

**The Making of *Annabelle Blue* (2014):  
a Peircean semiotic analysis of the creative process**

**Carol Porteous**

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Department of Communication  
Faculty of Arts  
University of Ottawa

## ABSTRACT

The paper discusses how the semiotic relationships involved in the process of creating a documentary, interconnect and affect the documentary's truth claims from the perspective of Peirce's semiotic theory. To do this, I created an autobiographical film called *Annabelle Blue* and then analysed the experience. The making of *Annabelle Blue* involved a number of representations, each of which involved the interplay of iconic, indexical and symbolic elements and each of which had a substantial influence on how the process continued. It is my contention that documentary's truth claims must be evaluated in light of the assumption that documentary representation is a dynamic, creative process involving the jostling for position between semiotic aspects at every level.

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## Introduction

John Grierson's definition of documentary as the "creative treatment of actuality" (qt. in Saunders, 2010, p.12), holds within its few words all the paradox, tension and vibrancy that still drives documentary practice and fuels debate over the fact/fiction divide. Documentary exists somewhere in the middle of the two terms: without 'creative treatment' what is left, at best, is a newsreel, and without 'actuality' it is fiction. Debate on the balance of these components can be inflammatory as Brian Winston's (2008) provocative comment on Grierson's definition suggests: "The supposition that any 'actuality' is left after 'creative treatment' can now be seen as being at best naïve and at worst a mark of duplicity" (p.14). Although documentary's main difference from fiction is generally thought to be its reference to the real, the nature of that relation is complex, especially when the role of the filmmaker is brought into the fray. The meaning of the terms in Grierson's definition are not clear or obvious even though much of the debate rests on their interpretation. Creativity is a value that carries a wide range of associations, from uncomplicated ingenuity through artful deception, to wild, unbridled fantasy; and while actuality appears to be, for all practical purposes, self-evident, its correlation to truth and the conflation of actuality with its representation renders it a much less obvious term.

One of the trends in documentary since the 1990s is towards subjective, expressive films that converge in the middle of the continuum between documentary and fiction, and further confuse the whole issue of truth in documentary (Bruzzi, 2000, Renov, 2004). These are multi-layered, complex films that use a wide range of film techniques at their disposal to impart a rich sense of experience beyond the bare facts. Applied to the films in the middle, the very label of 'documentary' can seem ironical, a filmic characteristic that can be manipulated as effectively as jump cuts or camera angles. With a wink and a nudge, these documentaries reflexively proclaim

that nothing they say is the truth. For this reason Bruzzi (2000) contends that documentary is inherently performative. Many recent documentaries do not hide the paradox of documentary, but instead incorporate the prickly questions of truth and referentiality into the film itself. As the most subjective of documentaries, autobiographical documentary plays right into this paradox. While traditional documentary values objectivity as a basic tenet of truth, autobiographical documentary could be considered to be the most truthful of all, as it is "straight from the horse's mouth." And yet, self-reference can create a circular loop that raises more questions than it answers. The notion of a 'self' is not clear and furthermore, it relies on memory, which is very complex in itself and, according to studies, quite unreliable.

Using Grierson's definition of documentary as a springboard, this paper explores how the semiotic relationships involved in the process of creating an autobiographical documentary relate to each other and affect the documentary's truth claims from the perspective of Peirce's semiotic theory. To do this, I created an autobiographical film called *Annabelle Blue* and then analysed the experience. The creation of *Annabelle Blue* involved a number of representations, each of which involved the interplay of iconic, indexical and symbolic elements and each of which had a decisive influence on how the process continued. It is my contention that documentary's truth claims must be evaluated in light of the assumption that documentary representation is a dynamic, creative process involving the jostling for position between semiotic aspects at every level.

### ***Methodology***

The study was conducted in two phases. The first phase was the production of an autobiographical film based on my memories of my childhood. The second phase was the theoretical analysis of the experience of making *Annabelle Blue* within the framework of Peirce's

semiotic theory. The study combines practical and theoretical components and is therefore in a propitious position to analyze the issues from a unique angle. Peirce's semiotic theory directly addresses the issues in question in this study, namely, the relation of a representation to its object and how meaning develops and grows in logical, triadic connection with that relation. Peirce's semiotic theory is triadic because it involves the relation between the object, representamen and interpretant, and thus it provides a counterbalance to the old dualistic debate of the division of fact and fiction in the documentary genre, and was therefore instrumental in framing an alternative perspective.<sup>1</sup>

The Making of *Annabelle Blue* is a qualitative study employing the autoethnographic method. Autoethnography is a natural fit with the present research that aims to explore the fact/fiction divide and truth claims of autobiographical documentary through the experience of actually producing one. The very purpose of autoethnography is to draw on personal experience to extend societal or cultural knowledge (Wall, 2008; Ellis, 2009). This method provides a means to bridge personal, practical experience and theoretical analysis, without subjugating either one. Ellis (2009) writes: "As an autoethnographer...I am the person at the intersection of the personal and the cultural, thinking and observing as an ethnographer and writing and describing as a storyteller" (p.13). In actual practice the method belongs to the family of narrative inquiry where data, in the form of interviews, observational notes and documents such as photographs, video and correspondence are collected and then "'restored' into a framework that makes sense" (Creswell, 2007. p.56). Ellis & Bochner (2000) describe the autoethnographic process as shifting back and forth between "an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of [the researcher's] personal experience; then, [the researcher] look[s] inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract and resist cultural

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<sup>1</sup> Peirce's theory of semiotic is outlined on pages 24-27.

interpretation" (p.739). Because autoethnography incorporates micro and macro perspectives, this method can provide a counter opinion to expert discourse and promote a dialogue between the two that can ultimately lead to a greater understanding of the subject at hand (Wall, 2008, p.50).

The autoethnographic report can range from a story-like narrative to a more explicit linkage of themes derived from the personal experience and supported with academic literature and theory. It is usually written in the first person to minimize the distance between the experience and the expression of it. Because autoethnography is based in the belief that there are multiple versions of truth, validity is attained through the study's persuasive, richly-layered communication of the experience and the practical ramifications of that communication (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p.751). As Creswell says, "knowing that there are no 'right' stories, only multiple stories...perhaps qualitative studies do not have endings, only questions" (44-45). The data in this study consists of the film itself and draws from notes and correspondence that I wrote during the making of the film. The analysis of the film and of my experience of making it are tightly linked to academic theory.

This study is unconventional because I am both the researcher and the subject. However, this also provides a natural starting point from which to study the autobiographical and memory aspects of the research. Some background information that is relevant to the study is in order. I have a background in visual arts and in graphic design, but I have very little experience with filmmaking. The film was made on almost no budget at all. I used a camcorder that I borrowed from the University of Ottawa and Final Cut Express 4, which is an amateur version of Final Cut Pro, for editing. I do have considerable experience using Photoshop, which I used extensively in the making of *Annabelle Blue*. The limitations are important in the context of this study, because restrictions tend to stimulate the need for creative solutions and consequently bring to the

forefront the influence of elements usually associated with fiction, such as imagination and creativity, on the truth claims of documentary. Working within a visual medium is second nature to me, but filmmaking was new, and since it is a very complex medium, each step required heightened attention to what I was doing—nothing was taken for granted and nothing was automatic. A professional product and technological perfection were not the goals of this experience, but still, the end result had to be consistent and understandable. This attention to detail facilitated the subsequent analysis of the experience.

### ***Organization***

The first section of the monograph explores the origins of the debate over the fact/fiction divide in documentary theory, starting with Grierson's definition of documentary. Grierson's tradition of documentary, epitomized by Flaherty's *Nanook of the North*, is compared to the American direct cinema movement to examine their respective concepts of truth and reality. This section argues that the fact/fiction debate is based on a rigid view of objectivism as truth. A pragmatic perspective in the form of the embodied realism of cognitive science and Peirce's semiotic theory is used to question these claims and provide an alternative definition of truth and reality.

The second section reflects on the making of *Annabelle Blue*. In keeping with an autoethnographic report, it is written in a more casual style, but still maintains academic rigour by weaving personal reflection with theory. Using the creative process as an example of meaning-making or semiosis, the analysis examines how the indexical, iconic and symbolic components interact at the different levels of transposition that were involved in the making of *Annabelle Blue*. First the experience is placed in its autobiographical context. Some of the historical changes in the notion of the self are described in light of shifting concepts of the

location and source of meaning in a life. Then memory is shown through theory and personal experience to be a representation in itself involving indexical, iconic and symbolic aspects. Next, Ricoeur's (1983) theory on time and narrative is the primary lens for exploring the transposition of my memories first into a script and then into film. The analysis focuses on the structure of significance and an explanation of causality in narrative to demonstrate the interplay of iconic and indexical aspects underlying the symbolic logic of *Annabelle Blue* and in fact of every film, whether that film is fiction or documentary. The exposition then examines the two main sign components of the film *Annabelle Blue*: **indexical evidence** in the form of home movies and testimony, and **performance** as the vehicle for the more intangible qualities of memory. Even in these sharply drawn categories, it will be shown that they inform each other to create understanding.

The third section, which is the discussion, gathers together the various components and applies them to the examination of the similarities and differences between documentary and fiction, and the consequences for the truth claims of documentary in general and for *Annabelle Blue* in particular.

### **Documentary's Authenticity Debate**

Grierson introduced the term 'documentary' and his definition of it as the "creative treatment of actuality" in reference to Robert Flaherty's films (Evans, 2005, p. 24, 161; qt in Saunders, 2010, p.12)). Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1922) is a classic example that illustrates Grierson's thought, and is therefore a logical starting point to outline some of the issues involved in documentary's authenticity debate. The debate over the fact/fiction divide in documentary is rooted in notions of objectivity and subjectivity: objectivity has become synonymous with fact and subjectivity with fiction. The common critique of *Nanook* is that Flaherty distorts the truth of the life of Canada's Inuit through his 'creative treatment' of the material, in effect, fictionalizing it to attain some picturesque or remarkable cinematographic moments. *Nanook* is presented as an ethnographic study, implying an objective distance of the filmmaker from the subject, yet Flaherty composes, reconstructs and arranges scenes to dramatize and romanticize the film's narrative of the unspoiled way of life of Canada's Inuit in danger of disappearing. Flaherty is accused of imposing this familiar literary theme of man, in this case, the noble savage, against the elements, onto the real situation as a structure, in order to appeal to contemporaneous audiences, their imperialistic leanings and their craving for the exotic. In fact, many of the traditional ways that are depicted in the film, such as the use of harpoons for hunting, had already disappeared from everyday life for the Inuit at the time of filming. These types of accusations portray Flaherty as willfully misleading the audience by presenting a false picture through his manipulation of the Inuit, their situation, the camerawork and the editing, for dishonourable motives. Documentarist Emile de Antonio offers a typical critique:

I realize now, after years of work, how uncomfortable I am with the myth of Flaherty and why. The charm and power of his camera are marred by distortions, lies, and inaccuracies which pander to a fake romantic, fake nature-boy view of society... *Nanook* is a

masterpiece of cinematography, and grossly wrong. The Eskimo did not live apart from Western influence. Nanook was not self-indulgent and romantic: he was an actor in a film by a self-indulgent romantic. (qt. in Saunders, 2010, p. 100)

De Antonio insinuates that *Nanook* is above all a portrait of Flaherty rather than of the Inuit, that Flaherty's personal point-of-view takes precedence over the facts of the situation — in other words, according to de Antonio's assessment, Flaherty's film does not meet standards of objectivity.

### ***Objectivity and Direct Cinema***

Objectivism is a basic tenet in Western philosophical and cultural traditions. Mark Johnson (1992), in *The Body in the Mind* describes it as follows:

The world consists of objects that have properties and stand in various relationships independent of human understanding. The world is as it is, no matter what any person happens to believe about it, and there is one correct 'God's -Eye-View' about what the world is really like. In other words, there is a rational structure to reality, independent of the beliefs of any particular people, and correct reason mirrors this rational structure. (p.x)

Meaning and truth are therefore objective, dependent on how well reason connects to reality (Johnson, 1992, p.x). Direct Cinema, a documentary movement that emerged in the 1960s in America, is a filmic instance of this objectivist concept as it is a non-interventionist, observational documentary method (Bruzzi, 2006, p.74). Direct cinema is considered to be the "single most significant intervention in documentary history" (Bruzzi, 2006, p.73). Its mission epitomizes what Stella Bruzzi (2006) calls the "grail of documentation": pure transmission of reality, untainted by the mark of the filmmaker (p.75). Direct cinema professed to "collapse the difference between image and reality," allowing viewers to make up their own minds about what was being shown on the screen as if they themselves were living it (Bruzzi, 2006, p.78). Film was hardly considered to be a medium at all, it was transparent rather, " just a window someone

peeps through" (Pennebaker qt. in Winston, 2008, p.150). This concept of documentary relies heavily on the cultural positioning of the camera that was established in the 19th century as a scientific instrument of observation like a thermometer or a barometer, and therefore able to directly deliver scientific evidence without depending on testimony or human judgement (Winston, 1995, p.135). In a similar sense, in the 1950s, André Bazin's film theories extolled the virtues of the mimetic powers of film, and this perspective was ushered into documentary practice by "offering a theoretical framework in which creativity could be downgraded and treatment supposedly ignored in favour of a passionate attachment to actuality" (Winston, 2008, p.130). While direct cinema may seem to exemplify the epitome of documentary objectivity, its particular expression of objectivity was a product of the historical situation in the 1960s, arising from both cultural/political forces and technological advances.

Culturally, direct cinema was a filmic response to prevailing anti-authority sentiments in the Western world, or more positively, the egalitarian impetus of the 1960s. Freedom of choice and plurality were valued over the imposition of a single standpoint. The notion of objectivity in this political environment emphasized impartiality and tolerance. Noël Carroll (1996) lists three concepts of 'objectivity' that are common in film discussion: "'objective' means 'true'; 'objective' means 'representative of all — or at least all the major — viewpoints on the subject at hand'; and 'objective' means 'having no viewpoint — personal, political, theoretical, etc. — whatsoever'" (p.230). By minimizing the input of the filmmaker, direct cinema's proponents believed the authenticity of the film representation would be obvious and available for the taking, and so they democratically left this task to the viewer. The upshot, however, was that any documentary that involved personal or political bias was seen as disingenuous, effectively dismissing most traditional documentary. Any hint of subjectivity became suspect, as direct cinema's principles are rooted in the belief that a point-of-view or a film's aesthetics inevitably dislodges the

referencial.

The aim of direct cinema to present a pure unmediated account of actuality was also inspired and supported by the development of lightweight cameras and portable synchronized sound at the beginning of the 1960s (Winston, 1995, p.147-148). This led to a spontaneous, liberated sort of style that came to be associated with authenticity itself. As Carroll (1996) writes, "Often the new style was promoted as an epistemological breakthrough for cinema [...] as if the new techniques guaranteed the filmic representation of reality" (p.225). The minimalist style mirrored direct cinema's ethos of purity and non-intervention. Long takes, wide shots, straightforward camera angles, hand-held camera, diegetic on-location sound and a loose narrative structure that seemed to emerge directly from events, all reinforced the notion, through the film's aesthetics, that the filmmaker was taking a hands-off stance. Similarly, traditional didactic, authoritative elements such as voice-of-God narration, staging or re-enactments were abandoned. Subject matter favoured the individual, the everyday and the contemporary, with a predilection for celebrities and crises to supply exciting natural narrative (Bruzzi, 2006, p. 73). The style became so associated with authenticity that it was easy to make fun of in mockumentaries, perhaps the most famous of which is McBride's *David Holzman's Diary* (1967). After the film's screening, Pennebaker, a direct cinema documentarist, accused the film's star, Carson, of "kill[ing] *cinéma vérité*," however, it can be argued that the film merely exposed some of the contradictions in the direct cinema rhetoric (qt. in Winston, 2008, p.202).

The filmmakers's exaggerated claims of authenticity caused a backlash of accusations of hypocrisy. Critics showed how the filmmaker's bias came into play from the first moment of the selection of the topic, to the intrusion of the camera which inevitably alters the situation, to the decisions made when editing and paring down the usually very abundant raw footage. In the course of the criticism, the notion of subjectivity grew into a huge catchall category that

encompassed all the input of the filmmaker, and then the film medium itself, as this statement by Erik Barnouw's suggests:

[The filmmaker] selects topics, people, vistas, angles, lens, juxtapositions, sounds, words. Each selection is an expression of his point of view, whether he is aware of it or not, whether he acknowledges it or not. ...It is in selecting and arranging his findings that he expresses himself; these choices are, in effect, comments. And whether he adopts the stance of observer, or chronicler or whatever, he cannot escape his subjectivity. He presents his version of the world. (qt. in Carroll, 1996, p.226)

Despite the critical backlash, the direct cinema observational style was at least partially instrumental in redefining documentary. Direct cinema's goal of representing objective truth remained a model for documentary even while, paradoxically, the medium of film was reassessed as inherently subjective. The direct cinema phenomenon ultimately led to the polemic opinions that the goal of documentary is objectivity because objectivity is equivalent to authenticity, *and* authenticity is impossible because the film medium is inherently subjective. Bruzzi (2006) describes this contradiction as a Bazin versus Baudrillard dilemma, "both of whom," she says, "argue for the erosion of any differentiation between the image and reality, Bazin because he believed reality could be recorded, Baudrillard because he believes reality is just another image" (p.6). Documentary was backed into a no-win either-or dualistic corner. It is, however, a dichotomy based on more than one shaky premise.

### ***Non-dualistic Concepts of Reality***

The camera cannot erase the gap between reality and its representation. Even on a commonsensical level the claim that this could be possible is dubious, as Terry Eagleton's (2003) quip demonstrates: "if a representation were to be wholly at one with what it depicts, it would cease to be a representation...[it] would simply merge into the world." Peirce's theory of signs offers a nuanced description of how a representation relates to its object that avoids dualism. In

Peirce's theory, there is no such thing as an unmediated experience, we only have access to the real through representations. Peirce's theory, however, is not synonymous with the construction of reality, let alone Baudrillard's simulacrum or simulation of the real. Rather, Peirce's theory is a realist position because facts, truth and general categories exist independent of what anybody might think about them (Corrington, 1993, p.53). We are enmeshed in the dynamic process of meaning generation and reality. The idea that it is possible to erase the gap between reality and its representation is based on the objectivist position that concepts can be "mapped onto objects, properties and relations in a literal, univocal, context-independent fashion" (Johnson, 1992, p.x). Peirce's concept of reality rejects this kind of separation of mind and the world, as Colapietro (1989) writes: "From the perspective of semiotic, we are always already in the midst of others as well as of meanings; indeed, otherness and meaning are given together in our experience of ourselves as beings embedded in a network of relations — more specifically, enmeshed in the 'semiotic web'" (p.28). Peirce labels this sort of continuity 'synechism' (Corrington, 1993, 51). As a doctrine or theory of continuity, synechism repudiates "dualism in its broadest legitimate meaning as the philosophy which performs its analyses with an axe, leaving as the ultimate elements, unrelated chunks of being" (Peirce, 7.570, in Colapietro, 1989, p.64). Rather, Peirce's theory of signs stresses the inter-relatedness of things in an evolutionary process towards a greater generalization and reality. As Corrington (1993) writes, "There is a continuum moving up from so-called inert matter to the higher forms of consciousness. With each step upward, there is an increase of freedom, spontaneity, and purposive activity, which in turn is guided by self-control ('constraint')" (p.102). The higher forms of consciousness are not separated from the things of the world.

Peirce's concept of an embodied reality is supported by more recent discoveries in cognitive science where reality is the experience of the whole body interacting with its physical

and cultural environment (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, p. 102). The sharp division Western philosophy has drawn between external reality and inner mind at least since the time of Descartes, does not correspond to discoveries in cognitive science about how we make sense of our world. Reason and hence our notion of reality have been thought to transcend the body but cognitive science demonstrates that reason is shaped by our embodiment — there is no gap between percepts and concepts (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, p. 22, 4, 95; Johnson, 1992, p.87). Conceptualization is the continuous process of differentiating clusters of meaningful qualities within the flow of experience so that we recognize them when they repeat in other contexts and we can use them to our advantage in our interactions with our environment (Johnson, 1992, p. 88, 91). As such, conceptualization is a form of action and entirely practical. In this theory, just like Peirce's theory of signs, reality is dynamic rather than static as it is in the objectivist account.

The objective versus subjective argument in documentary film attributes both too much and too little power to the filmmaker: too much because it assumes that the filmmaker has extensive control over the multitude of intersecting conditions and people that contribute to the complex process of making a film; too little because it supposes the filmmaker cannot put aside their personal viewpoint to put forward another perspective. The objective versus subjective view also does not take into account the audience's role. The audience knows that film is a representation. Most of us do accept that there is a concrete physical world that we interact with more or less successfully. The audience is capable of evaluating the claims made by the film against their own experience, and societal norms and knowledge.

Nonfiction film can run the gamut between an unbiased account and a personal impression of actuality. Some films do not differentiate between the strictly factual and the impressionistic. Saunders (2010), for example, describes Jonathan Caouette's autobiographical documentary, *Tarnation* (2003), as a "kaleidoscopic 'self-inscription' (literally, a writing of the

self) based on stream of consciousness reconstitution (of old amateur movies, photographs, found footage and answering machine messages), overt performance, interviews and an underlying foundation of highly confessional identity politics" (p.187). While the film has been referred to as an 'autofiction', Caouette's disagrees with this label: "Autofiction? ...I don't really like the notion of fiction in that word, I think. Of course there have been some reenactments, but those reenacted parts in *Tarnation* that I did during the editing process are not fictional to me. I just needed them to tell the story of my life, and as I didn't have a camera in every important moment, I would just capture them later" (qt. in Saunders, 2010, p.189). The resulting film is a raw, emotional immersion into the painful experience of a boy growing up gay and with a schizophrenic mother. Still, at bottom the claims made in documentary must, in some way, refer back to facts that can be examined and ideally verified. However, there are different kinds of facts.

### ***Facts and Reality***

Searle (1995) identifies two types of facts: 'brute' facts, which refer to literal knowledge about the physical world, and 'social facts' which are superimposed on the physical world at a more abstract level (in Breitrose, n.d., p.13). Breitrose provides the example of a five dollar bill: the piece of printed paper is a brute fact, but the piece of paper in question also represents a certain amount of money, which is a social fact — it is a result of human thought. It follows that a film can be true on different levels as well. In fact, there are many theories about truth (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Truth*). The notion that concepts can be literally mapped onto the external world is a principle of the correspondence theory of truth. Stated simply it can be defined as the following: "A statement is true when it fits the way things are in the world. It is false when it fails to fit the way things are in the world" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, p.98).

Problems arise with the correspondence theory when trying to figure out how concepts and the world can actually correspond when they must fit together regardless of context in order to be consistent with the principle of objectivity (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, p.98). For example, the statement that grass is green is true in a phenomenological context, but not in a scientific one (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, p.105).<sup>2</sup> For this reason, an embodied realism, rooted in cognitive science, considers truth to be dependent on understanding (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, p.107). Even though this is not an absolute, objective truth, it is not purely subjective either.

Embodiment ensures that we share stable truths at both the personal and societal levels (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, p.107).

Bruno Latour (2004) considers "matters of fact" to arise from "matters of concern,"(p.235) and believes it is a mistake to separate them: "Reality is not defined by matters of fact. Matters of fact are not all that is given in experience. Matters of fact are only very partial and, I would argue, very polemical, very political renderings of matters of concern and only a subset of what could also be called *states of affairs*" (p.232). The dominance of matters of fact over matters of concern during the Enlightenment period led to the debunking of many beliefs and illusions, but then the debunking tendency turned on facts themselves and we ended up, as demonstrated by the extreme subjectivist approach, with a nihilistic attitude towards any sort of truth at all (232). Latour (2004) suggests that we now need to add reality back to facts rather than continue to subtract it, by recognizing that "all matters of fact require, in order to exist, a bewildering variety of matters of concern" (p. 232, 247). Direct cinema attempted to present a literal truth by conscientiously recording the brute facts and by limiting other considerations while direct cinema's critics proclaimed that any film representation is too subjective to be

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<sup>2</sup> From a phenomenological perspective, colour is a property of the object, in this case grass. However from a scientific perspective colours are observed because of the interaction of conditions and properties occurring between the body the world. Colour is, "created by our color cones and neural circuitry together with the wavelength reflectances of objects and local light conditions" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, p.105)

authentic. Latour's assessment that matters of fact extracted from matters of concern leads to partial descriptions of experience, implies that direct cinema, by attempting to deliver the facts only, fell into the trap it was trying to avoid. But neither does he advocate for the position that everything is subjective and illusional: "The question was never to get *away* from facts but *closer* to them, not fighting empiricism but, on the contrary, renewing empiricism" (Latour, 2004, p.231, italics in original). Latour's position is similar to cognitive science's embodied realism and Peirce's theory of signs, where objectivity cannot guarantee truth, and subjectivity will not inevitably prohibit it, because there is no break between the world and thought and much depends on context.

In Flaherty's time, the role of the filmmaker was considered in a much more positive light while the function of the camera to mechanically record actuality was not regarded with such awe — some even considered it to be a limitation of the medium. Film, in the 1920s, was still relatively new and it was only beginning to find its unique language and cultural niche. Rudolf Arnheim (1958), who was developing his theories of art and perception at the time, points out that "the motion picture derived in the first instance from a desire to record mechanically real events. Not until film began to become an art was the interest moved from mere subject matter to aspects of form. What had hitherto been merely the urge to record certain actual events, now became the aim to represent objects by special means exclusive to film" (p.55). Prior to filming *Nanook*, Flaherty had shot 70,000 feet of raw, undoctored footage of the Inuit — which he promptly dismissed as boring: "It was a bad film; it was dull — it was little more than a travelogue. I had learned to explore, I had not learned to reveal" (qt. in Saunders, 2010, p.87). What Flaherty considered *most* important to reveal was the "essential story of the location," as he interpreted it (Grierson, Barsam (ed.), 1976, p.22). Grierson also believed that filmmakers should dig beneath the subject matter's "surface values" to expose its "reality" (Grierson, Barsam

(ed.), 1976, p.22, 23). Far from a falsification, Grierson saw the filmmaker's contribution as important to the meaning of the living story through the creative shaping and ordering of the material. Merely recording life was not considered to lead automatically to meaning or truth.

Shaping and a "structuring of the incidents," as Aristotle described it, is essentially creating a narrative: forming a cohesive whole out of disparate parts (Freeman, 2010, p.39). "Narrative," says Freeman, "is what we have available to make sense of our existence in time" (Freeman, 2010, p.39). Narrative ordering requires that we step out of the flow of things long enough to reflect and take-stock on what it all means, with an eye for the best way to proceed (Freeman, 2010, p.176). The propensity for narrative appears to be innate; people naturally form causal links between images, even random ones (Breitrose, n.d., p.6). Narrative, then is practical, essentially following the same process and purpose as conceptualization. In nonfiction, creating a narrative involves differentiating the essential facts from irrelevant ones, and then arranging them into a pattern, so it can possibly generate an understanding that can be applied to other situations. It is effective because it condenses and consolidates the pertinent events —the essence of the subject matter, into a manageable and portable shape. The same could be said about aesthetic expression: in the process of transposition, intangible qualities can become articulated in shapes, colours and sounds. The very fact of their transposition can bring awareness to those less concrete aspects of the original situation. Film in particular, because it is a multi-layered medium, compacts sensual and intellectual aspects of existence into a tidy package that can deliver a punch of signification. Johnston states: "Art matters because it provides heightened, intensified, and highly integrated experiences of meaning, using all of our ordinary resources for meaning-making....[The arts] help us grasp, criticize and transform meanings and values" (Johnson, 2007, *Meaning of Body*, p.xiii). Far from being irrelevant, or besides the fact, aesthetics is woven into reality; it is part and parcel together with the brute facts

and our processes of reasoning about them.

### ***The Role of the Filmmaker***

Still, back to documentary's debate, Winston (2008) criticizes Grierson's whole documentary project as wanting it both ways: the freedom of artistic privileges and at the same time the legitimacy obtained from the photograph's status as unequivocal evidence (p.222). *Nanook*, for example, did not direct attention to the artistry involved in making the film; instead aesthetics were surreptitiously assimilated into the evidentiary fabric of the film. The same complaint could be made against direct cinema. While it failed in its mission to eliminate the influence of the filmmaker, it succeeded in binding together the filmmaker's intent and the aesthetics with invisible stitches, achieving the challenging artistic goal of a unity of form and content.

While Grierson attributed an implicit role to the filmmaker, and direct cinema tried to deny any role for the filmmaker, Dziga Vertov<sup>3</sup>, a Soviet filmmaker working at the same time as Grierson, brought the role of the filmmaker to the forefront by explicitly making references within the film to the filmmaker and the process of filmmaking itself. In the 1920s Vertov created a series of documentary films which he called *Kinopravda* (film truth) in which he attempted to "shield the proletariat from the corrupting influence of artistic film-drama" (in Winston, 2008, p.166). He did this by exposing the underlying illusion of the film medium. So, for example, in his film *Man With a Movie Camera* (1922), the camera man is shown in the film

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3 Vertov's films also had an important influence on the Direct Cinema movement with his notion of "catching life unawares" and of emphasizing the visual over an imposed narration. However, *Man with a Movie Camera* also shares some similarities with Flaherty's *Nanook*. Both films, for instance, are didactic. But, whereas *Nanook* took a romantic look at the past, *Man with a Movie Camera* idealizes the future under Soviet industrialization. For Vertov the cameraman plus the camera equalled a new, more insightful way of seeing that he called 'kinoeye'. Film, he said "is not merely the sum of facts recorded on film...but the product, a higher mathematics of facts" (qt. in Winston, 2008, p.167).

as a character and as well, Vertov continually draws the viewer into the drama of the film world only to subsequently pull the rug out from under the viewer's feet by exposing how the shot was achieved. The French counterpart of direct cinema, called *cinéma vérité*, followed Vertov's example of reflexivity, thereby skirting accusations of hiding their films's subjective bias.

In more recent times this reflexive impulse has extended into what Bruzzi (2006) calls performative documentaries, "whose truth comes into being at the moment of filming" (p.10). Based on Austin's concept of 'performative utterances', Bruzzi (2006) proposes that performative documentaries simultaneously describe and perform the subject matter (p.187). A performative utterance cannot be evaluated as true or false, rather the utterance itself carries out in a felicitous way (or not) the meaning within the appropriate circumstances. For example, voicing the statement, "I name this ship the Queen Elizabeth" while participating in a ship christening ceremony is a description but it is also the act of naming the ship — it is embedded and implicated in the situation with a function and consequences. Performative documentary means that a "documentary's meaning, its identity is not fixed but fluid and stems from a productive, dialectical relationship between the text, the reality it represents and the spectator" (Bruzzi, 2006, p.7). Performative documentaries bring attention to the fact that film is a representation — it is not the real thing.

For example, Sarah Polley's autobiographical documentary, *Stories We Tell* (2012), probes her family mystery of the identity of her biological father through the testimony of her family's members and friends, home movies and re-enactments. The testimonies contradict each other and the truth of past events seem to be multiple and layered at best, if not completely elusive. As Sheila O'Malley (2013) writes in a review of the film: "Polley doesn't privilege one version over another. She is not interested in protecting her version (whatever it may be), or protecting her mother. She is more interested in how her family members interact with their own

memories, and where they might intersect or diverge." Thus, *Stories We Tell* is a film about storytelling itself in all its forms and settings, and so it is also a film about making a film.

Accordingly, we see or hear Polley throughout, interviewing her siblings or recording her father, who is an actor by profession, in the studio, as he reads the narration he wrote for the film.

Performance documentary, far from being a failure, a begrudging acceptance that it is not possible to reconstitute reality, demonstrates that this "dialectical understanding of the factual world [is] an asset and a virtue" (Bruzzi, 2006, p.13). This is because, instead of trying to mirror a reality that is considered to be static and lifeless, performance documentary's aim is to stimulate questions and therefore a possible growth of meaning. According to Peirce, meaning grows through the action of symbols: "Symbols grow. They come into being by development out of other signs.... A symbol, once in being, spreads among the peoples. In use and in experience, its meaning grows. Such words as *force, law, wealth, marriage*, bear for us very different meanings from those they bore to our barbarous ancestors" (CP2.302). In Peirce's theory of signs, this sort of growth of understanding is itself reality.

### ***Peirce's Semiotic Theory***

Semiosis is the process of signification, the action of signs (*Oxford dictionary* online). In Peirce's sign theory or semiotic, this implies not only representing and conveying meaning, but above all the development and growth of meaning. Peirce describes 'semiosis' as: "an action, or influence, which is, or involves, a cooperation of three subjects, such as a sign, its object, and its interpretant, this tri-relative influence not being in any way resolvable into actions between pairs" (5.484; in Colapietro, 1989, p.1). His theory is intentionally broad and general enough so as to illustrate the action of all signs, "every picture, diagram, natural cry, pointing finger, wink, knot in one's handkerchief, memory, fancy, concept, indication, token, symptom, letter, numeral,

work, sentence, chapter, book, library" (qt. in Colapietro, p. 3) According to Peirce, "We think only in signs," but signs do not originate in the mind, (CP 2.302); the mind is rather, a part of the process, as this statement of Peirce's suggests: "Logic will here be defined as formal semiotic. A definition of a sign will be given which no more refers to human thought than does the definition of a line as the place which a particle occupies, part by part, during a lapse of time" (NE 4:20 in Colapietro, 1989, p.6). Peirce's theory is not anti-humanistic; it is, rather, a general theory of meaning generation. Semiotic agents are not limited to the human domain. Semiosis is perhaps better thought of as a bubbling, fermenting mass of meaning-making activity than a linear progression that has a beginning that starts here or there and ends elsewhere. Each of the components in semiosis is evolving and multi-layered: a sign is triadic, it consists in an object, a representamen and an interpretant, but, for example, the object, could also be considered as a representamen or an interpretant depending on the circumstance, just as the interpretant systemically becomes the representmen of a future thread of semiosis. Peirce separated and categorized them in order to facilitate an analysis of the process. Fernando Andacht explains:

The same material (or imaginary) element can be construed as any of the three components of semiosis; it all depends on the logical function they are fulfilling: is it something about which some aspect will be revealed? Then you are dealing with a semiotic object. Is it the way or medium through which such revelation will take place? Then you are talking about the sign or representamen. And if you consider the meaning-effect... then it is the interpretant that you are interested in.  
(Personal correspondence)

Implied here also is the importance of context, since function is always situated.

Since semiosis is not a product of thought but the other way around, neither is meaning (CP 5.289). We cannot impose meaning on signs, the world is already meaningful in itself. All we can do is try to observe and then gradually learn to order signs to achieve our own ends to varying success: "Meaning creation and change is primarily a function of the dispositions and spontaneities of the signs themselves; and although we may develop our skills of artful

production, the result of our efforts is never due solely or primarily to what we do: man proposes, but the sign disposes" (Ransdell, 1989, para. 6). Semiosis is in part autonomous, because the sign itself generates its interpretant, with a teleological drive towards unity, that is, a tendency towards a convergence of the interpretant and the object in an ever-widening circle of understanding (Ransdell, 1989, Para. 6, 16). A sign then, as Peirce says, "is an object which is in relation to its object on the one hand and to an interpretant on the other, in such a way as to bring the interpretant into a relation to the object, corresponding to its own relation to that object" (8.332;cf.2.242 in Colapietro, 1989, p.6).

Peirce also categorized the relationships of a sign to its object and a sign to its interpretant in terms of triads. The sign-interpretant relation (rheme, dicisign, argument) will not be outlined here as the analysis of *Annabelle Blue* will focus on the relationship of the sign to the object. The sign-object relation can be primarily iconic, indexical or symbolic (Corrington, 1993, p.150). The relation always contains all of these aspects in varying degrees, but again, for the purpose of analysis they can be separated. The iconic relation is a sharing of some quality, property, possibility or resemblance of sign and object; the indexical relation is a real or physical link: the sign is the effect of the object; and the symbolic relation is characterized by generality, convention or law (Colapietro, 1989, p.16). In fact, in semiosis the three aspects must be present and work together to generate meaning. As Ransdell (1989) states: "the symbolic principle immanent in semiosis is the principle of the shuttle which weaves together the woof and the weave — the indexical and iconic elements — of the fabric under construction in the semiosis process" (Para. 15). The symbolic aspect contains the power to generate interpretants, but only by using the iconic and indexical aspects as raw material. While the indexical aspect supplies the actual manifestation — the structure or form, the iconic aspect is what the object is about — its character or content (Ransdell, 1989, Para. 15).

The result of the symbolic co-ordinating activity is the movement towards higher forms of generality or "rules of action" — what Peirce refers to as habits (Corrington, 1993, p.37, 28). Habits are somewhat similar to concepts in cognitive science, as described above, however, they are more far reaching— relevant to nature at large, as Peirce explains: "... habit is by no means exclusively a mental fact. Empirically, we find that some plants take habits. The stream of water that wears a bed for itself is forming a habit" (CP 5.492, in Corrington, 1993, p.64). For Peirce this habit growing evolution of life and nature is a fundamental activity of reality: "Generality is, indeed, an indispensable ingredient of reality; for mere individual existence or actuality without any regularity whatever is a nullity" (CP 5.431, in Corrington, 1993, p.53). As well as being evolutionary, semiosis is also pragmatic, in the sense that purpose, meaning and action are inseparable (Andacht, Personal communication). Semiosis is always moving toward the future and general consequences, even while suffering the resistance of the present, for the survival of the organism. Semiosis is possible because of the principle of synechism or continuity, which, as a "basic feature of the universe," encourages the formation and spread of novel associations and connections (Corrington, 1993, p.180). Andacht sums it up:

Reality, for Peirce, does not consist in what you bump against in the street, but it consists in Thirdness [the symbolic], the habit growing element of all living things, and regularity presupposes both Firstness [iconic] — the possibilist imaginary, and Secondness [indexical] — the hard knocks of the actual, here and now, or then and there — explaining for example the existence of a bruise in our body whose origin we do not even recall (Personal correspondence).

In a documentary film, the indexical aspects of the representation roughly correspond to its factual references, while the iconic is related to its intangible qualities. The indexical aspect however, always contains an iconic element. The interplay of these components within the co-ordinating context of the basic drive of life towards general or abstract understanding, is the basis of the film's meaning. The discussion above has argued that the fact/fiction debate is predicated

on a rigid view of objectivity and truth. A pragmatic perspective characterizes reality in terms of growth and understanding moving towards the goal of more effective functioning. In this view there is no objective/subjective divide, since body-mind-environment are all involved in reality. Rather than an absolute and static truth, there are temporarily stable truths within specific contexts. So where does this leave documentary film? Does documentary and fiction collapse into one? How does the definition of reality as dynamic and evolving rather than static affect the 'creative treatment' and 'actuality' components of documentary? To explore these questions the next section will examine in depth the process of making the autobiographical documentary *Annabelle Blue*.

### Reflections on the Making of *Annabelle Blue*

*Annabelle Blue*, the film, begins with the words, "Some of the following events actually happened...more or less." Despite its important function of introducing the film, this preface was the last element I thought of and added. I put it there because the first scene felt too disorientating and abrupt, like I was pushing the viewer off a cliff before they had even realized that they were on a hike. At least with the preface, I had given fair warning before the shove. In literary theory, a preface is included in what Gerard Genette (1987) calls the 'paratext' of a literary work: all the things that are not part of the text proper, but serve to present the text in a certain way (p.1). He refers to the paratext as a "threshold" or "vestibule" that "offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back"; a "zone not only of transition but also of transaction" (Genette, 1987, p.2). Documentary is predicated on a pact between the filmmaker and the audience that what is being presented is accurate and honest (Saunders, 2010, p.12). This is a moral agreement rather than a set of rules and stipulations and is therefore open to a wide range of interpretation. As Rabinger (2007) explains: "There are no rules in this young art form, only decisions about where to draw the line and how to remain consistent to the contract you will set up with your audience" (qt. in Saunders, 2010, p.18). *Annabelle Blue's* preface — my proposed contract — suggests that the *Annabelle Blue* documentary, will stretch credibility to the point where the genre's vague boundaries will be tested.

It was not, strictly speaking, my intent to probe the edges of documentary. My working goal was simple enough: to make a short film about my childhood memories of growing up in suburban Ottawa. The emphasis was on the existential and therapeutic: the meaning of memories in a life. It seemed to me that the exploration of memory itself and its transposition into film, would be less problematic, more like taking a jar from the grocery store shelf and placing it in

the shopping cart. I discovered soon enough that memories are much messier than I thought, and furthermore, they don't slip neatly into the shape of a film. Each component and every step was fraught with difficulties that had a significant influence in shaping the final outcome. Real problems imposed themselves and it was up to me to respond the best I could. Another person might have met each problem with a different solution; I drew on my own experience and abilities which are necessarily unique to me. Some of the difficulties were a result of my inexperience, but not all of them. Many are inherent in the creative process and others arose from the fundamental mismatch between the nature of memory and the nature of the film medium.

The creative process, in my experience, is the interplay — sometimes conciliatory, sometimes an outright brawl— between the iconic and indexical <sup>4</sup> aspects of art making. Iconic here refers to all my imaginative ideas and plans, and the indexical is the hard reality that intrudes to modify or crush them. The creative process is where mind meets matter and the potentially eye-opening, growth-provoking, if unpredictable results of that meeting. If it is successful, the finished work, which necessarily has absorbed traces of the process, will generate fresh insight into the subject matter for both the creator and the viewer. In keeping with semiotic theory of the Peircean, triadic kind, insight can encompass more than just a true/false assessment, since insight requires a mix of indexical, iconic and symbolic aspects. Dewey (1925/1981) explains, "Poetic meanings, moral meanings, a large part of the goods of life are matters of richness and freedom of meanings, rather than of truth: a large part of our life is carried on in a realm of meanings to which truth and falsity as such are irrelevant" (qt. in Johnson, 2007, p.267). Creativity, according to the standard definition, has two criteria: originality and effectiveness (Runco & Jaeger, 2012, p.92). Art must work in real life to be effective, which gives it a very practical justification. Creativity is not an intention or a certainty, it is something that may or

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<sup>4</sup> For an explanation of iconic, indexical and symbolic aspects of a sign, see page 26

may not happen when the individual gives in to the process. I have enough experience through my work in visual art and in design, to let the process run its course, to be at the service of it. But, because memories are so sketchy and film is so meticulous and precise, and because I have very little experience in this medium, I found myself consciously practicing "giving in to the process" very often while making *Annabelle Blue*.

In the end, the film and its truth-claims are as much a natural byproduct of the paradoxes inherent in the subject matter, the genre and the process of filmmaking, as it is due to my efforts and intentions. My experience bears out Bruzzi's (2006) contention that documentary is a negotiation between reality and its representation, that it is "predicated upon a dialectical relationship between aspiration and potential, that the text itself reveals the tensions between the documentary pursuit of the most authentic mode of factual representation and the impossibility of this aim" (p.6). The preface of *Annabelle Blue* is a contract and forewarning, but it is also a summary of the experience of my exploration into the nature of memories, their place in a life and the give-and-take process of representing them in film.

### ***Autobiography***

The preface was the culmination of a long process. The topic was my childhood, but there is nothing particularly noteworthy about my childhood — no great dramas, no pivotal, life-changing experiences; I was an ordinary kid growing up in ordinary, middle-class North America. So why try to make a film about it? In part it was the belief as Ricoeur says that, "life is a story in search of a narrator" (qt. in Muldoon, 2006, p.251). I believed, if I just looked, I could see the patterns that have led me to where I am now and that would give me a clue as to how to proceed. Like Guy Maddin in his docufantasia *My Winnipeg* (2007), I wanted to film my way out of the familial labyrinth. But also, the decision to make a film was a response to the bittersweet

nostalgia that came when I stopped long enough to realize that many of the people and things that I loved are gone, which left me wondering about the meaning of it all anyway.

This sort of inquiry is, of course, not unique to me. Self-examination to find meaning was embraced with gusto in the 20th century, and the pace of it has only increased since. In the words of James Olney (1998), the "agonized search for self, through the mutually reflexive acts of memory and narrative, accompanied by the haunting fear that it is impossible from the beginning but also impossible to give over, is the very emblem of our time" (p. xv). Socrates's claim that "an unexamined life is not worth living" is almost a proverb in modern society. However, in ancient Greece, the goal was to align oneself with the Good already existent in the world (Taylor, 1989, p.129). The modern concept of self-examination has more to do with discovering or constructing an authentic inner identity. Taylor (1989) traces the origins of this modern concept to Augustine and his turn inwards in what Taylor calls a "radical reflexivity. In radical reflexivity, "we become aware of our awareness, try to experience the experiencing" (Taylor, 1989, p.130). For Augustine, it was only through rigorous self-examination that man could connect with the higher truths of the cosmological order. Self-examination became fundamental to the search for truth and this inclination has remained to this day (Taylor, 1989, p.133). But while Augustine turned inward to find God, we are more likely to turn inward to find our own unique identity as a sense of permanence in a constantly changing world (Taylor, 1989, pp.177-178). While Augustine sought unity with God, we seek self-sufficiency and control through the power of reason (Taylor, 1989, p.156). The eventual outcome of Augustine's radical reflexivity was not just a subjective or objective stance that one could adopt or not, it drastically shifted the location of meaning and truth from between man and the world, to a realm exclusively inside man (Taylor, 1989, p.188). Self-discovery became aligned with self-creation and self-expression. Because there are no prototypes for our unique selves, "we discover what we have it

in us to be by becoming that mode of life, by giving expression in our speech and action to what is original in us" (Taylor, 1991, p.61). Art, formally about mimesis (imitation) or religious expression, became a prime vehicle for self-expression. Creativity from this perspective is focused on the originality aspect, the iconic, and eschews the indexical relation to the world.

For Peirce, the individual self is a semiotic sign that comes into being early on in a child's life as a sort of negation or splintering off from the child's environment (Colapietro, 1989, p.61). In fact, Peirce refers to the self as illusory in a very specific, theoretical sense, as in this passage:

Everybody will admit a personal self exists in the same sense in which a snark exists; that is there is a phenomenon to which that name is given. It is an illusory phenomenon; but still it is a phenomenon. It is not quite *purely* illusory, but only *mainly* so. It is true, for instance, that men are *selfish*, that is, that they are really deluded into supposing themselves to have some isolated existence; and in so far, they *have* it.  
(CP 8.82, in Corrington, p.98)

At first, there is no separation between the child's perceptions and reality (Colapietro, 1989, 70). However, the child soon discovers that he is able to act on his environment, and this discovery of his own body leads him to see himself as distinct from the other bodies that he is interacting with (Colapietro, 1989, p.71). With language, the testimony of others comes into conflict with his perception of what is real (Colapietro, 1989, p.72). When, through testing the testimony of others, the child's perceptions are proven wrong, "he becomes aware of ignorance, and it is necessary to suppose a self in which this ignorance can inhere" (CP 5.233, in Colapietro, 1989, p.72). The self develops as a reflexive agent, a function, that helps the individual navigate their interactions with their environment and others. As a sign, the self is always generating interpretants<sup>5</sup> based on those interactions, with the general teleological goal of regaining a sense of unity, free of error. We are always learning and changing and trying to become better people. This happens throughout life, as the self is, by definition, always incomplete and always feeling

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5 See page 24-25

the need for completion.

Closely related, Peirce describes personality as an evolving sign pattern, as "a coordination or connection of ideas" that in itself "is a general idea, and that a general idea is a living feeling" (CP 6.155). The personality, therefore, is a species of semiosis, always evolving. Personality's interpretants, generate further interpretants, and so on throughout a life, as Peirce goes on to explain:

This personality, like any general idea is not a thing to be apprehended in an instant. It has to be lived in time; nor can any finite time embrace it in all its fullness. Yet in each infinitesimal interval it is present and living, though specially colored by the immediate feelings of that moment. Personality, so far as it is apprehended in a moment, is immediate self-consciousness.  
(CP 6.155)

Peirce's account of the personality and self is dynamic, practical and orientated towards the future, as this quote shows:

[Coordination] implies a teleological harmony in ideas, and in the case of personality this teleology is more than a mere purposive pursuit of a predeterminate end; it is a developmental teleology. This is personal character. A general idea, living and conscious now, it is already determinative of acts in the future to an extent to which it is not now conscious.  
(CP 6.156)

Creativity, therefore, is not limited to some areas of life, it is our basic mode of being and functioning. This is an embodied concept of the self that is embedded in the world, in keeping with Peirce's principle of continuity or synechism. Colapietro (1989) writes that the "semiotic promises a way out of [this] subjectivism, for in granting priority to signs over ideas it shifts the focus from what occurs within a finite, individual consciousness to what occurs between social beings within a common framework of experience and action" (p.27).

One of the cathartic outcomes of the experience of making *Annabelle Blue*, was a loosening of the necessity to discover a unique purpose for myself. What started as a search for meaning ended as relief in the ordinariness of it all. Highly implicated in the two prongs of the

modern self that Taylor describes, the self-discovering and the self-controlling facets, is the responsibility and even obligation to find or construct some sort of inner order to replace that which used to be supplied by the cosmos. My ordinariness transferred some of the structure to elsewhere and removed the pressure to some extent. *Annabelle Blue* is an everykid type of character: the types of events she experiences are absolutely average and commonplace. My life, in this sense, was the raw material for an exploration into the nature of memory itself, and its place in a life. Making an autobiographical film, that is, something for public consumption, diminishes the insular and circular tendency of self-examination and throws meaning back out into the world.

As well, the actual mechanics of making a film is conducive to expelling problems, but not necessarily in the sense of a psychoanalytic reworking of the past and its meanings. Guy Maddin's (2009) experience with autobiographical filmmaking resonates closely to my own experience:

You do cure yourself by filming autobiography; it's a weird kind of therapy — you literally just wear out the subject matter. I don't think you surgically arrive at problems that might be troubling you. You don't unearth them, bring them to light, study them, break them down and deal with them or anything like that. What you do when you're making a film about these things is you turn them into words and then into film, you turn them into units of editing, of footage, that has to be dealt with. And then you've got to do all that hard work, sometimes tedious stuff...and by that time you have filmed your way out of your childhood and through your old relationship problems. You actually haven't learned anything — you've just bored yourself talking about them so much.  
(p. 133)

My long-standing problems with my mother were distanced from myself, thrown outside and not fed anymore, because I was simply sick of them. The fact that I played all the roles in *Annabelle Blue* added to what Maddin describes, because I acted out my demons, and furthermore, I was often acting them out in public — all alone in the park among strangers, for example, or running through the halls of the University of Ottawa in pyjamas and little-girl pigtails — all of which

leads to a certain amount of freedom from self-consciousness (Figure 1, p. 74). Making a film requires an extremely heightened attention to detail. Because I was doing everything, and because I'm new at filmmaking, my brain was stretched so thin that there wasn't any room left for preoccupation with my inner problems. As well, besides the amount of hard work, it was just plain fun, which is liberating in itself. However, I began the film with the usual idea of therapy.

### ***Memory***

Borrowing free association techniques from psychoanalysis, I started the process of making *Annabelle Blue* by sitting down with my notebook and pencil and jotting down whatever memories happened to spring into my mind without any idea of how they might fit together. Familiar memories uprooted deeper memories and soon I had what I considered to be a good sized list. But next to the span of time of my childhood, my list was very paltry indeed. Furthermore, the 'actuality' of some of the memories was suspect. For instance, I remember that my mother told me she would drop me off at the package check at the department store whenever she wanted to shop without hassel, and that brings up a vague image of a typical department store. But if I really examine it, I don't actually remember being deposited into the hands of a smiling or, more likely, grumpy clerk. And now, thinking about it, I'm not even sure she told me that story at all. I have no way of verifying it. On the other hand, some supposedly real events, vouched for by others, do not evoke any memory at all; I need to take it on trust that I actually did release all those budgies at Woolworths, as I was recently told. I suppose the two events could be causally connected, but I don't remember that either.

First-hand memory is jumbled in my mind with images evoked by stories I've heard, or read or saw on TV or even dreamt. Most of my memories don't come to me as complete entities; they appear as fleeting fragments or brief sensations. The more complicated memories have mix

and match components, which is how, in my memory, my smiling, blue-eyed father can take on the dark and serious air of Perry Mason through the motion of putting his fedora on his head. Perhaps in another decade or so, I'll remember releasing those budgies as well. Memory is not just an individual affair. I was born into a world that is replete with memories. Sutton et al write that "we have learned (both culturally and individually) to integrate our relatively vulnerable and permeable biological memory with more stable external scaffolding" (Sutton, J., Harris, C.B. & Barnier, A.J., 2010, p.220). Memory is distributed among people and over a variety of cultural artifacts, rituals, and practices (Sutton et al. 2010, p.223). In fact, Maurice Halbwachs claims that "neither individual nor shared memory has ontological priority" (Sutton et al. 2010, p.223). But even though social memory is more stable, it is not infallible. It is entirely possible that my mother invented what is now my (suspect) memory of being left at the package check.

In Peirce's semiotic, fallibility is an important feature of the teleological aspect of semiosis, in the sense that knowledge or truth is never final, but always open for revision (Almeder, 1982, p.58). Doubt can spur on the teleological process towards growth. The aim of the teleological process is constrained by the dynamical object,<sup>6</sup> and since the dynamical object is the real outside of any specific sign consideration or representation, there is always the possibility of error depending on the context (Colapietro, 1989, p.15). As we have already seen, error is a fundamental aspect in the development of a sense of self, and continues to impact a person's emotional and intellectual growth and interaction with others throughout their life.

By and large, the memories on my list fell into just two camps: either they were completely banal and unconnected to anything else, or they were highly emotional and the emotion was almost always connected to what I considered to be some injustice done to me. Damasio (1999) writes that human emotions are unique because they link to "complex ideas,

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<sup>6</sup> The dynamical object is discussed on page 40-41

values, principles, and judgments that only humans can have" (p.35). Emotion and consciousness are inseparable, and extended human consciousness, dependent on memory as well as emotion, is the source of the autobiographical self (Damasio, 1999, pp. 16,17). Autobiographical memory ensures a consistent version of life's experiences over time that corresponds to reality to some degree. In the Self-Memory System Model of memory, unconscious processes called the working self, facilitate or inhibit the retrieval of memories to further its goals (Sutton et al. 2010, p. 215). We remember those memories which aid our current goals or values, and tend to forget or adjust the conflicting memories. If, for example, it was somehow proven that I actually did cut down the fruit tree that my mother accused me of cutting down, despite my adamant memory that I did not do it — if say, someone found a photo of a three foot high me in the act of slaying the tree — my sense of self based on my values of justice and dignity, would receive a serious blow and adjustments would have to be made in order for me to move forward with any kind of confidence. In any case, whether my memories were banal or emotional, there was a distinct lack of detail to them. The strongest sense was my orientation within space. Visual, aural and olfactory details were extremely sketchy.

Bartlett's (1932) research, conducted early in the 20th century, found that we tend to retain only a general impression of events and then invent the details in recall (p. 206). The lack of detail is explained by the cognitive model of memory that outlines how memory encodes, stores and retrieves information (Sutton et al. 2010, p. 211). We remember things in rich detail for about three or four seconds in sensory memory, then most of it is gone. The seven or so items that strike us in some way, that we pay attention to, such as highly emotional situations, are transferred to short-term memory where they last for about fifteen to twenty seconds. This is the home of our working memory that allows us to make sense of speech, for example. Some short-term memory can be worked on for recall and some is turned into behaviours. Long term

memory is filed away according to meaning (Sutton et al. 2010, pp. 212-213). There two main types of memory in this model: declarative, which involves conscious recall and non-declarative which is comprised of our learned behaviours and skills (Sutton et al. 2010, p. 211). This is a simplified model but the actual operation of memory is very complex; it involves the "interaction and coordination of memory-related processes at many different levels and timescales: neural, cognitive, affective, bodily, social, material, and cultural" (Sutton et al. 2010, p. 210). At every step listed above we make selections dependent on our motivations, goals and expectations, and each of these is dependent on other factors (Sutton et al. 2010, p. 213).

Bartlett's (1932) theory of memory considers remembering to be "an imaginative reconstruction, or construction, built out of the relation of our attitude towards a whole active mass of organized past reactions or experience, and to a little outstanding detail which commonly appears in image or in language form" (p. 213). Interests and attitudes, themselves highly influenced by emotion, colour and shape the vague impression called a memory (Bartlett, 1932, pp. 33, 206). Memory in recall is constructed by adding imaginative details and connections to the vague impression, in such a way as to justify an attitude (Bartlett, 1932, p.207). So while attitude is fundamental in how an event is perceived and how the memory of that event is stored, it is also involved in how the memory is retrieved and reconstructed. Of course, the situation when recalling a memory has changed, and attitudes are different also. In that way, memory is an adaptation of the past to fit the present, with imagination playing an important role in making the link. It is very inexact in the sense of a Cartesian model of mind and the representation of reality, but, as Bartlett (1932) stresses, in a world of constant flux, literal recall is not completely useful (p. 204). Memory is fundamental to our ability to learn and adapt to our present environment (Bartlett, 1932, p.213). This is akin to Peirce's pragmatism, which was heavily influenced by the publication of Darwin's 1859 classic, *The origin of the species*. To that end, Sutton et al.

(2010) point out that memory's "intrinsic dynamics drive our productive capacities to select and to generalize appropriately" (p. 214). Memory, it seems, even with all its vicissitudes and imaginative invention, is part of the process of conceptualization, or in other words, reason, truth and reality.

The key point, in the context of this paper, is that memory is a representation of the past. Memory is a sign, subject to semiosis. It has its indexical aspects: the event that actually happened; its iconic aspects: the impressionist quality of it and the imaginative details and possibilities; and it has a symbolic role in generalization, and therefore growth and reality as Peirce understood it<sup>7</sup>. But, if memory is already a representation, a transposition, what does this mean for the truth claims of an autobiographical documentary that purports to be a representation of memory? Furthermore, memory, already a representation, has a role in the maintenance of a sense of self, which is a representation in its own right. Is representation upon representation akin to adding more water to the soup to the point where there is no real substance left?

At this point, it is useful to refine my brief outline of Peirce's semiotics to include the difference between the immediate object and the dynamical object. The immediate object is the part of the dynamical object that relates more directly to the sign or representation. It is taken from the dynamical object, in a sense by the representation. The immediate object draws a perimeter around the particulars whereas the dynamical object is the field. Peirce refers to the object of a sign as "its progenitor, its father. The Dynamical Object is the Natural Father, the Objective Object is the putative father" (in Andacht, 2010, p.5, MS 499 [alpha]). In *Annabelle Blue*, the immediate object is my memories, and the dynamical object is all that relates to that period in my life, whether I am aware of it or not. This includes my dreams, fantasies, delusions, fears, mistakes and memories, as well as all that happened that I don't remember or that others

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<sup>7</sup> See Page 27-28 for a description of how Peirce conceived of reality.

may or may not remember, and the various ways it may fit together, of which there may be evidence or not. Sign activity is an ongoing process that is not necessarily linear. A representatmen could alternatively be analyzed as an object or an interpretant, depending on the purpose of the analysis. In other words, it is impossible to determine where semiosis starts and ends in life. It is always representation upon representation, one generation giving birth to the next and the next, to use Peirce's analogy. This is an example of Peirce's principle of synechism or continuity, which he defines thus:

Almost everybody will now agree that the ultimate good lies in the evolutionary process in some way. If so, it is not in individual reactions in their segregation, but in something general or continuous. Synechism is founded on the notion that the coalescence, the becoming continuous, the becoming governed by laws, the becoming instinct with general ideas, are but phases of one and the same process of the growth of reasonableness.

(CP 5.4)

Representation is still rooted in the world because it always involves both indexical and iconic aspects. In analysis, a start and end can be arbitrarily defined based on the purpose of the analysis. For this paper, the *Annabelle Blue* film is considered as the representation and my memories insofar as they are represented in that film are the immediate object. Their historical source, the raw material, is the dynamical object. Drawing from the dynamical object I could come up with many other unique films of that period in my life. For the purpose of examining the truth claims of my documentary, the fact that my memories are already a representation of my childhood is relevant. And in fact, there are even more levels of representation before arriving at the finished film. It is my contention that all these different stages or levels of representation are part of the creative process involved in documentary filmmaking. *Annabelle Blue* is the result of almost a year's worth of work comprised of many representations along the way.

*Narrative*

So far in my account of the making of *Annabelle Blue*, I have only got as far as a list of memories, and a list of memories do not make a film. First of all, my memories did not just pop into my mind fully organized into a script. Arranging my memories into a narrative structure was also a process of transposition involving the interplay of iconic, indexical and symbolic components. I selected the strongest memories from my list, strung them into a loose structure and sent the resulting script to two trusted reviewers. One responded after a couple of days with: "Its interesting... I'll get back to you next week with more feed-back... I'm really, really busy right now." The other was more blunt: "What's your point? It's just a bunch of unrelated events. I don't get it. Tell me what it's about in one short sentence." In a bit of a funk, I whipped off a one-page outline of a dark, allegorical tale based on Snow White, whose one-sentence premise was conspicuously stated right in the outline itself: "Annabelle Blue became consumed with the idea that if she could just connect these memory fragments into a thing of beauty, she could escape her prison." My ideas had hit the hard wall of my reviewers's assessments which provoked a change of direction that also incorporated their critiques. The allegory definitely gave a valid frame to my childhood memories, but it was also true that I was feeling quite worried at this point about the whole project of making an autobiographical film; I was feeling imprisoned by my commitment, and wishing I could just write a little 100 page thesis paper instead. The script of my memories and the difficulties I was experiencing while writing the script were curiously related.

The context for the past is the present just as much as the context for the present is the past. That was my epiphany. It goes both ways. Memories truly are, as the narrator in *Annabelle Blue* speculates, "boisterous, mischievous children, auspicious when surrounded with love and understanding, but trouble if treated with disrespect." The present is the narrative glue and the

source of the imaginative details that fill out my vague memories. But this present moment is also the culmination of all that has come before. As Taylor (1989) says, "We are made what we are by events; and as self-narrators, we live these through a meaning which the events come to manifest or illustrate" (p. 289). My mother's character in *Annabelle Blue*, for instance, reflects a caricatured aspect of the real person and of our relationship, but the character is also augmented by other overbearing, controlling people who have come into my life since my childhood. The original pattern remains, but it also grew into the memory of my mother with all this extra baggage. My memory of my mother is as much about me today as it is about her back then. Reality is more about "things-in-relation" than separate, distinct things, says Cohen (qt. in Pascal, 1977, p.48). That can apply to people and their memories, but it can also hold true for whole time periods as well.

The concepts of past, present and future, in themselves, dissolve into nothing when they are examined: the past is gone; the future is not yet; and the present is merely the division between past and future — it has no duration (Dowling, 2011, p.19). Freeman (2010) writes that "one of the challenges of writing a memoir is precisely to hold in tension both then and now, past and present" (p.3). It is only from the vantage point of a 'sort of an ending,' to reword slightly the title of Kermode's classic book on fictional narrative, that we can reflect on the past to see some order in it. We are born into an ongoing world, but as Kermode (1967) says, "Men in the midst make considerable imaginative investments in coherent patterns which, by the provision of an end, make possible a satisfying consonance with the origins and with the middle" (p.17). Every story moves forwards and backwards at the same time, according to Ricoeur (Dowling, 2011, p.10). It moves forward through the logic of causality, but backwards from the perspective of the narrator who knows the story as a whole, from beginning to end, as if standing outside time (Dowling, 2011, p.88). While we are living our life in the moment we are like the reader of a

novel, experiencing it as it goes, muddling through with incomplete information, not knowing the outcome. But when we pause to look back and reflect, we take on a narrator's role. From this distance, outside time, meaningful patterns manifest and structure the past into a unified whole that makes sense. Understanding the patterns of the past help contextualize the forward motion into the future. As Andacht (2010) says: "stories function like evolving maps for still vaguely known or anticipated life paths" (p.4).

Kermode (1967) writes that the logic and strength of a story is in the tick and the tock of a clock (p.44). Tick-tock is a self-contained interval, with an organized shape and duration, whereas tock-tick opens into an indeterminate space that Kermode characterizes as the ground. The duration of the tick-tock interval is the pregnant tension between the beginning and the end. Tock-tick, on the other hand is the boring, bland, unrelenting succession of seconds into perpetuity. Kermode (1967) writes that, "within this organization [of the tick-tock interval] that which was conceived of as simply successive becomes charged with past and future: what was *chronos* becomes *kairos*" (Kermode, 1967, p.46). *Chronos* is "waiting time" or "passing time" whereas *kairos* is "the season, a point in time filled with significance, charged with a meaning derived from its relation to the end" (Kermode, 1967, p.47). Reality is usually associated with *chronos* (Kermode, 1967, p.50). However, since the successive instants in *chronos* are indistinguishable from one another, time can only be measured against the distinction of a "now" of lived experience (Dowling, 2011, p.24). As such, in a sense, the birth of important figures in human history, such as Jesus or Buddha, also gives birth to shared time and therefore, Ricoeur argues, narrative and community (Dowling, 2011, pp.75, 76). The same logic also applies to events that hold importance for an individual — these are the moments of *kairos* that structure a life in time. This notion of time is fundamentally different than either a purely objective "time of the world" or subjective, inner "time of the soul," because it is the shared time, shaped by human

preoccupation, in which we communicate (Dowling, 2011, p.20). Ricoeur calls this the "third time of narrativity," and proposes that through this space of narration and its "webs of significance" we are able to transcend our individual isolation to communicate with others in time (Dowling, 2011, pp. 69, 72, 97).

Communication is one of the primary objectives of art or film, or any language, whether the painting or film is filed away and never seen, or not. John Dewey (1934) explains:

The work of art is complete only as it works in the experience of others than the one who created it. Thus language involves what logicians call a triadic relation. There is the speaker, the thing said, and the one spoken to. The external object, the product of art, is the connecting link between the artist and audience. Even when the artist works in solitude all three terms are present. The work is there in progress, and the artist has to become vicariously the receiving audience. (p. 106)

Traditionally, art was part of community life, rooted in, and reflecting everyday experiences, which is why, according to Dewey (1934), the Athenian Greeks paid considerable attention to the aspect of mimesis or imitation in art when developing their philosophies of aesthetics (p. 7). It is only at the end of the 18th century that art began to shift away from mimesis towards the concept of creation, embracing that which is original over that which endures (Taylor, 1991, p.82). Dowling (2011) describes mimesis as "having something to do with that puzzling intuition that makes us want to say that art imitates life" (p.1). The question that has sparked theories and debates is not so much if art imitates or relates to life, but *in what way* it imitates life. As we have already seen, the direct cinema movement proclaimed that documentary should imitate life directly, as a copy, in order to be truthful. On the other hand, if the aim of art is merely self-expression, there is a danger of sliding towards relativism, where external standards are negated and truth is a matter of self-centred opinion. In Taylor's (1991) view, this stance is self-defeating, as it leads to one of the enemies of authenticity: triviality (pp. 40, 60). I have been arguing that both life and its representation are more dynamic, interwoven and complicated than either of

those positions, involving the interplay in time of both factual and imaginative aspects towards a growth of understanding. Ricoeur (1983), taking as his starting point Aristotle's assessment of dramatic mimesis as the "imitation of an action," (*mimesis praxeos*), developed his own description of mimesis as a process (Dowling, 2011, p.1). He discards the concept of mimesis as imitation in the sense of being a literal copy of an object and outlines a progression that takes life as its source and ultimately ends up feeding back into life through the abstracted third time of narrativity.

Two inherent factors in the narrative structure make a third time possible: "an internal disproportion between the time of narration and the duration of events in the story, and a teleological movement or forward-straining tension that develops as a purely formal consequence of the internal disproportion" (Dowling, 2011, p.46). As mentioned above, narrative is structured by significant events, not according to linear, *chronos* time. Time is compressed or expanded within the space of the narrative according to the importance given to these nodes so that "what emerges from the disproportion is a structure of significance" (Dowling, 2011, p.47). For example, *Annabelle Blue* is an half hour film, but it covers all of my childhood years, at least. Memory is already a selection of significance, as we've seen, but that reduction of reality was again diminished for the script, as I selected memories that were significant in the context of my relationship with my mother. But it does not end there: that second selection of memories was further reduced by practicalities. By the time I was writing the second script based on the outline, I knew that I could not hire actors or coerce friends into acting or rely on any other help and that forced me to choose memories that I thought would be easier to act and film. As well, film requires an exorbitant amount of detail on both visual and auditory levels, and the detail must be consistent throughout to maintain continuity and create a believable film world. The layering of information renders the film narrative even more condensed than a written narrative.

I was already becoming aware of the need for imaginative detail to fill out my vague memories when I was writing the script, but when I began to storyboard it, I became fully aware of the mismatch in terms of the need for detail, between memory and the medium of film. As I worked through the storyboard, I was continually reducing the dialogue as I relocated information to the visual or auditory levels. If I really wanted to hammer the significance of something, I could use all layers at once. All these layers work together and what finally emerged in the finished film is a type of dense scanning pattern of my childhood and my relationship with my mother based on where my mind's eye/ear rested or skipped over. The scanning pattern is mostly governed by my intent to make a film about my childhood and my relationship with my mother, but not completely. The process is dynamic; real life intruded and demanded that I re-think my plans and come up with other solutions. The structure of significance, which is symbolic, is therefore a result of the interplay of iconic and indexical components at several different levels. Signs generate interpretants which, being themselves signs, generate further interpretants. The process does not have a pre-ordained outcome, as the collision and interaction of the different components result in unpredictable patterns. As Ransdell (1989) says, "...such control as we do have over the powers of signs (thus over meaning phenomena in general) lies in our skill at setting them in interaction with one another in the compositional process in ways favorable to some desired result. But we can predict such results only to a limited extent, owing both to our typically incomplete understanding of what the generative powers of a given sign actually are and to the spontaneity of the signs themselves" (para. 2).

The forward motion of narration rests on a notion of causality that takes intention and context into account. Ricoeur understands culture to be a symbolic system that we are born into, and this provides the general context for causality as it relates to motivation and volition (Dowling, 2011, p.4). Somewhat similar to Peirce's account of the development of the self, for

Ricoeur, "the world is significant for us before it becomes objective" (Dowling, 2011, p.70). The world is already full of significance, we do not give it meaning. In his analysis, Ricoeur draws from G.H. von Wright's (1971) model of causality because it deals with the "interactions between consciousness and material circumstances that, for most of us most of the time, constitute the stuff of daily existence" (Dowling, 2011, p.62). Within the general context of our culture we isolate what von Wright (1971) calls a "fragment of the world" as the immediate context for our interpretation of an action (in Dowling, 2011, p.62). For example, when a typical suburb dweller sees his neighbour's overgrown grass and then sees the neighbour wheeling the lawnmower out of the garage, he predicts that the neighbour is going to mow his lawn. He believes the neighbour has this intention. Somebody from another culture might not make this connection, which would lead to a completely different understanding. When the neighbour pulls the lawnmower's cord, the engine starts. In this description of a basic mechanical action, intention partially explains the causal link between the pulled cord and the engine starting, and also links intention with the result of a mowed lawn (whether that actually happens or not). The sequence places intention as a control factor in the chain of causality (Dowling, 2011, pp. 63-65).

Peirce also makes clear how "an intellectual principle" can work to connect independent occurrences in a way that is not merely mechanical and therefore gives rise to semiosis and the generation of meaning. As an example, he discusses a story from *One Thousand and One Nights* where Jinnee's son is coincidentally killed when a merchant throws away a date-stone. While the accident is purely random, the product of two "independent facts [...], had he aimed at him [...] there would have been a relation of aiming which would have connected together the aimer, the thing aimed, and the object aimed, together in one fact" (in Andacht, 2010, p.3, CP1.366). Peirce does not limit the "intellectual principle" to human intention, however, but rather describes it as a underlying basis for semiosis everywhere, whether in nature at large or limited to the human

domain.

Most importantly, this is how we can explain and understand the actions of others. We designate possible or probable intentions to other people's actions based on our assessment of the situation, itself based on the cultural context, and the chain of causality continues on in the same way. Thus, understanding other people and communicating with them is fundamentally rooted in emplotment and narration, and narration is a complex interplay between indexical, factual elements and iconic, imaginative ones. Both are essential: without the indexical facts, possibilities are not relevant or meaningful; without the iconic freedom of possibility, the real remains static and cannot move forward. The iconic aspect gives hard reality its wings and hard reality makes sure imagination keeps within sight of its nourishing ground. Narrative, as the predominantly symbolic aspect, coordinates both elements into a meaningful whole.

The allegorical framework of *Annabelle Blue* based loosely on Snow White provides the "fragment of the world" from which the plot of the film proceeds. As the narrative glue it serves several purposes: it very efficiently takes care of my (then) present situation without going into details, thereby providing the endpoint from which to view past events; it contributes layers of cultural meaning related to sexuality, femininity, female rivalry and growing up that can generally be applied to mother-daughter relationships everywhere; and it allows for some distance, which, for me, was more ethically sound. My mother was a very complex person, but in *Annabelle Blue* it is clear that what is being depicted is one aspect of her as seen from an impetuous child's viewpoint. The narrator in *Annabelle Blue* symbolizes my inner child, and the fairy-tale context is appropriate for this perspective. It signals that the story to follow will be highly symbolic. Playfulness and dark seriousness are in a tug of war right from the beginning scene where Annabelle Blue collapses after catching the apple missile, wounded, bloody and apparently dead (Figure 2, p.74). In keeping with a child's perspective the opening scenes

indicate that the story will weave factual events with exaggerated, dramatic and imaginative flourishes. The indexical events ground the story, while the imaginative flourishes, within the logic of the allegorical context, suggest connections between them and drive the story forward. Most all of the events in the film are either true or typical, however they are bound together by the symbol of the apple and arranged in such a way so as to build tension that culminates in the mother-daughter confrontation over the cut apple tree. The objective is to give the viewer a sense of the everyday felt reality for this child growing up.

The flow of the film, arrived at through editing, is yet another film element that works at almost a subliminal physical level to drive the forward motion of the film. Video editing is similar to music and choreography because it capitalizes on what Daniel Stern (1985) describes as, "vitality-affect contours" which are, as Johnson (2007) explains, "the patterns of process and flow of our felt experience, such as the buildup of tension and its release, the sense of drifting, the energetic pursuit of a goal, the anxious anticipation of some coming event, and the starting and stopping of a process" (qt in Johnson, 2007, p. 238; p.238). Johnson's (2007) remarks about music can apply to video editing also, "[its] function is presentation and enactment of felt experience" rather than a representation of something (p. 238). This is the realm of iconicity.

*Annabelle Blue* took shape in the editing. Sometimes the length of one frame could make all the difference in how a shot tipped into the next. I discovered that we see the movement of blobs of colour or strong shapes more readily than the composition and detail in each frame and I used this knowledge in how shots were edited together to create a stretched out composition of movement and emotion. The most obvious example of dramatic editing in *Annabelle Blue* is the nightmare scene that borrows from horror films to build suspense. The first park scene is a more subtle maintenance of tension between the carefree atmosphere of the park and an ominous undercurrent of threat, such as when the threatening mood produced by the Hitchcockian bird

shot is suddenly punctured by the sun flashing in the trees and Madame Goose plodding through the park with her whimsical hat (Figure 3, p. 75). These type of conflicting forces create apprehension and expectations in the viewer, and become what Dowling calls a "forward straining tension" at almost a visceral level ( Dowling, 2011, p.46).

Narrative imitates life as a model does; it offers a condensed experience of the process of life. Pascal (1977) explains:

The essence of the story is the process, the reader's experience of a process that is a model of some aspect of human relationships, during which he is constantly engaged in anticipations and surprises, wishes and setbacks, judgments that require correction, a series that is somewhat altered with every new reading and involves, like life, alternations of expectations and revisions until the ending. Its stuff is the contingent, its purpose the discovery of some coherence within the great mass of the contingent.  
(p.46)

The contingent here can be read as the intrusion of brute reality, the indexical, that frequently upsets all our carefully laid plans, and it is only through imagination that coherence or meaning, and a way forward, can be discovered. But, as Kermode (1967) says, "...the contingency must be there, or our *as if* will be mere fantasy and unrelated to the basic human task of imaginative self-invention" (p.146). Imaginative freedom must remain tethered to the ground of the real, just as *kairos* only makes sense against the ground of *chronos*.

### ***The Official Story: Home Movies and Evidence***

By the time I was working on the second script, I had managed to get the old family projector, circa 1959, up and running, and had viewed some of the reels of 8mm film that I had retrieved from the basement of the house where I grew up. I had not seen these movies in at least forty years, if ever. What struck me about these home movies, besides the emotional impact and the gorgeous saturated colours, was how they did not correspond at all to my memories, with the exception of one where I am riding my tricycle (Figure 4, p.76). The home movies are magical,

bright and happy, whereas many of my memories are dark and conflicted. This led to the structure of the film. I was not willing to throw out either the home movies or my memories, so I arranged the script to feature each of them in their own section, held together by the allegorical skeleton. In my mind I characterized these two sections as the official versus the hidden real story.

My characterization is somewhat ironic, because home movies are generally considered to be reliable, unbiased indications of what it was really like back then. They derive their compelling air of authenticity from the fact that they catch family life in all its unpretentious and unedited innocence. The film quality is usually grainy, the motion jerky, composition unbalanced — all signifying a spontaneity unmarred by artful or technological trickery. The person filming usually knows the people being filmed and this adds to the aura of authenticity because the motive behind the film is pure, based on love and the desire to capture mementos for family viewing only. Speaking of photography but equally applicable to film, Barthes (1980) calls this type of unintentional and untheatrical quality, *punctum* because it "pricks" or "wounds" or "bruises"— it captures attention in some immediate, visceral way, almost like being there (qt. in Fried, 2005, p.539). The sense of an unmediated experience contributes to the film's feeling of authenticity. Similar to Kermode's characterization of *kairos* and *chronos*, *punctum* stands out against the ground of the rather unexciting or predictable subject matter which he calls the *studium*.

For Barthes (1980), a photograph is not memory, "it actually blocks memory, quickly becomes a counter-memory" (qt. in Fried, 2005, p.560). When I first saw them, my family's home movies felt like they belonged to somebody else. The very energetic little girl of the home movies that is supposedly me was vaguely familiar, like somebody I think I've met before, somehow, somewhere —similar to me in the family photographs —however the overwhelming

sentiment was not recognition, but curiosity about this little person that is and isn't me.

Mannerisms and overall feeling of life do not show up as clearly in photographs. Now however, some of my family's home movies have become part of my memory — more integrated into my being than mere media. Other home movies, ones that had sparked a shadowy recognition, have brought light to the murk in the form of vibrant detail. For the tricycle memory, the home movie replaced some of the detail: in my memory my tricycle was bright red and shiny, not a dull blue and brown. Dull blue and brown is more true in an indexical sense, but shiny red captures the very real feeling of freedom and happiness better. In this case, it feels like the home movie diminished the memory. It highlights the tension between the pure exuberant quality of happiness and excitement of play versus the actuality—the dull paint of the tricycle.

Home movies are historical evidence as much as a fossilized footprint or a stone tool is. All are examples of traces from the past. As both a thing and a sign, a trace is "the disarrangement of some order that invites explanation in terms of an absent cause" (Dowling, 2011, p.72). Traces encourage stories as a means to explore the possibilities or probabilities of how this thing from the past was integrated into the lives of the people (or animals) who used or created them. In themselves, they do tell us something, but not all that much. As Bruzzi (2006) says, "The document is not empty of meaning, although it can be devoid of interpretation [...]. The fundamental issue of documentary film is the way in which we are invited to access the 'document' or 'record' through representation or interpretation, to the extent that a piece of archive material becomes a mutable rather than a fixed point of reference" (p. 17). Bruzzi (2006) explores these ideas through the example of Abraham Zapruder's home movie footage of the assassination of President Kennedy in 1963 (p. 17). The footage, while "unimpeachable" in itself, insofar as it is a piece of evidence—an indexical sign in physical contiguity with the assassination of JFK in Dallas— has predictably spawned many versions of what actually

happened that day. The footage functions, as she says "as incontrovertible evidence, whilst as a text incapable of revealing conclusively who killed President Kennedy, it functions as an inconclusive representation"(Bruzzi, 2006, p.20). The indexical aspect of the footage, the fixed point of reference, to use Bruzzi's (2006) words, is not sufficient to deliver indisputable proof or complete and reliable understanding of what happened. It does not provide enough context. As a consequence, because this is typical, archival images are usually used in documentary either as illustrations to back up other documentation and testimony or critically, as part of an argument (p. 26). In either case, the indexical evidence is incorporated into a structure that follows the same basic logic of narration as was discussed above. Indexical evidence is woven together with probability to advance a version of reality. Where the evidence is used critically, the use of archival footage exploits the difference between the original context and its recontextualization to make a point about subject matter.

In the case of *Annabelle Blue*, home movies are used in both ways. As an illustration they provide a visual component to the narration that introduces my family members, for example. In a critical sense, they appear in the first instance, as shown projected on a screen with a cut out of me commandeering the situation to bring attention to myself, while my bored siblings are wishing it would just be over soon (Figure 5, p.76). This is a comment on home movies themselves as trivial and uninteresting except to those depicted, unless they are arranged into a story to give them meaning. They are like Kermode's *chronos*, they just go on and on with no end to give them definition.

In the second instance home movies and photographs of half a century ago are spliced with present day footage of me in the same location. The juxtaposition accentuates both the continuities and differences. Some things change very slowly — the house is still painted the same colour for example — but my parents are dead and the me of today is many years older

than my parents in the movies. Film in itself highlights the distance between now and then, delivering a *punctum* punch of raw emotion relating to the inevitability of death. As Barthes (1980) says, again in relation to photography: "there is always the defeat of Time in them: *that* is dead and *that* is going to die,"(qt. in Fried, 2005, p.560). By juxtaposing film from now and then, I brought the uncomfortable sensation of the incomprehensibility of time and death out into the open. But, as the caption<sup>8</sup> superimposed on the next sequence makes clear, I also offer the suggestion of an antidote: love endures, even when material substance disintegrates.

The official section is bolstered by my testimony. I speak straight to the camera and tell my stories in a typical documentary style. Testimony is associated with bearing witness and implies a dialogical and moral relationship with the audience, as Felman (2000) makes clear: "Memory is conjured here essentially in order to *address* another, to impress upon a listener, to *appeal* to a community ... To testify is thus not merely to narrate, but to commit oneself, and to commit the narrative to others: to *take responsibility* — in speech — for history or for the truth of an occurrence" (qt in Tait, 2011, p.12). The strength of the impact of testimony led Lanzmann to use testimony exclusively when he created the documentary *Shoah* (1985). The rationale was to provoke the survivors to relive their experiences and thereby "abolish all distance between the past and the present" (Lanzmann, 1990 in Waterson, 2007:, p.55). Testimony then becomes an event, and part of the present (Waterson, 2007, p.61). In *Annabelle Blue*, however, all my testimony, while true, is scripted and then acted in several takes to give me choice in editing. It is a performance, which may seem to repudiate the rationale behind the indexical principles underlying testimony in the documentary film genre. However, the aspect of performance is embedded in *Annabelle Blue* from the start with the use of an allegorical framework. My acted testimony is in keeping with the logic of the film.

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8 The exact words are: "Love can't disintegrate because of bad stitching"

***The Child's Perspective: Performance and Intangible Qualities***

Usually there are many people involved in the making of a film. From my multi-role experience in the production of *Annabelle Blue*, I can now say that the contribution of every single one of them is crucial, from driver to director. To compensate for my limited crew of usually just me, I made many check-lists<sup>9</sup>. Every day of filming, I compiled and printed out a shot list that included the order in which the shots were to be filmed. After a few mess-ups where I had forgotten glasses or lipstick or whatever, I started including a detailed list of the costume components for each character at specific times as well. Because I was playing all the roles, I tried to change costume as little as possible to minimize the possibility of error. Except for the scenes where two or more characters are in the same frame, I filmed all the shots of one character, several times over, and then a bunch of shots of the other character. It had to be done fairly quickly to maintain a reasonable continuity, because of the changes in the natural light. There was little time for thinking. Nothing was rehearsed — I repeated my lines a couple of times before turning on the camera and then just concentrated on remembering them and saying them with more or less the appropriate emotion. My acting debut was pure flying by the seat of my pants.

This however, was expected and the script was written to not only compensate, but actually embrace bad acting. The allegorical framework allowed me to write the characters as one-dimensional caricatures. In fact, this was absolutely essential, as I needed to differentiate between me as my mother, me as an adult and me as a child (Figure 6, p.77). The only way to do this was to exaggerate distinctive characteristics and to be very consistent with the mannerisms and costumes. The mother's colours are bright and loud, so as to fill the space. She is

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<sup>9</sup> For the official scene, the overhead bathtub shot and the nightmare, I had help with camera work.

overbearing, abrupt and angry all the time. To signify that me, a middle-aged woman, is a child in the film, the young Annabelle wears stereotypical pigtails with big pink bows, even though I never wore pink bows as a child. She is always either hurt or snarky. As an adult, Annabelle's pink bows and white shirt and shorts have become smaller and her hair has grown out.

At one point somebody suggested that the title of the film could be "It's all about me." The experience however, was the opposite of self-absorption. I was not trying on identities in the postmodern sense as Zygmunt Bauman (1995) describes: "If the modern "problem of identity" was how to construct an identity and keep it solid and stable, the postmodern "problem of identity" is primarily how to avoid fixation and keep the options open. In the case of identity, as in other cases, the catchword of modernity was "creation"; the catchword of postmodernity is "recycling." (qt. in Renov, 2004, p.139). Both the modern and postmodern concepts of the self are rooted in the contemporary version of Augustine's "radical reflexivity," where meaning has become insular. The making of *Annabelle Blue* was more of a turning outwards than inwards. Michael Ondaatje in an interview with Guy Maddin describes it this way: "Well, something happens, I think, when you are obsessed with something and then you are shaping it as something out there. You're objectifying it and then the form takes over and deals with it in a more objective way" (qt. in Maddin, 2009, p.133). The preoccupation is on getting the job done as honestly and effectively as possible rather than on self-absorption or self-expression.

In the film I give a nod to Cindy Sherman in a scene in Strathecona park where a woman named Cindy is trying on clothes from a vintage shop. Cindy Sherman's photography has been embraced by theorists as a prime example of postmodernism. She photographs herself dressed in various personas, thereby bringing attention to the question of identity in the late 20th and early 21st century. In one of her early series called *Untitled Film Stills*, the photographs seem to depict still shots from movies (Figure 7, p.78). However, Sherman staged the scenes for the

photographs; the photographs do not refer to actual movies. Rather, the photographs are self-referential; they refer most evidently to their creation by Sherman. In her *Untitled Film Stills* series, Sherman is playing with different modes of representation to explore how representation is related to reality. Carroll (1996) explains these different modes using Monroe Beardsley's nomenclature (physical portrayal, depiction, nominal portrayal), but it transfers seamlessly to a semiotic classification (p. 240). The indexical aspect is the fact that film "physically portrays its source" (Carroll, 1996, p. 240). At the same time, the film also portrays a class of objects. This is the symbolic aspect of a shot. The iconic aspect lifts the shot from its straightforward reference to the source and gives it a different reference within the context of the film. Cindy Sherman's photography shows the Cindy Sherman that was there dressing up and taking a picture indexically, but it also shows a symbolic depiction of *typical* movie star which never-the-less is also dependent on iconic qualities. Without the mimetic, iconic aspect which makes the resulting image resemble an actress playing a role, there would be no symbolic sign. As well, some of her photography portrays *specific* movie stars, Marilyn Monroe for example, and this switches the hierarchy around to be primarily an iconic representation which also has symbolic aspects. As already discussed, all of these aspects are present in any representation, in varying degrees.

The fundamental difference between simulacra upon simulacra *à la* Baudrillard, and the semiotic classification is the denial or rejection of the indexical aspect in postmodern theory. Baudrillard believes that the postmodern culture resides completely in representations because the link to the object has eroded to the point of being nonexistent (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001: 227). Simulacra are signs without objects, copies without originals, symptoms without the disease (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001, pp.164, 366). Postmodern culture is obsessed with change and surface because that is all we have access to (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001, p. 258). There is nothing that endures. Digital media are emblematic of the post-modern culture as Bauman (1995)

explains:

... if the 'media which was the message' of modernity was the photographic paper (think of relentlessly swelling family albums, tracing page by page the slow accretion of irreversible and non-erasable identity-yielding events), the ultimately postmodern medium is the videotape (eminently erasable and reusable, calculated not to hold anything forever, admitting today's events solely on condition of effacing yesterday's ones, oozing the message of universal "until-further-noticeness" of everything deemed worth of recording). The main identity-bound anxiety of modern times was the worry about durability; it is the concern with commitment-avoidance today. Modernity built in steel and concrete; postmodernity — in bio-degradable plastic. (qt in Renov, 2004, p.139)

In terms of Peirce's semiotic this characterization would indicate that culture in the digital age is more concerned with iconic aspects of representation than its indexical aspects. Still, there are also symbolic aspects involved, as there is meaning in what people do with these disposable images. The attention for iconic over indexical aspects may hold true generally in contemporary life, which could be why obesity is epidemic, for example, along with related diseases. The real world still finds its way to intrude. As Peirce writes: "[The indexical] is existent, in that its being does not consist in any qualities, but in its effects — in its actually acting and being acted on, so long as this action and suffering endures. Those who experience its effects perceive and know it in that action; and just that constitutes its very being" (CP 6.318). Reality in Peirce's semiotic incorporates all aspects irregardless if we favour one over the other because it is not human dependent. While Baudrillard's characterization of today's society is symptomatic of an inward and endlessly circular "radical reflexivity," in Peirce's semiotic, meaning is embodied, it takes place between the body-mind and the world and it connects to the real through indexicality.

If there were no such thing as a movie, Sherman's symbolic depiction of a typical still shot of a typical movie would not make any sense. It would not be relevant and it would not cause us to wonder about the relation between the image and reality. Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* are related to archival footage with its too-tight context in the sense of being the exact inverse. We know how they generally fit together, but there is no direct link. Indexicality is

downplayed in favour of the iconic and symbolic aspects, but it is not completely gone. In Sherman's work, indexicality is conspicuous by its apparent absence — there is, instead, overt self-referentiality or reflexivity in her photography. Sherman's manufactured film stills are not an illustration of reality as a cerebral product, but rather, are used critically to explore how a representation is related to its referent. Meaning is not necessarily seen as detached from reality, Sherman's photography leaves the question open.

Sherman's own comments on her work focus on the "fun" aspect of it, and the fun aspect of this type of endeavour is something I certainly experienced in the filming of *Annabelle Blue* (Mulvey, 1991, p. 138). Playfulness and the irony of the situation were at the forefront. How, for example, does a fifty-four year old convincingly play a ten (or so) year old child? Even if that child was (is?) me? There is something fundamentally ironic in the realization that I might not be the appropriate person to do a re-enactment of myself. Somebody else might be more convincing. The mechanics of the representation of the characters in *Annabelle Blue* work like this: the actual footage of me sporting pigtails or alternately a black wig is lifted from its indexical connection which is bound by time, and shifted through the context set up by the film, to drop me in a different time or to portray a completely a different person in the form of my mother. In the re-enactments, whether I'm playing myself as a child, or my mother, the primary aspect is iconic. It is also symbolic in as far as these portrayals, partially because they use stereotypes, say something about mothers, daughters and their relationships in general. It is still indexical, because these people actually do/did exist and these events actually did happen, even if there is little documentation outside of memory.

In one of the most indexically accurate re-enactments of the film, the bath scene, a depressed Annabelle says: "I wish I were somebody else. But what if I were already somebody else? How would I know?" Forty-some years later, I still don't have an answer (Figure 8, p.79).

The next shot where the young Annabelle morphs into her mother while looking in the mirror, has associations with Snow White and the fear of growing old, especially as it relates to femininity, and it also relates to Annabelle's confusion about what if anything endures in a person. This is the same issue that is brought up when I, an adult, perform myself as a child or when I juxtapose present day footage with footage from fifty years ago. Autobiographical and social memory ensures some sort of feeling of continuity, but it does not not provide an answer to the question of why. But this might be one of the biggest paradoxes of all: it is the prospect of an end that causes the forward straining tension of the narrative of life, and therein lies the irony and the playfulness that is rooted in the absurd.

While filming *Annabelle Blue*, but more specifically editing it, my operative thought was to take the film as far from realism as I could. The film needed to be very obviously fake, even beyond exaggerated acting and re-enactments. The graphics that are integrated into the live footage, for example Madame Goose's hat, or the flowers surrounding the apple trees, are bright and bold and without shadows. The fantasy element is a performance in itself and since it is obviously so, it becomes reflexive. I am not trying to pull the wool over anybody's eyes and pretend that Madame Goose was actually strolling through the park as she appears in the film. Sturken & Cartwright (2001) define reflexivity as "the practice of making viewers aware of the material and technical means of production by featuring them in the image or as the 'content' of a cultural production" (p.248). Traditionally, documentary hides the modes of production so as to concentrate on the subject matter and not the representation. But Bruzzi (2006) contends that since all documentary is, at bottom, a negotiation between the representation and reality, it is inherently performative:

The performative documentary [...] — whether built around the intrusive presence of the filmmaker or self-conscious performances by its subjects — is the enactment of the notion that a documentary only comes into being as it is performed, that although its

factual basis (or document) can pre-date any recording or representation of it, the film itself is necessarily performative because it is given meaning by the interaction between performance and reality.  
(p.186)

From the outline of the process of making *Annabelle Blue*, it should be clear that what Bruzzi calls performance incorporates many layers of transposition, and the interplay of indexical and iconic aspects is involved at each level. The clashes or collaborations, as the case may be, of indexical and iconic aspects, leaves traces in the final product and contributes to a multi-layered reading. How this relates to the reality of the object that documentary is purporting to represent is also complex and partially depends on if that object is seen as simplistic and static or complex and evolving.

For example, while the bathtub re-enactment in *Annabelle Blue* is primarily indexical—I actually did lie in that very bathtub forty or so years ago and I did think those very thoughts—the garden tea party that precedes it scores higher in its iconic and symbolic properties (Figure 9, p. 79). In *Annabelle Blue*, scenes that are primarily iconic, that aim to evoke feelings and other intangible qualities are juxtaposed with others that are primarily indexical and so the iconic/indexical tension is not limited to within each scene, but also structures the film. The garden tea party highlights qualities such as feelings and imagination, which I consider to be as much a part of reality as the indexical setting of the garden. The scene is derived from both my mother's oft-stated exasperation that I was not living up to her expectations mixed with the fact that she was always expressing that exasperation along with my private issues to her friends. Statements such as: "Why can't you be like Kathy James?" or whoever, were typical. I reworked those sentiments based on typical occurrences from a child's perspective to try to give a sense of how this made me feel as a child. As Alexander (1990) writes: "For imagination to operate...it must reveal the 'extended environment' of a situation. That is to say, in order to understand a

situation, we must not only grasp its actualities but its possibilities. Those possibilities are ontologically part of the situation" (p.339). As we have already seen, this is one way we understand other people's actions. It is vital for communication, interacting with our environment and living in general. From an autobiographical point of view, the fact that the scene is couched in imagination is also symbolically realistic because it is based on a typical occurrence: I spent much of my time immersed in my imagination as a child. Therefore on both counts this scene has its roots in a symbolic reality that incorporates the indexical and iconic interplay, even if I cannot pinpoint the exact origin. The garden tea party, however, is much closer to fiction than the bathtub scene.

## Discussion

So what, finally, is the difference between documentary and fiction? The interplay of indexical and iconic elements is relevant for both documentary and fiction film, as it is in life. Furthermore, fiction and documentary film can have very similar, even identical styles. Aesthetics do not make the difference. And yet there is a difference, although I believe it is more of a continuum than a sharp division. This is fully congruent with Peircean synechism. Philosophy makes a distinction between the *use* of an expression from the *mentioning* of it (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Quotation). Ricoeur believes this distinction explains the difference between a factual account and a fictional one. The *use* of an expression points to a reality independent of the expression. For example, the sentence "Shut the door", asks us to look through the word door to a real door. On the other hand, the sentence, "Door has four letters," is referring to door as internal to the sentence; it has no reality outside of this context (Dowling, 2011, p.87). The ground for documentary is the world we inhabit. Fiction, on the other hand, is a self-contained world, even if its characters and situations are drawn from experience. There is much that is indexical in fiction even without considering historical genres. Documentary is enmeshed in real life whereas fiction takes a piece of real life, removes it to a safe place and lets it grow. Documentary's context has several implications. Documentary is not protected from the backlash of the real world. Real people can refute its claims, and in fact, this is one of its purposes — to extend the discussion beyond the boundaries of the representation. The different contexts of documentary and fiction influence our perception of intent and how we expect causality or reasoning to proceed. Whereas fiction may fly with more abandon into the realm of the possible, documentary must remain at least cognizant if not completely respectful of the probable. Besides the general context and expectations related to the respective genres, each film

also sets up specific pacts with its viewers that influence expectations. The specific context of *Annabelle Blue* is clearly demonstrated from the beginning as allegorical and symbolic.

However, *Annabelle Blue* is still a symbolic representation that is tethered to the indexical: it points to and draws from a reality that existed independent of this representation of it.

Both documentary and fiction can be used as instruments of thought leading to a greater understanding of life. Fiction works in this regard in the same way that the concepts of zero or infinity, although not real numbers, can still enable practical discoveries and applications (Pascal, 1977: 41). Fiction is an exploration of possibilities and it works because it is intentionally removed from the indexical circumstances, which allows it more freedom. (Kermode, 1967: 64). However, it cannot directly explain, question or even interpret a real life situation. It is not face-to-face with the situation. When people discuss a fictional film it is about how it relates to life in broad strokes. Documentary is more closely tied to the nitty gritty of life, although it can inspire generalizations as well. In the end, it is more the existential weight of each semiotic aspect in the relation of the sign to its object, rather than its inclusion or exclusion that determines if a film is fiction or documentary. Fiction leans heavily on the symbolic and iconic side, while documentary is more concerned with the indexical and the iconic.

How a documentary approaches its subject depends, in part, on how the filmmaker views reality and truth in general. If truth is thought to be static and absolute, then an explanation or interpretation is the likely course of action. In this case the documentary is a product. The documentary's goal is related to the imitation of life as a literal copy and it hides the modes of production. Most traditional documentary, but especially the direct cinema documentary, are examples of this approach. If, however, reality is considered to be dynamic and multi-dimensional, documentary is more likely to be used as an instrument to explore the subject matter. This brings it closer to the purpose of fiction. This kind of documentary imitates life as a

creative process. The recent increase of documentaries that push the genre's limits may be due to a changing perception of reality in society at large. Documentary in this case is an extension of the subject matter where the process of representation happens over time with many representations along the way, more akin to Bruzzi's (2006) idea of performative documentaries as the "crucial point at which the factual event, the difficulties of representation and the act of watching a documentary are confronted — if not resolved" (p. 7). The creative process, that is an interplay of iconic and indexical elements, is no longer a behind-the-scenes activity when documentary is used as an instrument. Instead, the creative process is left exposed and becomes part of the subject matter of the film as a natural outcome. These types of films are cognizant of the fact that it is impossible in life to determine where semiosis, or meaning-making, starts and ends. As such, the interpretants of these films are likely to be more varied and complex, and as Andacht (2010) says, it is precisely this, "synechistic generation of layered interpretants that leads us to the truth. These complex signs enable viewers to contemplate not a faked or invented reality, but to attain a better grasp of it, that is to further revelations of the real" (p.6). It allows us to gain a better grasp of it *because* it is multi-dimensional and therefore encourages the aggregation of various readings that can lead to a more encompassing understanding of the object. This is no different than how we usually determine truth. In life, we are always weighing, comparing and combining imperfect and incomplete information from different sources, and this is how we understand our reality (Andacht, 2010, p.6).

*Annabelle Blue* is a documentary of this second type. Memory is too fragmentary and mutable to be considered stable in itself. *Annabelle Blue* relies heavily on my own memory and is not bolstered or refuted by the testimony of others or by much documentary evidence. Within the limitations of this project, an explanation or interpretation of my childhood would not have been possible, whereas an exploration of my childhood through memory and consequently an

exploration of memory itself, was entirely doable. Whatever I may have wished to do, the indexical intervened to influence the course of *Annabelle Blue*. What ensued was a continuation of the negotiation between my ideas and the limitations. But limitations do not always diminish the end result; limitations can also encourage solutions that are more original and suited to revealing the multiple layers of the quest for truth driving the representation. Many filmmaking decisions are entirely practical but must still manoeuvre the film towards the goal of an authentic representation within the context. I've outlined some of the process and difficulties of producing *Annabelle Blue* to make it clear that this is the creative process; this is how films get made. For experienced filmmakers, the process might run smoother and with better results, but it is a matter of degree. Filmmaking, as in any art production, is all about the confrontation of the iconic and the indexical aspects—sometimes as a peaceful negotiation, sometimes a collision—towards the most authentic symbolic representation of the object possible. Traces of this tension, the struggle between the iconic and the indexical, are embedded in the final product and contribute to the meanings of the film. The film is thus both a result and a continuation of the creative processes that are at work in all life and communication. To quote Andacht (2010): "We tell stories about ourselves as keen pilots who are intent on arriving safely to some still partially unknown but somehow foreseeable destination" (p.7). Along the way there are many obstacles that need to be negotiated, and that is just part of the journey.

## Conclusion

This paper has analyzed the progression involved in representing my memories in an autobiographical documentary film from the perspective of Peirce's theory of semiotic. The study found that the process of creating a film is comprised of a series of representations, each involving the interplay of iconic, indexical and symbolic elements, and each having a crucial influence on the how the process will proceed until its culmination in the final product. Traces of the various transpositions are embedded in the final film and contribute to the meaning and truth value of the representation. In the making of *Annabelle Blue* the main transpositions considered were those of self and memory to script/narrative to film/editing. In another analysis or in the consideration of a different film, the specific transpositions would surely be different. I have called this progression of transpositions 'the creative process', and it closely correlates to Peirce's concept of semiosis: the activity by which signs gain significance and grow in generality and meaning. While this study was confined to the process of the making of a documentary, it can be safely extrapolated, based on Peirce's theory, that the creative process does not end with the finished film, but continues to develop in its interpretants over time, as viewers— including the film maker —watch it, think about it, comment on it, and so on. The creative process is not seen as beginning and ending with the filmmaker, but rather is inherent in all activity and communication where some sort of growth is involved. The filmmaker's role is to integrate him/herself into that activity.

The creative process is therefore integral to both documentary and fiction film. This paper proposes that the difference between the two is in the existential weight of the sign-object relation in the representation. Both involve all three semiotic relations, but documentary rests mostly on the indexical and the iconic while fiction leans towards the symbolic and iconic.

Documentary points to and draws from a reality that exists independent of the documentary's representation of it, whereas fiction is relatively self-contained. This is not a sharp distinction, but rather a continuum between the two poles. Both documentary and fiction, can lead to a growth of understanding about life, either in general in the case of fiction, or about a specific real-life situation in the case of documentary.

This thesis has argued that the traditional documentary debate on authenticity is based in a rigid objectivist view of truth where reality is static and truth is considered to be a mirror of that reality. A pragmatic view of truth considers reality to be embodied, dynamic, evolving and inseparable from the way we act in the world. This concept of reality has an important impact on the evaluation of documentary's truth claims. If reality is seen as dynamic, the truth of the documentary will also be dynamic and multi-faceted and must be evaluated by taking context and implications into consideration.

The combination of the practical, artistic experience of making a documentary with the theoretical analysis of that experience increased the understanding on both sides in this study. Often the artistic and the analytical seem to exist in completely separate worlds as they involve different modes of functioning. Their marriage in this paper was at times difficult and stormy, while I attempted to give equal voice to each, even though one or the other kept wanting to take over. From my perspective, the struggle was worthwhile as the theory clarified what was for me more of an intuitive, unarticulated process. My hope is that the articulation of the creative process involved in making a film has also validated it in the rarified realm of theory, by demonstrating that art-making and theoretical analysis are not so diametrically opposed after all, they are, in fact, complementary, and each has a necessary place in the dynamic, evolving sort of reality that is semiosis.

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Appendix



**Figure 1**  
Running in the halls of the University of Ottawa



**Figure 2**  
Annabelle Blue after catching the apple



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5



**Figure 6**  
The adult Annabelle Blue



The child Annabelle Blue



Annabelle Blue's mother



**Figure 7**  
**Untitled Film Still #3. 1977.**  
**Cindy Sherman**  
Collection The Museum of Modern Art,  
New York.

Cindy Sherman's "Untitled Film Stills" are a series of photographs inspired by movies and women's magazines that she shot from 1977 to 1980.  
(<http://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/1997/sherman/>)



**Figure 8**  
Bathtub scene



**Figure 9**  
Garden party scene

