

**NEGOTIATING REALITY: REFLECTIONS ON DISCOVERY AND  
FORM IN NON-FICTION FILM**

by

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## ABSTRACT

Over the years I have made several documentaries: *Burying the Saints*, *Tying the Knot*, *ManDove*, *Mad Long* and short pieces whose subjects range from birthing to chicken slaughter. This paper examines these films from a process-oriented approach. While there is no particular unifying theme between my films, except the varying appearance of my hand and voice, each work has built on the experience gained over time, which I will attempt to delineate. This paper also seeks to situate my work within the theoretical, historic and artistic threads that tether together sometimes disparate quarters of the documentary field.

In connecting my own work to the extant body of documentaries I consider several factors relating to the flexible triangle between subject, filmmaker and audience. First is the cinematic space that filmmakers open for an audience. This experiential room, a *mélange* of artifice and truth, activates not only a viewer's persistence of vision, but may give rise to an internal psychological montage of emotions, ideas and states of being. Attention to this multi-layered connection with audience often underpins decisions in shooting, editing and sound work.

The second factor relates to the reflexivity of the camera, or the meta-dialogue of a film with itself and by proxy the filmmaker with audience and subject. This topic takes up notions of inter-subjectivity, power, performance and participation. It also looks at the role of video art in experimenting with the documentary status quo to deconstruct and reassemble method and form.

Finally the paper considers approaches to story and authorship. Central conflict theory drives most films and I consider alternative routes of narrative in my own work. By sharing stories of production I illuminate keys to my own creative decision making process.