



ASPIRE

a creative exploration of the short, lyrical documentary

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A MASTERS THESIS + TWO SHORT FILMS
OCTOBER 2013

Aspire:

A creative exploration of the short, lyrical documentary.

This exegesis is submitted to the
Auckland University of Technology
for the degree of Master of Art & Design.

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October 2013

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Attestation of Authorship

'I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning, except where due acknowledgement is made in the acknowledgements'.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to give my sincere thanks to my primary supervisor Dr. Welby Ings, Professor of Design at Auckland University of Technology (AUT), for his invaluable wisdom and guidance throughout this project.

My thanks are also extended to Andrew Denton, my secondary supervisor.

I wish to acknowledge the help provided by AUT's School of Art and Design for resources and the research stipend associated with this degree.

I owe gratitude to Clarence Silvestre, Charles Silvestre, Raymond Opeza, Jay-Ar Saavedra and Reynald Mercado for kindly giving their time and effort to make these projects possible. Special thanks should also be given to Carmina Agbayani for her assistance during production.

I am indebted to Siu Yuat Wong for his advice and unwavering support.

I am appreciative of the international film festivals Freshly Squeezed International Student Short Film Festival (FSISSFF, Dublin, Ireland, 2013) and Little and Short from Shnit International Short Film Festival (Bern, Switzerland, 2013) for their official selection and screening of films from this thesis.

Finally, I would like to express my deep gratitude to my family and friends for their love and continued encouragement throughout my journey to the completion of this project.

Abstract

Aspire: A creative exploration of the short, lyrical documentary.

This practice-led research project creatively considers the potential of the short lyrical documentary. In so doing, the thesis examines the nature of a specific genre of Asian television advertising and creatively applies it to a distinct form of narrative social portraiture. The practical component of the thesis is concerned with the design, direction and realisation of two short,¹ lyrical² documentary portraits that explore the theme of aspiration.³

¹ By 'short' I refer to a special category of short films that are around three to five minutes in duration.

² By lyrical I refer to an expressive or stylistic approach to documenting an event, environment or character. The term might also refer to a poetic or experimental approach. Lyricism can refer to the way a shot might be framed, the manner in which a sequence is edited, the grade of an episode or the distinctive manner in which sound and music relate to visual material.

³ The short films are designed for national and international short film festivals. As such, the inquiry is also concerned with recent, original contributions of filmic narratives in similar genres and their accompanying stylistic treatments.



Introduction

Robert Nelson (2004) notes that in the exegesis “the writing cannot disappoint the high charter of the creative work.”⁴ Accordingly, this document contains both a personal and an analytical voice. As a reflective practitioner I am positioned subjectively, however in contextualising the research and discussing critical ideas underpinning my practice, I negotiate reconciliation between what Hamilton (2011) calls “the disinterested perspective and academic objectivity ... and the invested perspective of the practitioner/producer.”⁵ These voices percolate through five chapters that explain and contextualise the creative project.

This exegesis serves to contextualise and discuss issues related to the creation of two short, lyrical documentaries, namely *Saranggola* and *Tumbang Preso*. Both address the theme of aspiration.

The first chapter employs a reflective and subjective voice to offer a positioning of myself as the researcher in relation to the project and past work. It discusses significant personal experiences that have led me to choose aspiration as a theme. These experiences include a serious relapse in my kidney condition and its aftermath.

⁴ Robert Nelson, “Doctoralness in the Balance: The Agonies of Scholarly Writing in Studio Research Degrees,” *Illuminating the Exegesis Special Issue 3*, Retrieved September 1, 2013 from <http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue3/nelson.htm> (Monash University, 2004).

⁵ Jillian G. Hamilton, “The Voices of the Exegesis,” *Practice, Knowledge, Vision, Doctoral Education in Design* (School of Design, Polytechnic University, Hong Kong, 2011) para. 2.

The second chapter is more analytical. It provides a review of contextual knowledge and considers writers who have contributed theories related to short film, documentary and television media (specifically in relation to narrative structure and form). It also discusses stylistic treatments in specific filmic texts that have influenced the research.

The third chapter describes the research design and methodology employed in explicating the project. In so doing, it briefly discusses principles of action research and heuristics that have been adapted to heighten chances of discovery and criticality in the work.

The fourth chapter adopts a more academically objective voice, to consider critical ideas that have influenced the creation of the two short films. It discusses stylistic and structural issues in certain Asian television commercials (TVCs) and presents an analysis of short lyrical, documentary films that operate as a form of social portraiture.⁶

Appendices accompanying the thesis include the films' synopses, director's notes and a brief commentary on each work.

⁶ The term is explained in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

chapter I:
POSITIONING THE RESEARCHER



Positioning the Researcher

Past work

This research project is an extension of thinking around structure and short film design. This was explored in 2011 and 2012 in relation to my previous films *Give it Back* and *Sword*.



Figure 1. Joseph De Guzman, *Give it Back*, 2011. *Give it Back* presents a linear narrative that explicates one main conflict or idea in a simple plot. The film is about a typical university student who is mistakenly accused by a stranger of stealing his wallet. A bystander knows what really happened but chooses not to get involved. In a light manner, it deals with issues related to cultural stereotyping.



Figure 2. Joseph De Guzman, *Sword*, 2012. *Sword* presents a more complex mode of storytelling, as I attempted to address several themes through the inclusion of subplots and multiple conflicts (that are generally unconventional in traditional short film narrative). I also explored how structure can give clarity and dramatic impact. *Sword* is about a young martial artist and the dissonant relationship he has with his grandmother, whom he has to live with due to the recent loss of his parents. The protagonist copes with the tragedy by being rebellious. However, this attitude leads him into trouble. The film follows the results of an attack and its impact on his values.

The completion of *Saranggola* (January 2013) after *Sword* has led me into this year's project. I continue to explore the potentials of narrative structure in terms of how we construct meaning through subtext, metaphors, symbols and connotations. However, in this thesis I have become concerned with the lyrical potentials of nonfiction narratives.

Theme

Thematically, this project is concerned with aspiration. The concept has been central to recent changes that have shaped certain values and priorities in the way I understand the human condition.

In August 2012, my kidney condition⁷ took a large toll on me physically, resulting in a serious relapse. My muscles had deteriorated to the extent that it was difficult to achieve even a small jump. As a *wushu*⁸ practitioner, I became depressed and frustrated that I had lost my physical abilities. I was left with a decision. I either accepted the condition or aspired to something that doctors were uncertain I could attain.

Determined to regain my strength, I asked my friend, a *wushu* gold medalist, to help me. Since my release from hospital, we have been training everyday, waking up at five in the morning and also attending night classes. I have made extreme changes in my lifestyle in terms of diet and exercise with the hope of getting better. Although the road towards recovery is neither smooth nor complete, the burdens of my condition feel less limiting and gradually, improvements in my training and health are beginning to show.



Figure 3. Joseph De Guzman, *Wushu Training*, 2013.

⁷ Nephrotic Syndrome – a potentially terminal kidney disease.

⁸ A Chinese martial art that includes acrobatics.

When one faces the possibility of death in one's twenties, many values reformat. Certain fundamental ideas prioritise. Love, support and aspiration become more than euphoric virtues; one realises they are fundamental to survival and to understanding what it is to live a fulfilling life.

Accordingly, this thesis is not about angst-ridden narratives of post-adolescent isolation. It is about life. It is about the small essences of hope that help us to understand our will to survive and strive beyond the mundane and expected. I try in these films to capture a belief that aspiration includes hope and desire towards achieving something, despite seemingly pervasive obstacles. These films are not grand narratives. They are located in the ordinary worlds of ordinary people (the street children of Manila where I was raised as a small boy).

The films contain both innocence and dreams. In *Saranggola*, children band together to create a kite from old plastic bags. Through determination and teamwork they are able to create and fly it, despite the seeming improbability of the enterprise. I filmed the same children in *Tumbang Preso*. Here, the main character talks enthusiastically about what he and his friends aspire to be when they grow up. As they do, we see them (almost as a counterpoint) playing their favorite game, tumbang preso.⁹ Their social class is a limitation they do not comprehend. They see the world positively and their hopes carry them forward.

As a filmmaker one can create stories on many levels. One can entertain or one can seek to touch something of what it means to be human. The thesis draws its focus and intent from the later concern. Accordingly, I ask how my filmmaking might, in its lyricism, create forms of social portraiture.

⁹ *Tumbang preso* is a street game in the Philippines. I discuss it in detail Appendix 2: How to Play Tumbang Preso.

chapter II: REVIEW OF CONTEXTUAL KNOWLEDGE



Review of Contextual Knowledge

This chapter reviews knowledge relating to the design of the two short films that constitute the creative and scholarly concerns of the thesis. In so doing, it considers both filmic texts and theoretical thinking.

Although the thesis draws much of its inspiration from certain approaches to television media forms like the TVC (television commercial) and the narrative music video, it understands that the concept of the lyrical documentary short is also underpinned by developments in short film, documentary, and broader television narratives.

Narrative structure in short film

Short films are normally economical in terms of storytelling. Cowgill (2005) and Raskin (1991) argue that the ideal short film is “focused and specific,”¹⁰ that it works best “...when [the] story is tightly constructed and trimmed down to the bare essentials.”¹¹ Cowgill notes that unlike feature films, short films forgo superfluous moments and unnecessary detail, as they “...don’t have time to leisurely explore more than one topic.”¹²

¹⁰ Linda Cowgill, *Writing Short Films: Structure and Content for Screenwriters* (New York: Lone Eagle, 2005), 14.

¹¹ Richard Raskin, *The art of the short fiction film: a shot by shot study of nine modern classics* (USA: McFarland, 1991), 170.

¹² Cowgill, 14.

On the other hand, Vandegrift (2012) suggests that short films generally contain the same structure as traditional Hollywood feature films. She argues that the three-act structure¹³ is a vital component. Her assertions are supported by a number of writers on short film screenplay writing including Gurskis (2007), Nash (2012) and Johnson (2010). However, despite the seemingly pervasive nature of this idea, writers like Jones (2010) argue that the short form is far removed from the long form, in terms of conventions and structure. Jones believes that assumptions like Vandegrift's form part of an under-critiqued tradition that can limit the creative manner in which the short film designer engages with narrative structure.

Cowgill (2005), Reid (2003), and Cooper and Dancyger (2004), in contesting propositions like those held by Vandegrift, note that normally short film is driven from a single plot, idea or conflict. Cowgill (2005) says that because short films are able to "...focus on the conflict in one incident to great effect"¹⁴ they "...can effectively deal with difficult themes."¹⁵

Because short films are able to provide complete and comprehensible narratives in a relatively compact manner, Reid (2003) argues that they are closer to everyday experiences. By extension, Rabiger (2008) argues that the short film may be considered poetic because it requires "...deft characterization, a compressed narrative style, and something fresh and focused to say."¹⁶ Both of these observations are of significance to this study because I am concerned with both the compact 'everyday' experience and the lyrical voice that such short narratives might adopt.

The concept of the short film as a compact narration that employs a 'deft' form of lyrical characterisation is useful because it suggests approaches one might also take to the design of a lyrical form of documentary.

¹³ Syd Field's three-act structure divides the feature film into three acts: the set-up, the development and the resolution.
Syd Field, *Screenplay, The Foundations of Screenwriting*, rev. ed. New York: Bantamdell, 2005.

¹⁴ Cowgill, 11.

¹⁵ Cowgill, 11.

¹⁶ Rabiger, 207.

Documentary Structure and the Position of the Lyrical

Grierson (1933) defined the documentary as a “creative treatment of actuality.”¹⁷ He suggested that documentary records reality, whereas fiction shows imitations or representations of it. His definition appears on the surface to incline our thinking about documentary away from concerns with the lyrical and metaphorical towards a preoccupation with objective social recording.

Nichols (1991) takes this idea further. He suggests that documentary film “... merely reveals what we could have seen around us had we, too, looked with a patient discerning eye. [It] reveal qualities of the historical world that were there all along.”¹⁸

Grierson (1976), Bernard (2004), Rabiger (2009), and Nichols (1991) describe documentary filmmaking in a similar manner. In exploring people and situations, Bernard says, the filmmaker organises, in careful arrangement, factual information “...weaving it into an overall narrative that strives to be as compelling as it is truthful and, at its best, results in a film that is greater than the sum of its parts.”¹⁹ Although the documentary deals mostly with natural material and recorded reality, Rabiger (2009) points out that a story must also be told to reach the audience.

¹⁷ John Grierson, “The Documentary Producer,” *Cinema Quarterly* 2, no. 1 (1933): 7-9.

¹⁸ Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*. Vol. 681, (Indiana University Press, 1991), 6.

¹⁹ Sheila C. Bernard, *Documentary storytelling for video and filmmakers*, (Focal Press, 2004), 2.

In considering the role of lyrical portraiture in documentary, it is useful to consider Nichols' (2001) taxonomy that proposes documentary as six modes:

- The *expository documentary* (argumentative, often accompanied by narration)
- The *observational documentary* (a 'fly on the wall' approach where the filmmaker simply watches with minimal to no interaction)
- The *participatory documentary* (where the filmmaker is involved, engaging with the situation or subjects through interviews)
- The *reflexive documentary* (where the audience is aware of the production process, admitting that what they are watching is just a reconstruction of reality)
- The *performative documentary* (acknowledges the emotional and subjective aspects of documentary. It is often autobiographical and allows the audience to draw different meanings from its content)
- The *poetic documentary* (subjective and artistic, it is used for the purpose of expressing or finding an inner truth).

Nichols' poetic mode may be seen as interfacing with the last of Renov's (1993) four functions of documentary.²⁰ Smith (2007) describes Renov's fourth function as "to express" through artistic representation or a poetic approach. So, both Nichols and Renov note the existence of a potential lyrical form or purpose in documentary.

²⁰ Renov's (1993) other three functions as outlined by Smith (2007) are:

- Recording, revealing or preserving (as a historical artifact)
- Persuading or promoting (an argument or proposition)
- Analysing or interrogating (either the object of study or the process of filmmaking, as in the reflexive mode)

Renov notes that these categories are not mutually exclusive and can overlap.
Greg M. Smith "The Segmenting Spectator: Documentary Structure and The Aristocrats."
Berghahn Journals 1, no. 2 (2007): 83-100.

Smith (2007) also discusses the significance of the *observational* and *poetic* forms in documentary filmmaking. He stresses the importance of these in shaping an audience's decoding and expectations of documentaries, because the *observational* and *poetic* "...affect our emotional and cognitive assessment of the world being presented."²¹

In relation to lyricism or poetic form, Rabiger (2009) cautions that, "Any film led by mood, metaphor, and imagery risks forgoing dramatic tension and momentum for the intensity and resonance of the moment."²² However, he notes that this should not be a loss to the film so long as the documentary can hold the viewers' interest and leave them with a larger vision.

Lyrical form in television advertising and narrative music video

To explain the nature of television narratives, Ellis (1992) compares them with cinema in relation to spectatorship. Ellis explains that the television is a domestic object viewed in domestic surroundings whereas the cinema screen is surrounded by darkness. The discrete environment of the movie theatre encourages a higher degree of spectator concentration. Compared to cinema, TV is treated in a unique way so it "...engages the look and the glance rather than the gaze."²³ For this reason, television narratives are visually simple, emphasising close-ups and ensuring that information is clear and obvious. Television narratives, whether they are news items, TVCs, dramas or music videos "...demand short bursts of attention."²⁴ Ellis argues that television's lack of detail and simplicity are compensated for by rapid cutting, to provide variety and interest. He notes that because of this preference for rapid cutting, the informational values of the images are quickly exhausted. Cumulatively, this is why television narratives often build and descend very quickly from exhilarating experiences. We receive narratives as short bursts of rapidly fatiguing information that collectively contribute to a continuous flow that constitutes the broader, ongoing metanarrative of the medium.

²¹ Smith, 85.

²² Michael Rabiger, *Directing: Film Techniques and Aesthetics* (Burlington, USA: Focal Press, 2009), 306.

²³ John Ellis, *Visible Fictions* rev. ed., (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1992), 128.

²⁴ Ellis, 118.

In generalising television content (programs and TVCs) Burton (2000) argues, “though television may be innovative to a degree it is rarely if ever genuinely experimental in its narrative constructions.”²⁵ This of course is arguable. Ings (2005) and Reiss and Feineman (2000) argue that music video design has often pre-empted developments in cinema (both technologically and narratively). Narratively, the media form has also developed unique ways of constructing narratives that orchestrate tensions between enigma and meaning. Music videos and TVCs have also contributed distinctive treatments of dramatic arcing and editing so that stories can be told in very condensed ways (Ings, 2005).

Although a significant body of academic research surfaced in the 1980s and early 1990s on music video by writers such as Aufderheide (1986), Gow (1992a), Straw (1988), Kinder (1984), and Jones (1988), much of this concern was with content analysis, especially as it related to violence, gender, and sexuality. However, Shore (1985) and Reiss and Feineman (2000) have offered more industry-focused critique of structure, context and function in the media form. This said, critique of narrative style and the role of lyrical approaches to storytelling appear to have been less examined.

Aufderheide (1986) and Gow (1992b) describe music videos as the pioneers in video expression, arguing that they are in fact a distinct form of television advertising. They are a freeform moving image art that crosses between the commercial and the experimental (Hanson, 2006). However, unlike the TVC, they have a greater length (usually the length of their respective songs). These texts (unlike short film or documentaries) are designed to be seen repeatedly. As Reiss and Feineman (2000) point out, “most video directors ... prefer a denser, more abstract style to telling a simple, literal story”²⁶ so they can sustain interest in repeated viewings.

Kinder (1984) and Gow (1992a) identify several forms of music video, while also noting that these can fuse stylistically. They define these forms as, narrative dominated, performance dominated, and those presented as dreamlike or abstract visuals.

²⁵ Graeme Burton, *Talking Television: An Introduction to the Study of Television* (London: Arnold, 2000), 107.

²⁶ Steven Reiss and Neil Feineman, *Thirty Frames Per Second: The Visionary Art of the Music Video* (Harry N Abrams, 2000), 13.

Indicative of the kind of narrative music video considered in this thesis is Bernard's (1984) work, *Small Town Boy*. This short, lyrical narrative documents a triumph over adversity. Using a form of narrative flashback, it relates the story of a gay boy's quest for freedom. The song in this video plays as a kind of melodic 'voice over'. Although the band does not perform in the film, its lead singer (Jimmy Sommerville) is identifiable as the protagonist in the story. As such, the text proposes itself as a promotional, autobiographical documentary portrait that integrates family photographs and dramatic re-enactment to present the narrative of the man's 'outing' and subsequent exclusion from his family. As is indicative of most narrative music videos and TVCs, the film compresses its narrative so, in the case of this story, the protagonist's attraction to a swimmer, his bashing, arrest, expulsion from his family and construction of a new network of friends is told in under three and a half minutes.

Contemporary TVCs of interest to the thesis (because of their ability to condense narrative and character studies) include *Chrysalis* (Sornsriwichai, 2008), *Panyee FC* (Devine, 2011) and *The Reunion Sek Fan* (Isaac, 2012). Originating from Asia, these advertisements constitute a distinct genre of documentary that, while operating as a TVC, is comparatively longer than Western models in duration. Some of these advertisements take up to five minutes to tell their story. In so doing, they draw on structural devices from both narrative music video and short film.²⁷

Short documentary works that have also been influential in this project, include *Sword Maker* (Fukunaga, 2013), *Among Giants* (Cresci, 2013), *I Beat Mike Tyson* (Weinstein, 2013), *The Roper* (McNicol and Sandilands, 2013), *Everything is Incredible* (Bastian, 2011), and *Reindeer* (Weber, 2011). These works provide referential material in terms of social portraiture in short documentary with consideration to dramatic and narrative structure. In addition, two recent short documentaries about aspiration, *Noe Kuremoto* (Brother, 2012) and *Amar* (Hinton, 2011) offer some insight into the potential of treatments of narrative portraiture and the lyrical.²⁸

²⁷ These TVCs are unpacked in Chapter IV.

²⁸ These works are also discussed in Chapter IV of this thesis.

Conclusion

A review of contextual knowledge related to short film and documentary can become very broad. This project, however, is primarily concerned with the design of a unique form of short, lyrical documentary, drawn from certain stylistic approaches and developments from television. Although the texts presented in this chapter are diverse, they are noted because they have influenced the project's trajectory by contextualising or influencing the work.

chapter III:
METHODOLOGY



Methodology

The overarching research design for this project employs a combination of interior and exterior methods, namely heuristic inquiry,²⁹ and action research.³⁰

Heuristic Inquiry and Filmmaking

In heuristics research, Etherington (2004) notes that the researcher is someone who also has a story to tell. She emphasises that the researcher's personal experience and tacit knowledge relating to the topic of inquiry are part of the data collected and greatly influence the research trajectory. Moustakas (1990) says heuristic research is "...aimed at discovery; [it is] a way of self-inquiry and dialogue with others aimed at finding the underlying meanings of important human experiences."³¹ He suggests that it is also a research method usefully employed when one is seeking to increase the chances of creative discovery in a project.

²⁹ A heuristic inquiry may be defined as a means of intuitively searching for the meaning of human experience where the practitioner attempts to solve a problem or investigate a theme through subjective reflecting and exploring.

Bruce G. Douglass, and Clark Moustakas, "Heuristic Inquiry," *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 25 (1985): 40.

³⁰ Action research can be described as a practical research method that takes the researcher through a process of experimentation and continuous refinement.

Ernest Stringer, *Action Research: A Handbook for Practitioners* (Sage Publications, 1996), 17.

³¹ Clark Moustakas, *Heuristic Research: Design, methodology, and applications* (Sage Publications, 1990), 15.

Although heuristics is commonly applied in psychology, the process is useful in developing film narratives as well, especially when these narratives are either autobiographical or draw on cultural constructs embedded in the director/designer's lived experience. In the early stages of creating the films, I draw from these experiences and related knowledge. Through self-reflection, I write rough story outlines that explore a theme. Douglass and Moustakas (1985), in discussing heuristic inquiries, describe this process of immersion where "through persistent self-search and reflection, the researcher inquires as to where and how the theme is relevant and in what ways it might be shifted to reveal its components most effectively."³²

Unlike fiction filmmaking where there is a high level of control, the lyrical documentary shot on the street demands quick action. I record events as they happen, intuitively framing my subjects and composing shots. Accrued experience in filmmaking in terms of camera work and editing are employed when it comes to production and postproduction. These all contribute to the films' style and look, and decision-making engages both tacit and explicit knowledge³³ emanating from lived professional and personal experience.

As I am working with a lyrical form of filmmaking, a certain personal style begins to surface. What I know, what I can do, and how I see and understand things, dictate the questions I ask of gathered and emerging data.³⁴

³² Douglass and Moustakas, 47.

³³ Here, I refer to Polanyi's (1966) idea that "we can know more than we can tell." Tacit knowledge may be described as knowledge based on emotion, experience, insights and intuition, whereas explicit knowledge is based on logical or technical facts. Both simultaneously affect decisions in filmmaking.

Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 4.

³⁴ I use these terms to describe discrete bodies of data. Gathered data refers to material accessed in the field. This may be broadly understood as audio and visual footage but it can also include additional information like colour, texture, tone, movement, emphasis and metaphor. Emerging data refers to information surfacing as I process the recorded material. In other words, this is data that the research generates in a process of creative testing and refinement. This can include relationships between image, sound and narrative, or structural data including narrative arcs, emphasis, pace and rhythm. Thus data may be understood as both gathered in the field and generated as a consequence of creative testing and refinement.

Action Research and Filmmaking

Although the ability to dwell inside the question and employ the tacit and personal in decision-making is useful, the research inquiry moves beyond the tenets of a heuristic inquiry when it engages with a more exteriorised process of testing and refinement of material. Stringer (1996), in his discussion of action research, describes the generative process of trial and feedback as “a continually recycling set of activities”³⁵ that takes the researcher through a process of experimentation and continuous refinement. Because the effective design of a short film has technical, narrative and aesthetic dimensions to be considered, action research helps the formation and testing of ideas in a reflexive environment.

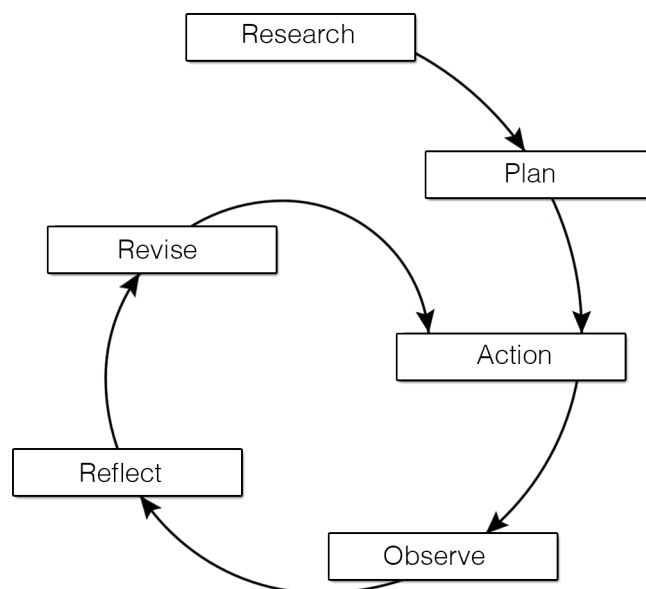


Figure 4. Joseph De Guzman, *Illustration of the cyclic nature of action research*, 2013.

³⁵ Ernest Stringer, *Action Research: A Handbook for Practitioners* (Sage Publications, 1996), 17.

Lewin (1946) describes action research as a spiral set of actions, a "...circle of planning, executing...for the purpose of evaluating results [and] preparing [a] rational basis for planning".³⁶ The practitioner is able to address a problem, plan, act, reflect and evaluate towards a revised plan.

In terms of filmmaking, action research is applied as the film progresses from one stage to the next; from preproduction (research, writing the script, storyboarding, reconnaissance, technical experiments, mock-ups), to production (shooting, recording foley and audio), and postproduction (pick-up shoots, music and editing). Because filmmaking is often unpredictable and flexible, especially in documentary, the stages often overlap and are different for each project.

To illustrate how action research plays out in different ways in my projects I will briefly illustrate its application in two of the documentaries.

Saranggola

I began this inquiry by taking my camera into the field. I was remembering how as a child on the streets of Manila my friends and I made kites out of recycled material. I wandered randomly around a poor area of the city and eventually found a young boy. I asked if he knew how to make a kite, and when he said "yes" I asked him if I could film him doing so.

Thus 'planning' was influenced by location but also responsive to opportunity. Accordingly, I had my camera, I knew the subject I wanted to document and I found a location where such an event was likely to occur. As the boy ran off to locate materials and friends, I followed with my camera in hand, recording events as they unfolded. In this phase, action, observation, and reflection were not discrete linear processes but integrated and responsive. I saw, recorded, reflected and re-recorded as part of an ongoing response to what was unfolding in front of me. This cycle continued in post-production phases of the project as I developed rough cuts, adjusted clips and refined pacing until I was satisfied with the result.

³⁶ Kurt Lewin, "Action Research & Minority Problems," *Journal of Social Issues* 2, no. 4 (1946): 34-46.

The initial footage for this film was shot in February 2012. An early edit was developed for a special competition by NFFTY with Expedia³⁷ so it could showcase their motto, 'Find Yours'³⁸. However, I was not satisfied with the result and the work was re-edited during January 2013 so that it might be more suitable for short film festivals. Shortly after its completion I went back to the Philippines so I could find the same children and shoot *Tumbang Preso*.

Tumbang Preso

In this documentary I had more control and preparation time. At the outset, I began planning using a rough outline treatment.³⁹ Thus in this project, planning was initially less location-responsive. However, to assist with my thinking I entered the field and spent time talking with and observing the children on the street.⁴⁰ As a result, new ideas and impressions took form and the treatment was reconsidered. Again, in this project, action, observation and reflection phases were not discrete but fused. I recorded the children playing *tumbang preso*⁴¹ to get a feeling of what issues might surface for me as the project developed. I reflected on this material and replanned my approach to the filming so I was in a better position to anticipate technical and logistical issues that might potentially arise.

³⁷ The competition was held by NFFTY (National Film Festival for Talented Youth) with Expedia, an online travel agency.

³⁸ In Saranggola's case it was 'Find Your Dream.'

³⁹ A 'treatment' in film is not a script. It is normally a step-by-step narrative design that operates as a draft document.

⁴⁰ The projects followed normal professional procedures regarding ethics and consent. Thus participants were given professional release forms and the project was carefully explained to them. For participants under the age of eighteen, parents, caregivers or guardians were approached and provided written consent after having explained to them the subject of the documentary and how the material would be used. The consent forms are those used in the field by the University when working with documentary material.

⁴¹ *Tumbang Preso* (translated as 'jailbreak') is a street game in the Philippines where players attempt to topple down a tin can which is guarded by an 'it'. The game is further explained in the appendices.



Figure 5. Joseph De Guzman, *The Bridge, Tumbang Preso*, 2013. The picture is an example of an idea that came up during production. When I asked the children to take me to their school, they showed me the bridge where they played 'slides'. This was material later added to the script.

Once I had most of the material, I reflected on what was gathered and located a few minor beats that were missing. In film these are sometimes called 'pick-ups'. Thus, as a consequence of reflection on material, I noted missing elements and re-entered a cycle of new action (recording), observation and reflection.



Figure 6. Joseph De Guzman, *Production Stills, Tumbang Preso*, 2013.

As with *Saranggola*, in this film a process of action and reflection operated throughout the post-production phases of the inquiry. However, where reflection in the field tended to be internal,⁴² during postproduction of both works, I also sought external feedback. Because both films balance the lyrical with the documentary I chose to seek feedback on the communicative clarity of iterations of the work. To do this I used informal focus groups⁴³ made up of directors,

⁴² Because shooting a documentary relies on a certain level of immediacy, I needed to reflect upon and respond to material very quickly. However, there were times when the children told me something that activated a new kind of experiment. Thus, while reflection may be seen as primarily internal, it was also influenced by the agencies of the environment and the people with whom I was working.

⁴³ A focus group normally involves a selected number of people who are asked for their opinions and attitudes towards the investigated subject. In this case it was the clarity of the documentary narratives I was developing.

editors, colleagues and supervisors. Their reflections and critique proved useful in identifying not only structural storytelling lapses but also technical issues. As a consequence, throughout the postproduction phase I was able to review and improve changes in the work. Although international juries officially selected work in this thesis, their engagement with the texts cannot be seen as a form of peer review because, at the time of selection the films were already completed designs. The exception to this was Saranggola, which went through significant refinements after its initial selection and screening at the NFFTY/Expedia competition (2012). This was because (despite its recognition) I wasn't happy with aspects of the editing and structure.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have employed an integration of heuristic inquiry and action research because both enable a research design that is responsive to the diverse needs of the project. Making the films required experimenting with and refining ideas that were sourced from my cultural past. These approaches enabled a validisation of the subjective combined with a critical reflection on gathered data and emerging creative outcomes.

chapter IV:
CRITICAL IDEAS



Critical Ideas

Saranggola and *Tumbang Preso* are short, lyrical documentaries that, in presenting a form of social portraiture, draw structural and aesthetic considerations from televisual influences on narrative. In discussing ideas impacting on their design it is useful to consider these works through four lenses. These are:

- stylistic treatments of TVCs
- music video form and structure
- the short documentary as a type of social portraiture
- and the documentary as a lyrical form.

Stylistic Treatments of TVCs

Although Young (2008) notes that Western TVCs are traditionally formatted as texts playing between fifteen and sixty seconds, this project has been influenced by a genre of advertising narrative that has surfaced in Asian television. These extended narrative advertisements are often emotionally intense, visually lyrical, and normally deal with narrative trajectories that move through aspiration, conflict and triumph. Although the stories are often edited in a manner reminiscent of music video, they are used for the promotion of companies like banks, or to sell products as diverse as shampoo and rice.

A consideration of three of these texts is helpful in highlighting approaches to structure and aesthetic values that have influenced my work. *Chrysalis* (Sornsriwichai, 2008) relates in four minutes and three seconds, the fictional story of a deaf girl aspiring to play the violin in a competition. The lyrical nature of its portraiture is achieved through artful intercutting between the music and the social defeats of the protagonist. This results in an escalation leading to a climax that is as much narrative as it is stylistic. The work is closely cut and this becomes more emphasised as it drives towards its climax.

Panyee FC (Devine, 2011) is designed as a lyrical documentary portrait. It is five minutes and fifteen seconds in length. It tells the true story of a group of boys from a small village built on water, who aspire to form a football team and compete nationally. The work uses a single 'voice-over' that is prominent throughout. The speaker is never seen but we know that he is one of the boys. Its naive, perfunctory narration is contrasted with the highly lyrical and emotionally edited narrative. Accordingly, the pacing of the edit accompanies the dramatic tension, getting faster as it ascends emotionally, and slower as it descends. The work transitions into historical documentary footage towards the end to show how the team and the village advanced after the original event.

Finally, in the poignant *The Reunion Sek Fan* (Isaac, 2012) we see the dissonant relationship between a father and his rebellious son. In three minutes and ten seconds the work explores the breakdown of a traditional family unit and its reuniting through reconsiderations of responsibility and love. Like most television commercials, the narrative pace is rapid with tight cuts between scenes that tend to be very specific in their content and purpose. Emotionally the work is also tightly cut so there is little time for respite from its emotional turbulence and euphoric triumphs. Like *Noe Kuremoto* (Brother, 2012), the text contains a voice over but this is extra-diegetic because it does not belong to any of the characters in the story. Structurally, the film cuts back and forward across time to create a lyrical consideration of family dynamics that are woven into a simple narrative of aspiration and triumph.

These extended narrative TVCs employ rapid, rhythmic editing and have musical soundtracks that emphasise emotional shifts in the narrative. They all present emotionally simplified stories that escalate quickly because their role is not to deal with subtlety but to communicate an idea and an emotional response to it (aspiration and euphoria realised through the triumph of the protagonist). The texts all present social narratives that begin with an exposition, develop through adversity, then climax and resolve (with the brand identity synchronising with the emotional resolution of the narrative). In these stories, the characters' goals and impediments are established early in the text. Their narrative trajectories are singular, simply drawn, and focused on struggle and aspiration.

The impact of these works on my films can be seen in their similar time frames, compressed editing style, and in their hybrid nature.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ By this I mean their approach of integrating devices borrowed from other media forms like cinema, music video, short film and documentary.

Music Video Form and Structure

Jones (1988) describes music videos as “cohesive but not coherent. They do not necessarily rely on a linear, chronologically based system of storytelling. Information is provided in pieces, rather than presented as a whole.”⁴⁵ This often gives these texts a dreamlike quality. In this regard, the videos often emphasise the experimental, lyrical or abstract. As a consequence, the viewer is sometimes engaged in a search for meaning as they try to make sense of what they are seeing.

Certain music videos contain coherent sequences of linear narrative that are often disrupted by extradiegetic⁴⁶ episodes of performance by the recording artists (*Outside*, Arnell, 1998; *Stranger in Moscow*, Brandt, 1996; *All I Want Is You*, Meiert, 1989; and *Papa Don't Preach*, Foley 1986). Here a normally chronological arc is intersected by cutaways to a performer who appears outside or tangential to the narrative. On the other hand a video like *Haru Haru* (Cha, 2008) has its performers singing and acting out the narrative simultaneously.

On a more complex level, music videos that use stories sometimes oscillate between two parallel narratives. This is evidenced in works like *Hall of Fame* (Lader, 2012). Here two unrelated characters momentarily pass on the same street. Both the young boxer and the ballet dancer aspire to achieve excellence in their respective fields, despite physical limitations. Although the video makes conventional cuts to the performing band, it also offers condensed comparative portraits of its protagonists. These portraits are graded in a subtly desaturated, cool palette that emphasises the austerity of the character's environments. The work is tightly edited so a complex comparison between two complete stories is delivered in three minutes and fifty-four seconds.

Similarly, *Not Giving In* (Cole, 2012) is a music video set in the slums of the Philippines. It tells the story of two brothers living in the same poor conditions but having different aspirations. One wants to be a dancer and the other is caught up in the drug scene. Their different paths are compared through crosscutting. The stories climax in an intercut where the dancer falls during a dance off at a party and the other brother falls but as a consequence of being shot. Unlike *Hall of Fame* (2012) there are no cutaways to the performing artist.

⁴⁵ Steve Jones, “Cohesive but not coherent: Music videos, narrative and culture,” *Popular Music & Society* 12, no. 4 (1988): 15-29, 20.

⁴⁶ The term is used by Genette (1980) to refer to narration that occurs outside of the world (diegesis) of the story. Genette, G. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (Cornell University Press, 1980).

In both of these works we see the use of dual narratives. Each story is in rhythmic discourse not only with the music but also with its parallel story. To achieve this, the narratives are kept simple and chronologically linear. They escalate at parallel rates and occupy similar proportions of narrative space in the film. In both videos the theme of aspiration is made increasingly explicit. We identify similar trajectories in videos like these that follow a simple path from destitution (emotional or physical), to aspiration, into failure, into regrouping and finally through to triumph (or redemption). Like most music video, *Not Giving In* and *Hall of Fame* develop their narratives via a soundtrack comprising a single piece of music.

Influence on my work

Both of my films employ tightly cut sequences that tend to focus on specific detail rather than ask us to dwell in a cinematic contemplation of place (Ellis, 1992). The informational values of the images are direct but quickly exhausted.

Structurally *Saranggola* uses a linear narrative played out across the performance of a single song.⁴⁷ It uses a simple storyline that escalates emotionally and reaches euphoria in the closing frames. We encounter a world that references the hyperreal encodements⁴⁸ of documentary footage and reality television. Here the camera is not stable but moves in a chase for information. We sense a kind of authenticity through an encounter with the fleeting immediate. This approach is very evident in fractured narrative videos like Arnell's *Outside* (1998) that intersperses surveillance footage with references to the story of the arrest of George Michael in 1998.

Structurally *Saranggola* contains a single, linear arc. Similar to narrative music videos it compresses its story and escalates action and emotion towards a redemption or triumph (that occurs in the closing sequence of the film). Its arc is very simple; its information is closely cropped and devoid of complex

⁴⁷ 'Morning Wanderer' by Olive Musique.

⁴⁸ Goldman and Papson (1994) suggest that hyperreal encodement in television emphasises the presence of the camera. Hyperreal encodement connotes a heightened sense of unmediated reality. We see this in the shaky movement of footage where we encounter a world not through the human eye but through the limitations of a camera held awkwardly as it seeks to capture what is equally unstable.

Robert Goldman and Stephen Papson, "Advertising in the age of hypersignification," *Theory, Culture & Society*, 3(1994): 23-53.

detail. The film tells its story in two minutes and forty seconds. Like many music videos it has no significant dialogue. The soundtrack is dominant throughout and images are edited in relation to the rhythm of the music. Slow motion, a stylistic characteristic of many music videos, is employed during dramatic beats when the boys rejoice by jumping up and down as the kite flies and when the protagonist looks up at it with a sense of achievement in the closing (triumphant) shot.



Figure 7. Joseph De Guzman, *The Children Rejoice*, Saranggola, 2013.



Figure 8. Joseph De Guzman, *The Closing Shot*, Saranggola, 2013.

Tumbang Preso on the other hand borrows from the more abstract nature of music videos. It does not follow a chronological timeline but oscillates between past and future events. The divisions between these are deliberately unclear. This technique is closer to the structure of narrative videos like Bernard's (1984) *Small Town Boy* where we initially encounter an enigmatic train ride that turns out to be the end of a narrative that we eventually realise we have encountered through retrospection.

Much the same as narrative music videos and TVCs *Tumbang Preso* is also accompanied by a single song,⁴⁹ however, the film contains some intradiegetic sound.⁵⁰ Identical to television narratives, shots are tightly cropped and contain a specific piece of information (normally a singular movement). Like *Saranggola* the documentary also utilises hyperreal encodement. The shaky camera and 'realistic' colour grade are employed to reference the immediacy of a street shot documentary. These techniques emphasise the unsophisticated world of the story and also serve to underscore a certain innocence or lack of affectation in the story.

While *Tumbang Preso* is aspirational, its theme is subtly undermined by constant reference to the lack of opportunity in a world constrained by poverty. The joy and dreaming are there, but shots are constructed antithetically so we see the boy's world through bars, wires, flatness, and decay.



Figure 9. Joseph De Guzman, *Suggestive Shots, Tumbang Preso*, 2013. Compositions suggesting 'being behind bars.'

⁴⁹ The song is a recorded piece of indigenous music in the Philippines played by natives.

⁵⁰ Sound emanating from the lived environment of the characters in the documentary. This technique is also evidenced in videos like *Chrysalis* (2008), *Panyee FC* (2011) and *Sek Fan* (2012).



Figure 10. Joseph De Guzman, *Stylistic Compositions*, *Tumbang Preso*, 2013. Shots composed as lacking depth.

Unlike *Saranggola*, *Tumbang Preso* does not present a linear narrative. Not all shots and scenes are connected sequentially through cause and effect. Instead they oscillate between parallel narratives. The first is the story of boys playing a game in the street. The second is a journey through their world that draws attention to its poverty. This second narrative is voiced over by a boy telling us of his dreams.

Similar to many music videos that condense narrative, *Tumbang Preso* elides time by skipping moments. Jump cuts are employed to compress long observational footage. This technique is seen in the opening of *Not Giving In* (2012) and more prominently in the narrative music video *Haru Haru* (2008), where single actions are shown from diverse camera angles. This technique produces the visual variety Burton (2000) discusses as indicative of television, and results in a seemingly energetic and faster pace of narrative progression.

The Short Documentary as Social Portraiture

I see my two films as a form of 'social portraiture'. I have borrowed the term from Emtman's (2009) discussion of the art of capturing a social moment in photography and I adapt it to define a form of documentary filmmaking.

The word portrait comes from the Latin word *prōtrahō*, meaning to bring to light, discover, disclose, reveal, expose or portray.⁵¹ Wilson (2012) suggests that the

⁵¹ "Protraho," Wiktionary, accessed August 19, 2013, <http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/protraho#Latin>

filmic portrait “not only captures but also displays expression, personality, and the mood of its subject.”⁵² Building upon Emtman’s discussions, he notes that “the social portrait serves as a cultural recording of an idea... it is not an object but a context dislocated from its temporal origin. It considers an individual or group in a social environment where both the subject and setting constitute an integrated study.”⁵³ He suggests that such texts operate *not* as a ‘slice of life’ but as “mediated incursions into lived moments”.⁵⁴ Here the documenter frames and edits an event to communicate his or her understanding of it. Such portraiture is therefore subjective and sometimes storied because it presents a narration of a social situation.

Because social portraiture is subjective, the nature of the documenter is embedded in the text. We see the world through his eyes. The lyricism of the text is related to his lyricism. We are not witnessing the world as an objective recording, but watching his response to what he encounters. The social portrait as documentary is therefore not an impartial body of data but a constructed picture, deliberately assembled and infused with the filmmaker’s values, aesthetic bias, sense of rhythm, emphasis, and visual voice.⁵⁵ As such it might be understood as concurrently a social *and* a self-portrait.

Like short film, the social portrait may focus on the exploration of a single topic idea or conflict that can be traced from inception, to climax, through to resolution (Cowgill, 2005). Like short fiction film, short documentaries are also orchestrated. However, this is done differently in the sense that narrative arcs are primarily constructed in postproduction. What is initially recorded is generally responsive to what is encountered (although themes and ideas might accompany the filmmaker into shoots). Two short documentary portraits, one about a sword maker and the other about a helicopter builder illustrate this point.

Fukunaga’s *The Sword Maker* (2013) is a portrait of Korehira Watanabe, one of the last Japanese swordsmiths. He is shown making swords while talking about his craft and his struggle to pass on his passion to a younger generation. While the documentary flows in a coherent manner, this is not the order in which it was filmed. Similarly, in Bastian’s *Everything is Incredible* (2011), we are introduced to a disabled man, Agustin, who has been building a helicopter for the past 53 years. We learn about him both through his recorded reflections and through

⁵² Grant Wilson, *The Filmic Portrait* (Edinburgh: Constall Press, 2012), 135.

⁵³ Wilson, 135.

⁵⁴ Wilson, 135.

⁵⁵ Indicative of this is my natural treatment of colour. In contrast to some TVCs and most music videos which have very noticeable and stylistic colour grades, my films exhibit little colour manipulation and remain close to their raw state. Only slight adjustments are made to the shadows and highlights so the pictures suggest a greater sense of depth.

comments made by people who know him. Thus the portrait is a composite. We encounter a man depicted through many lenses. Each element in the portrait is edited and positioned so it becomes part of a picture that is both multifaceted and subjective (because its emphases are those of the filmmaker). Neither of these portrait documentaries utilises conflict resolution as a stylistic device. Instead, a sense of closure is achieved when we are given an idea of what might happen in the subject's future.

However, some short documentary portraits adopt approaches that employ the dramatic, climaxing arcs of short film. *Noe Kuremoto* (Brother, 2012) paints the portrait of an aspiring female boxer as she voice-overs a discussion about her training. The work climaxes with a fight for which she is preparing. *I Beat Mike Tyson* (2013) does something similar as we follow Kevin McBride in his lead up to a boxing match that may constitute his career comeback. However, these portraits, while structured using acceleration towards a climax, are less dramatically and emotionally intense than the TVC portraits discussed earlier. Their social portraiture is more subtle and multifaceted. They also tend to be less tightly edited so we are given space to reflect upon what is being said. Unlike the TVC portraits, these documentaries were not made for television; accordingly we see them less shaped by its conventions. However, the works do pursue a single idea and present studies of socially considered individuals in comparatively short timeframes.⁵⁶ They also clearly seek to capture Emtman's (2009) 'social moment'.

Another prominent characteristic in these portrait documentaries is the presence of monologues or voice-overs. For example, in *The Roper* (2013) we learn about Kendrick as he shares his dream of achieving a place in the rodeo finals in Las Vegas. In this work, visuals are split into sections and not all are connected by cause and effect. This is because they are edited to accompany information provided by the speaker. Thus the portrait is constructed from both mediated and unmediated footage.⁵⁷

If we understand that the social portrait is subjectively constructed and may orchestrate a number of devices, both to focus its narrative and to construct an integration of subject and setting, it is useful at this point to consider the nature of the filmmaker's voice as a lyrical expression.

⁵⁶ *Among Giants* (Cresci, 2013) – 12mins 51 sec
I Beat Mike Tyson (Weinstein, 2013) – 12mins 41 sec
Everything is Incredible (Bastian, 2011) – 10mins 5sec
Amar (Hinton, 2011) – 9mins 41sec
The Roper (McNicol and Sandilands, 2013) – 6mins 9sec
Noe Kuremoto (Brother, 2012) – 6min 4sec
Sword Maker (Fukunaga, 2013) – 3mins 57sec
Reindeer (Weber, 2011) – 3mins

⁵⁷ *Tumbang Preso* adopts the same approach as it also employs the use of a voiceover. It is also similar to the TVC *Panyee FC* (2011) in that the voiceover is scripted but based on facts. However, in *Tumbang Preso* no actors are used as the subject himself provides the voiceover. The visuals are edited to accommodate the voiceover, which acts as the primary agent in the film's narrative progression.

Lyrical Documentary

One might argue that a documentary becoming lyrical in nature renders it an unreliable representation of the real world. In this regard, Bruzzi (2006) suggests that it is best to accept that documentary can “never be the real world, the camera can never capture life as it would have unraveled had it not interfered, and the results of this collision between apparatus and subject are what constitutes a documentary.”⁵⁸ In other words, she suggests that even if an approach might move towards the lyrical or metaphorical, this need not compromise any problematically held premise that ‘true’ documentary is objective.

Nichols’ (1991) poetic mode allows for the exploration of visual and auditory images, allowing the viewer to “... explore associations and patterns that involve temporal rhythms and spatial juxtapositions.”⁵⁹ He argues that the designer/director of such texts might use images and sounds as metaphorical explorations in storytelling. In so doing, documentary might usefully reach into the lyrical and rhythmic in an attempt to effectively approach the ethos of its subject.

In terms of structure, *Saranggola* may be closely related to a *narrative poem*⁶⁰ whilst *Tumbang Preso* may be compared to a *lyrical poem*.⁶¹ *Tumbang Preso* is more abstract in that it does not tell an explicit story. It is structured so a child appears to be aimlessly speaking about whatever occurs to him in the moment.⁶²

⁵⁸ Stella Bruzzi, *New Documentary* (Routledge, 2006), 7.

⁵⁹ Nichols, 102.

⁶⁰ A narrative poem tells a story with a plot, presented as a sequence of events. Its origins lie in cultural narration and it includes diverse forms like the epic, ballad, and idyll.

⁶¹ A lyrical poem is non-narrative and expresses personal feelings, an emotional state or state of mind. Its origins lie in structured verses that were sung to the accompaniment of a lyre. Its forms include the sonnet, ode, haiku, villanelle and elegy.

⁶² Accordingly, the accompanying visuals, as simple as they are, seem random as well. This apparent randomness is also indicative of certain experimental music videos.

Traditionally lyrical poems were set to music⁶³ and in this regard both *Saranggola* and *Tumbang Preso* may be framed as 'lyrical'. However, this observation is only superficial. Clive Scott⁶⁴ notes that lyrical works typically express personal or emotional feelings and are traditionally positioned in the present tense. Shaw (2003) notes that 'lyric' in literature of the medieval and Renaissance periods denoted a poem whose particular structure, function or theme was not specified. Both of my films conform to these conventional understandings of the word. However, I use *lyrical* to also describe a certain stylistic approach to interfaces between image, sound and subject.

Although both films present social portraits and both (in different ways) suggest stories, as a filmmaker I use stylistic devices to heighten the poetic voice in the work. In both films the theme of aspiration is presented through symbols and metaphors. We can clearly see the children's impediments to achieving their dreams. They are poor but poverty is not depicted as an abject or patronised condition. It is treated as an integrated aspect of daily life. There are no squalid beggars to elicit sympathy, boys use concrete bridges as slides, old plastic bags fly to the heavens, and the same streets that form environments for crime are the backdrop against which the delight of children's games are played. The children in these films are determined, positive and hopeful. In *Saranggola* the kite serves as a metaphor for aspiration; the joy of mundane things when fed by imagination. In *Tumbang Preso* children talk about their dreams and these are related to a game. This metaphorically presents a reflection on innocence and attitude. In a broader view, the game, 'Jailbreak,' suggests that everyone in the same social situation is playing this game in life; imprisoned by poverty and trying to get out. These themes are not didactic; they are designed to suggest.

Movement (as editing and emphasis within frames) is designed to respond rhythmically to the music accompanying the films. In this regard the films may be described as traditionally lyrical. Although Rubin (1995) notes that lyrical devices such as metre, alliteration, and metaphor traditionally served as memory devices enabling bards to more easily recall content,⁶⁵ in my work their

⁶³ Mary Lewis Shaw, *The Cambridge Introduction to French Poetry* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 39-40.

⁶⁴ Clive Scott, *Vers libre: the emergence of free verse in France 1886-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

⁶⁵ David C. Rubin, *Memory in Oral Traditions. The Cognitive Psychology of Epic, Ballads, and Counting-out Rhymes*. (Oxford University Press, 1995).

employment serves issues of continuity and emphasis. The films change rhythm (metre) in response to action; we accelerate through streets and watch children's games with the excitement, passion, and irregularity of play. The worlds allude (through metaphor) to social issues beneath the surface of the children's games. Devices like colour, framing and the timing of specific shots are repeated. They alliterate... they are structured so they sound, move, or look similar... sequences of images are composed in analogous ways so we encounter a wholeness made up of grouped similarities.

Conclusion

Both *Saranggola* and *Tumbang Preso* are experimental and may challenge audience expectations in terms of documentary viewing. In creating a social portrait, one might expect something more argumentative, or informed by interview. But the films do not follow this convention. They document simple things; social moments, aspirations and the excitement of lives lived on the streets of Manila. They are presented uniquely, using techniques that draw their inspiration from compressed television forms. As such they suggest that structure and style in documentary can be something flexible. They propose that, in discussing culturally located stories, a contemporary director might look beyond cinematic approaches into alternative, culturally (locally) constructed media forms. The extended Asian TVC, the short documentary and the narrative music video are three of these.



Conclusion

This project has been practice-led. Here, new ideas have been discovered alongside new processes and ways of seeing. Accordingly, improvements and changes were constantly being made. Although *Saranggola* and *Tumbang Preso* are heavily influenced by external elements, their roots are embedded in the world in which I grew up as a child.

It is an expectation in academia that the postgraduate researcher should contribute to knowledge, rather than simply describe or resynthesise what exists. In this thesis I have taken a risk. Designing, contextualising, and theorising a new form of documentary means that often one is working without the security of an established roadmap (or a prescribed theoretical context). One's work draws into itself diverse observations and ideas. It seeks to understand, discuss, and generate something that has not (in its particular form) been presented.

Making these documentaries has allowed me to meet and learn about people on a personal level and has contributed to my understanding of the human condition (including my own). It has also enabled me to grow in expressing and understanding myself as a filmmaker.

But more than this, it is an aspiration. It is a reaching artistically and conceptually into the unknown in anticipation of something that does not yet exist. It is the drawing together of ideas and experiments in pursuit of a new whole.

It is hope.

Joseph De Guzman
October 2013



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Appendices

Appendix 1: Saranggola (Kite)

Synopsis

Saranggola (the Filipino word for 'kite') tells the story of a group of children working together to make a kite. Despite their poverty, they are resourceful and determined. They remind us that when you aspire to achieve something, the sky is the limit.

Film Production Credits

Director / cinematographer / editor.....Joey De Guzman

Production Notes

Saranggola was filmed in the slums of Santa Mesa, Manila, in the Philippines. It was shot on the 11th of February 2012 and initially edited around May specifically for a competition for Expedia. It was then re-edited and completed during January 2013. The work was shot on a Canon 550D at 25 frames per second. Intradiegetic sound was recorded in-camera.

The film was edited in Final Cut X with an aspect ratio of 16:9. A letterbox was added to make it 2.35:1 (Cinemascope). Screening formats include a secure onlinescreener and DVD PAL (Region 0 / Multizone).

Festivals

Official Selection, in competition, Freshly Squeezed International Student Short Film Festival, Dublin, Ireland

Official Selection, Little and Short, Shnit International Short Film Festival, Bern, Switzerland



Figure 11. Joseph De Guzman, *Film Festivals, Saranggola*, 2013.

Director's Notes

I've always had the idea to film a kid making a kite and flying it. The film was a spontaneous event. I was waiting around the area for some singers because I was going to shoot their music video. They came four hours late. During that time I wandered around and stumbled upon a boy. I asked him if he could make a kite. He told me enthusiastically that he could and I proceeded to film as he ran off to gather his friends.

Although at first I doubted whether it would work, the children proved me wrong as the kite flew high. I was astounded by their cleverness and resourcefulness. In the film, I capture their enthusiastic attitudes, their determination and teamwork. The kite becomes a symbol for aspiration.

Appendix 2: Tumbang Preso (Jailbreak)

Synopsis

Clarence shares his and his friends' aspirations and plays their favorite game, *tumbang preso* - a game of arrests and escapes where each player's life chances depend on the toppling of a tin can watched by a 'tag' who plays guard.

Film Production Credits

Cast

Clarence Silvestre
Charles Silvestre
Jay-Ar Saavedra
Reynald Mercado
Raymond Opeza

Crew

Director / cinematographer / editor.....Joey De Guzman
Production assistant.....Carmina Agbayani (my mother)

Director's Notes

A year after shooting *Saranggola*, I went back to the same place and sought out the same children for this new project. This time however, I spent time with them so I got to know them better.

Because my project was about aspiration, I asked them what they wanted to be when they grew up. It just so happened that I found a connection between their favorite game, *tumbang preso*, and one of the boys' dreams. Clarence, the main subject, wanted to be a policeman, describing him as the guy who protects and catches the bad guys. The 'tag' in the game does the same thing - he guards the tin can and tries to catch the guys who try and topple it.

As Clarence states in the film, the game does not really end, as there are no winners and losers. It only stops when you want to stop, and the boys cease playing because they are tired or have to go home because it is dark. In a broader view, the game of *tumbang preso* operates as a metaphor for people in a social situation where occupational dreams don't come easily. They must strive and 'jailbreak' their way out of poverty... and not give up.

In the film I try to capture the innocence of these children in relation to their aspirations. Although they know what they want to be when they grow up, they

are still very young and just want to play games after school. Responsibility and work are the last things on their mind. They are not aware of their social class and how much of an obstacle it will become. Just like in the game, they must 'jailbreak' out of this world in order to be successful. When they play the game, they are enthusiastic but also very focused. I believe that this attitude may carry them forward in life.

Production Notes

Tumbang Preso was also filmed in the slums of Santa Mesa, Manila, in the Philippines. It was shot in February 2013 using a Canon 60D at 24 frames per second. Sound was recorded with an H1 Zoom recorder as well as in-camera. It was edited in Adobe Premiere and After Effects with an aspect ratio of 16:9. A letterbox was added to make it 2.35:1 (Cinemascope). Screening formats include a secure online screener and DVD PAL (Region 0 / Multizone).

How to Play Tumbang Preso

Tumbang Preso requires at least three participants to play. A tin can and slippers or jandals are also required.

The tin can is placed inside a small circle. An area around this is marked as the territory of whoever is the 'tag'.

The 'tag' must guard the tin can and there can only be one. He can free himself from his position by tagging others. However, he may only tag them if they are inside his territory and if the tin can is upright.

The other players' aim is to topple the tin can by aiming and throwing their slippers. They may also hit the 'tag' if they can get close enough. If they run out of slippers to throw, they must try and retrieve some by going inside the territory. This is the opportune moment for the 'tag' to tag one of them.

The game can play on forever. It normally ends when the players get bored or tired.

Appendix 3: Indicative TVCs and music videos on the attached DVD data disc.

TVCs

Chrysalis (2008)

Director: Thanonchai Sornsriwichai

Production Company: Phenomena, Bangkok

Panyee FC (2011)

Directed by: Matt Devine / The Glue Society

Production Company: Revolver Film

The Reunion Sek Fan (2012)

Director: Al Isaac

Production House: SuperWonderful Films SDN BHD

Music Videos

Not Giving In (2012)

Artist: Rudimental

Director: Josh Cole

All I Want Is You (1989)

Artist: U2

Director: Meiert Avis

Hall of Fame (2012)

Artist: The Script ft. will.i.am

Director: Ethan Lader

Papa Don't Preach (1986)

Artist: Madonna

Director: James Foley

Small Town Boy (1984)

Artist: Bronski Beat

Director: Rose Bernard

Haru Haru (2008)

Artist: Big Bang

Director: Eun Taek Cha

Outside (1998)

Artist: George Michael

Director: Vaughan Arnel

Stranger in Moscow (1996)

Artist: Michael Jackson

Director: Nicholas Bradnt

