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Cameron McGill Dark Times: The Pursuit of Objectivity in a Subjective Medium

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Dedication

To Kelly & Andersen Bateman for
their Love and Support

Abstract

Cameron McGill: Dark Times

The Pursuit of Objectivity in a Subjective Medium

By

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DePaul University, 2013

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This thesis project discusses the issues of objectivity, truth, and reality in documentary filmmaking. This debate has been ongoing since the establishment of the genre. Scholars like Bill Nichols, Michael Chanan, and Jane Chapman argue that the filmmaker's subjectivity inevitably corrupts any possibility for the attainment of objectivity and that no absolute truth or reality can be captured in documentary film; while scholars like Stephen Mamber and filmmakers who ascribed to the schools of cinema verite and direct cinema suggest that objectivity is attainable through filming real people in uncontrolled situations. By framing the discussion using Nichols and Mamber along with other pertinent film scholars, this analysis investigates how said scholarship works in practice. Through a critical analysis of the film's pre-production, production, and post-production, *Cameron McGill: Dark Times* this thesis project contributes to the discussion of objectivity, reality and truth within documentary film by providing an examination of the scholarly issues through production. The inability to capture every moment of McGill's life during production, the self censorship and censorship of access, the injection of the filmmaker into the action, the facades constructed as a result of the

presence of the camera, and the subjectivity of the choices made during production and post-production resulted in a subjective film. When I began working on this project I fully intended to create an objective documentary. Through a reflection of the pre-production, production, and post-production processes in light of pertinent scholarship, I realized that an objective documentary proved to be an unattainable endeavor.

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Introduction

The potential for creating an objective documentary has been an ongoing debate within the world of documentary. Could a film capture truth and reality objectively? Prior to engaging in this film project I believed that a documentary could attain objectivity, as long as the filmmaker did not inject himself into the action. Just as I believed a journalist or a historian could objectively report the facts, so too could the filmmaker objectively capture truth and reality. When the project began I was not aware of any debate within the genre that questioned the filmmaker's ability to be objective. The following is a critical reflection and analysis of the pre-production, production, and post-production that went into making the documentary *Cameron McGill: Dark Times*. This paper will chronologically follow my own development and engagement with the documentary genre. I have chosen to provide background on the project, its objectives, and my account of the production process prior to introducing the scholarly analysis. Through this structure my metamorphosis and maturation will be made apparent. Although when I began working on this project I fully intended to create an objective documentary, this goal proved to be unattainable.

Review of Pertinent Literature

Since the inception of the genre, documentary film scholars and filmmakers have debated the definition of the genre, as well as the film and filmmaker's ability to objectively capture truth and reality. Part of the complications that surrounds the question of subjectivity and objectivity is rooted in the early claim that the camera does not lie (Chapman p.49). Reflections on the documentary form began in the 1920s with John Grierson and Paul Rotha. Grierson coined the term "documentary" when writing about

Robert Flaherty's film *Moana* in 1926, stating "Of course, *Moana* being a visual account of events in the daily life of a Polynesian youth and his family, has documentary value" (Ellis p.3). Throughout the 1900s the debate surrounding objectivity, truth, and reality has endured, intensifying in the 50s and 60s with the rise of direct cinema and cinema verite, as well as in the 90s with the resurgence of the documentary genre. Technological advances in cameras, audio, and social networking now allow anyone with a cellphone and an Internet connection to document and post an event online. Chapman argues against the notion of obtaining objectivity, but states, "As the [Internet] becomes more truly global, differentiations and distinctions between subjectivities and objectivities dissolve into the ether" (p.71). The most recent revival of the debate surrounding objectivity in documentary film is due to the appearance, proliferation, and production of genres that border the documentary, such as "reality" television, docudramas, mockumentaries, etc. My project thesis contributes to the current discussion by presenting a review of pertinent scholarship as it relates to the practical production of a documentary film. My paper reexamines to what extent a documentary film can be objective. Essential to the discussion of objectivity in documentary film are the issues of truth and reality. As a result it is important to review the discussions surrounding the issues of objectivity, truth, and reality within the documentary film scholarship.

Truth, Reality, and Objectivity

The "documentary" emerged in the 1920s as an all-encompassing label that referred to any film that was classified as nonfiction (Chanan p.32). This designation appeared to prompt more questions than answers from scholars. Nonfiction carries connotations of objective, real, true, and factual. Early travelogue films promoted

themselves as ethnographic productions that provided the public with scientific "evidence" of an event or culture. Documentary filmmaker Grierson defined the genre as a "creative treatment of actuality" (Chanan p.31), whereas Dziga Vertov promoted kino-pravda[1]. Although Grierson and Vertov claimed to capture truth and reality, they viewed film as creative medium and therefore a subjective construction, rather than objective nonfiction. Grierson and Vertov separated truth from objectivity. Their quest was to represent truth, not to be objective.

Although much discussion has taken place concerning objectivity in documentary film, the question of objectivity in the genre persists. Perhaps filmmakers and academics have exhausted the issues of objectivity, but the connotation of "documentary" often still drives certain audiences and those not privy to such scholarship to accept documentary films as objective portrayals of reality (Chapman p.4). Works such as Nichols' *Introduction to Documentary* and Chanan's *Politics of Documentary* provide a thorough history of the documentary film genre. Examining the development of the genre, Nichols and Chanan contextualize the major issues concerning the documentary films. In the 1990s Nichols' scholarly work articulated in multiple texts that documentary films do not objectively capture truth and reality, but are subjectively "representing reality" (p.318). Ultimately these scholars assert there is no single truth or reality to objectively capture, so the filmmaker's attempt to do so is foolhardy. This view of documentary film has and continues to be complicated by the emergence of genres that claim to be representing truth and reality.

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[1] During the 1920s Vertov produced a series of newsreels that promoted the concept of kino-pravda or "film truth." Focusing on capturing everyday experiences he believed that these films allowed audiences to view events as if they were there (Mamber p.5).

Works like Chapman's *Issues in Contemporary Documentary* extend the discussions presented by Nichols and Chanan, contextualizing the relevant issues facing documentary film since the resurgence in the genre in the 21st century. Citing scholars like Noel Carroll[2] who admits that objectivity *is* achievable and Carl Plantinga who argues that relative objectivity[3] exist, Chapman illustrates how arguments from the past continue to influence the debate concerning objectivity within the genre today (p.70-71).

Some fissures have developed within the debate concerning objectivity in documentary film, but Nichols, Chanan, and Chapman continue to argue against the ability for the filmmaker to remain objective. From the mediating impediments of the camera that captures the images to the choices made by the filmmaker during production and the subjective choices made in the editing room these scholars maintain that the filmmaker cannot help but be subjective. Chapman states that,

> Science does not have to justify truthfulness by claiming objectivity, because its experiments are capable of repetition without authorial influence, whereas documentary involves a non-repeatable human faction. Real time, real events are fairly chaotic, and there are usually a million opinions about whatever the issues is that is being discussed, and once you are in the process of constructing a film and editing all of that chaos, you invariably start to shape it to your own view. (p.49)

Nichols, Chanan, and Chapman maintain that objectivity is simply unattainable; it doesn't exist. This line of scholarship walks against that scholarship supporting objectivity within the documentary genre that came into prominence in the 1980s and 1990s after the rise of cinema verite and direct cinema.

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[2] Carroll argues that our being moved by nature belongs to the class of being emotionally moved. This emotional response can occur without the problems of subjectivity. Confusion and abuse of language have lead to an imprecise identification of objectivity with truth (Chapman p.71).

[3] Plantinga argues that no representation will ever be absolutely objective, but we can nonetheless measure our representations against other representations and demand closer approximations to absolute objectivity (p.1).

Direct Cinema

In the 1950s and 1960s scholars and filmmakers debated the merits of Cinema Verite and Direct Cinema that developed as a result of technological advances in filmmaking. Armed with a lighter camera and the ability to record synchronized sound, the filmmaker's newfound mobility allowed for documentary production to develop. "The direct cinema artist played the role of uninvolved bystander; the cinema verite artists espoused that of provocateur" (Nichols p.39). Direct cinema filmmakers like Robert Drew, D.A. Pennebaker, Albert Maysles, and Richard Leacock asserted that the newfound tools for production allowed the filmmaker to objectively capture truth and reality as it happened. The films these filmmakers produced provided audiences with the experience of "being there." These filmmakers employed a fly-on-the-wall technique that, they believed, allowed the presence of the filmmaker and camera to objectively capture truth and reality without disruption. These claims came under fire from film critics like Louis Marcorelles, Colin Young, and Peter Graham who asserted that such claims of objectivity, truth, and reality were impossible to attain (O'Connell p.158-160).

Works such as Mamber's *Cinema Verite in America* and P.J. O'Connell's *Robert Drew and the Development of Cinema Verite in America* examine the cinema verite and direct cinema movements in the 50s and 60s. Both Mamber and O'Connell survey the theories and processes asserted by Drew, Leacock, and Maysles. Mamber's text systematically explores the development of direct cinema, or as he calls it at the time cinema verite, as it developed in America in the 50s and 60s. Examining the prominent films of the movement like *Primary* (1960) and *Salesman* (1968), Mamber illustrates

how filmmakers were able to capture the truth and reality of an event by employing techniques that they claimed allowed for objectivity.

While Mamber constructs a foundation for objectivity around the proponents of direct cinema styles (p.250-252), O'Connell addresses the critics of direct cinema, citing Marcorelles, Young, and Graham (p.158-160). Through the filmmaker's account of the direct cinema style, O'Connell lays out the case for objective truthfulness in the documentary genre, but unlike Mamber, he provides the critics with an oppositional voice to the movement in the 1950s and 60s. Jack Ellis and Betsy McLane add to the discussion in *A New History of Documentary Film*, explaining that the filmmakers allowed for the subjects to ignore the presence of the camera because they were "involved in an activity demanding their full attention and evoking certain unalterable behavior" (p.216). While this scholarship is crucial to the discussion concerning objectivity, my critical analysis contributes to this debate by providing a firsthand contemporary account of the production process of a documentary, something much of this scholarship is lacking.

Cinema Verite vs. Direct Cinema

Although today the terms direct cinema and cinema verite are often used interchangeably, they are actually two contrasting methods of documentary filmmaking that share the similar goal of capturing reality. In the 50s and 60s two styles thrived among the advocates of truth and reality in documentary film, cinema verite and direct cinema. Scholars like Nichols, O'Connell, Mamber, and Chapman provide a brief background of cinema verite and direct cinema. O' Connell defines cinema verite and direct cinema as:

> *Cinéma Vérité*: a method of documentary filmmaking based on the use of highly portable equipment and characterized by a *high* level of filmmaker involvement in

the activities of the subjects, in the form of questions and requests for introspective reflections on events…Direct Cinema: a method of documentary filmmaking based on the use of highly portable equipment and characterized by a *low* level of filmmaker involvement in the activities of the subjects, in that the filmmaker act principally as observer of events. (p. xiii-xiv)

While both styles of filmmaking utilized the new lightweight equipment as well as synchronized sound, their methods of capturing truth and reality differed. In France proponents of cinema verite like Jean Rouch, Edgar Morin, and Jean-Luc Godard believed that interventionist techniques like asking questions or directing their subjects, could extract truth from an event. The proponents of cinema verite were not claiming to be objective; they acknowledged the subjectivity that was brought in by the observer. Rouch "believed that the camera's intervention stimulated people to greater spontaneity, expression, and truth without asking them to act as though the camera was not there" (Ronald Bergan). Through such a process the filmmaker could provoke the truth and reality out of an event.

Conversely, American proponents of direct cinema like Drew, Leacock, Pennebaker, and the Maysles brothers believed that through noninterventionist techniques the filmmaker could simply observe and capture reality objectively as it occurred. Certain events have their own "drama" or "crisis structure" that allowed for the subjects to ignore the presence of the camera because they were "involved in an activity demanding their full attention and evoking certain unalterable behavior" (Ellis p.216). As scholars and filmmakers in America began to use the term cinema verite more commonly, it became a synonym with direct cinema (Mamber p.2). Works like Ellis and McLane's book, *A New History of Documentary Film* and Liz Stubbs article, "Albert Maysles: Father of Direct Cinema" conflate the history, application, and the eventual merging of the two styles of filmmaking into direct cinema. Presently, these terms continue to be used

interchangeably. Fundamentally connected to objectivity are the elements of truth and reality. Historically the documentary film's designation of being nonfiction conveys that what is being shown is true and factual.

The Construction of Truth in Documentary

Works such as Linda Williams' "Mirrors without Memories: Truth, History, and the New Documentary" and Brian Winston's *Claiming the Real: The Griersonian Documentary and Its Legitimations* examine how truth and reality are impossible to capture. In his deconstruction of truth and reality in documentary film Winston points to a residual claim to photography's rhetoric of capturing the real in complicating the discussion of truth within the genre. Just as the filmmaker cannot achieve objectivity, the camera can never completely capture truth or reality. Williams states, "the photograph – and by implication the moving picture as well – is no longer…a 'mirror with a memory' illustrating visual truth of objects, persons, and events but a manipulated construction" (p.9). Construction of the event is inherent to the medium and through such construction the filmmaker can only attain an approximation of truth. She asserts that although capturing a single all encompassing truth is unattainable; filmmakers are able to construct a "new truth" (p.15). This claim is echoed by Peter Bates' "Truth Not Guaranteed: An Interview With Errol Morris." Morris explains that the "truth is 'not guaranteed' and cannot be transparently reflected by a mirror with a memory, yet some kinds of partial and contingent truth are nevertheless the always receding goal of the documentary tradition" (Williams p.14). The filmmaker is continuously framing the discussion and providing the viewer with an approximation of truth and reality, as he understood it.

This relative truth may not be the same for every viewer. Chanan argues, that a "documentary operates by Zeno's paradox, constantly approximating but never seizing a real which flees before it" (p.56). In short, these authors argue that although reality exists, the past reality is inaccessible but through representation. By providing the discussion with a contemporary critical analysis from a filmmaker negotiating the pre-production, production, and post-production of a documentary film, I hope to provide insight into the current state of the debate surrounding objectivity, truth, and reality.

The scholarship that has been covered examines how objectivity, truth, and reality have been debated within the documentary genre from its founding in the 1920s to the 21st century. After the direct cinema movement in the 1950s and 60s scholars have generally maintained that objectivity, truth, and reality are unattainable for the documentary filmmaker. The resurgence in documentary film and the prominence of "reality" television has continued to promote this discussion within the genre. My critical analysis of objectivity, truth, and reality contributes to this debate by examining pertinent scholarship as it relates to the production of a documentary film. This firsthand account from the filmmaker is something that much of the scholarship is missing.

Using the aforementioned scholarship I will establish the foundation for my critical analysis of this thesis project and direct my additional investigations. Having earnestly believed in both sides of the argument, I have a perspective that will prove beneficial for the ongoing discussion of objectivity, truth and reality. When I began this project I believed, like Mamber, Drew, and other proponents of direct cinema that objectivity, truth, and reality were attainable goals for a documentary filmmaker. Through production and post-production my position began to shift towards Nichols,

Chanan, and Chapman and the view that objectivity, truth, and reality are impossible for the filmmaker to capture. As my report and analysis will show, a filmmaker cannot be objective, and truth and reality cannot be captured. The filmmaker can only obtain a partial version of the truth that is unavoidably subjective. Through the production of a documentary film, the review of pertinent scholarship, and my reflection on the project, I hope to contribute to this bourgeoning debate within the documentary genre.

Oceanfront property in Chicago: Pre-Production

In 2006 I graduated college and returned home to Chicago. Having graduated from Indiana University with a B.A. in Secondary Education: Social Studies, I hoped to pursue my passion of filmmaking on the side. Although my profession would be education, I so admired those people who threw caution to the wind and followed their dreams. During school I had to make a choice, to be a filmmaker or to be a teacher. Being very practical I chose the profession that would afford me a life where I could raise a family and achieve that white picket fence. Artists and musicians pursued such a romantic ideal; follow your passion regardless of the cost. Not having the stomach for such a life, I hoped to experience this through proxy. Having little skill for script writing, I felt that a documentary was my best bet for a project. I had absolutely no academic training in documentary film; it was simply a passion of mine that I honed in college documenting my life and my friends' lives. If I could find someone who was interesting and engaging, all I would have to do is capture life as it unfolded. At the end of the day I wanted to create a film that I could be proud of and something that people would want to watch.

Cameron McGill is a thirty-six year old singer-songwriter from Chicago. Having seen him preform in 2002 at a local coffeehouse, I began to correspond with him while I was away at school. Being a fan of his music, I began to try to get his record played on the student radio station and whenever possible tried to catch one of his shows. When I returned home to Chicago in 2006 I began to pursue a filming opportunity with McGill. I enjoyed his music and after four years I did not know one thing about the man. From the little I knew about documentary filmmaking, I felt that he would be the perfect subject of the film. Although I was not educated in film, I sold myself as if I had minored in the subject. Perhaps this was a bit dishonest, but I desired the opportunity so much that I stretched the truth and perhaps my abilities as well.

Originally the project was simply to document a single performance. Having no film merits to speak of that would convince McGill to allow me to film a performance; I tried to sell him on the idea of the film I wanted to make. Using words like organic and truth and referencing films like *Dig!*, *Don't Look Back*, and *Ryan Adams & The Cardinals: September* I hoped to persuade him to let me into his world. I told him that I simply wanted to capture the event. Like a fly-on-the-wall I would remain unseen. The goal was to objectively capture the reality of his life. Not knowing exactly what that would look like, I told him that I wanted the film to organically develop before me. I did not want to influence anything, simply capture the event. Although I may have been overcompensating, he agreed to allow me to film one of his performances, April 10th, 2006 at the Hideout in Chicago.

With news of this opportunity I contacted a friend of mine with whom I had worked on film projects while away at school. The crew would consist of Brian May and

me. We had two cameras, both Sony consumer Handycams. My camera still used Hi8 tape cartridges, while May's used mini DV tapes. Needless to say we were lacking the appropriate equipment to produce the film that I had sold to McGill. The video and sound quality were poor for the project on which we were embarking. As the date neared, I continued to correspond with McGill and continued to push for more access. One of the main reasons I wanted to film McGill was because of his mysterious persona. On stage and in song he comes off as depressed and lonely, but I wasn't sure if this was simply a facade. Still working to sell McGill on the idea that we were going to produce the next *Last Waltz*, I asked for access backstage and behind the scenes. I wanted to capture what went into the performance and what he did to prepare. This request was twofold; I felt it would improve the film to incorporate B-roll into the performance, and, honestly, I had never been backstage before so I though that would be an enjoyable experience. With some reluctance McGill agreed.

Riding this wave of opportunity I purposed that we film McGill for a week leading up to the performance. I wanted to capture McGill in his everyday life, practicing alone, rehearsing with the band, writing, and performing. I hoped to mimic the aforementioned film's portrayals of each artist's life. I believed that each of these films objectively captured life as it happened. The camera, cameraman, and director were never seen and never spoke in the film. To me this was non-fiction. As a documentary filmmaker all I needed was to keep the camera rolling, capture the action, and stay out of the way. McGill was a bit more hesitant about allowing me such access, but after a number of conversations he agreed. The project had expanded from filming a single performance to filming an entire week leading up to said performance. This gradual

progression continued. Once McGill allowed me access to his life for a week, he suggested that he was going to be recording a new record for a week in March of 2006 and that I should film that as well. I suppose that McGill felt that if we were going to do this, then we should do it the whole way.

With the possibility of an actual documentary on my hands, I invested in a new camera and shotgun mic. I purchased a Panasonic DVX-100B prosumer video camera and Rode shotgun mic. Although I was relatively poor right out of college, I was able to purchase this professional equipment for around $4,000. With this new equipment I would be able to produce something that could possibly be distributed or sold. In 2007, when the project began *YouTube* was becoming a popular place to share videos, so at the very least I would be able to post my film there and hope for exposure.

As previously mentioned, I had very little formal training on how to make a film. I understood the basic rhetoric of cinema, but only in the capacity of what I thought looked nice and what did not. I understood what a low angle conveyed, but was unaware of Eisenstein's theory of montage or other academic elements of film. Needless to say I was a green filmmaker. The education I received in filmmaking came directly from filming the documentary. I learned through trial and error and had to learn from my mistakes. This includes but is not limited to, not knowing what white-balance was, leaving the lens cap on, not turning the mic on, etc. Although these setbacks caused some aggravation, I was able to learn to adapt to the conditions and work in less than ideal circumstances.

The pre-production of this project involved viewing films to find shots or angles that I liked and wanted to recreate. For McGill's part I said very little to him about what I

wanted. The production would be an organic process where we would capture him as he was in reality. I do distinctly remember referencing how some documentary films or reality shows directed their subjects or setup shots and I vehemently objected to doing anything remotely similar. As a filmmaker it was my job to capture reality. I didn't want to film McGill opening a door, then reset and film him entering a room. We would use the run-and-gun[4] method to capture what took place. We would work around McGill and the other members of his band. We did not want to disrupt the action or make our presence known. The goal was to make an objective documentary that honestly recreated the reality of being there.

Throughout pre-production I maintained that as long as we were honest and captured the reality as it happened we could create an objective documentary. Objectivity was attainable as long as the filmmakers remained in the shadows and did not inject themselves into the action. With the prospect of filming McGill for a week leading up to a show, rehearsals leading up to a record, and the recording of an album I felt that my job would simply be to capture the event. As long as I didn't disrupt the process and focused my camera on the action, the attainable objective documentary would be made.

Exploring the infinite abyss: Production

Perhaps I was simply in the right place at the right time, but it appeared that McGill was prepared to open himself up to a camera and I was able to sell him on the idea of making a documentary. This weeklong documentary film project continued to

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[4] Run-an-gun refers to the style of filmmaking often employed by small film crews, where the filmmakers try to capture video and audio of an uncontrolled event as best they can through improvisation.

expand until it has grown into a seven-year production as of April 2013 and nearly three hundred and fifty hours of footage. The length of the project has resulted in a number of changes to the original intent of the film. Although in my mind I wanted to produce an objective documentary, capturing the truth and reality of McGill's life over seven years without disturbing or altering the action became problematic. The practical application of filmmaking changed much of my preconceived notions about documentary films. The reality of being a fly-on-the-wall was easier said than done. Throughout production I began to realize that the camera's presence, my presence, and the choices made while filming inevitably resulted in subjective outcomes. Although I fervently fought against such results, inevitably objectivity became an unattainable goal.

When production began in April of 2006 the agreement between McGill and me for the project was not completely clear. McGill, self-conscious of the outward appearance of having a film crew follow him around was allowing me to film him for my own purposes. McGill had not requested the film and did not want anything from the project; he was simply allowing me access. I assume his issue resulted from the fact that he did not want to come off as if he thought that he was a big deal and was deserving of a film crew. This was a precarious position for me to be in. Unlike most documentary films where the filmmakers are there at the behest of the subject or some contractual agreement, our production was day to day. The terms of the project put quite a bit of distance between McGill and me. He treated me as if I wasn't even there, but this played perfectly into my goal for objectivity.

Having little knowledge of the legal elements of film production and caring little if the film resulted in monetary gains, we had a gentleman's agreement. McGill and I

resolved that the project would end when he became tired of me filming him or when I became tired of filming him. This would prove to create an enormous hurdle concerning access. Throughout production, especially in the early days when I was afraid of ending the project before it began, I walked on eggshells in order to not make McGill uncomfortable to the point of shutting down production. McGill insisted on getting final cut and I, being thankful that he had agreed to allow me access, accepted. This was an agreement that I would later regret, but at that stage in the process, who was I to make demands? Although I was the one with the movie camera, the power appeared to be in the hands of McGill. He was able to control when and where I filmed. He was the gatekeeper and without his consent I wouldn't have a project to film.

The first day of filming took place at McGill's place of work, the *Record Emporium*. I wanted to capture McGill in his natural habitat, working a part-time job in order to support his music. Initially, although still pursuing the objective documentary, I framed the narrative around the starving artist giving up everything in order to play music. Already the fissures in the objective documentary began to form, although I was unaware of them at the time. In the hours spent filming at the record store, I only introduced myself to McGill and the shop owner, made arrangements for our next meeting, and gave the salutation of goodbye. Not wanting to impact the world that I was filming, I remained as unobtrusive as possible. I would tiptoe through the store as to not make a sound alerting McGill of my presence or reminding him that I was filming. My goal was to fade away into the shadows. Although I say this, the definition for fading into the shadows was at times standing about two feet away from McGill as he packaged CDs and DVDs for transport.

In the first few months of the project I filmed everything I could. Given our odd agreement, I was at the mercy of McGill. Unfortunately I was only able to film what I was invited to film, but as long as I had access, the camera was rolling. Aside from greetings and goodbyes I remained as quiet as I could. During rehearsals I would try to position myself out of anyone's line-of-sight as not to disrupt the event. Not privy to information like set list or schedules, we had to adapt to the conditions we were presented with. Not knowing how many takes McGill would play on each song, we did not know if we would get one shot to film it or five. This proved difficult when trying to accrue long, medium, and close-ups for future editing. Although I was trying to capture the reality of the situation I wanted to produce something that was attractive and interesting. I wanted to create something that hopefully someone would want to watch. Without getting too deep into philosophical discussion, most art is produced to share and make some sort of impact. A single static shot rarely is able to hold someone's interest for very long and as a result we needed to vary our shot selection as best we could.

Issues of light, sound, and battery life were an ever-present issue. Not having formal training in film production, I had to adapt and find solutions to these problems. McGill preferred dark rooms while rehearsing or preforming; this does not bode well for the image quality. When you increase the gain on the camera, the image becomes very noisy. Too much noise and the film shot become worthless. Balancing the array of instruments that performed with McGill, depending on his ensemble, also proved problematic at times. The result was that some audio recordings in the early years are not of the quality that would allow them to be used. The importance of quality audio motivated the purchase of the Zoom H2 Digital Audio Recorder. Without a script we did

not know what or how long we were going to be filming. Still adhering to the run-and-gun philosophy we just followed the action. At times our battery power inhibited our ability to capture everything. Although rarely, filming would have to stop so we could recharge the batteries. The show continued on and those possible recordings are lost.

After a few months of shooting I began to question what I was capturing. Concern over whether or not watching someone at work or at home paying bills would be interesting to a viewer began to creep into my mind. While filming performances or time spent making a record in the studio was full of compelling action, when those events were over the day to day became mundane. Although I didn't want to inject myself into McGill's reality, I realized that without asking him a question or invading his space I would not have a story to tell. Unknowingly my filmmaking style shifted from direct cinema to cinema verite. Instead of observing, I was now using invasive techniques to extract truth from events. McGill and I began to have sit-down interviews where I would ask him questions about his music, relationships, touring, performing, etc. In order to get what I wanted, I had to extract it from McGill, because he had proven that he was not going to simply pontificate on such matters. Still, even with my presence in McGill's world I maintained that objectivity was still being maintained. I was simply pulling the truth out of the situation, not shaping the outcomes. I was not telling McGill what to say or what to do, just asking some probing questions to get the action started. I would still remain a fly-on-the-wall, but if necessary I would ask for an explanation.

When reviewing footage from the first few months I also began to notice that the shots I was capturing were too distant and disconnected from the action. Establishing shots have their place, but I needed to get the camera closer to the action. The audio was

at times difficult to hear, so again I found that I needed to be closer to the action. As a result I began to vary my approach for filming. I would incrementally move closer to the action as the subjects being filmed appeared more comfortable with my presence. By tempering the camera into the action I was able to just become the kid with the movie camera. As filming continued, the subjects began to open up more and more as a trust was established. If McGill or his band mates asked, I would explain what the project was and what I hoped to achieve from the production. Just as I had told McGill in the past, I said that I simply wanted to capture the life as it happened. The more I was around, the more I became part of the scenery, or at least that is my interpretation of the production. Once again my lack of scholarly knowledge concerning documentary film allowed for my production methods to adapt and change depending on the circumstance. When it was warranted I would remain stationary and film from a distance, run-and-gun to capture the action, remain silent, or engage the subjects.

At times even when I would not inject myself into the action, I would be dragged into it by McGill or one of his band mates. In order to build trust and to allow them to open up to me, I had to at times socialize with the subjects I was filming. So when I was asked a question or acknowledged by the subject while filming, I responded. I couldn't be rude or stay mute. I was a guest in their world trying not to be noticed; I had to be affable, agreeable, and never contentious. If I was told to stop filming or if someone, through his or her body language, seemed uncomfortable, I wouldn't push the issue. Again, given my precarious position, I did not want to burn a bridge. I had to sacrifice the short-term loss of content, for the dividends I hoped would be reaped later.

The censorship of access is but one element where narrative content was lost. It was extremely apparent that at times self-censorship was holding McGill and his band mates back from lifting their facades to reveal their true selves. In an interview with McGill he said,

> There is always a learning curve when getting comfortable when talking to that thing [camera]. It wasn't easy at first. Now, when you turn that thing on I don't even really think about it being there even, I don't really even look at ever…now I can do that, that doesn't get in the way. I am worried that it probably got in the way, but I don't know. What can I do? (April 2013)

Although McGill eventually became acclimated to the presence of the camera, his concern that it may have impeded the truth and reality that was captured early in the project illustrates the disruptive influence the camera possesses. Disputes that were coming to a boil were cooled as to not make anyone look bad on camera. Tongues were held as to not say an overtly disparaging remark about a fellow musician. I could have demanded more access from McGill, but I risked loosing the entire production.

Given the agreement between McGill and me I decided to take what I was given. This choice inevitably would affect the objectivity of the project. If I was not provided access to the truth and reality of the event, how could I possibly objectively capture it? Unfortunately this censorship came when events were just becoming interesting. Often narratives that could have been told are full of holes because of censored access. Much frustration has been felt when reflecting about what I know, but the camera does not. I chose to accept McGill's censorship, because I did not know when production would cease. Given my status as a filmmaker, I had very little power in the matter.

Unfortunately holes in potential narratives were also created by my inability to follow McGill at all times. As the months and years went on, I was unable to be present for every major event that took place. McGill would go out on tour, but I was unable to

attend because of available space in the van or scheduling conflicts. Although I was

enjoying filming McGill rehearse and perform, I was not getting compensated for my

time. I had a job, so I was unavailable during the day and could not leave for weeks at a

time to capture McGill as he toured or recorded a new record. I was locked in Chicago. In

an interview with McGill he expressed concern with this issue. He said,

> There's been a lot of things that we missed, that were big things. I never expected
> this to be flattering. You capture what you capture at the time; it's just
> embarrassing to be captured at a time when you don't feel like you were very
> good yet and then when you get better, your like it would have been nice to
> capture the making of this new record. I mean who wants to watch a documentary
> of somebody that's average? (April 2013)

The issue of access became a major issue when trying to capture the reality of the

situation. If I don't capture an event as it happens how do I address that hole in the

narrative? Continuity issues materialized as the subjects discussed events that the camera

was not present for. The editing process would become extremely difficult as I worked to

negotiate such issues. At this point in the production, even though the issue of access

deterred me I still believed that objectivity, truth, and reality were still attainable goals.

To compensate for this I gave McGill a small Sony Handycam to capture events

that I might miss. Without being very specific I simply told him to film what he could

and that anything was better than nothing. He accommodated my request and actually

captured quite a bit of tour footage. Unfortunately his preoccupation with performing hurt

the image and audio quality. The result is about forty hours of footage with only about

fifteen hours of usable film. Ultimately only four scenes that McGill captured made it

into the film. During the "Worry 'Bout a Thing" tour montage I used McGill shoveling

dirt, staring over a crop of soy or corn, and running down a gravel road. Unfortunately

much of the footage was too inside, lacked context, and didn't fit into the film's narrative.

Ideally I would have the time and money to be present for every waking moment, but it is not practical. Events happened off camera and they must be addressed to maintain the narrative. Those choices made by the filmmaker are inevitably subjective. It was at this point that all hope of objectivity was lost; I just hadn't realized it yet. As time continued on, my presence became more and more infrequent. I still filmed rehearsals, performances, and interviews, but rarely did I just film McGill going about his everyday life. My availability had grown thin as my own life began to develop from a college graduate to now working on a career in teaching. My skepticism about whether anyone would want to see McGill going about his everyday life made it easier to forgo such engagements.

Even with my limited academic understanding of documentary film, I could see the individuals being filmed changing in the presence of the camera. Subjects acting one way when the cameras were rolling and another way when they were off posed quite the dilemma for my project. How could I capture reality, if the reality was being altered simply by the presence of the camera? As much as I tried to hide and blend in, the camera is an obtrusive object that is difficult to mask. Even after taking a more aggressive approach with the camera and getting into people's personal space until my presence appeared to be ignored, it was impossible to tell if the subjects filmed were being real or simply performing for the camera. While in the studio McGill and the engineer, Manny Sanchez, got into a minor dispute over the length of the session.

> Sanchez: "Cameron, were you really being upset with me? I'm kidding… I'm acting."
> McGill: "Oh. Well this isn't a movie."
> Sanchez: "Oh really? When'd they tell you?"

Although I had not directed Sanchez in anyway and had only spoke with him to introduce myself and ask if it was acceptable for me to film, he still altered his actions for the camera. Even if I did everything within my power to remain an objective observer, I would never have control of the subjects that I was filming. The mere presence of the camera is enough to change people's behavior.

Another example of the camera's presence becoming an issue occurred in the studio. Even though McGill was focused on making the record, his awareness of the camera was still apparent. In an attempt to limit my intrusion on the process I placed a static camera on a tripod and allowed it to capture whatever occurred in the iso-booth. Every fifteen to twenty minutes I would reorient the camera to capture a different angle of the action. McGill was struggling to get the song "Minor Suite" the way he wanted it. His frustration level was growing with every incomplete take. As I went to the booth to change the tape McGill asked, "can you get that thing outta here?" Even though I was not there and the camera was left static, McGill was still affected by the camera's presence. Contrary to my initial belief, the sheer presence of the camera made it impossible to capture the truth and the reality of the experience regardless of the objectivity of the filmmaker.

Putting Practice in Theory: Media and Cinema Studies

After following McGill for five years I enrolled in a MA program in Media and Cinema Studies at DePaul University. The two events appear related, but they are not. I enrolled in the program to expand my teaching repertoire, not to improve the film I was making. Documentary production was becoming old-hat for me. By this time I had

learned many practical applications to achieve the right shot, sound quality, or best possible lighting. While in school I learned a great many things that I had never considered when following McGill, but some of the content existed in the theory and had no place in practice. If my goal was to be unobtrusive and capture the truth and reality of the situation, the ideal lighting, sound, and shots were not always available. When I began the program at DePaul in the fall of 2011, I was still pursuing the objective documentary. Even if I was injecting myself into the action to ask questions or filming at a close proximity to the subjects, what I was filming was still real and truthful. I was not directing the action; I was simply capturing the moment as it occurred. After reviewing the pertinent scholarship on documentary film I slowly realized that my pursuit of objectivity, truth, and capturing reality were unattainable endeavors.

Before taking a Documentary Production and a Documentary Studies course I was unaware of any conflict within the genre's scholarship or between practitioners. I assumed that documentary films were non-fiction and as a result objective. Like the soft sciences, scholars of history and anthropology, documentarians observed and reported. The results were not based on opinion, but on the facts available. Merriam-Webster defines documentary as "of, relating to, or employing documentation in literature or art; *broadly*: factual, objective <a *documentary* film of the war>." After immersing myself in the scholarship surrounding documentary films, I found that this definition has been highly problematized within the generic scholarship and practice.

Although when I began production on *Cameron McGill: Dark Times* I believed that I was embarking on an objective documentary, my devotion to the idea began to crack as I became more aware of pertinent scholarship. According to Mamber to achieve

truth and capture reality "the filmmaker acts as an observer, attempting not to alter the situation he witnesses any more than he must simply by being there" (p.2). In theory Mamber's claim may function, but in practice the filmmaker inevitably alters the situation by his mere presence. Drew claimed that by filming real people in uncontrolled situations during a crisis moment, the filmmaker's presence could be mitigated; but if uncontrolled how could the filmmaker know when a crisis moment would likely take place? To have that kind of insight would contradict the premise of the assertion.

While filming McGill at his home as he was paying bills, checking his email, and going about his daily routines, the situation was real and uncontrolled, but the crisis moment never occurred. What transpired was an odd series of events where I filmed silently for hours as McGill worked. Although I was trying to capture the truth and reality of McGill's life, I couldn't help but question the entertainment value in what I was shooting. The goal was to juxtapose McGill's music with his life off stage. According to Mamber uncontrolled situations are the road to objectivity, but practically attaining something worth presenting could take years. In an ideal world that would be acceptable, but to wait years cost not only money but also time. Even with the funding or equipment to constantly film McGill, the editor would still have to cut scenes to construct a narrative, resulting in a subjective documentary. As a result I began to inject myself into the events to precipitate drama or an event. This transition took me from a direct cinema style to a Rouch version of cinema verite. Rouch had hoped to extract truth and realism from an event by evoking it from his subjects. If McGill was not going to give up his thoughts willingly, I intended to elicit a response. Even when asking questions of McGill

and becoming more aggressive with the camera, my motivation was still to capture the truth and reality of the situation as objectively as possible.

I began to have sit-down interviews with McGill in order to clarify events that had taken already place, those that were filmed as well as those that were not captured. The goal was to achieve an "approximation towards reality" (Chanan p.55). If I could not capture the reality as it happened I would use McGill's voiceover from the interviews along with pertinent b-roll to convey reality by proxy. This approximation intended to stay true to the original, however it was now moderated through McGill and my own recollection of events. This interpretation of reality leaves objectivity dead on arrival. I was trying to capture the reality of the event and give the audience the feeling of "being there," but it was my understanding of events, not an unbiased account of what transpired.

My interpretation of the event is inherently subjective. According to Ward, "The 'event' remembered is never whole, never fully represented, never isolated in the past alone but only accessible through a memory which resides…in the reverberations between events" (Ward p.15). To some extent Ward's claim proves valid in my experience. Even the most seasoned filmmaker can never wholly capture the full truth and reality of an event. When filming I was only able to capture what the camera and mic were able to record. If the audio was too quiet or the light was too low, the scenes potentially would not make the final cut. Events and conversations that took place off camera were lost. The issue I take with Ward's claim is in his theory of a "new truth" being created by the filmmaker. This new truth is fabricated and constructed by the

filmmaker. What good is truth if it is mediated through a subjective lens? This so-called truth is nothing more than a wolf in sheep's clothing.

Regardless of what the filmmaker is able to capture, the issue still persists of the apparatus used to record the event. According to Chapman, "The camera is incapable of simply delivering an unmediated reproduction of truth: the camera itself is by definition an instrument of visual mediation" (p.4). Although skeptical at the start of my project, through production I found that Chapman's claim is entirely accurate. The camera has the potential to manipulate the lighting and sound in a way that at times is inconsistent with the event captured. During filming McGill preferred to play in dim lighting, which is terrible for the image quality, as a result I would have to manipulate the exposure and ISO on the camera in order to capture the poorly lit event. Although my eyes were able to adjust to what was taking place, the camera was inhibited by its limited capabilities. What the camera captured was not the same as what actually occurred; every event had to be constructed through the camera lens.

Everything involved in the production process is a subjective choice. According to Emile de Antonio, "Whenever you point a camera, you make a statement. Whenever you cut a piece of film, you make a statement" (Lellner & Streible, p.214). Even if the goal of your production is to not make a statement, the absence of a statement is a statement. It begins with the choice of subject and the motivation behind said choice. When I began pursuing this project with McGill, I already had a number of preconceived notions for the narrative I wanted to capture. The general storyline of a struggling musician working to make music laid the groundwork for the narrative. Although I did not know if would capture such a story, I had an interest in what made McGill tick.

Similarly Drew focused on projects that had an inherent crisis structure. According to Mamber, the "crisis structure" is a technique of filming events with an inherent element of drama. Through the crisis structure subjects would ignore the filmmaker and the camera because they were concerned more with the events unfolding before them. It is through the crisis structure that the filmmaker could achieve objectivity (p.115-118). Although Drew and Mamber believe this technique promoted objectivity, the filmmaker's choice of subject and when to film fundamentally cast a subjective veil over the film. Perhaps not fully aware of what would take place, the search for a crisis moment allows subjectivity to creep into the process.

By its definition objectivity is "the ability to perceive or describe something without being influenced by personal emotions or prejudices" (Merriam-Webster). When filmmakers are involved in the production process subjective emotions and prejudices are unavoidable. Choices must be made and each choice pursued, which leaves countless others in its wake. Answers to questions like who to follow, when to film, how to film, etc. all result in a subjective film. In my own experience, the days and events I chose to film excluded others from the project. To capture the truth and reality of a situation requires extensive context to understand and interpret a truth and reality that don't exist. Each individual has his or her own perception of truth and reality, so to capture one all-encompassing truth is an insurmountable task, it simply cannot be done. The filmmaker throughout production is simply chasing a ghost that cannot be captured. The most basic elements of the process, the shots, are inherently subjective. As the filmmaker, I have to decide where to setup and what types of shots to film. The choice of what to film and what not to film precludes truth and reality from being achieved.

During the production of *Dark Times* I was continuously faced with these subjective choices. For the vast duration of the production I was a one-man crew and I had to make a choice about what or who to film with my one camera and one mic. Given that the film was about McGill I chose to predominately follow him and allow the band mates to go relatively free from the camera's gaze. As a result much of the collaboration that went on between McGill and his band mates was not captured, because I simply could not capture both perspectives of the discussions. This is evident in the film when McGill is discussing the lyrics for the song "Sold the Rest." He and his band mates, Katie Bracken and Darren Garvey, are discussing the grammar choices of using the conjunction "I's." McGill speaking to someone off-screen debates the merits of his choice stating, "What? Like I was or when I am…I's…I's…that's totally legitimate" (March 2007). Given the circumstances I was unable to capture all perspectives of the discussion, I chose to stay on McGill, loosing the actual dialogue that was occurring. Even if I had multiple cameras and mics it would still be impossible to capture the event objectively, because the filmmaker would have to determine the shots filmed and editor would have to construct the event from the multiple tapes shot. Once again the subjective choices of the filmmaker determine what to film, what to cut, etc.

Being under the impression that documentaries were objective, non-fiction, and that the camera couldn't lie, these revelations came as quite a shock to me. During discussions in my documentary studies course I fought for the notion of the objective filmmaker, always to find myself wading into subjectivity. Even if the filmmaker and the camera could somehow achieve objectivity, the subjects filmed present a whole slew of issues. As Chapman argues, "the presence of the camera is likely to give it a different

inflection, resulting in a level of performance by social actions which indicates that the camera has an influence, if still with in the parameters of real life" (Chapman p.15). The self-censorship that became apparent when the camera was turned off was at times the bane of my existence. The most prominent example of this occurred nearly every show that I filmed. While warming up McGill prepared his voice by gargling tea or water and going through a cadence of high to low pitch sounds. He would do these wailing noises into his arm as to not bring attention to himself. This preparation evidently made McGill self conscious because he would continuously avoid doing them while the camera was on. If the camera were rolling he would leave the room. If I followed, he would go into a room and close the door behind him. If I continued to pursue the shot he would ask me not to film it. Perhaps not an essential moment to miss, but it is emblematic of McGill's self-censorship. Although it was apart of his process, he wanted to keep it out of the camera's gaze.

As a filmmaker trying to capture an objective reality, viewing one thing on camera and another when it is away is extremely problematic. Two narratives were being constructed, one when the camera was rolling and another when the camera was off. At times these narratives would overlap, but the more provocative and interesting events generally occurred behind closed doors or when the camera was away. An example of this would be when McGill was going through a falling out with one of his band mates. During an interview I had asked McGill to explain what had happened to lead to the breakup and he was less than forthcoming. I continued to ask probing questions about the event until McGill told me that he did not want to discuss it on camera. Although obviously upset by the matter he censored his responses and refused to provide the

camera with details of the falling out. Once the interview ended I asked McGill about what happened between he and his band mate, and although still choosing his words carefully, he told me that the person in question wanted more money for playing and touring and was upset with McGill's managing of the band. Although alcohol allowed for some events to slip past the censorship board, the next day I was asked to delete what I shot. Of course I agreed, but still have the tape. The problem that results is that if McGill has final cut, then if I ever wanted to distribute the film, I would be unable to use that material.

Maysles explains the relationship between filmmakers and subjects, "if you're trying your best to understand them, that's another way of saying you like them. So much of it hinges on your ability to empathize" (Stubbs p. 6). Getting too close to the subjects being filmed can cause issues with objectivity. "Sometimes the director may feel special sympathy towards a certain character, maybe because he or she has be through a formidable experience or set of circumstances in the presence of the crew" (Chapman p.113). Even as I write this thesis paper Chapman's claims ring true. Realizing that this paper will be made public I am careful not to expose too much of what I witnessed or captured. During an interview in April of 2013 when reflecting on the film McGill said,

> I am just being honest with you that I am really scared to watch it. I have no doubt that you filmed it incredibly well and that your editing skills are great and all of that. But, it's nothing to do with you, it's me being really scarred to watch me…Nobody wants to come off as a douche bag, let alone nobody wants to come off thinking that they were just being themselves and then later looking back on that and being like 'I hate that.' Nobody wants to feel that way about themselves and I am scared that that's how I'll feel about it. Even if I was just trying to be true and tell my thing and do what I was doing. If the truth is that I look back and I am like 'What a fucking douche bag.' That's depressing, nobody wants to feel that way about themselves. (April 2013)

McGill trusted me and provided me access to his life for over seven years. Even though I am a filmmaker and I wanted the film to be objective, true, and real, it is challenging to get past the relationship, if you can call it that, which I developed with McGill.

Throughout production, my documentary paradigm was in a constant state of flux. What began as the observational mode[5] transitioned into the participatory mode[6] and continued into the performative mode[7] of documentary filmmaking (Nichols p.99-100). This shift would continue during post-production. During production I tried my best to keep our relationship as filmmaker and subject, as opposed to friends. Inevitably though, a friendship developed. Over seven years I was present for a number of important events in McGill's life. As band mates, girl friends, and others left his life, I remained. I tried to take the position of an ethnographer filming in the wild. Although I still try to maintain some distance between us, growing close to the subject has led to issues during post-production when constructing the final product. It is through post-production, where the inability to find objectivity in documentaries crystalized for me.

Splice Here: Objectivity on the Cutting Room Floor

When I began editing the film I used a borrowed copy of *Final Cut Express HD*. Using my MacBook Pro, the cost of post-production was quite modest. Unlike in the past my editing was completely digital. I filmed using MiniDV tapes, so all I had to do was

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[5] Observational Mode: emphasizes a direct engagement with the everyday life of subjects as observed by an unobtrusive camera (Nichols p.34).
[6] Participatory Mode: emphasizes the interaction between filmmaker and subject. Filming takes place by means of interviews or other forms of even more direct involvement (Nichols p.34).
[7] Performative Mode: emphasizes the subjective or expressive aspect of the filmmaker's own engagement with the subject and an audience's responsiveness to this engagement. Rejects notions of objectivity in favor of evocation and affect (Nichols p.34).

import them into *Final Cut* through a firewire. I didn't need an editing suite or rent

anything to complete the film, everything was readily available. Like production, I

learned *Final Cut* through trial and error. I didn't require any formal training, simply the

patience to figure out the subtle nuances of the software. When issues presented

themselves I could use the Internet to find a solution. The barriers of entry are extremely

low. As previously mentioned, nearly anyone with the motivation can make a

professional looking film and distribute it through *YouTube* or *Vimeo*. New media has

had an egalitarian effect on the hierarchy of filmmaking. In the 21st century everyone

potentially has a voice and is able to express themselves globally. In the past I may not

have been able to produce a documentary film and contribute to discussions within the

genre, now the process entirely feasible.

Although I am still filming McGill, when I began editing the film in January of

2013 I still believed that objectivity, truth, and reality were attainable. In the early stages

of post-production I still held out hope that through some miracle I could defy the

scholars and the thousand pound gorilla in the room. Slowly this devotion to objectivity,

truth, and reality eroded. My preconceived notions that began when I first pursued the

project manifested themselves. I chose to film McGill, because I thought that he would

prove to be an interesting subject, whose music and demeanor interested me. I

constructed the narrative of a starving artist who struggled to survive for his music. The

term "starving artist" faded during production, but the premise remained the same. I

wanted to capture a musician pursuing his passion and throwing social pressures of a

white picket fence to the wind. No matter how hard I tried to allow the footage to come to

me organically, I saw everything in relation the narrative already constructed in my mind. The filmmaker cannot dispose of preconceived notions and cultural framework.

Although the filmmaker can do everything within his power to pursue objectivity during production, editing can leave objectivity on the cutting room floor. In practice the ability to capture reality just as it occurred is unattainable. As previously discussed, a single all encompassing reality does not exist in film. Chapman explains,

> Real events are fairly chaotic, and there are usually a million opinions about whatever the issues is that is being discussed, and once you are in the process of constructing a film and editing all of that chaos, you invariably start to shape it to your own view. (p.49)

When trying to construct a coherent and engaging film, the real events are rarely captured in their entirety. Chapman's critique of subjectivity within production and post-production rang true in my experience. In the film when McGill is in the studio assessing the "ba ba bas" on the song "Lose Americans" I had to choose what to film as McGill and the engineer went back and forth discussing each song. Through the chaos I was left with about three hours of footage. From those three hours I had to shape the film into a cohesive event that lasted all of one minute and thirty seconds. In order to construct this seemingly linear event I had to splice two different events together to create the illusion of a consistent event. This manipulation of the tape was done again in the film during the song "Ghost of New York." Since I only had one camera and one mic I was unable to shoot both a medium and a close-up shot. Through the chaos of live filming I would not get another chance to film the song using different shots. Luckily in the live version of the song they sing the final verse multiple times. As a result I was able to splice two separate shots together to create both a medium and a close-up of McGill and his band

mates harmonizing on the song. Issues in creating a coherent narrative also proved difficult when trying to stay true to the chronology of actual events.

Although I had intended the film to play out chronologically, comprehension of the narrative proved to be difficult to ascertain. The context of conversations or actions was often absent from the footage. The result was events that had to be manipulated or cut completely. An example of this is a scene that I had to cut because the audio was not clear and thus the context of the conversation was lost. While rehearsing one of McGill's band mates commented on his guitar that read, "This Machine Kills Hipsters," an homage to Woody Guthrie. He told McGill, "You better want to be carful with that guitar and that haircut" (March 2007). This initial statement precipitated a discussion that lead to McGill explaining that, "some person sent a comment that was like, 'I like your suicide machine'" (March 2007). The discussion reveals how McGill perceives himself and how others see him. His reactions to the comment showed a sense of humor that he rarely reveals before the camera. While performing McGill generally appears stoic with a hint of anxiety. To see him crack a smile or laugh provides a more complex view of who he really is. I felt that this candid discussion would have been great to include in the film, but unfortunately the poor audio quality at the beginning of the clip made understanding the discussion extremely difficult. Since the initial statement came from off camera, it passes unnoticed if you're not prepared for it.

Another example of when reality needed to be manipulated can be found when McGill was practicing the untitled song about Omaha in his bedroom. In the second verse of the song McGill's voice had a sort of lisp that distorted the lyrics and disrupted the flow of the song. This glitch only happened once during the song, but unfortunately I was

only able to capture McGill playing the song once. Elements of this untitled song were appropriated into what would become "Ghost of New York" and McGill never played that version again. As a result I chose to cut the error out and seamlessly unite the first and the third verses together. This scene was important in illustrating McGill's process in developing a song. In an attempt to accurately construct McGill's reality, I chose to manipulate what actually occurred. Unfortunately, I discovered that action inevitably resulted in a catch 22. Issues of image and audio quality make it difficult to simply let the footage to play out as it did in reality. Choices had to be made in order to construct the narrative.

Mamber referencing *Don't Look Back* asserts that, "the film appears to adhere rigorously to the irrelevant, refusing to treat Dylan as a 'documentary subject,' someone whose past must be explained, whose present motivations must be explored, and whose significance must be established" (p.178). This may function with a subject like Bob Dylan, but McGill does not carry the same intrigue and credentials. In order to maintain an interesting film, it is my job to provide the viewer with a reason to care for or engage with the subject. To achieve this, certain choices were made to reconstruct chronology and event order. The story must be constructed with a beginning, middle, and end.

A narrative has to be constructed and unfortunately real life doesn't always roll itself out in a neat little package. Often fragmented within multiple events, the story could is found. My job was more like an anthropologist reconstructing a skeleton, rather than simply laying down a pile of bones. I did my best to recreate events as they occurred, but this proved extremely challenging. I constructed the narrative to mirror reality; unfortunately this did not align with the way events actually occurred. In the film,

Cameron McGill: Dark Times the structure followed: (1) McGill interview (2) McGill practicing, rehearsing, and performing (3) McGill living (4) McGill recording a record (5) McGill editing the record (6) McGill touring (7) McGill back to writing, practicing, and doing it all over again. Each of these events are not a single uninterrupted experience, but a compilation of events that took place over the seven-year period. Events from 2007 are cut with events from 2008 to create the whole experience of a song. The footage was just not available to have a whole event play out in its entirety. With over three hundred and fifty hours of footage, edits had to be made. Subjective choices had to decide what was in and what is cut from the final product. Other issues persist to make chronology and objectivity erode throughout post-production.

During sit down interviews McGill would respond to questions, but at times his answers would be long and drawn out. Elements at the beginning of his response and the end would be relevant, but the body of his response would prove to be tangential and unnecessary for the film. In the editing room I could have allowed his entire response to be shown, but this caused early drafts of the film to drag and viewers to lose interest in the film. I had to sacrifice objectivity and an adherence to replicating reality in order to keep the film interesting. Ultimately I want to produce something that I could be proud to show. I can honestly say it is not about money; it's the self-satisfaction of producing something that someone would be interested to watch. To achieve this certain liberties had to be taken with the footage. The first scene of the film is a composite of an entire evening of questions. Allowing the entire evening to play out would be impractical, resulting in a film that was hours long. I subjectively had to pick and choose which points were necessary in order to communicate a clear narrative. Similar to Graham's assertion,

"If film is an art, its purpose is not merely to record, but to select, organize, and alchemize what is recorded" (O'Connell p.159). In a perfect world McGill would have provided concise answers, but when filming in an uncontrolled situation you take what you can get. Although I was attempting to recreate what really took place, it was all through my subjective lens.

The shots selected for use during post-production are the preference of the filmmaker or editor, depending on who is responsible for cutting the film. The filmmaker's subjective preference leaves objectivity on the cutting room floor. When cutting *Cameron McGill: Dark Times* I had the choice of using over twenty different songs when choosing to focus on McGill practicing, rehearsing, recording, and performing. With such a selection, I chose the songs that I most enjoyed while filming. Another criteria narrowed down my selection, what songs had the most usable footage. Without the image I was unable to use it in the final cut of the film. Even then selecting from usable footage, I had to choose from hours of similar shots from different times and locations. How does one objectively choose which shots to use?

During post-production I also found myself having to make choices regarding my position in the film. Even as my documentary paradigm shifted from observational to participatory I had still hoped to exclude myself from the final cut of the film. Once again the narrative precipitated change to my once steadfast intentions. During the sit-down interviews, McGill and I would for all intents and purposes be having a conversation and occasionally McGill would make some very poignant comments. Unfortunately these comments would be in the context of a conversation where McGill was addressing me. As a result, in order to use the footage from the interview I chose to insert myself in the

film. This can be found when McGill is reflecting on his life and making music he says, "I'm loosing my fucking mind. I wouldn't be sitting on the floor of a fucking record store talking to you about this. There is just nowhere else to be" (*Dark Times*). During this voiceover the audience is able to see my hand come from behind the camera and pass McGill a beer. This gives the documentary a reflexive quality that takes the film even further away from my original intent.

My personal preference dictated what events and shots I put in the film. Shots that I felt looked pretty or caught my fancy were used while others were discarded. Perhaps it was the framing, the lighting, or the action captured, but it was all based on my subjective criteria. Songs that I didn't necessarily enjoy were left out of the final product. Although McGill had a number of songs that you could call singles, I decided what songs were chosen. As a result out of his four records, I only used *Ghost of New York, Sold the Rest, Worry Bout a Thing,* and an excerpt from an unreleased piano medley. It would simply be impractical to show every song. The project has gone on for too long to achieve what Mamber and Drew promoted in the 1960s and 1970s. Although Carroll believes that objectivity *is* attainable, I reject the idea. The filmmaker has to make choices and each choice is subjective. Objectivity is an all or nothing production. You can pursue a relative truth and give the viewer a sense of reality, but these are through a subjective lens. You cannot be kind of impartial; you're either in or out.

Last Words

My approach to this thesis project was to provide the background and rationale behind my view of objectivity within the documentary genre. I began the project with little knowledge of the debate within documentary film structures and practices

concerning objectivity, truth, and reality. Unaware, I believed, that documentaries are nonfiction and thus objective and true to reality. Once becoming familiar with the discussion I continue to fight for objectivity. I was simply under the assumption based on "the realist tradition [that] has encouraged the viewer to assume that unproblematic access to the truth can be achieved in a documentary" (Chapman p.4). When I set out to make a documentary my goal was to be an objective observer who captured reality as it happened.

After actually engaging in the process I found that without injecting myself into the action with a question or the camera's presence, the film lacked drama. Unknowingly I pursued both the direct cinema and cinema verite styles of documentary filmmaking. Although now more involved in the action, I refused to direct or guide the subjects I was filming. All of this was done under the pretense that I was able to achieve an objective documentary. Slowly I realized that such an undertaking was impossible. Every step of the filmmaking process I found subjectivity. The subject chosen, the anticipated storylines, when filming would occur, the shots selected, the censorship of access, the self-censorship of the subjects, the choice of cuts and reordering of shots during post-production, the mere presence of the camera, etc. I was pursuing truth and reality, but through my own subjective lens. It is impossible to turn off your mind and simply capture reality. Choices must be made during production to capture the necessary shots in order to make a film that is worth viewing. Choices must be made during post-production to cut a film down from its original length. The medium itself inhibits objectivity. Although the camera lens is physically capturing the images, the choices made by the filmmaker while

filming and editing result in a subjective representation of reality from the filmmaker's point-of-view.

I began this project in search of the objective documentary. Throughout the production, even as it became abundantly clear that objectivity, truth, and reality were lost causes, I still pursued them. Struggling to overcome the definition of the genre I could not comprehend the paradox of nonfiction. Like a child who discovered that Santa wasn't real, I simply couldn't accept the truth. It was not until the eleventh hour as I pieced together this thesis paper that I came to terms with the fact that the objective filmmaker is only a figment of my imagination. Even in a perfect world where I could have had unlimited access to funds, equipment, and the subject, I would still have been unable to capture truth and reality objectively. There is not a single all encompassing truth or reality to capture and the filmmaker cannot be objective. These elements of documentary filmmaking simply do not exist. When it comes to objectivity, truth, and reality; there is no difference between a fiction and nonfiction film, accept that the fiction film concedes its fabrications.

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