992.

Butcher, SH, trans. *Aristotle: Poetics*. edited by Francis Ferguson. New York: Hill & Wang, 1988.

Cotrupi, Caterina Nella. “Vico and the Making of Truth.” in *Northrop Frye and the Politics of Process*. Toronto: University of Toronto Pres, 2000.

Danesi, Marcel. *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Semiotics, Media, and Communications*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000.

Danesi, Marcel. “Contemporary Persperctives on Giambattista Vico.” in *The Imaginative Basis of Thought and Culture: Contemporary Perspectives on Gimabattista Vico*. edited by Marcel Danesi and Frank Nuessel. Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press Inc, 1994.

Derrida, Jacques. “The First Session.” in Acts of Literature. edited by Derek Attridge. New York: Routledge, 1992.

Frye, Northrop. “The Keys to Dreamland.” in *The Educated Imagination: The Massey Lectures, Second Series*. Toronto: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1963.

Frye, Northrop. “A Motive for Metaphor.” in *The Educated Imagination: The Massey Lectures, Second Series*. Toronto: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1963.

Frye, Northrop. *Myth and Metaphor*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1990.

Giovanni, Nikki. “Poetry.” in *The Norton Introduction to Literature, 4th ed*. edited by Carl E. Bain, Jerome Beaty and J. Paul Hunter. New York: WW Norton and Company, 1986.

Grierson, John. “First Principles of Documentary, 1932.” in *Non-Fiction Film Theory and Criticism*. edited by Richard Barsam. New York: Dutton, 1976.

Lever, Yves. *Histoire générale du cinema au Québec*. Québec: Boréal, 1988.

Livingston, Paisley. “Cinematic Authorship.” in *Film Theory and Philosophy*. edited by Richard Allen and Murray Smith. London: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Mikics, David. *A New Handbook of Literary Terms*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010.

McLuhan, Marshall. *The Guttenberg Galaxy*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963.

O’Neil, John. “Vico and Myth.” in *The Imaginative Basis of Thought and Culture: Contemporary Perspectives on Gimabattista Vico*. edited by Marcel Danesi and Frank Nuessel. Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press Inc, 1994.

PERIODICALS

Marcorelles, L. and Rohmer, E. "Entretien avec Jean Rouch." *Cahiers du cinéma* 144 (1963): 1.

Sellors, C Paul. “Collective Authorship in Film.” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 65:3 (Summer 2007): 263.

Cormellier, Bruno and Frigon, Martin. “L’homme à la camera.” *Nouvelles Vues* 1 (Winter 2004).

Fidelman, Charlie. “Doc-Makers call the shots.” *The Montreal Gazette*. September 13, 1999: E1.

FILM

Bowling for Columbine. DVD. Directed by Michael Moore. Detroit: Dog Eat Dog Film, 2002.

Cinema Verite: Defining the Moment. VHS. Directed by Peter Wintonick. The National Film Board of Canada, 1999.

Michael Moore Hates America. DVD. Directed by Michael Wilson, Dallas, TX: MMHA Productions, 2004.

SALT. Directed by Louise Leroux, Amber Goodwyn, Morgan Gage, Karen Shamy-Smith and Beverly Brown. DVD. The National Film Board of Canada, 2000.

The Days Before Christmas. VHS. Directed by Stanley Jackson, Wolf Koenig and Terence Macartney-Filgate. The National Film Board of Canada, 1958.

INTERVIEWS

The author conducted telephone interviews with the following persons for the purposes of this thesis:

Brault, Michel. February 17th, 2010.

Carrière, Marcel. February 4th, 2010.

Ulrich, Barbara. February 5th, 2010.