

Doubling Reality: Artifice and Self-Reflexivity in Non-Fiction Film
Eric M. Lachs
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The non-fiction film is the original creation at the crossroad between cinema and authenticity. It is traditionally considered to be the truest of any art form by focusing on perceived reality, whereas fictional narratives necessarily fabricate conscious experiences for the application of style and meaning.

Documentary films have a considerably more complex signification than fictional works because they propose the viewer's reality as the film's diegesis, two areas that are disparate in works of fiction. The ultimate goal of non-fiction film must be to come as close to portraying reality as possible. There exists, however, a great deal of deception in the act of conjuring or doubling reality for a filmic endeavor. This deceptive practice combines and confuses the two realms. Non-fiction films use ambiguous or duplicated reality as a theme to cast self-reflexive awareness on the cinematic processes. (Nichols 12-15)

The question of objectivity arises in this pursuit as it does in any expressive form. The very essence of what the viewer believes himself to see is constantly challenged by a suspected subjectivity. Since the angle or distance at which something is seen can change its entire meaning, it is quite possible that reality is impossible to obtain in any circumstance. The theories of Roland Barthes, a 20th century literary critic, are the basis for the dilemma posed by the possible conflicts of the camera and what is real. He explains the photograph as something that "always carries its referent with itself." He goes on to say that because of this relationship, the image is a constant reminder of that which it represents. For Barthes, the film is an analog of all that its existence implies and the filmic referent is the only one that is necessarily real (due to the inherent

reality of the recording). Notwithstanding that, it is still the non-fiction film director's goal to come as close as possible to objective production so that the observer can be epistemologically convinced by the film's message. (Renov 135-142)

Normal non-fiction movies address reality through exposition, observation, or interaction. There also exists a substantive discourse for challenging the conventional modes of representing reality. Reflexive documentary seeks to expose the means by which the viewer conceives of the real while also emulating it. While a traditional non-fiction film would use audio-visual representation to elicit the viewer to envision a certain referent, a reflexive film would complicate this matter by drawing attention to the processes by which a certain referent originates. This type of film also examines the necessary subjectivity of truth and reality in the cinematic medium. (Nichols 32-34)

For example, *F For Fake* (1974, dir. Orson Welles) begins with the director, with whom the viewer is supposed to invest authorial trust for 88 minutes, performing sleight-of-hand magic. For the careful spectator, this is a forewarning of the subtle ideological maneuvering that the director feels himself in control of. If a magician is able to manipulate an audience in person, Welles defies the captive viewer to contend with the smoke and mirrors of trick photography and editing. Before the magic trick is over, he admits to being a charlatan, which problematizes the film's overall believability. The auteur theory, a major contention from the 1950's, suggests that a movie's director is analogous to a literary author in influence and craft. An admission of fakery and deceit from

a championed auteur such as Welles further complicates the audience's burden to obtain reality from behind a veil of deception.

The film hints at the underlying paradox of the visual arts: even the most successful attempt at objective realism, when recorded and projected, only creates a duplicate reality that is false by virtue of temporal and spatial discontinuity. Welles' self-described charlatanism epitomizes the acute emulation that his profession requires. *F for Fake* examines this mesmerizing practice of fraud and thinks through the problems associated with authorship and truth. The first chapter, which shows hidden cameras filming men as they watch an attractive woman pass them, presents the foundation that continues throughout the film. Since it is assumed that the men would not ogle if they knew they were being watched, a deceptively hidden camera is necessary in order to truly capture this event. The film continues with the assumption that the remainder is necessarily tainted by the knowledge of the camera's presence. This elucidates Welles' second paradox: awareness of the camera creates some degree of artifice in the filmed subject that can only be removed by deceiving them.

The remaining scenes are prefaced with a bold subtitle stating that "For the next hour, everything in this film is based strictly on the available facts," which seems in retrospect to be either a trope to falsely garner trust or a hollow promise when confronted with interviewees who lie religiously. The film showcases Elmyr de Hory, the greatest art forger of the 20th century, and his equally infamous biographer, Clifford Irving. Welles questions the illegality of counterfeiting by Elmyr, who can paint Modigliani and Matisse replicas that are

indistinguishable from the genuine originals. He argues that no one person should have the authority to declare a work to be so valuable, as does the art expert, whose existence necessitates forgery. The experts accuse Elmyr of being arrogant, to which he responds that no man is more humble than he, who paints masterpieces that hang in great international museums under other artists' names. The great parallel becomes clear; that Welles' artistry, which attempts to duplicate an already-present reality, mirrors Elmyr's emulation of the real artists. Shots of Elmyr painting a Picasso replica are inter-cut with audio clips from Welles' famous radio broadcast of *War of the Worlds*, which incited panic when it originally aired. Both men profit from artifice and deception, reframing what already exists.

Another film about art and authorship, *Tokyo Ga* (1985, dir. Wim Wenders) follows Wim Wenders' personal experience of Tokyo and retraces the city through the films of Yasujiro Ozu. *Tokyo Story*, Ozu's most famous film, was released in Japan in 1953. It is about an old married couple that travels to Tokyo to visit their children. They are greeted warmly, but are treated as if they are just an annoying sidetrack from the children's busy lives. The mother becomes ill and dies soon after they return home, leaving the family to reflect on her visit. The subject matter of the story consists of a social commentary on Japanese middle-class family life and more acutely, an examination of human mortality, alienation, and modernity. Wenders' movie begins and ends with scenes from *Tokyo Story* and interviews both the film's main actor (Chishu Ryu) and

cameraman (Yuharu Atsuta), who agree that Ozu's subtle differences from mainstream filmmaking separate him.

Ozu's style of representing reality is more naturalist and spatially aware than the average cinematic conventions. His stylistic system is not dependent on the narrative, and he is capable of using intentional discontinuity to heighten the personal appeal of his story and characters. For example, one of the opening sequences in the movie is a conversation between the married couple that deliberately cuts back and forth over the 180-degree line in each successive shot. The effect of this technique is that each character achieves perpendicularity with the camera, which creates the illusion that the characters are speaking directly to the audience. Another subtlety of the film is the intentionally low camera angle. This level is called the "tatami" shot, named after the floor mat that the normal Japanese viewer would be sitting on when they screened the film. These invisible techniques are products of the cinematography, mise-en-scene, and editing that bring the focus to exterior elements of the film without disturbing the diegesis. By exposing the intricacies of Ozu's style, Wenders exposes the processes that contribute to film creation and realism.

An interesting difference in the formal system of *Tokyo Story* is the use of transitional scenery in connection with the aesthetic. Under normal circumstances in a Hollywood film, a long shot consisting of a natural or environmental representative of a specific area will be used to establish location. In this film, an establishing shot is substituted for an isolated landscape. This scene is used to provide transition between chapters of the story and can be

looked at as a pause for comprehension. Preceding many sequences, there is a shot of construction. While this shot is associated with the same area throughout the film, it is entirely independent and unrelated to the narrative. Not a single graphic match connects it with the formal space. Wenders achieves a similar pause when his homage to Ozu cuts to the view of mountains from a distant tower. The view follows a meeting and conversation with fellow German director Werner Herzog about Ozu's imagery. Herzog jokes about joining NASA due to the dearth of adequate images available for filming. Wenders then appropriates real images of modern Tokyo, exposing the artifice involved in borrowing or duplicating.

The film focuses on several modern appropriations including Japanese teens that mimic sock-hop dances from 1950's America, the presence of vast driving ranges without full golf courses, and the preparation of plastic models of prepared restaurant dishes. The sock hops borrowed the fashion and dances from the era with no real sense of the cultural influences that influenced or followed them. The golf ranges focus minimally on making contact with the ball with no concept of the importance of distance, accuracy, or number of strokes. The plastic food makers invest meticulous care into an object which has no value other than to appear as close as possible to the food that it represents. These three scenes show how precise emulation removes the original intention or significance of the represented object. Through these examples, Wenders comments on the aesthetic of deceit, and the ambiguous result of emulating

reality. In a way, he achieves the opposite of Ozu's transitional scenery, a shot with a concept and no referent.

Hiroshima Mon Amour (1959, dir. Alain Resnais) is a love story about a French woman's affair with a Japanese man in Hiroshima. By all usual categorizations, it is a fictional story, however it has many elements that appeal to historical discourse and the non-fiction genre. Early in the film, the lovers discuss their experience of Hiroshima. Neither were present for the event; Lui was a Japanese soldier abroad and Elle was a growing girl in Nevers. As she recalls the painful history of the event and the memory of Japanese newsreels, Lui debunks her memory as fraud. Resnais uses the malleability of history and memory to garner interest for the film and its characters. When Lui tells Elle that she does not know Hiroshima, he is denouncing the possibility of knowing something by hearing of it or seeing it on film. Resnais emphasizes the fictional basis for even the most objective visual evidence. Elle could not know the reality of Hiroshima unless she was there; and in fact, total footage of the bombing was not even available until *Hiroshima-Nagasaki: August, 1945* (1970, dir. Paul Ronder) was compiled and released. (Barsam 237-238)

The French New Wave film consortium championed this film as the first great post-war modern masterpiece, and Jean Domarchi stated that the film should be seen as a documentary on Emmanuelle Riva, the actress who plays Elle in the film. In a round-table discussion on the film by the *Cahiers du Cinema* critics, Jacques Rivette famously comments on the double meaning of Resnais' work.

Resnais' great obsession, if I may use that word, is the sense of the splitting of primary unity—the world is broken up, fragmented into a series of tiny pieces, and it has to be put back together again like a jigsaw. I think that for Resnais this reconstitution of the pieces operates on two levels. First on the level of content, of dramatization. Then, I think even more importantly, on the level of the idea of cinema itself. I have the impression that for Alain Resnais the cinema consists in attempting to create a whole with fragments that are a priori dissimilar.... The Emmanuelle Riva character remains voluntarily blurred and ambiguous. Her acting takes the same direction as the film... The film has a double beginning after the bomb; on the one hand, on the plastic level and the intellectual level, since the film's first image is the abstract image of the couple on whom the shower of ashes falls, and the entire beginning is simply a meditation of Hiroshima after the explosion of the bomb. But you can say that too, on another level, the film begins after the explosion for Emmanuelle Riva, since it begins after the shock which has resulted in her disintegration, dispersed her social and psychological personality. (Domarchi 60-64)

Resnais' use of doubling in the opening credits equates Elle and Liu with a couple laying as ashes fall on them from the Hiroshima bomb, as both couples are engaged in a similar embrace and the characters' faces are not shown for the first 15 minutes of the film. In truth, they both experienced the trauma of the war, with Liu being a Japanese soldier whose family died in Hiroshima and Elle being a French girl who fell in love with a German soldier who died the day of Hiroshima. Since Elle is an actress in a film observing Hiroshima's horror, it is the memory of the bombing that brings them together. Resnais uses Emmanuelle Riva as an actress (who was actually 18 during the bombing) playing an actress who was 18 during the bombing. The emotional shock she experiences upon her lover's death translates to her recollection of the war. In this way, Resnais shows how memory can interfere with history and render the real moment ambiguous in the shadow of a recreated memory. (Domarchi 59-70)

Elle visits the set of her film, and Liu finds her watching a reenacted procession about the war's effects on Japan. Resnais structures a film within his film to project the historical setting into his characters. They make decisions based on the reality, and can not let go of each other or their memories. For the last half of the film, Elle details her recovery from the trauma of her dead lover. She convalesces from her pain and dissociation, but experiences it again when she meets Liu. He seems to remind her of the past, and by doing so forces her to face the truth again. She describes her problems to Liu as if he is the German soldier, and in the end she decides to leave him and the memory that he stirs in her. Liu says that she is Nevers, and he is Hiroshima. Elle can leave, but Liu's character does not have the luxury of forgetting. Resnais weaves this fictional layer into the historical reality, creating a new way of looking at the devastation of war. Emmanuelle Riva, like Hiroshima, is devastated and fragmented and must learn to recover from her past. Resnais uses the visual medium to duplicate the reality of the ash-covered couple and resolve the psychology of a past ordeal. (Nichols 117-121)

In *F For Fake*, *Tokyo Ga*, and *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, the filmmakers seek to mirror a past reality, and in doing so they create a new plane of signification. The potential modes of representation complicate the politics of authorship and artistic endeavors. Welles' sleight-of-hand, Wenders' re-imagination of Tokyo, and Resnais' anthropomorphized history all develop the ambiguous relationship between reality and diegetic authenticity.

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