

Lunds universitet

Institutionen för kommunikation och medier

Kandidatprogram i journalistik

Handledare: : Michael Rübsamen

Uppsattsseminarium:

Nicki Jose Farschi

JOUK10 Kandidatkurs



LUNDS
UNIVERSITET

The Power of Visual Storytelling in Documentary Filmmaking

A Case study on How Visual Storytelling is used in the
Documentary *Dear Zachary*

Abstract: The aim of this thesis is to analyze the use of creative techniques in documentary: *Dear Zachary* through visual storytelling. As well as analyze how the use of visual storytelling in *Dear Zachary* relates to theoretical boundaries within documentary filmmaking and the concerns from the journalistic field. The documentary: *Dear Zachary* is an inspiring story about grief, love and perseverance. This case was chosen because although it contains two murder cases, the documentary filmmaker was able to despite its tragic events through the use of visual storytelling techniques create a story about hope and perseverance. The result of the thesis showed that the visual storytelling in the documentary *Dear Zachary* was kept within the theoretical framework of documentary filmmaking. However this is only one case study and can not be ground for the conclusion that this is the case with most documentaries. The hope is that future researchers will continue studying the relationship between visual storytelling and the boundaries within documentary filmmaking. As well as continue research regarding journalisms concerns with documentaries by testing those concerns through case studies similar to this one.

Keywords: Visual storytelling, Documentary filmmaking, Journalism, Dear Zachary, Case Study

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2. INTRODUCTION

In 2018 *Columbia Journalism Review* released an article defending documentary's status within the journalistic field. The author of the article, June Cross, a Professor of Journalism at Columbia University, challenges the idea that documentaries can not tell compelling stories while also being factually accurate. Cross also argues that journalism has evolved beyond the "narrow" view of objectivity, as it does include opinions¹. Cross explains that documentaries went through a revolution of their own from informational to captivating stories during the 1950's when photographer Robert Drew asked: Why are documentaries so dull? What would it take for them to become gripping and exciting?"

He realized that documentaries are not interesting if they are just lectures with pictures, instead he started studying the art of storytelling and came to the conclusion²:

"As the power of the drama builds, viewers respond emotionally as well as intellectually"³.

According to Award-winning filmmaker Sheila Curran Benard what makes a compelling documentary is visual storytelling. This is what makes documentaries motivational and inspirational⁴. Furthermore Bernard argues that there is an art to visual storytelling in documentaries, meaning there are a range of creative techniques that make a great story⁵. This thesis aims to analyze the significance of storytelling in documentaries through a case study: *Dear Zachary*⁶. The documentary is an inspiring story about grief, love and perseverance. This case was chosen because although it contains two murder cases, the documentary filmmaker was able to despite its tragic events through the use of visual storytelling techniques create a story about hope and perseverance.

However as the popularity of documentaries continues to rise through mainstream media and streaming platforms, the concern regarding documentary's status within the journalistic field is more relevant than ever. One of the main concerns against documentaries

¹ Cross, J. (2018) "In defense of documentaries as journalism" *Columbia Journalism Review*, 3, December. P. 2.

² Cross, J. (2018, p. 3)

³ Cross, J. (2018, p. 3)

⁴ Bernard, S.C. (2007) *Documentary storytelling: Making stronger and more dramatic nonfiction films*. Amsterdam: Focal Press. P.4

⁵ Bernard, S.C. (2007, p. 15)

⁶ *Dear Zachary* (2008) Directed by K. Kuenne [Film]. New York, NY: MSNBC Films

was highlighted in a report from Center for Media and Social Impact, which was that documentaries lack a system of accountability and can therefore lead to a platform of dis/misinformation⁷. Which presents the question whether documentaries can achieve visual storytelling while still keeping within their theoretical boundaries. The aim of this thesis is to address this concern through the analysis of the case study.

This thesis will set up the theoretical framework within documentaries as well as introduce creative techniques to create visual storytelling. Additionally some of the concerns on how documentaries fit within the journalistic field will be presented. Those theories will then be applied in the case study to investigate to what extent storytelling can be told without compromising documentary's theoretical boundaries as well as address journalism's concerns of the upholding of those boundaries.

2.1 Thesis aim

The aim of this thesis is to analyze the use of creative techniques in documentary: *Dear Zachary* through visual storytelling. As well as analyze how the use of visual storytelling in *Dear Zachary* relates to theoretical boundaries within documentary filmmaking and the concerns from the journalistic field.

2.2 Research questions

1. How does the Documentary: *Dear Zachary* apply creative techniques through visual storytelling?
2. How does visual storytelling in the Documentary: *Dear Zachary* relate to the theoretical boundaries within documentary filmmaking; and how does this relate to journalism's critique regarding documentary filmmaking upholding these boundaries?

2.3 Previous research

The research on visual storytelling in documentary filmmaking is limited. There is research on how filmmaking is done through television such as "How to Study Television" by Keith Selby and Ron Cowery⁸. The book provides a theoretical framework to analyze media texts, which includes documentaries. However the cases presented in the book are more focused on

⁷ Aufderheide, P. and Woods, M. (2021) *The State of Journalism on the Documentary Filmmaking Scene*. rep. Center for Media and Social Impact, pp. 2–19. P.3

⁸ Selby, K. and Cowery, R. (1995) *How to study television*. Hampshire: Macmillan.

fictional content, such as commercials and television series. The research is still relevant for this study as it sets up a general method for analyzing media but it does not present the difference between fictional and nonfictional filmmaking.

Furthermore there is research specifically on nonfiction filmmaking such as “The Art of Nonfiction Movie Making”⁹. The book brings up some of the concerns and challenges that nonfiction films such as documentaries face. The leading researcher in visual storytelling, specifically within documentary filmmaking is Sheila Curran Bernard. Bernard emphasizes the power of visual storytelling in her book “Documentary storytelling: Making stronger and more dramatic nonfiction films”¹⁰. Furthermore she presents the technical tools used within documentary filmmaking to create compelling stories.

Researchers have addressed concerns regarding documentary’s status within the journalistic field. Recently a report was conducted by the Center for Media and Social Impact to study the state of journalism on the documentary filmmaking scene¹¹. The study consists of interviews with around 66 professionals within documentary-focused journalism. Another study that has conducted research on documentaries' role in journalism is Tim P.Vos in *Journalism, a handbook of communication Science*¹². Different researchers within the handbook agreed that journalism does not have a precise definition and is an evolving profession. Researchers within the journalistic field highlight similarities and differences between journalism and documentary filmmaking.

In conclusion there has been some research on the theoretical similarities and differences between documentaries and journalists¹³. There have also been studies conducted on storytelling in documentaries that are exemplified through different cases¹⁴. However the research field is lacking in case studies that investigate how storytelling techniques are compatible with documentary theoretical framework, as well as addressing the concerns from the journalistic field.

⁹ Friedman, J., Epstein, R.P. and Wood, S. (2012) *The art of nonfiction movie making*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger.

¹⁰ Bernard (2007)

¹¹ Aufderheide, P. and Woods, M. (2021)

¹² Vos, T.P. (2018) *Journalism Vol 19*. 1st edn. Berlin: de Gruyter Mouton.

¹³ Vos, T.P. (2018)

¹⁴ Bernard (2007)

This is precisely the aim of this thesis. To bring these theoretical theories within the three connected fields: journalism, documentary and storytelling and analyze their compatibility through a case study.

3. THEORY

The theory will consist of three chapters. The first chapter will set up the theoretical framework to documentary filmmaking. The analysis will refer back to this chapter to discuss whether the case has kept itself within the theoretical framework. The second chapter will discuss documentary filmmaking position within journalism as this thesis does represent research within the journalistic field. Some of the concerns from the journalistic field will then be addressed when discussing the case. The third chapter will explain the theory behind the art of storytelling within documentary filmmaking. This chapter will present the necessary tools for an interesting Narrative. How and if these tools have been applied in the case will be discussed near the end of the thesis, as well as they relate to journalism's concerns.

3.1 What is a documentary

What is a documentary? That is a question that is still being discussed today. It could be argued that there has never existed a precise definition. However one commonly referred to definition came in the 1930's when John Grierson defined documentaries as "creative treatment of actuality".¹⁵ This definition highlights the tension between the "creative" and "actual" side of documentaries. The creative part gives license to some fictional freedom, but how far can liberties be taken? The actuality part represents the factual and objective aspects, similar to responsibilities that journalists and historians have. One defining quality in documentaries is that the stories *speak about actual situations or events and honor known facts, especially historical accuracy* while fictional movies are allegorical¹⁶. Stories that are allegorical do not have to uphold factuality or be historically accurate. Although ideally similar to documentaries these fictional movies tell us something about us and the world we live in. Documentaries that do not uphold the balance between creativity and actuality risk their own status as a documentary¹⁷.

Another distinctive characteristic is that *documentaries are about real people who do not play or perform roles as actors do*. These real people, referred to as social actors in documentary filmmaking, represent themselves or reenact actual events, unlike professional actors that adopt a fictional performance. Social actors may represent themselves differently

¹⁵ Nichols, B. (2017) *Introduction to documentary*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press. P.24

¹⁶ Nichols, B. (2017, p.37)

¹⁷ Nichols, B. (2017, p.3)

in front of the camera but it is still a version of them. Just like the same person can adopt and present different sides of themselves depending on with whom and where they are. People's behavior changes as a relationship develops.¹⁸ A social actor may be shy and embarrassed in front of the camera but eventually relax and put their guard down once they get comfortable with the documentary filmmaker. Which means that the social actors "performance" is highly dependent on the documentary filmmaker. Social actors that come off as natural on camera may be strongly shaped or affected by the documentary filmmaker. This creates a blurry line between a social actor's actual representation or performance is strongly influenced by the documentary maker.¹⁹

Lastly there is an expectation that *documentaries tell us stories about what happens in the real world*.²⁰ That means that even though documentaries have creative liberties to create captivating storylines, the events have to at least be a realistic representation or interpretation of what actually happened. That means that there is a limit to the "creative liberties" that a documentary maker can take. If a documentary does not respect these criterias it can no longer be categorized as such. As already mentioned this line between "creative" and "actuality" is blurry.²¹ However there are two criterias that help distinguish documentaries from fiction. Firstly a documentary has to at least be a *representation of reality*, meaning the film does not have to be a reproduction of actual events. In representation the value is placed on the insight and quality of perspective conveyed. This however as mentioned does not mean that events can be completely imaginative. The events that are represented or reenacted must be relevant to the story or message of the documentary. Secondly the *representation of reality needs to at least be plausible*. Meaning that the reenactment needs to correspond to known historical facts.²² This also means that a documentary usually represents one story while many other interpretations and representations of the same or different story could be made.

By combining the criterias presented so far, the thesis has set up a theoretical framework for documentaries:

1. The documentary film speaks about situations and events involving real people who are social actors presenting a version of themselves or reenacting events relevant to the documentary's story.

¹⁸ Nichols, B. (2017, p. 5)

¹⁹ Nichols, B. (2017, p. 6)

²⁰ Nichols, B (2017, p. 7)

²¹ Nichols, B (2017, p. 8)

²² Nichols, B (2017, p. 10)

2. The documentary film represents a plausible perspective on the lives of the social actors, situations and events portrayed.
3. The documentary film representation of reality is based on the historical world unlike a fictional allegory.

This is the theoretical framework that will be referred to when analyzing whether the case has been kept within the boundaries of documentaries.

3.2 Documentary filmmaking status within journalism

As mentioned this thesis is a study conducted within the journalistic field. It is therefore required to discuss documentary status within journalism. Bengt Nerman defines the journalistic role as interpreting the world around us. The purpose of journalistic work should be to affect and engage the public. This is achieved by journalists taking a stance on world issues and inviting the public to share their worldview.²³ One way journalists do this is through a process called framing.

Research within the journalistic field has shown that journalists have organized language called “frames”.²⁴ These frames can be studied through framing theory which analyze how issues are formulated and presented within journalism.²⁵ This means a part of journalism is processing and interpreting information which results in certain aspects and perspectives being framed. An example of framing is how journalists form a story to hook the reader's interest when explaining important details such as who, what, when, where, why and how.²⁶ A lot of journalists are reluctant to see this process as framing and instead call it conveying facts²⁷.

From this perspective, that journalists' role is to interpret the world we live in, documentaries could fit within journalism's definition. As mentioned in the previous chapter the broadest definition of documentaries is that they are a “creative treatment of actuality”. Meaning that documentaries are an interpretation of the world we live in. The Nieman Report found that there are similarities between journalists and documentary filmmakers. One common ground between the two is both tell us about the real world and important stories in

²³ Nerman, B. (1973) *Massemedieretorik*. 1st edn. Norstedts. P.19

²⁴ Vos, T.P. (2018, p.205)

²⁵ Vos, T.P.(2018, p. 206)

²⁶ Vos, T.P (2018, p. 221)

²⁷ Vos, T.P(2018, p. 222)

it.²⁸ One Neiman contributor sees documentaries as a longer version of journalistic work. This opinion is reinforced by journalism's inclusion of documentaries in professional journalistic awards in Long-form categories.²⁹

One main critique against documentaries being a part of journalism is their difference in ethical obligations. The journalistic role has an ethical obligation to the public to report on important matters in the world. While documentary filmmakers primary ethical obligations is its treatment of the participants in the documentary.³⁰ The argument against documentaries being a part of journalism therefore is their lack of ethical obligations to their audience. According to a 2021 report from the Center for Media and Social Impact, documentaries lack a system of accountability and can therefore lead to a platform of dis/misinformation that is driven by ratings.³¹

Documentary filmmakers have expressed that their ethical obligation to their participants and their artistic vision can sometimes come in conflict with external economic pressures.³² Which is not an issue only documentarians have but also exists within the journalists field.³³ Furthermore research has shown that the journalist's normative role, the standards and rules set up by the public for journalists to achieve varies around the world as well as changes over time.³⁴ For example democratic values may be important in the western world, however some values such as persevering harmony and respect for leaders are more important in other parts of the world.³⁵ This shows that researchers are not in consensus of a set universal of standards and rules that journalists need to uphold.

In conclusion the question whether documentary filmmaking is a part of journalism is a complex and evolving discussion among researchers. However this thesis does not intend to answer that question since it would need a lot more research and is outside of the thesis research aim. This chapter is only a small representation on the status of documentary film making within the journalistic field. However the journalisms' concern regarding the upholding of standards will be addressed in the case. The next chapter is going to go into more detail on what creative techniques exist within storytelling and how to apply them in documentary filmmaking.

²⁸ Vos, T.P (2018, p. 429)

²⁹ Vos, T.P (2018, p. 427)

³⁰ Vos, T.P (2018, p. 428)

³¹ Aufderheide, P. and Woods, M. (2021, p.3)

³² Vos, T.P (2018, p. 428)

³³ Vos, T.P (2018, p. 429)

³⁴ Vos, T.P (2018, p. 46)

³⁵ Vos, T.P (2018, p. 47)

3.3 Storytelling in documentary filmmaking

According to Bernard what distinguishes documentaries from other films is not on the basis of facts. Rather the essence of a documentary is what is created from those facts to make a great story.³⁶ The goal of a documentary should be to challenge its audience and make them want to learn more and engage. To be able to achieve this goal, the documentary has to be compelling enough to grab its audience. Which according to Bernard is done by telling a good story.³⁷ Although a documentary can be grounded in facts it is not the same as it being objective. Bernard explains that any form of communication, both verbal and visual, involves making choices. That means that subjectivity is unavoidable because there has to be choices made regarding what material to use or exclude as well as how to present it. However, because of the audience's belief in the truth of documentaries, it is important to try to uphold this integrity. This means that although a documentary is subjective its arguments and conclusions need to be grounded in accuracy³⁸.

A story according to Bernard is a series of events or a narrative that captures an audience. It should engage the audience on both an emotional and intellectual level to keep the audience invested until the end. To achieve this Bernard introduces certain storytelling strategies. One of those strategies is *exposition*: the information that grounds the story. It answers the questions: who, what, where, when and why.³⁹ These details are revealed as the narrative unfolds and are what allows the audience inside the story. One common mistake documentary filmmakers make is to put the entire backstory at the beginning of the documentary. It is important to give just enough details throughout the documentary to keep the audience invested.⁴⁰

The second strategy used in storytelling is having a narrative spine, also called the *train*. This is what drives the story forward from beginning to end. The exposition is usually the backstory but it is also good to have a current story that is connected to the past and the future that moves the documentary forward. There can also be smaller plots or events that detour from the main storyline as long as the story gets back on the train and moves forward. However it is important that these detours are relevant as well as contribute to the main narrative. It is a challenge to be able to make a documentary interesting to the general

³⁶ Bernard, S.C. (2007) *Documentary storytelling: Making stronger and more dramatic nonfiction films*. Amsterdam: Focal Press. P.2

³⁷ Bernard (2007, p. 6)

³⁸ Bernard (2007, p. 15)

³⁹ Bernard (2007, p. 15)

⁴⁰ Bernard (2007, p. 16)

and not just people interested in a specific topic. What differentiates a good documentary from a great one is having a narrative spine that extends beyond one single topic and storyline.

A documentary needs to have a *theme* which is the main topic and underlying message of the story. A good documentary has one or more themes that resonates with the audience beyond the story, affecting them on a personal level. The themes of the story are usually derived from the motivation and inspiration behind the film maker's decision to make the documentary.⁴¹ Other elements to storytelling are a plot and/or interesting characters. Some documentaries are *plot-driven* where the events are what leads the story forward while other stories are *character-driven* where their wants and needs are the leading factors.⁴² A documentary does not need to have both but usually has at least one. However there are also documentaries that are driven by questions and have an essay-like structure.⁴³ Additionally the characters in the story need to have an arc.

An *arc* is what transforms the main characters through the events in the story. Meaning the characters in the story are changed and affected by the events.⁴⁴ Also, the audience needs to emphasize with the main characters. This means that the main character needs to have a *goal or objective* that the viewers can root for. To reach this goal the character needs to overcome something difficult to create *tension* in the documentary. This tension is one of the reasons the audience is invested in the story, to find out if the obstacles are overcome and the goal is achieved in the end. There are other ways to create tension, for example through conflict by presenting two opposing forces.⁴⁵ By creating different sides and putting forward arguments in favor of one or both sides, the film maker creates an emotional bond between the characters and the audience.⁴⁶ It is important that the characters are not one dimensional and it is okay to lead the audience to emphasize with both sides. This is what makes a good documentary, having a worthy opponent that challenges both the hero and the audience as well. These multidimensional characters are one of the core elements in documentaries which also differentiate it from fictional characters, because they show real humans.⁴⁷ Although the opponent does not even have to be a human, it could be

⁴¹ Bernard (2007, p. 20)

⁴² Bernard (2007, p. 21)

⁴³ Bernard (2007, p. 22)

⁴⁴ Bernard (2007, p. 20)

⁴⁵ Bernard (2007, p. 25)

⁴⁶ Bernard (2007, p. 26)

⁴⁷ Bernard (2007, p. 26)

an opposing force such as societal issues.⁴⁸

In storytelling there are *active and passive goals* as well as *active and passive heroes*. In general it is good for a story to have an active hero that sets active goals, because as mentioned earlier it is much more interesting and engaging to follow a story where the hero overcomes their struggles. However in some stories the protagonist can be passive if it contributes to the overall message and theme of the documentary. The protagonist could be facing injustices that make them unable to take action. The purpose of the documentary could be to highlight such injustices in society.

A successful story makes an emotional impact on the audience and is able to keep their active attention from start to end, which is not an easy task. In film this is described as “show, don’t tell” which means that you do not tell the audience how to feel but let them experience those feelings themselves by watching the documentary. This is successfully done when audiences feel like they are not just watching the documentary but are fully invested in the characters and events that are unfolding. An emotionally impactful documentary usually has a strategic structure to its story. Which means that the story is structured so that the storyline has moments of: “conflict, climax and resolution”.⁴⁹ Every documentary filmmaker has to be able to find the right rhythm and timing for the events of the story to make as high of an emotional impact as possible.⁵⁰ It is also a skill not to overdo the drama so that you exhaust the audience and make a good story into a soap opera. Some details might be unnecessary and be more of an overload instead of insightful. The same goes for overusing digital effects such as music that create false emotion. This can lead to the audience feeling manipulated as well as the documentary filmmaker losing the audience's trust.⁵¹

Another tool to create emotional storytelling is by raising the stakes throughout the documentary. The stakes may be personal or represent a greater purpose.⁵²

Lastly it is important for the story to have a *satisfactory ending* so that the audience feels that watching the story and drama of the documentary was worth it.⁵³ A satisfactory ending is usually one that feels unexpected but at the same time inevitable. It is connected to the question or problem the filmmaker set out to solve in the beginning of the

⁴⁸ Bernard (2007, p. 27)

⁴⁹ Bernard (2007, p. 28)

⁵⁰ Bernard (2007, p. 28)

⁵¹ Bernard (2007, p. 29)

⁵² Bernard (2007, p. 30)

⁵³ Bernard (2007, p. 23)

documentary.⁵⁴ The ending does not have to solve all the problems or be happy but it should answer some of the questions set out by the documentary filmmaker so that there is resolution for the audience.⁵⁵

All of the storytelling techniques mentioned contribute to an interesting narrative in documentaries. The thesis will refer to these techniques when discussing how the case formed its visual storytelling and to draw the conclusion whether they were successful in creating an interesting narrative.

⁵⁴ Bernard (2007, p. 30)

⁵⁵ Bernard (2007, p. 31)

4. METHODOLOGY

To be able to analyze the case study the film has to be deconstructed using a method called *critical analysis of media text*. This method is used to analyze a media text step by step using theoretical concepts within communications and media studies, and consists of two steps. The first stage is to give a summary of the media text. Here is where the media text's broad structure is presented as well as identifying recurring patterns or themes. The second step consists of choosing six sequences from the media text where a deeper analysis can be conducted.⁵⁶ The theoretical concepts are the following: construction, audience and narrative.

The first step is *construction* which is a tool used to analyze the visual aspects of a media text. These visual aspects can be referred to as codes and make up a “media language”. These codes carry certain meanings to them and can be divided into two categories: formal codes of construction, also called *Mise-en scene* and technical codes of construction. The *formal codes* of construction consist of setting: where the scene is taking place; props: what objects are used in the scene; codes of non-verbal communications: analyzing the body language of the subjects and lastly codes of dress: how the subjects are dressed.⁵⁷ The *technical codes* of construction consist of: shot size, camera angle, lens type, focus, lightning codes, composition, as well as color and film stock codes. Lightning codes or keys refer to the brilliance of the picture as a whole. A picture which is fairly bright is described as a high key. One which is dark is said to be low key. Another lightning code is contrast. Some pictures are described as “contrasty” by photographers. By this photographers mean that the dark areas of the image are nearly black and the brightest areas are brilliant white. Such images are described as being “high contrast”; a low contrast picture is one which has much narrower range of tones, with many grays but no areas of deep black or bright white⁵⁸

Another way to analyze the media text is by looking at how the audience is being encouraged to take up a *position* regarding the media text. Is the audience being told to think and feel in a forceful approach through a hard sell; or is the audience only being given information which is a soft sell.⁵⁹ The media text can also be analyzed by how it addresses its audience, questions to consider are if the audience is being spoken to: nicely or aggressively;

⁵⁶ Selby, K. and Cowdery, R. (1995) *How to study television*. Hampshire: Macmillan. P.66

⁵⁷ Selby and Cowdery (1995, p. 16)

⁵⁸ Selby and Cowdery (1995, p. 17)

⁵⁹ Selby and Cowdery (1995, p. 26)

like an equal or condescending; warm and intimate or cold.⁶⁰ These factors matter because how and the tone the audience are addressed make an impression on them.⁶¹

The ground to a good analysis is to identify the *different levels of meaning* in a media text. These levels can be divided into three steps.⁶² The first level is to describe what happens in the narrative. This is where key elements of what make up the “story” are presented in a descriptive and detailed way. These descriptions lay the groundwork for interpretation which is the second level where explicit themes within the media text are identified.⁶³ Different connotations can be made depending on when and where the media text was made. Which means that context as well as time and space matters.⁶⁴ The last level is finding what implicit meanings can be found in the Narrative.⁶⁵ This level puts the information from the first level as well as explicit meanings from the second level to draw conclusions of the meanings of the narrative. These implied meanings should relate to dominant values and beliefs within society to be able to draw conclusions on those themes.⁶⁶

⁶⁰ Selby and Cowdery (1995, p. 28)

⁶¹ Selby and Cowdery (1995, p. 29)

⁶² Selby and Cowdery (1995, p. 30)

⁶³ Selby and Cowdery (1995, p. 31)

⁶⁴ Selby and Cowdery (1995, p. 32)

⁶⁵ Selby and Cowdery (1995, p. 33)

⁶⁶ Selby and Cowdery (1995, p. 34)

5. ANALYSIS

5.1 Overall analysis of the documentary: *Dear Zachary*

Dear Zachary - a beautiful story that breaks your heart twice but leaves you believing in humanity.

Dear Zachary is on the surface level a documentary about a murder case but has a deeper meaning about hope and perseverance. The documentary is written, produced, edited and directed by Kurt Kuenne, Andrew Bagby's childhood friend. Andrew is one of the main characters of the documentary. The documentary starts off as a love letter to Andrew, a young man that was murdered. The audience gets to follow Kuenne as he travels around the world to collect eulogies from Andrew's close friends and family. Parallel to that Kuenne explains Andrew's murder case, which is unfolding at the same time as he is traveling. As the story continues we find out that Andrew's suspected murderer, an older woman named Shirley Jane Turner, is pregnant with his child. We get to follow Andrew's parents, David and Kathleen, the true protagonists as they share their journey of grieving their son while simultaneously being put in a tough situation. Which is David and Kathleen having to cooperate with their child's suspected murderer Shirley, the story's antihero, in order to have a relationship with their grandchild. This documentary takes many twists and turns but through its many themes such as: grief, love, injustice it is most of all about *perseverance* and *hope*.

The documentary can be divided into acts. In the first act of the documentary we find out about Andrew's death and how it happened. Kuenne, the documentary maker and a childhood friend of Andrew's, explains that the purpose of this documentary is to make one last film with his friend. His mission is to travel the world to meet Andrew's friends and family to collect their memories and stories about him. As a tribute to his late friend.

However, a third way into the documentary the audience together with Kuenne find out that the woman who is accused of murdering Andrew is pregnant with his child. This revelation leads to Kuenne changing the meaning of the documentary. Now the purpose is to collect memories of Andrew so that his son, Zachary, can get to know his father. As the audience we get to know Andrew on an even deeper level by learning how much he meant to the people around him. Especially when we see that Andrew's friends and family all around the world invite Zachary into their lives. There is hope and joy for David and Kathleen. Since some part of their son is still living and will carry on his legacy. It is the silver lining in a tragic story.

Once again tragedy strikes. As the audience finds out that Shirley drowned herself and Zachary. Not only is the last part of Andrew's future taken away but there can no longer be justice for his alleged murderer. Despite this tragic turn of events Kuenne finds a way to find the glimmer of hope in this story. He chooses to focus on two characters who have preserved and inspired everyone around them through all of this. David and Kathleen. Andrews parents, as well as Zachary's grandparents. The documentary changes the message from being a love letter from a father to a son to a love letter from loved ones to two inspiring people.

Throughout these three parts the common theme that sticks them together is finding hope and persevere through dark times. With all of the tragic events that occurred, Kuenne could have told a completely different story. One that paints the world as a dark and unjust place. Although the documentary consists of these themes, its main message is of love. It leaves the audience with a feeling of hope for the future. That despite bad people in the world there are good people like David and Kathleen that makes the world a better place. It is a prime example of how cinematography and storytelling can make a big difference to the theme of the documentary.

5.2 Analysis of key sequences of the documentary: *Dear Zachary*

As explained in the overall analysis the documentary can be divided into three acts. In each act the purpose of the documentary changes. The following analysis consists of two key sequences within the three turning points of the documentary.

ACT 1: Tribute to Andrew from his family and friends

5.2.1 Key sequence 1: Finding out of about Andrews death⁶⁷

The introductory sequence of the documentary is one minute long and consists of Andrew's friends and family telling the audience about him. The sequence is fast cut and has a happy and light hearted mood to it. There is a laid back but quirky song playing in the background and all of the subjects seem happy and in good spirits when talking about Andrew. But at the end of that one minute the atmosphere abruptly changes to sad when Andrew's childhood friend appears on the screen. The fast pace stops and the audience gets a longer scene where Andrew's friend breaks down in front of his son while explaining to him who Andrew was and what happened to him. The audience is represented in the son, we as well are confused as to why the father is crying and want to know what happened to Andrew.

⁶⁷ Dear Zachary (2008, 00:02:00 - 00:03:00)

The next sequence is of Andrew's parents: David and Kathleen, explaining about how they found out about their son's death. The camera angle is a close up shot of the parents sitting on the couch. This creates an intimate setting where the audience gets to focus on David and Kathleen. They are both dressed casually. There are no props or intense lighting to distract the audience. The scene feels authentic and natural. Kathleen has her arms crossed and close to her chest. Her face looks tired and sad. She is leaning on her husband and he is comforting her. David has his arm around his wife with a serious look on his face. He is trying to hold in his emotions. This is especially demonstrated at timestamp 02:11 where he holds his hand close to his mouth. It looks like he is holding in his emotions and trying to not get emotional. There can be many reasons as to why he tries to not show his emotions. It is a stark contrast to Kathleen who is shown being vulnerable. Throughout the documentary this dynamic will continue. David seems to put a strong front, protective of his wife and family. His grief is shown in anger while his wife is more emotional. A point we will get back to later in the analysis. This intimate scene of David and Kathleen only lasts a few seconds.

The rest of the sequence consists of Kathleen telling the audience about when she found out about her son's death which is reenacted in the documentary. When she explains getting a call from the coroner's office the audience is shown a shot of the coroner's office. When she explains dialing different people to find out if her son is dead the audience sees a telephone. There is no background music, only Kathleen's voice and the reenactment sounds of the phone dialing and the clock ticking. The pace of shots get faster as the tension builds. The senses of the audience are heightened just as Kathleen's were experiencing them at the moment. Then suddenly the fast pace stops as Kathleen finds out that her son is dead. The clock is no longer ticking. This revelation is followed by pictures of Andrew, pictures of him as a child, pictures of him with his parents. This choice lets the audience feel their own emotions without being too affected by the parents' reactions. Kuenne could have chosen to focus on the parents and give us a close up shot of them, but choose not to do that. But as Kathleen recounts telling David that his son is dead the mood changes completely. The natural colors change to a dark contrast of red and purple and the pace picks up again. It is as if we change the narrative from Kathleen, the feminine that represents vulnerability and sadness, to David the masculine that represents rage.

This is a recurring element in the documentary. It is through their shifting perspectives that the audience gets to experience their grief. Kathleen represents the feminine elements of grief while David represents the masculine.

5.2.2 Key sequence 2: The evidence against Shirley⁶⁸

The evidence against Shirley has a different tone than when the audience finds out about Andrew's death. The music is uncanny and suspenseful. The sequence consists mostly of extracts from the police report involving Andrews murder case. These documents are complemented by photos that exemplify some of the evidence at the crime scene. It is unclear whether these pictures are evidence from the case or just regular photos. Furthermore while presenting the evidence from the police the narrator, Kuenne, draws parallels to Shirley. Kuenne is speaking fast during this sequence and is giving a lot of information to the audience. The narrator, Kuenne, even gets emotional during the part where he explains the spot where Andrew was shot several times. In some parts of the police report they mention Shirley and in others they do not. Kuenne the narrator draws his own parallels to Shirley. This occurs simultaneously while the scene is still on the police report. While at other parts Kuenne is narrating exactly what is being said about Shirley in the police report. Therefore the audience has to pay very close attention to distinguish between what the facts are from the police report and police investigation and what is Kuenne's own accusations against Shirley. There are also scenes where Andrew's parents and family add to the evidence to give further explanation. In one part of the sequence there is a call from Shirley made the same day Andrew was found dead. The call is being played over a scene where a man is lying seemingly dead on the ground surrounded by police. There are also sirens in the background. Kurst also brings up different discrepancies between Shirley's story. This is mostly done by showing the police report which does not correlate with what Shirley is saying on a phone call with the police.

Although the evidence presented against Shirley is mostly conclusions and accusations made from Kuenne and Andrew's friends and family, it is constructed in a structured and matter of fact way. As if the audience were in court and Kuenne is the prosecutor with a murder case against Shirley. The scenes consist of documents from the police report as well as pictures exemplifying the evidence. It is a stark contrast to the earlier sequences such as Finding out about Andrew's death which felt personal and emotional.

⁶⁸ Dear Zachary (2008, 00:21:00 - 00:26:00)

ACT 2: A love letter about a father to his son Zachary

5.2.3 Key sequence 3: Getting to know Kathleen and David⁶⁹

Getting to know Kathleen and David is a significant sequence in the documentary that builds on the narrative chosen by Kuenne. The interviewees describe David and Kathleen as amazing people. The words they use to describe the couple are not only positive but personal. They describe David as silly yet logical and Kathleen is described as feisty and loving. The audience can see the love and admiration people have for them through the interviewees facial expressions. When talking about David and Kathleen their eyes light up and they automatically smile.

The audience is also told about their love story. Pictures from when Kathleen and David were young are shown on the screen. During this whole sequence a sentimental song is playing in the background. When David is describing how they first met Kathleen is sitting right beside him. Her facial expression is bashful as she has a small smile on her face. Like a shy schoolgirl with a crush. Davids usually void eyes light up when talking about Kathleen. It is clear that they are two people who are still very much in love. The audience also finds out that Kathleen and David tried for a long time before they got pregnant with their only child Andrew. Their story is told as a love story. Two young people meet and fall in love and desperately want to have a baby. Finally their wish comes true and they have their own little family. A slideshow of pictures of Andrew's birth are shown. Kathleen and David embracing their newborn son.

This sequence is crucial for the narrative that the documentary filmmaker sets up. It gives the audience the chance to fall in love with David and Kathleen. To form a bond with them early in the documentary. This sets up the rest of the story for the audience to keep being invested and also to be on Kathleen and David's side. It is also crucial to the ending of the documentary which the thesis will come back to later in the documentary. But from here on the audience have two new protagonists: Kathleen and David.

5.2.4 Key sequence 4: Getting to know Zachary⁷⁰

The sequence getting to know Zachary picks up right as the earlier sequence Getting to know David and Kathleen ends. The last scene from the earlier sequence is of David and Kathleen with Andrew as a newborn. This sequence starts with a picture of Zachary as a newborn

⁶⁹ Dear Zachary (2008, 00:30:00 - 00:32:00)

⁷⁰ Dear Zachary (2008, 00:38:00 - 00:39:00)

alone in the hospital. Once again the music stops and the pace is slow. The scene is stuck on the picture of Zackary in the hospital. The audience is told that David and Kathleen came to see Zackary at the hospital but Shirley would not let them see him. The following minutes consist of Kuenne collecting interviews with Andrews friends and family. The interviewees share their fond memories of Andrew. The interviews are close ups. The setting is casual either outdoors or in a home. There are no props to distract the audience, the focus is on the interviewee. This once again creates an intimate and natural setting.

Before the audience gets to know Zachary, the documentary maker sets up the scene. The audience is told of how hard David and Kathleen had to work to get a chance to get to know Zachary. They had to negotiate with their son's accused killer. Once the audience is told about Zachary the audience is introduced to him through David and Kathleen's love for him. In one of the first scenes about Zachary, Kuenne asks Andrews ex fiance when she got to meet Zachary for the first time and she replies:

“Meet him personally or meet him by seeing the light in Kate and David's eyes.”.

The following scene is of David and Kathleen explaining when they got to meet Zachary. The audience gets to see first hand their eyes light up with love when speaking about him. As Kathleen explains the “overpowering” feeling of meeting Zachary the screen is paused on that scene. It is completely quiet and the audience sees a slideshow of David and Kathleen meeting Zachary for the first time. As if once again the whole world stops. The audience is experiencing the same feeling as Kathleen and David.

ACT 3: A love letter to David and Kathleen

5.2.5 Key sequence 5: Grief over Zachary's death⁷¹

The sequence starts with a ring on the door. The colors on the screen are on a light key. The camera focus is a bit blurry. The background music is scary and unnerving. The audience is in a heightened sense, just like Kathleen and David. Once again the audience is experiencing and viewing the events from David and Kathleen's perspective. The screen then turns to black and the audience is shown a newspaper with the title: “Turner, son found dead”. The screen turns red and there is a scream of rage in the background. Then the audience hears David's voice and his unfiltered rage. David says things such as: “I want to strangle that bitch”, referring to Shirley. When the rage scenes end Kathleen explains about when they had to identify Zachary's dead body. The pace and the coloring of the screen turns back to normal.

⁷¹Dear Zachary (2008, 01:08:00 - 01:09:00)

Kathleen's sad voice is talking. Once again Kathleen and David are represented as the feminine and masculine side of grief.

There is a serene scene of David and Kathleen sitting by the ocean, the same one where Zachary was killed. It is one of the few scenes where they are not in focus. The frame is at a wide shot. Kathleen and David are sitting on the rocks admiring the ocean and the pink sunset in front of them. Kathleen describes her hate towards Shirley, calling her the devil. Words that could have been edited in a similar way like David. Yet there is no range, the scene and the coloring is sad and vulnerable. In another scene Kathleen is crying because she feels bad for not being there when Andrew was cremated. In Kathleen's vulnerability David puts his arms around her and says "Come on Kathleen ". As to say, Kathleen, be strong. Just like he has been. While he holds her he looks up away from the camera. His eyes are teary but he holds it. David is Kathleen's rock, but who is comforting David? All of a sudden David turns angry and says: "This is what that fucking bitch didn't know. Or maybe she does know that this is what she is leaving". It is almost as if David does not let himself be sad. Instead he turns his sadness into anger and rage. He says that he hates Shirley for killing his son, killing his grandson and upsetting his wife. He barely acknowledges his own pain.

The interviewees describe Kathleen and a strong woman that stands up for what she believes in. Yet that is not the characteristic the audience is shown. At least not if we compare how David is portrayed. It is also interesting that Kuenne decided to always interview Kathleen and David together. They are described as a unit throughout the documentary, the audience does not get to know them as individuals. This dynamic between the couple might make them take their stereotypical gender roles. However the audience might have seen a different side to David, where he was vulnerable if he had been interviewed alone. He would not have to be strong and protective for his wife and could express his true feelings. The same case could be argued for Kathleen. Maybe without David by her side she would speak up more and show her angry side.

This sequence also speaks to faith. David and Kathleen believe that Shirley was the devil, in a literal sense. Two of the interviewees that used to know Zachary and his family through the church have had their faith in God "tested" after the tragic events.

5.2.6 Key sequence 6: Love letter to David and Kathleen⁷²

After all of the tragic events Kuenne tells the audience that he almost gave up on making the documentary. When Zachary was killed he did not see a point in finishing. Then he realized that the true purpose of this documentary was a love letter to David and Kathleen. The interviewees praise and thank David and Kathleen for raising such an amazing son. They are also inspired by David and Kathleen for their strength and resilience. There is also love, almost all of the interviews say that they love David and Kathleen. In one of the last scenes David happily says that he and Kathleen still have children. Andrew's friends are now David and Kathleen's children. It gives the audience comfort that David and Kathleen are not alone. Despite all the grief there is still hope and love in their lives.

Lastly the interviewees say how they know that Andrew loved and admired them as well. An audio is played where Andrew speaks of his parents. It is the last scene the documentary ends on. A letter from Andrew expressing his love for his parents. The documentary comes full circle. From being a love letter to Andrew from his friends and family, especially his parents. To a love letter from the same family and friends to David and Kathleen, as well as his love letter to them.

5.3 Documentary synopsis

1. WHO IS ANDREW: 00:00:00 - 00:10:00 (MEANING OF DOCUMENTARY IS A TRIBUTE TO ANDREW)
2. WHAT HAPPENED TO ANDREW: 00:10:00 - 00:23:00
3. AFTERMATH OF ANDREWS DEATH: 00:23:00 - 00:26:00
4. FINDING OUT ABOUT ANDREWS SON: 00:26:00 - 00:37:00 (MEANING CHANGES TO A COLLECTION OF MEMORIES OF ANDREW TO HIS SON ZACHARY)
5. CUSTODY NEGOTIATION AND THE STORY OF ZACHARY: 00:37:00 - 01:09:00
6. THE SUMMARY OF THE EVIDENCE AGAINST SHIRLEY II + MURDER OF ZACHARY: 01:09:00 - 01:10:00
7. AFTERMATH OF ZACHARY'S DEATH: 01:10:00 - 01:16:00
8. CRITICISM OF THE GOVERNMENT: 01:16:00 - 01:22:00
9. ANDREWS PARENTS ACTIVISM: 01:22:00 - 01:25:00

⁷² Dear Zachary (2008, 01:28:00 - 01:33:00)

10. INTERMEDIATE - WHERE DOES THE DOCUMENTARY GO NOW?: 01:25:00 - 01:28:00
11. TRIBUTE TO ANDREW PARENTS 01:28:00 - 01:33:00 (MEANING CHANGES FROM MEMORIAL FROM ANDREW TO ZACHARY TO TRIBUTE TO ANDREWS PARENTS)

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The discussion is divided into two parts to answer the research questions. The first chapter will discuss which creative techniques were used through the visual storytelling in the case; while the second chapter will discuss whether the visual storytelling techniques were kept within the theoretical framework for documentary filmmaking as well as how this relates to journalism's critique.

6.1 Answering the first research question

1. How does the Documentary: *Dear Zachary* apply creative techniques through visual storytelling?

Bernard explains that the goal of a documentary should be to challenge its audience and make them want to learn more and engage. To achieve this the documentary has to be compelling enough to grab its audience. Successful documentaries do this through “show, don’t tell” by letting the audience experience emotions by watching the documentary, instead of being told how to feel. This technique of “shown don’t tell” is applied throughout *Dear Zachary*. The audience is shown the love as well as the pain of loss Andrew’s friends and family feel. It is demonstrated through the way they speak about Andrew, the way their eyes light up when talking about happy memories as well as how empty and sad their eyes look when they speak of losing him. This, as explained in the theory, creates an emotional bond between the audience and Andrew.

Another visual storytelling technique is developing a strategic structure and raising the stakes throughout the documentary. As presented in the analysis the narrative in the case can be divided into three parts. These parts each tell their own story but are connected by the documentary's main theme which is hope and perseverance. The first act of the documentary: *Tribute to Andrew from his family and friends*, the conflict is solving Andrew's murder case. The audience is built to a climax as the evidence on up to the key sequences: *The evidence against Shirley* is presented. It is right at that time the audience finds out that Shirley is pregnant with Andrew's child. This creates a new conflict about Andrew’s parents' journey to getting to know their grandson. However the earlier conflict is still there, the murder case against Shirley has not gotten a resolution. This raises the stakes even more in the documentary. Now getting Shirley convicted of murder is not only about justice for Andrew but also to protect Zachary. The relationship between David, Kathleen and Shirley creates a

tension that gets stronger as the stakes get higher. David and Kathleen express their hate for Shirley very openly in the documentary. They without a doubt believe that Shirley murdered their son and the couple have no problem calling Shirley bad names. With this knowledge the audience knows how hard it must be for the couple to create a civil relationship with Shirley in order to get to know their grandson Zachary. It lets the audience empathize and feel for David and Kathleen. As explained in the theory as an audience empathizes with the characters they will continue watching the documentary because they become invested in the characters lives.

One visual storytelling technique that the documentary lacks is dimensional characters. The documentary presents heroic characters in Andrew and his family while literally calling Shirley the devil, Kathleen says that she believes that Shirley is the devil reincarnated. The issue in portraying Shirley as the devil is that the audience does not see her as a real human and could have a hard time empathizing with her. Which puts into question if she is a worthy opponent for David and Kathleen who are portrayed as angels. The documentary filmmaker misses an opportunity to investigate why something like this could happen. The audience can only guess what would lead Shirley to allegedly commit such awful crimes. What was her story? Was she bullied when she was little? Did Andrew lead her on? Did she have mental illnesses that led her to act the way she did? None of these questions are answered which creates a very simple one dimensional character that does not teach much to the audience. The purpose of the documentary is to tell its audience about the world, the good and the bad but in an honest and realistic way.

The documentary follows a clear perspective which is in favor of Andrew and his family. For example the evidence against Shirley is presented by the filmmaker Kuenne as well as by David and Kathleen. The way in which the documents from the police investigation are shown simultaneously as Kuenne is making his own conclusions can be misleading. Which might lead the audience feeling distrust in the evidence put forward. Kuenne could have had a lawyer explain the murder case against Shirley which would have given the documentary more credibility. However the way Kuenne has presented the circumstances leaves little room for the audience to feel sympathy for Shirley. This brings into question what obligation Kuenne has to portray its subjects as honestly as possible which will be discussed in the next chapter.

The documentary can be seen both as plot-driven as well as character driven. One of the main plots that drives the narrative forward is getting justice for Andrews murderer. While there are plots such as Kathleen and David struggling to get to know their grandson.

With these different storylines happening at the same time, it can sometimes feel overwhelming. One thing that grounds the audience is the presence of David and Kathleen, contributing to the character driven narrative. As explained earlier it is easy to empathize with and become invested in the couple. David and Kathleen are constants in the narrative and whatever circumstances are thrown at them they keep going and move the story forward. This is one of the reasons David as well as Kathleen are the main characters, not Andrew. Another reason is that David and Kathleen go through an arc. In the beginning of the documentary David and Kathleen are just two ordinary people living ordinary lives. The documentary shows the beginning to the end where David and Kathleen make it to the other side. Kuenne could have focused more on Andrew and whether he would get the justice he deserved. However that might not have been as satisfactory as the ending the audience got. In one case scenario Andrews' murderer would have been convicted and justice would have been served. However it would have been a documentary that lacked a powerful message. While the other scenario would have been what actually happened, Shirley killing herself, a message about the issues in the judicial system. However the key to a satisfactory ending is that: the audience feels that watching the story and drama of the documentary was worth it as well as the ending being unexpected yet inevitable. In this case the documentary was filled with drama and unfortunate circumstances meaning that there would need to be a really powerful ending for the audience to feel like watching the documentary was worth it.

A powerful ending is one that connects with the audience. What makes this documentary impactful is that it represents more than its circumstances. *Dear Zachary* speaks about the good and the bad in the world. It tells the truth about the world, that bad people do exist and bad things happen to good people. However the bigger message is that good people like David and Kathleen exist as well. The message of this documentary is that it matters to be a good person and to not give up when life gets tough. That despite the losses you make in life if you persevere you can make it to the other side. David and Kathleen make a transformation through the documentary. They go from ordinary lives to advocating for judicial change. The documentary also shows that David and Kathleen still have people in their lives that love and care for them. These are all messages that the audience can connect to on a deeper level. This is what pulls *Dear Zachary* away from being a crime documentary to being an extraordinary documentary that touches people's hearts. This is the power of visual storytelling.

6.2 Answering the second research question

2. How does visual storytelling in the Documentary: *Dear Zachary* relate to the theoretical framework within documentary filmmaking; and how does this relate to journalism's critique regarding documentary filmmaking upholding these boundaries?

Through the theory presented in the thesis three criteria were formed to set up a theoretical framework for documentaries:

1. The documentary film speaks about situations and events involving real people who are social actors presenting a version of themselves or reenacting events relevant to the documentary's story.
2. The documentary film represents a plausible perspective on the lives, situations and events portrayed.
3. The documentary film representation of reality is based on the historical world unlike a fictional allegory.

This chapter is going to go through each criteria to discuss how *Dear Zachary* relates to the criteria of a documentary. Lastly the thesis will comment on journalism's critique regarding documentary filmmaking upholding these boundaries.

6.2.1 The documentary film speaks about situations and events involving real people, who are social actors presenting a version of themselves or reenacting events relevant to the documentary's story.

The three characters presented the most in *Dear Zachary* were David and Kathleen: as the heroes and Shirley: as the antihero. The documentary filmmaker tended to sometimes present these characters as one dimensional. David and Kathleen for example were presented as the stereotypical wife and husband, David representing the masculine while Kathleen represented the feminine. They were introduced to the audience as Andrew's parents and kept that role throughout the documentary. When people spoke about them they described them as nurturing and caring, they were parents not only to Andrew but to their community and friends as well. Additionally they were always presented as a couple, there was never a scene

or an interview where they were apart from each other. This showed the dynamic between the couple which also was presented through the feminine and masculine sides of grief. In the presence of each other Kathleen played a vulnerable and weak role and David was protective and strong.

Although this showed a one dimensional side to the couple, it was still *a version* of them. It might have been interesting for the audience to learn more about them as individuals but that is not necessary within the theoretical framework of documentary filmmaking. Even in the extreme case of Shirley being portrayed as the devil, that as well was a version of her. She did commit those crimes and those were the genuine feelings of the people affected. However, as mentioned in the theory, documentary filmmakers have an ethical obligation towards their subjects. This means that since the subjects are real people, how they are portrayed in the documentary can affect their actual lives. In the case of Shirley she was already dead but she still had children and family that were living. These people could very much be negatively impacted by the portrayal of Shirley. It could therefore be argued that the filmmaker in some aspects lacked their ethical obligation.

In conclusion *Dear Zachary* kept within the theoretical framework regarding their social actors. However some criticism can be made regarding the filmmakers ethical obligation to protect their subjects and not portray them unfairly in the case of Shirley.

6.2.2 The documentary film represents a plausible perspective on the lives, situations and events portrayed.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the documentary portrayal of events is clearly biased in favor of one perspective. That perspective painted Andrew and his family as heroic people while Shirley was presented as an evil person. The audience only got to know Shirley through the perspective of the people close to Andrew as the documentary only spoke of Shirley when related to Andrew or Zachary. This can be interpreted as a boundary set by the documentary filmmaker. Because if the documentary filmmaker were to give a perspective on Shirley's life, Kuenne would have to interview people close to Shirley to be able to give a fair perspective on her life. However the documentary was not a biography about Shirley.

The purpose of the documentary was to honor Andrew as well as his parents David and Kathleen. As stated in the analysis the message of this documentary was about hope and perseverance. Kuenne, the filmmaker, is clear in the beginning of the documentary that his

motivation for the documentary was to pay tribute to Andrew. Context is important because it lets the audience know that *Dear Zachary* is a subjective documentary. The filmmaker is a close friend of Andrew and wants to make one last movie with him. Meaning this is not an objective documentary made about a murder case. It is an intimate documentary following the journey of a murder victim's family and friends grieving him. Their perspective is pain, anger, and resentment. Through the understanding that *Dear Zachary* follows this *one specific perspective*, the documentary has kept within its theoretical definition.

6.2.3 The documentary film representation of reality is based on the historical world unlike a fictional allegory.

There are two parts to this criteria: firstly, the documentary film has to be a representation of reality; and secondly, it has to be based on the historical world. As mentioned in the theory, documentaries do not have to be a reproduction of reality but a representation. The value in representation is placed on the quality of perspective it conveys. Once again emphasis is put on which perspective the documentary filmmaker wants the audience to see. This means that the representation of reality can be subjective since it represents a specific perspective. As the thesis has stated the perspective of the documentary is through the perspective of Andrews close family and friends. The first part of the criteria is therefore fulfilled.

The second part of the criteria is that the reality is *based on the historical world unlike a fictional allegory*.

The documentary is a representation of lives, situations and events that actually happened. The message about hope and perseverance is demonstrated through the events of the subjects. This means that the events in a documentary can not be completely fictional but have to be relevant and correspond to historical events. The events in the documentary, although interpretations, did actually happen. David and Kathleen are real people and their son as well as their grandson were killed. The criteria also has an emphasis on that the reenactments need to correspond with historical facts. One sequence that could be up for discussion regarding this criteria is: *the evidence against Shirley*. In this sequence it is unclear what the actual facts are and what are the opinions and conclusions of individuals who are not leading the police investigation. Pictures are shown that look like they are from the crime scene. One picture is of a man laying down dead on the ground and surrounded by police cars. This picture was most likely not of Andrew but a stock photo. However the context in

which the evidence against Shirley was presented, makes it hard for the audience to distinguish what is a reenactment and what is actual fact. As mentioned in the theory, reenactments need to correspond to historical facts. Meaning that even if the documentary filmmaker used stock pictures, these should not be misleading. However no conclusion can be made on this sequence since it is unclear whether these pictures are stock pictures or real photos and whether they are based on historical facts or not. With that exception it can be concluded that the documentary does represent a reality based on the historical world.

Lastly, the thesis will comment on journalism's critique regarding documentary filmmaking upholding their theoretical boundaries. One of the main concerns presented in the recent report from Center for Media and Social Impact was that documentaries lacking a system of accountability would lead to dis/misinformation. Through the thesis a theoretical framework was set up that was later tested through the documentary: *Dear Zachary*. The upholding of theoretical frameworks in *Dear Zachary* have been presented in this chapter. All the three criterias were fulfilled in the case. However some ethical concerns were raised regarding the portrayal of Shirley.

In conclusion, visual storytelling in the documentary *Dear Zachary* was kept within the theoretical framework of documentary filmmaking. However this is only one case study and can not be ground for the conclusion that this is the case with most documentaries. The hope is that future researchers will continue studying the relationship between visual storytelling and the boundaries within documentary filmmaking. As well as continue research regarding journalism's concerns with documentaries by testing those concerns through case studies similar to this one.

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