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'He Came to Point and Stare':
Performativity and Voyeurism in the
Documentary Films of Louis Theroux'

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US Wrestler: "YO PUSSY ASS GON' DOWN!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!"

Louis Theroux: "I'm afraid to tell you that you will be going down."

(Louis Theroux's Weird Weekends: Wrestling)

And boy, did I go down.

Above all, I would like to acknowledge the guidance and patience of William Osgerby, whose supervision was a model of dedication, kindness and patience, without which this thesis would never have been completed.

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1 Introduction

This thesis will seek to take a closer look at the work of Louis Theroux, a British broadcaster who's documentary programs have been produced for the television channel BBC 2. He maybe be regarded as part of the grouping labeled Les Nouvelles Egotistes, a term that has not really taken off, but is very fitting. Filmmakers belonging to this group, such as Michael Moore, Nick Broomfield or Jon Ronson are reflexive and heavily featured in the story as it unfolds, resulting in the highlighting of two subjects, the filmmaker and the filmed reality. The shared stylistic features of these filmmaker include taking on a faux naive persona to trick subjects. The persona that Theroux had adopted in his early work, over time has been discarded in favor of a more organic style.

On the following pages information on Theroux's person will be provided, the information is largely drawn from incredibly interesting interviews, of which he has given plenty over the years. Since the paper deals with his person, I hope, his voice will be the loudest and clearest and a constant companion on this journey of discovery of a documentary filmmaker, who seems to have moved from performance to voyeurism.

Next a review of the relevant literature will follow, resulting in a brief summery of the history of documentary film and the theoretical foundation of this study. Firstly the focus will lie on historical developments, the genres usage during the time of war and important documentary filmmakers, who pushing boundaries contributed to the development of the documentary film genre.

The subsequent section tries to position Theroux's documentary films within the theoretical context, in an attempt to describe and classify his output. Modes as proposed by Nichols are considered, but due to not achieving the perfect fit, different avenues are explored by considering different types of narrators, the essay film and even the ethnographic documentary film.

The penultimate part of this thesis will occupy itself with tracing the shift in Theroux's style from performativity to voyeurism. This section tries to asses in what ways the filmmaker interacts with his subjects and whether his behavior is stands in any kind of relation to the topic being investigated.

The last section concludes the exploration with a short summary of the discussion and conclusions of the foregoing chapters. Additionally, a digest of critics' reception is presented to substantiate claims with a second opinion.

2 Louis Theroux

Louis Theroux, born in 1970 in the bustling cosmopolitan city of Singapore, spent his childhood in London as the son of the American travel writer Paul Theroux and the British Anne Castle, who worked for the BBC World Service. Due to his father being American and never letting his son forget his American roots, Theroux has a dual sense of cultural identity. His father by no means can be described as a typical American, according to his son, since the writer is a literary man of the world, with a strong sense of irony. The son's American side should not be overestimated, since the father is an anglophile, although having problems with the British he himself would resent the identification (Docville May 2012).

His brother Marcel and him attended the local state school till they were about nine, then changed to "a posh private school", where they were taught Latin and Greek, which his father would then visiting the American side of the family show off about. Having been involved in theater in school, Theroux had to concede that acting was not his calling, after he was gripped by stage fright while playing Dandy Dan in *Bugsy Malone* in a school production (Docville May 2012). Nevertheless, due to having a writer as a father, he felt choosing a creative profession to be important. Writing not coming easy to him, Theroux thought doing TV was "an interesting compromise". He could be creative without fearing being hit with comparison or comments such as him being "a pale imitation of his father". Initially Theroux had set out to become a sitcom or even drama script writer, but fate had chosen a different path for him (Docville May 2012).

Theroux seems to have contemplated several career paths. After completing his history degree from Oxford he aspired to become an academic, but instead ended as a TV presenter and journalist. But not really knowing what he actually wanted to do later on in life and with his father being an American, he decided to go live in America for some time

once he left university. As he began looking for a job, the then young man thought about going into journalism and so started to write articles for a newspaper in San Jose. His television break Theroux owes to Michael Moore, who hired him to work on his project TV Nation, which needed a British correspondent, since money was being supplied by the BBC. Being the only one interviewed for this job vacancy, he was hired on the spot and a week later Theroux was already off on his first assignment on religious cults (Canvas+ Interview 2008).

Due to his unique style his career took off, leading Theroux to be described in an interview with the Belgian television station Canvas+, as one of the most iconic television producers at the age of 38 in 2008. Theroux's interviewer introduces him as a student of Michael Moore, who enters weird and marginal territories, to talk to "the most bizarre people" who "see Theroux as an ideal son in law", which apparently is the role he then tries to occupy while interacting with them. Theroux says of himself that he is a shy person, which he thinks is the reason for him doing the work that he does (Canvas+ Interview 2008). Though he might be shy, Theroux's show on his explorations of subcultures, have fared exceptionally well. In a review for MediaWeek it was reported that the network Bravo, with its upscale 25-54 demo, had premiered the first episode of Theroux Weird Weekend, due to being "challenging" and "cutting-edge" and so "the perfect fit" for the network. Theroux's appeal being undeniable, the network spent \$10 million on consumer advertising to promote his series in the fourth quarter of 1999 and the first quarter of 2000. Buys of major print, spots on cable television and wild postings, a type of guerilla marketing, in New York, Los Angeles and Chicago were part of the campaign (Frutkin 1999). This most certainly must have been an investment that had payed off. His Weird Weekends series won him a BAFTA award in 2001, after which he went on to make his series When Louis Met..., for which he received another BAFTA in 2002.

It is Michael Moore, Werner Herzog and Alan Whicker whom the award winning Theroux credits as his inspirations. In particular, the "straight man in a crazy world" Alan Whicker, has had a great impact on him, since he would "put himself in these strange situations", covering stories about celebrities, plastic surgery, crime and dictators, subject areas which Theroux later also dealt with. What all of Theroux's work centers around, is his formation of a bond with people, "who at first glance you would characterize as extreme and try and bring out the normal side of unusual behavior". Theroux agrees and repeats that his

programs are about him making “something like friendships or at least some form of human contact” with people who have been labeled a certain way. On being frequently compared to Nick Broomfield, who “pioneered the first person approach”, Theroux expresses understanding as to why that may be so, but nevertheless proceeds with drawing attention to their differences. Broomfield “is all about the quest”, while for Theroux “it is a given that you are there, you are in the room”, which dissuades him from “making a feature of the attempt to find the story”. Although Broomfield, similar to Theroux, is always in the frame posing questions in a “deceptively laid back” fashion while focused and unyielding deep within, he subscribes to the cinema vérité school and more or less makes independent films, whereas Theroux sees himself as “making TV”. Theroux does not reckon being “deceptively laid back” on purpose, but does describe himself as always being “in shambles”, not dressing too well, trying to ingratiate himself with the people that he meets “by not being intimidating, by not being bossy”, which is a reflection of his real life personality. Being focused and knowing what he wants to get out of each interview does apply to him too, he explains, making room for the comparison to Broomfield. Disarming people, is not what he aims for, he prefers when subjects feel relaxed by creating rapport, so that they can tell him the truth (Bacon Interview April 2012).

Notable about Theroux’s work is that he has developed the habit of making documentary films in America, about Americans. The filmmaker accredits the size, wealth of the country and the cultural distance allowing for a certain dynamic to take place while he is there. Theroux also gives journalistic reason for setting his most recent program on diseases in America, saying that Phoenix offered itself due to being a hotbed for the elderly and those affected by the sickness, additionally the American city is the place where many new medical techniques are being pioneered. What else speaks for setting his programs abroad is the fact that uncomfortable subject are made more agreeable, because of the cultural distance and Britain’s relationship with America. Theroux also admits that another selling point, would be America’s sunny weather conditions (Docville May 2012).

Making shows in America, has become a habit Theroux says. This has to do with the size of America, the home of 311,591,917 people (as of July 2011 according to the U.S: Census Bureau) and the only super power in today’s world. The country is also “the cradle of all kinds of fascinating stories”, and that the understanding of stories developing in Britain may be improved by “the difference experience that they have”. In the case of

Autism, in New Jersey, the city with the best facilities, Theroux found one out of 29 boys is being diagnosed with the disorder, while in Britain its only one in a hundred, which added to the attraction of filming there (Bacon Interview April 2012). Also in a tweet on January 19 2012 in a response to [@danfox190](#) he reiterated his reason by writing that he does shows in America because it is a country in which “people are generally more open anyway”. America to Theroux seems like an utopian experiment, in which people are not afraid to live out their dreams, which does not mean that Americans “are inherently weirder”, shares Theroux in an interview with the Yorkshire Post back in 2005.

In this section the reader has been introduced to Louis Theroux, the BBC 2 presenter of documentary programs made for television, moving in on the life and practices of people perceived to be weird by the mainstream culture. To summarize, the both British and American Theroux regards himself as making television about connecting with people who are different to him. He maintains that he does not mistreat his subjects, but by means of a relation akin to friendship extract the truth from them.

3 Documentary Film

To make meaning of Theroux’s work in a more informed way, the following section will conduct an indicative exploration of the history of the documentary film, with key figures being identified. The matter of capturing an unbiased reality shall be addressed.

3.1 Defining the Genre

Finding a clear definition of documentary films is problematic (Hattendorf 1994: 40). Many authors agree that an unifying description of the genre does not exist. This difficulty may be led back to the multiplicity of existing definitions, which the documentary filmmakers themselves put forward (Steiner 2005: 31). The vagueness of the definition stems from the changes definitions are subjected to and no definition fully covers all films qualifying as documentaries (Nichols 2001: 21).

Many have tried to capture the essence of the documentary film, Charles Hoban Jr. saw the documentary as being "produced to dramatize some significant social situation and to develop an awareness of the condition and a willingness to do something about it.", while Paul Rotha specified in simpler terms that "documentary films are the recording and interpretation of fact" (Pratzner 1947:394-5), which John Grierson further broke down by understanding the documentary as "the creative treatment of actuality" (Lipkin, Paget & Roscoe 2006: 19).

3.1.2. History of the Documentary

The birth of documentary films depended on the the development of the camera or cinématographe, in the 19th century by the Lumière brothers and George Méliés, who then created two types of film (Steiner 2005: 48). The brothers showed an interest in recoding moving images depicting scenes from the busy public or middle-class family life. Their early work "L'arroseur arrosé" shows boys playing a prank on a gardener while he is watering plants, while other pieces show busy streets or workers leaving the family owned factory. The only purpose of their short films was to depict the environment (Steiner 2005: 28-49).

George Méliés on the other hand, being the owner of a theater house, captured scenes from the stage on film. He shied away from any filmic effects and simply positioned his camera right in front of the stage and recorded all that was unfolding on stage from this stationary position. Viewers were so exposed to an exact copy of what they had witnessed in the theater before (Steiner 2005: 50). The content the Lumières and Méliés presented differed greatly in nature, since the brother's films were photographically realistic, while Méliés's were depictions of fictional narratives (Steiner 2005: 51). This seemingly theatrical quality of early movies, does not imply that many films with a fictional character were created. Most of the produced movies were a filmic documentation of a pre-filmic reality (Giebler 2008: 57). At the beginning audiences were eager to watch depictions of reality and so in the year 1904 over 90% of all movies were documentary in nature. This huge success led the producers to abandon waiting for reality to happen unexpectedly and to be captured by them on film, so they started to invent and enact incidents, which led to

a dramatic change in the production process and ended in 90% of movies being fictional in character by the year of 1907 (Giebler 2008: 57).

Years later the documentary form was employed as propaganda. During the first world war governments of warring countries utilized the documentary film to strengthen the moral of their people and to sway the mind of the public in the government's favor. At this moment in time films were not produced with the purpose of entertaining or informing but as propaganda (Böhler 2007: 17). In the 1930s when fascist ideology was being spread, Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*, was released in 1935, possibly one of the most famous historical documentaries. Scholars writing about her work seem to largely prefer to focus on her person, speculating on whether she was a Nazi, whether she was supportive of the National Socialists or whether she was carrying on with Adolf Hitler (Tomasulo 1998: 99). Her magnum opus *Triumph of the Will* was commissioned by Hitler and meant to "be the official documentation of the annual Party Congress of September 4-10, 1934". The film promoted fascism and the National Socialist Party as the way to a fresh German nationalism and patriotism (Tomasulo 1998: 101). Although Goebbels has been recorded saying: "We are convinced that films constitute one of the most modern and scientific means of influencing the masses", *Triumph of the Will* does not express any precise political policy or concrete ideology. Since Hitler repeatedly insisted that masses can only be swayed by feelings and beliefs, instead of arguments or logic, the film uses symbolic imagery and faint patriotic appeals (quoted in Tomasulo 1998: 101). During the film a personality cult is set up by associating the leader with the sky, earth, animals, flags and parades, torchlight rituals and the military-national symbol permeate the scene in the absence of any type of commentary (Tomasulo 1998: 102).

During the second world war documentary films were employed in a manner that allowed for the reaping of recognition and the exhibition of a manipulative usefulness. Early in the war, a Nazi general supposedly was convinced that the combatant with the best camera rather than the one with the best weapons would be victorious. This was not far from the truth since the use of films made it possible for opponents to train their soldiers in one third of the time formerly necessary. During this time two types of training films were used. The first kind was instructional in nature and showed the fighting men how and what to do, while the other kind was meant to build their attitude and influence their thinking and behavior, in addition the films were meant to expand the knowledge of the reasons and the

development of the conflict. These non-fiction films were also shown to civilians, as a way of making them familiar with current historic events (Barry 1945: 2). But with statements such as these: "[t]hey [German propaganda films] form a striking contrast to the consciously truthful and far less elaborate "propaganda" films of their victors" (Barry 1945: 15) one can tell that the author indulges in some whitewashing of the truth, making the reader take the offered information with a rock of salt. After all, nothing not even the slightest shift in the proximity to the truth substantially changes the nature of the concept of propaganda.

In the time between 1940 to 1945 the documentary or educational film received its greatest impetus. During this time according to Lieutenant J. W. Brown, responsible for training aids, 9th Naval District, Great Lakes, Illinois the United States Navy on their own utilized more than 1,300,00 prints and over 10,000 projectors, which helped enhance as well as make instruction more flexible, standardize training and bring about the fighting spirit (Pratzner 1947: 395).

The next mile stone in the history of documentary film can be recognized in Robert Flaherty's film *Nanook of the North*, released in 1920. Flaherty, working on expeditions for the Canadian Railroads in the Hudson Bay area, took an interest in the life of the local Inuits. This led him to live among them for several months and with their consent he started filming the lives of the locals. He chose to ignore all modern influences and told the protagonists of his film to act in a way as to recreate daily life as it once was. This purposeful reenactment of reality resulted in the creation of a new genre, which also made many other filmmakers attain success (Wipperberg 1998: 20-21).

Flaherty, bowing to the preferences of his sponsor Revillon Freres, showed the Inuit's hunting practices as benefiting them and the fur consumers. The film did not preoccupy itself with showing the actual lived reality, since the traditional hunting techniques caught on film were no longer in use by the 1920s, which makes evident that Flaherty constructed a world he wanted to see (Nichols 2001: 3-4). The filmmaker, actively involving Nanook and his family in the film making process, did not shy away from instructing them on what to do and so it can be said that he directed their actions for the camera. His film, far from having any ethnographic value, portrays the life of its subjects as timeless and unchanging (Rothman 1998: 24).

Britain in the 1930s was home to John Grierson, who established an institutional base for documentary film, lead the production of documentary films under the sponsorship of the government. With time he gained a large following of like-minded filmmakers and a secure institutional foundation. Documentaries produced in the 1930s were tied to economic and political turmoils. Dictatorial governments utilized them to secure the collaboration of their people. Britain and America employed such films in an effort to invigorate democratic societies confronted with a weak economy within their own borders and imperialist attacks out of the country (Ellis & McLane 2005: 227).

John Grierson distinguished between lower and higher forms of documentary. Beyond films made from natural materials one begins to wander into the world of documentary proper, into the only world in which documentary can hope to achieve the ordinary virtues of an art. The documentary no longer only was a description of natural materials but an arrangement, rearrangement and creative shaping of them (Rosen 1993: 64). In those days the documentary primarily had a social mission (Rosen 1993: 65).

Documentary films are made up of explored, photographed and selectively edited life experiences. According to Grierson the images only offer an approximation of one kind of social reality, making what is projected onto the screen a textual artifact (Flanagan 2011: 286). Before and during the war documentaries made in Britain were to a great extent discerned to have pedagogically enriching and morally uplifting properties and to be representations of nationalism. Grierson, putting out most of his documentary work during the thirties, which coincided with the climax of the global economic depression, was of the opinion that Britain should not try to go up against in contest with America's output of commercial films and the established French and German traditions. Alternatively, he advocated his belief in what Jim Leach referred to as "films of fact and public information", which was a conception of cinema as a political form of "public service". Grierson in his thinking was affected by John Reith, the BBC director-general in the twenties working toward the establishment of the BBC Radio as a "centralized, hierarchical, and paternalistic 'public service'", with an essential monopoly on information. The BBC was meant to address the educated middle class, which was considered to be passive and compliant. In the nineteenth century, restrictive, formally administered perceptions of what culture was, who it was made by and what its purpose was had manifested. Matthew

Arnold, writing on culture, described it as having civilizing effects and the admiration of historical concepts of beauty could be used as protection against vulgarity, crudity, commonplaceness. Culture became the most authoritatively didactic of everything said or done. Britain's endorsement of official outlets of culture and information by the way of the liberal state was linked up with the conjectures about the nature of documentary films, what it was meant to expound on and who it was supposed to be directed at (Flanagan 2011: 283). Films following the parameters of the Griersonian school, concentrating on industrial labour in Britain, are socially dedicated and simultaneously intensely dictatorial about where alliances should lie. All things considered, Griersonian films advocate for righteous and honest virtues of selfless labor, maintaining the value of British material manufacture and function under the presumption that the camera records an expected reality without problem. Grierson and his British representatives conceptualize documentaries as immersed in the idea of the camera being unable to tell lies and that it has the ability to capture a politically neutral and truthful image of the world (Flanagan 2011: 284).

As another important figure Dziga Vertov can be singled out. Vertov held that the camera was capable of seeing the world more accurately than the human eye (Bould 2006: 57). Although having produced documentaries earlier in the 1920s in the Soviet Union, he did not manage to have the same success and remained a nonconformist. So after having become the prime advocate of documentary film movements in Britain and later Canada, it was Grierson who ensured a to some extent permanent niche for the documentary film (Nichols 2001: 84). Vertov, known for his style called kino-eye, was meant to create a form that assembles shots in a pattern, which allows for indiscernible aspects of the world to become visible and the substantiation of the filmmaker's voice. The montage's ability to represent the historic world by the means of photographic fidelity was acknowledged. This capacity was made use of by Soviet theories addressing constructivist art and cinematic montage to allow the filmmaker to shape the world according to the revolutionary fresh society (Nichols 2001: 96). Vertov's work, with its futurist and formalist elements, had a political message. Art was equated with a machine and this was brought to the awareness of audiences. The fact that machines were manmade was laid emphasis on and art was revealed to be labour instead of magic, which was shown as such on the screen (Feldman 1998: 43).

Avant-gardism being a chief aspect of his work, Diga Vertov, was Denis Arkadevich Kaufmann's futurist pseudonym, which translated means something long the lines of 'spinning top' or 'spinning gypsy'. Influenced by the St. Petersburg avant-garde and the Italian Futurists, he too had little respect for the classic arts. In his piece *The Man with a Movie Camera*, Vertov attempted to capture pictures from all possible camera angles and distances, while implementing an abundance of camera movements. Effects such as slow motion, split or freeze frame are also employed. Shots are arranged into one smooth sequence and put together according to theme. His creative setup could would for example first include the display of a movie poster for a movie titled *A Woman Awakens*, which then were to be followed by a shot showing a woman waking up. The editing's pace varies between unhurried to hectic, between subdued to overwhelming arrangements of one or two shots (Feldman 1998: 41).

During his twilight years, though marginalized by the mainstream productions in the Soviet Union, he continued to work making his last feature film in 1937, and some short propaganda pieces during the time of the second world war. After the war and till his death, he returned to being a newsreel editor and published some articles, gave talks and made plans for films that were never to be realized. Only after his death Vertov became the symbol of change in the theory and the practice of cinema. In the West he once more received attention in the 1960s due to the French historian Georges Sadoul, who linking Vertov's name to his early newsreels named *Kinopravda*, which in their time had been a new kind of documentary. Vertov's *kinopravda* was issued 23 times between the year 1922 and 1925, each lasting around 20 minutes and dealing with three different topics and intended as a counter concept (Hochenberger 1998: 10-11). The rediscovery of Vertov's work lead Sadoul to translate the Russian term into French, *cinéma vérité*. So Vertov became an inspiration to filmmakers working in the genre of *cinéma vérité* and French New Wave, which directed them to the streets to investigate the lives of ordinary people (Feldmann 1998: 51). The films within the genre of *cinéma vérité*, named so by Dziga Vertov along with the French anthropologist Jean Rouch, had as it's aim as intended by Vertov the provocation of the viewer's understanding of the world, through which social change should be initiated. So by clarifying the creative process the world was clarified (Roseman 1991: 506). Vertov showed that artistic means had to be revolutionized, so that they could keep up with the changes of the time. His rejection of fiction films as a bourgeois art form gave rise to his theory of *Kinoglaz*, which gave the *Kinoki*, the followers

of this theory, the task to create films of facts, which had the aim of finding the questions of life answered, by documentary filmic decoding of the visible and the to the human eye unknown world. Kinoglaz was also implemented to mean a academic and experimental method, used to investigate the world on the basis of a systematic fixation of facts on film and on the basis of a systematic organization of on film held documentary material (Hochenberger 1998: 10-11).

In summary it can be said that, the documentary which has experienced a revival in recent times, which it owes to Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11*, the highest-grossing documentary in U.S. history (Rich 2006: 108), which is being accounted for having altered election results (Rich 2006: 110), have a long history, out of which no clear definition was ever born. The origin of the documentary seems to have been pinpointed by scholars with confidence and precision, Paul Rotha saw its true beginning in Flaherty's *Nanook in America* (1920), Dziga Vertov's work in Russia (circa 1923), Cavalcanti's *Rien Queles Heures* in France (1926), Ruttmann's *Berlin* in Germany (1927) and Grierson's *Drifters* in Britain (1929). This set standard has governed the majority of discussions and writings on non-fiction film, by entailing that documentary film necessarily has to be art and that no actual documentaries were produced before 1920 (Bottomore 2001: 160). According to Rotha only such films as *Nanook*, meaning films made according to a personal vision are to be considered genuine documentaries. This results in the omission of common travelogues, industrial, and interest films, but also their modern counterparts, the average television documentaries are exempt from scholarly publications (Bottomore 2001: 161).

3.1.3. The Modern Documentary

In the 1990s film theory was started to be applied in the analysis of documentaries, a trend instigated by the American film theoretician Bill Nichols. He views every film to be a documentary, and only differentiates between those which have the function of wish-fulfillment and those which deal with social representation. The first having a fictitious narrative while the latter are perceived as non-fiction. These offer representations of visible features of the world, which have been selected and arranged by the filmmaker (2001: 1), an idea already voiced by Vertov, who also maintained that narrative cinema simply was camera recorded documentary footage that was organized in a certain way (Rodes &

Springer 2006: 1). Documentaries may show what once was, what now is and what reality might be understood as and they only carry meaning if the viewer decides that they do. Their claims and asserted views need to be put in relation with the world known to one in order to test if these presented perspectives are to be believed in (Nichols 2001: 2). Nichols is firm on the fact that “documentary is not a reproduction of reality, it is a representation of the world we already occupy” (2001: 20).

A documentary's voice can present certain views or may try to influence or convince the viewer and the way an argument is presented defines the voice of the documentary, this voice can be understood to be akin to style (Nichols 2001: 41-43). Style in the genre of documentary film, is derived from the filmmaker's effort to convert their vision of the historical world into visual terms and the direct relation established between the filmmaker and the subject (Nichols 2001: 44). The voice of a documentary is constructed with the help of cutting, editing, shot composition, synchronous sound, voice-over translation or dubbing, music, sound effects, commentary, following the chronology of events or changing their sequence so a point can be made, using other peoples materials such as archival recordings or images or only using original footage taken by the filmmaker and then a filmmaker needs to select a mode of representation according to which the film will be organized, such as expository, poetic, observational, participatory, reflexive or performative (Nichols 2001: 46).

Nichols when trying to specify what documentaries tend to be about, finds the recurring topics to be war, violence, biography, sexuality and ethnicity. These topics are a generalization traced back to specific experiences, by which they are placed in larger classes, that have their own sharp qualities. Due to this organization documentary films are conceptual or abstract shots, with a specific structure like that of the problem/solution, a story with a beginning and end or a focus and crisis or one with a prominence of a tone (2001: 66).

Nichols has identified six sub-genres of the documentary film, these being: poetic, expository, participatory, observational, reflexive, performative. Due to the dissatisfaction of filmmakers with a previous mode and perceived deficiencies, new ones are created (2001: 99-101). The participatory mode, of particular interest when examining Theroux, uses anthropology and sociology, as the researcher goes into the field to observe, all the

while remaining detached. Documentaries belonging to this group should give the viewer an idea of what being in a certain type of situation would be like, but does not specify how the filmmaker feel like in this particular situation. The viewer is given a representation of the historical world through the lens of an active participant rather than an unobtrusive observer. Since the filmmaker is visible on screen, he might adopt the role of a mentor, critic, interrogator, collaborator or provocateur (Nichols 2001: 116). The performative mode, raising question about the nature of knowledge, sees it as concrete and embodied if it is based on personal experience and so meaning is understood to be subjective and determined by affects (Nichols 2001: 130.131).

Nichols observes that “images serve as illustrations or counterpoint of the verbal argument”, making the visual being commanded by the commentary (Bernstein 1998: 398). Documentary modes are similar to the genres of fiction films, since they are a maker by which audiences recognize them. Once a documentary has been identified as belonging to a particular tradition of a mode, viewers will come to have fixed expectations. The interactive documentary depends on the interaction between subject and filmmaker and the latter’s open admission and limitation of knowledge (Bernstein 1998: 401). The expository mode is defined by a seemingly objective narration, which declares the absolute authority of the filmmaker (Bernstein 1998: 402). The use of interviews paired with voice-over meets the requirements of the expository mode (Bernstein 1998: 409).

In the theoretic model created by Bill Nichols, attention is given to the expectations of the viewer, which are different from those of a theatrical film. He also addresses the relation between documentary films and reality (Beyerle 1997: 34-35). Neale Altman also saw genres not being defined by films alone, but by the expectations of audiences and the distribution of intertextual communications, such as different industrial, journalistic and other media texts, defining a film for its reception (Holmes 2008: 162).

The classic assumption made about documentary film is that it is a filmic representation generating “sober, unauthored texts, texts through which the world supposedly tells itself, without any ideological interventions from the author” (Godmilow 2002: 3). Godmilow sees this insistence on adhering to the real as being responsible for the ceaseless reproduction of a corrupt version of public knowledge by the filmmakers. She observes that documentaries in the Unites States have become more and more sensational, with the

focus being on titillation, desire and commercial concerns. These documentaries although enhanced with digital effects and background music, still seem to regard the reality footage that they offer to be pure and saturated with an essence unassailable and only their own. The idea that a documentary film presents reality and its seeing triggers the understanding of something that should be known. In this manner they assert the position of the real and its accompanying attributes and privileges. This apparently also serves as a mask for the documentary's inherent disposition toward pornography, where it would be more of a pornography of the real. Pornography might be read as the objectification of a graphic image, wherein the subject is turned into an object, with the purpose of the commodification, circulation and consumption as an object of the depicted person (Godmilow 2002: 4). This seems to recall Barthes' opinion on photography. Having admitted to having failed distinguish photography from cinema (1980: 3), he goes on to say that photography turns the subject into an object (Barthes 1980: 13). Photography he continues, is not a copy of reality, but an emergence of the reality which is now in the past, it is a kind of magic, not an art form (Barthes 1980: 88). Documentaries have the quality of pornography of the real, if they choose to exploit a real life situation with the purpose of the difference causing titillation within the middle class viewer, who seems to enjoy and need it. These titillating scenes inviting the taking in of the severely different, cause the audience to apparently rejoice in the knowledge that what was caught on camera does in no way describe them (Godmilow 2002: 4).

Godmilow offers 11 items in a list constituting her Documentary Film Dogma 2001, with point number three seeming as if directed at Mr Theroux. She demands for "freak shows" not to be produced, since a film dealing with the oppressed, different, criminal and primitive is equatable to social pornography. These according to her are not done out of compassion (2002: 5). Theroux having interviewed criminals, drug addicts, porn stars, swingers and other minorities, one could say, has in a way exploited their uniqueness, which is derived from their unusualness due to the lack of contact between them and the middle class audience.

3.1.4 Public Television and the Documentary Genre

Documentaries, as a stylistic genre, have also been an influence on television. John Corner coined the term “post-documentary culture”, to describe the many new ways in which recorded reality is used in television. Corner, not claiming that the genre of documentary film having reached the end of its life, sees it has having been adopted in the contemporary television production as a “set of practices, forms and function”. The term also has the task of pointing to the crisis and survival of the definition of the documentary film (Holmes 2008: 160). Lisbet Van Zoonen sees the reason for Reality TV being ridiculed and causing controversy among theorists, in the challenges it causes to the traditional bourgeois hegemony of the private and public domain and its address of class and gender (Holmes 2008: 166). Reality television, produced for commercial reasons, combines popular entertainment with a discomfited pretension at the real (Holmes 2008: 168). Reality television can be said to be part of mass media, which earned its name by increasing sales by accommodating the want for relaxation and entertainment of the part of society, which enjoyed little education, rather than trying to appeal to the large part of society that highly rates culture in its pure form (Habermas quoted in Livingston & Lent 1994: 17). The media might make the media as a system lose its representative and participatory capacity and turn it into a system consisting of principal and centralized monopolies, which collected yield a more selected and more undifferentiated ideological and cultural scope of connotations. There has not been enough conjecture on what broadcasting should be like and no positive conception of a public service ethic has been brought into existence. Broadcasting market models are to a certain extent validated by an appraisal of the elitist and condescending quality of the public service ethic, which created the need for an enfranchised instead of an onerous notion of the public service ethic so that the case of a market-led broadcasting system could be opposed (Livingston & Lent 1994: 17).

Along with reality shows television has also offered documentaries. These television documentaries often concentrate on individuals and ethical, psychological or spiritual values as opposed to housing, work, property or any other kind of material matters, which had stood at the center of earlier documentaries (Ellis & McLane 2005: 191). The documentary made for television has also undergone some changes, from the 1950s onwards the presenter appeared on screen, demanding to be one of the points of attention. Nevertheless, presenters still withheld their personal opinions on the subject

matter (Ellis & McLane 2005: 191). In the 1960s it became practice for documentaries to always appear as part of a series (Ellis & McLane 2005: 192).

Although now presenters are more likely to voice opinions, television does not seem to instigate grand social changes, but on occasion does manage to give an impulse that may lead to alterations in thinking or even consumer behavior. The oldest form of television is indeed the documentary. Its use of visual evidence, explicative narration and experts as authorities makes it come off as a confirmed and factual representation and informed depiction of its subjects. The current documentary, with its pledge for truthfulness, promotes a new understanding of social, economic, political, and cultural contrarities and conflicts (Rymsza-Pawlowska 2007: 35). Documentaries, according to McCreadie owe their popularity in part to their ability to fill the void left by the “broken” studio system, which no longer manages to produce “intelligent entertainment” (2008: 12). Undeniable also seems to be the trend of “a creative mix of fact and fiction” told from the first person view and the starring of the filmmaker himself (McCreadie 2008: 13). Purists might find fault with Michael Moore’s *Fahrenheit 9/11* for its inaccuracies, which does not change it from being the highest grossing documentary of all time, or disapprove of Morgan Spurlock’s *Super Size Me*, which managed to pressure McDonald’s to discontinue its Super Size portions, held responsible for contributing to the obesity rate (McCreadie 2008: 19). A documentary should after all be “a text that advances an argument, marshals evidence, or makes assertions and reaches conclusions” concerning matters pertaining to the “real historical world” (Ellis & McLane 2005: 142), so expectations of bringing about change can be considered reasonable.

Minor effects can also be seen caused by docudramas, such as for example Channel 4’s *Supersize vs Superskinny* or Showtime’s *Married and Dating*. The docudrama, a hybrid made up of documentary and melodrama, demands the audience’s deferral of disbelief (Lipkin 2002: 12). Its form, of representing real people, actions and locations, is highly appealing to audiences, which also has gives it the power of influencing and reinforcing ideologies (Lipkin 2002: 13). What sets the docudrama apart from the documentary is what Nichols termed the “documentary mode of engagement”, where logic and evidence take precedence over temporary abrogation of disbelief and identifying with the characters (Lipkin 2002: 33). A desired connectedness to the world is exactly what reality TV manages to provide (Lipkin 2002: 35). Material featured in docudramas in order to appeal

to audiences needs to be “rootable”, “relatable” and “promotable” (Lipkin 2002: 56). “Rootability” stems from the subject of the story emerging from current events, its appearance on the news attest its claim at truth (Lipkin 2002: 57). “Relatability” comes from audience members thinking they could be that character and that situation could happen to them (Lipkin 2002: 59). Relatability or the identification it enables, is a play between projection and reception in the reading of a character (Lipkin 2002: 67). But in Theroux’s case the exact opposite seems to hold true, it is the stark difference that seems so appealing.

In summary it can be said that the documentary has come a long way, from recording simple scenes of casual living, over pressing political agendas and acting as a training tool during war time, instigators of social change to documentary film derivatives aimed to entertain on television. With practices and philosophies changing constantly, it is no longer surprising that no clear definition could ever be put together. Since what is considered as reality was only alluded to, the next section will endeavor to bring a more detailed account.

3.2 Representing Reality

Discourse on documentary always raises the concern of veracity and whether the material loses its claim to truth due to the editing process. In the case of photography it can be argued that, the assumption of the existence of an ontological link between performance and document is ideological. Reality made accessible through a documentary photograph was an idea resulting out of the conventional tenet of photography so that “through its trivial realism, photography creates the illusion of such exact correspondence between the signifier and the signified that it appears to be the perfect instance of Barthes’ “message without a code”. The “sense of the photograph as not only representationally acute but ontologically connected to the real world allows it to be treated as a piece of the real world, then as a substitute for it” (Helen Gilbert quoted in Auslander 2006: 1). Even the choice of color can have a tremendous effect on the way reality is received by the viewer. Photography in black and white, common in classic performance photography, Jon Erickson suggest as an amplification of the reality effect of the photograph, while color photographs present themselves as objects in their own right. Black and white bring with it the sense of utility, contributing to the notion that the document complements a

performance taking place within a context and a space exhibiting actions and ideas, of which the black and white photograph only reminds (Auslander 2006: 2).

The use of photography and film can be approached either in a positivist or constructivist manner. From the classic positivist perspective filmed footage has the capability to reproduce reality. In this way footage serves as a document of foreign realities and can function as material for their analysis (Haller 2005: 153). Only a specific approach will make a strictly objective form of the film possible. To ensure a scientific observation the camera must occupy a objective position, which is based in invisibility (Arthur 1973: 70). This creates a scientific atmosphere, which with the help of aesthetic and normative regulations, produces the illusion of scientific reality. Nothing seems to have a greater power of verification than film and it is exactly that which in a scientific framework is meant to be provided. Evidence, which the researcher is not allowed to have fabricated by himself, is to be collected, meaning that his film, as an unclouded camera view needs to be directed at the real, so that the real becomes evidence (Hohenberger 1988: 152). This means that the positivist approach needs to be empirical. The scientific conception, according to which the real in itself already contains findings, can be called empirical. As the object of science the given can be taken, from which the researcher extracts information by means of certain methods, without directly exerting an impact on the object, since every intrusion in the observed condition of the object falsifies the objectivity of the information gained. To keep this from happening the representation must seem free of a subject (Hohenberger 1988: 153). Theroux's shows could be recognized as empirical, since he does collect information by either asking questions or participating, but since his programs are permeated by his person, his presence and especially the effects of his persona may have had a falsifying effect of the information. In the constructivist view films and photography are influenced by the cultural imprint of the filmmaker and those he films, this leads to filmic and photographic records being a glide path to the intercultural production of images and discourses (Haller 2005: 153). It is under the umbrella of the constructivist perspective that most collaborative, self reflexive, participatory and polyphonic ethnographic films can be brought together. Here, reigns the assumption that reality and truth are social constructs and that factors such as culture, gender, class may depend on the relation of the members of society. For the filmmaker this changes the meaning of terms such as realistic or authentic, from the ascribing and to evidence leading objectivation of the positivist ethnoscientific film to the multipolar relativity of the

constructivist position. If the filmmaker occupies this multipolar and polycentric position he is likely to be aware of the impact of his own subjectivity. This awareness results in the different representational forms, where the focus rests on a discursive description rather than a realistic one.

There is enough evidence to support the notion that documentaries do not possess the ability to hold fast onto one universal truth. Documentaries are not reality, but do not blot out nor destroy reality by means of their representational character. They should instead be considered a compromise involving reality and image, and are open to interpretation and bias (Bruzzi 2000: 5). In this regard a documentary is the “collision” of documentary mechanisms with the subject (Bruzzi 2000: 7). This may be seen as a shot at debunking the conviction of the camera’s capability of logging life as it is, if nothing had interfered. But bringing in the idea of a collision indicates that the documentary production process makes an impression on the subject, which can have a negative impact.

Apart from doubting the existence of one true reality, one should acknowledge the fact that reality can be tampered with in many ways and the gate keeping function of media could be regarded as one of them. Jean Baudrillard sees the line separating fiction from reality to be extremely blurred by current means of representation that desire, compassion and pleasure are effects generated by the media without having a referent in true suffering. This results in all forms of emotional responses being manufactured and set up by the “habitual social control” of the media (Dean 2003: 95). Media controls far more than just emotional responses. Censorship affects all aspects of life, with the seemingly boundless internet being the best example for through control altered reality. In the audiobook version of his 2011 piece *Gemeinsam Einsam* Carsten Görig holds that freedom on the internet has always been an illusion and is even more so now, since the internet is subjected to commercial interests. Again and again websites are being blocked, user profiles are being deleted, search results are not being displayed, companies make moves against contributions in which they see themselves being portrayed in an unflattering light, governments block submissions or even limit internet access entirely. That the internet is not as free as one might assume, the author tries to prove by comparing the search results on the American and German google page using the same search words. While in America pages with right extremist propaganda are easily found, pages of such a nature will not show up in German. He agrees that this might be a welcome restraint in the case of Neo

Nazi propaganda. Already the finding of missing pages raises questions about who might cause the removal of website from the internet. The question is who removes and supervises these, if everything occurs above board, or who is responsible for ensuring that Google does not simply delete or rank pages last, that are inconvenient for a company.

No matter how much integrity a journalist may possess, he still moves within a restricted area of possibilities. On 24 November 2004 Shi Tao, a mainland Chinese journalist was in the employ of Business News in Huan province. The following year he was sentenced to 10 years in prison and lost his civic rights for two years. His offense was the sending of an email to acquaintances in America, containing the recommendations for the news coverage of the 15th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square Protests of 1989. He described how censorship is decreed and in doing so had passed on state secrets, making him a political offender. Yahoo!, whose email service Shi Tao was using, supplied information to the Chinese government, which helped trace the text of the message back to Shi Tao's personal e-mail account and his computer (BBC News Sept. 7th 2005). Yahoo!'s passing on of the personal data led to the journalists imprisonment. China implements censorship, access restrictions, blocking of pages and a firewall, as a means of protection from undesired opinions. This causes a problem for companies which see China as a potential market, where money could be made, but who operates in China must bow to the rules of the country. Claims of Amnesty International, that Yahoo! has collaborated more than once with the government, suggest that the company has opted for actions which will yield more profit in the long run. Microsoft does not set itself apart in this case. The company deleted the blog of a Chinese citizen, although the blog was saved on a server located in the United States, meaning that China would have had to appeal to an American court to see the blog deleted, which would not have had very little success. Economic pressure probably was the reason. This was no isolated incident, for in the autumn of 2010 Microsoft was accused by the media of working together with the Russian secret service to combat members of the opposition (Görig 2011 audiobook). So it is censorship that helps create reality.

Apart from censorship it is the narrow focus that also shapes what is considered reality. Media coverage can be spotty, only focusing on selected issues, as two foreign correspondents working in China after the Tiananmen Square protests had to realize. Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn observed that the media does not pick up stories on

certain people's daily experiences. In China the arrest of a prominent troublemaker would become a front-page article, while the routine kidnapping of 100,000 girls, who then would be sold to brothels, did not make the news. This is assumed to be the case due to the tendency of journalists to report events that take place during a particular day and fall short of covering events that are a daily reality to some (Soderlund 2011: 193).

So it is that the editing process, picking out what information is used and which is neglected, is responsible for what we call reality. So it is worth to think about which scenes actually manage to make it into the final cut of a documentary. Dziga Vertov, though anticipating an extent of surveillance, which would lead to a desensitization of omnipresent cameras, which would allow him to record life in its natural way, but until then he would try to capture life unexpectedly. With cameras being a standard feature on smart phones, they have become ubiquitous, yet people still either hog the screen or express a dislike for having it directed at them. Theroux Definitely seems to adhere to Vertov's example, in attempting to catch people off guard. In *Living with Louis*, the camera is already rolling when the subject opens their home's door to Theroux, just to record the subject say that she would rather them not film this part of the house, due to ongoing renovations. Recalling that moment for the sake of feedback, the subject remembers being taken by surprise and laments not having been given any time to make herself look presentable.

In essence all filmmaking is a combination of a database and narrative. The database, consisting of the raw unedited footage, and the narrative, being the outcome of selection and composition or editing (Manovich 2001: 237) would make Theroux a database filmmaker, since the images that end up in the finished programs are drawn from a much larger database. That such a database is combed through during the editing process of sequencing and establishing connections to break down the excess of data in an intelligible way, is implied by Theroux's narrations, which do mention spaced out repeat visits of subjects, spanning several days each, and the task of cutting hours of footage to a one hour show. In the editing room Theroux is not alone, he is joined by his director and the editor. Together during seven to eight weeks, they create several cuts, the first being four to five hours, the next 90 minutes long. After repeated viewings which take place one week, then 5 days, then 2 days apart, the documentary receives its final shape (Docville May 2012). Theroux's programs could also be seen as an archive of his personal encounters, documenting assorted, subjective perspectives that end up creating a vignette

of a subculture at liberty. Rather than as a testimony, the subjects point of view is given out through a conversation with Theroux, who both stand before the camera. Representing a culture in a participatory documentary means mediating between the depicted world and the subject, who is meant to act as a broker. Not much authority is given to the subjects though since Theroux inserts himself as an agent against whom subjects are pitted, which causes an additional tension and detracts from the main point of investigation. Although several perspectives, for the sake of diversity, are brought together in a participatory documentary, it is left to the documentary filmmaker to pick people to speak for a distinct culture and in which manner their attitudes are imparted. Only a few subjects are selected from a far larger group, which has documentary filmmakers make use of the surplus of footage to assemble a conceptional narrative. This means that the actual filmmaking takes place once the participant's contributions have been gathered and so an archive, from which material is to be chosen, is compiled. With the production of documentaries being described so, in the vein of Rouch, power relations in these films should not be ignored. Once the filmmaker intrudes in the narrative no closed form of reality can be recorded. In accordance with the postulates of direct cinema, a form that came to rise two decades after the second world war, filmmakers were to refrain from interfering with what happens in front of the camera during shooting, as well as hold back from adding any kind of commentary or using manipulative editing, which would have a specific impact on viewers (Giebler 2008: 63). The American form of direct cinema was meant to be free of the influence of its authors, so to give viewers the impression of being eyewitnesses, in a position to form an objective first hand opinion of reality unfolding. These types of documentaries were meant to film events, which would take place even if the camera were not present. Interviews in the documentary film practice of direct cinema were denounced due to being regarded as meddling with what was developing in front of the camera, since it went against the principle of no intervention (Essmayer 2005: 6). Since Theroux mingles with his subjects, he in becoming one of the documentaries subjects breaks these rule and dramatically intervenes with the subject's daily life. Quite early in the direct cinema movement it was noted that the personality of the filmmaker did have a considerable impact on what and how images were shown in the end product. It was made clear though, that subjectivity has its place within the recorded frame, rather than in the orchestration of a scene (Giebler 2008: 64). Though editing may only have a limited power over the content offered by subjects, the importance of steering participants into a certain direction during an interview and having staged scenes, should not be overlooked.

Concerning the matter of staging, Theroux says that they do make arrangements, such as meeting at the subjects home at a certain time or at a different place. While making the show on Neo Nazis, he knew that the show needed a climax in the third act, requiring him to come on stronger. So when one of the subjects, a member of the KKK and a Neo Nazi, admits to being friends with someone of Peruvian descent, Theroux confronts him about being a hypocrite, which ended up becoming “this quite enflamed, but powerful encounter”. Unfortunately, due to a disconnected sound cable the scene was unusable, which meant that they had to repeat their original confrontation for the camera. Theroux, assents that it was a weird situation to be in, but they did manage to duplicate the same argument, with better results the second time round (Doceville May 2012). Reaction shots on the other hand are something, Theroux reckons, directors should not ask of contributors. He does accept that editing shots are needed, such as shots of him looking in a certain direction, to with the help of editing make clear whom he is turning to during a conversation. Contributors often think it weird, which may cause discomfort and suspicion. He does “not love doing it, but sometimes you have to do it” (Docville May 2012).

Expressions and reactions are vital to the telling of a story. Parallel to direct cinema, cinema vérité began to develop in France (Wippenberg 1998: 34). The French movement, as opposed to the American direct cinema, did employ interviews and conversation, along with different camera angles, such as long or close shots of subject’s faces, which payed particular attention to expressions (Steiner 2005:68). In his main work “Chronique d’un été” the principal representative of cinema vérité french filmmaker Jean Rouch tried to bring people to communicate things they would normally rather not (Steiner 2005: 67). Theroux too seems to make, maybe because of his faux naive persona, people come out with often uncomfortable admissions, as for example in his show on America’s Most Dangerous Pets, where a man admits to the filmmaker that he trusts his wild animal more than his wife. With the passing of the years, new hybrid forms of the documentary film emerged, most of them made for television, resulting in a large number of different kinds of films, ranging from attempts at earnest documentaries to doku-soaps (Grassl 2007: 26). Experimenting has led to many hybrid forms and in the case of more serious documentary films made room for the stance of the author to depend on a more individual perception and subjective authenticity (Zimmermann 2001: 10). This might be relevant in the case of

Theroux, since his films, at least his older ones, he is unafraid of sharing his personal opinions, especially disagreement, often through the enactment of his persona.

In summary it can be said that documentaries can not be regarded as reality for the simple reason that they show processed material, that has been intentionally selected and edited. They only show a sliver of truth if at all, since they all have been created by a subject with a certain bias and have to bend their knee to censorship.

4 Theroux's Style

The following section is dedicated to describing and determining Theroux's style. Since the filmmaker usually seeks to investigate marginalized subcultures in a country in which he does not live, the concept of ethnography is brought into the discussion. The main focus lies on performance and the way in which Theroux submerges himself in the action. His presence on the screen, he explains, originates from having been a correspondent on Michael Moore's TV Land, which just lead to the continuation of the practice. Theroux argues that if he was "a real documentary filmmaker" he would be behind the camera. About making "these kind of bastardized types of documentaries" in which he the presenter enters and walks around, he feels ambivalent. When he wanted to direct or be an executive producer for a possible future project, the BBC told him that they have twenty others who could do that, giving him to understand that his stock and trade was the formation of relationships on screen. Being a performer, he says, also brings a different dynamic to the screen and seems to speed up the production process (Docville May 2012). Not only will attention be drawn to the instances of performance in his interactions with his subjects, but also the way in which Theroux himself becomes a subject, melting into the worlds he is set to discover through actions and experience, which he then shares with the audience, put him in the role of an author.

4.1 Authorship

Since in the work of Theroux is doubtlessly subjective, in encompassing a self portrayal, that shies away from autobiography, and open ended, which are features of the essay film (Renov 2004: 71), it could be regarded as bearing a resemblance. The essay film interweaves two chronicles of interrogation, that of subjectivity and that of the world. The

essayist at all times bears in mind his own immersion in the world outlined and the effect encounters have on the filmmaker's onscreen self (Renov 2004: 73). Though the form of the essay is heterogeneous and inexhaustible, its logic prohibits a verifiable truth of rhetorical content, order or correctness. The essay form is essentially inexact, meaning that its pushing a thesis, although not necessarily out ruled, could be hard to accomplish (Renov 2004: 70). Since Theroux's works includes the personal, narrating voice and subjects are set up as representatives of an exploration of a particular cultural scene, considering it an essay film could be understandable. Theroux, as he explained in his Docville interview, has moved away from scripting his performance to allow interactions to play out in a more organic manner. Shooting without a script or a particular outcome in mind, he does in a way distance himself from the footage. Although Theroux has let go of excessive artifice, his programs, a record of his interactions with subjects, do not have the feel of memory making about them. Memory making does comprise social, participatory, reciprocal actions from which a collective cultural memory could stem, but in Theroux's case he seems to present his own personal memory making. Often, especially in the case of his newer films, he seems to make his private experiences public in the form of his shows, mainly for voyeuristic purposes since he does not articulate any kind of mission statement. That he does not have any kind of clear thesis, which can be supported by the example of the other of a autistic child asking Theroux to record her sons tantrum, for the sake of showing the realities of daily living with the disease. Theroux's audio visual archive in the end holds a record of his own memories, the documentation participation and performance within the restricted framework of the documentary film.

As previously mentioned Theroux narrates and immerses himself in the action as a subject, and it is indeed the narrator, that is the simplest form of transporting subjectivity. Narrators function as mediators in the communication model, betray themselves through their biased viewpoints and is identical to the author in non fiction discourses (Steiner 2005: 95). Allocating Theroux to only one category of narration again proves tricky, since several apply in some slight respect. The reporter narrator only appears in documentary films as the interviewer. His hierarchal position situates him above that of the participants, which awards him interpretation sovereignty, but no room is allowed for him to exhibit a more distinctive figure (Steiner 2005: 98). Though Theroux does use interviews as one of the primary ways of obtaining information, this description does not befit him on account of his personal envelopment and persona. The investigative narrator, at first glance seems to

be the most accurate and applicable to Theroux's work, since this narrator as the central character embarks on the quest of gathering facts on current affair themes. A common feature of this narrative technique is for the investigative narrator to look to speak with attestants, who in turn become narrators in their own way. These then occupy the same hierarchal position, during the interview, as the investigative narrator himself. But since the thematic content remains in the foreground, leaving no time for any revelations about the narrator's person (Steiner 2005: 98). Another possible option that could be considered is the protagonist narrator, if Theroux's claims are true about his real life personality being actually appearing onscreen (Steiner 2005: 99). But since Theroux is held to put on a persona, most noticeably in his older work, he does not produce a pure and truthful self portrait, which makes this category also unsuitable. Should Theroux's off screen equal his on screen personality, the category of autobiographical narrator could be pertinent, since this combines the main character with the author in one person. Here the filmmaker becomes one of the protagonists in front of the camera. This narrative form is marked by two specific elements, firstly the autobiographical narrator is simultaneously the one who experiences and recounts. The story and narration merge in time, as they manifest as one. Furthermore, the autobiographical narrator is identified by how open he is about his subjective perspectives, without having to fear about his credibility, on account of the documentary dealing with his own perceptions (Steiner 2005: 100). It is this type of narrator, that permits full subjectivity in all situations, making the communication of a thought processes in voice overs, camera appearances and articulation of opinions possible. Here one should revive the memory of countless interviews, during which Theroux keeps repeating that he is fiercely protective of his privacy and wants to remain in the shadows, which also translates onto the screen, where he is never shown to exchange personal information with any of the people he meets. Hence, this category only holds true to a certain extend in Theroux case.

To somehow seal the deal on the discussion on the aptitude of the category, one should examine the stylistic means the film employs. Subjectivity is said to be transmitted best through such stylistic means in documentary films such as on camera appearance of the filmmaker, voice over commentary, interviews and the use of editing and background music. In the case of voice overs two types can be distinguished, that of the authoritative "voice of god", that seems to claim the absolute truth and the personalized voice over commentary. During the latter the narrator adopts the role of the subjective observer, eye

witness or participant, which as a circumstance colors the commentary (Hissen 2004: 47). Interviews, which most commonly tend to make up a documentary, are used to convey authenticity, since a subject's account is accredited with more credibility than a simple commentary. Interviews may be misused to substantiate the personal opinion of the filmmaker, which can already start at the scene during the interview and in the cutting room. So it is the style of questioning and the possible intercutting of scenes that a filmmaker could use to disseminate his own way of thinking (Hissen 2004: 51). It is also the use of music, that announces Theroux's attitude in a more indirect and ironic way. For programs on themes that are no laughing matter, such as his three on Law and Disorder or his two on Extreme Love exclusively feature instrumental pieces, that are not intrusive and merely serves as background music. Programs on less funereal topics seem to get a more satirical musical treatment. In the show on Swingers the song Love American Style by The Cowsills plays as he introduces the swinger community in his voice over narration, or during the actual swinger event a cover of the song un homme et une femme can be heard. Throughout the episode Twilight of the Pornstars 'Everybody's Weird Except Me' by Stereolab and Chairlift with Garbage is played. Here the songs could be seen as not only being meant as negligible background accompaniment, but as a form of commentary to the shown images. All in all, it can be said that Theroux seems to employ stylistic devices only sparingly, with the focus resting on his communication and participation.

4.2 Subjectivity

All of Theroux's show have the first person narrative in common. The presented stories can be relived through the filmmaker's perceptions and his understanding of the world. His subjectivity acts as a stylistic device, but is not merely a vehicle of identification of who exactly the author is. Making use of closeness, personal concern and fervency gives the viewer a deeper insight into the world of the first person narrator. The filmmaker's subjectivity, clearly discernible, does make the text more enthralling but also sets the tone for how the filmmaker's report and opinion should be pegged (Haas 2004: 62). Theroux does his fieldwork by familiarizing himself with the daily life and surrounding of the people his shows document, he so immerses himself in their reality. This seems to be of importance in Theroux's case, since he does not deal in facts but rather in experiences. His immersion in to these foreign worlds are time consuming, since they demand him to

make two to three seven to ten days long trips as he explains in his Docville interview, and his immersion seems very thorough since he often appears to stay over at the homes of the people he shadows, as is in the case of his *When Louis met* series, as well as in other programs such as *America's Medicated Kids* or his *Weird Weekends* episode on survivalists.

It is through the on screen appearance that the reporter persona manifests, which allows for the accentuation of the filmmaker's personal view. Since the filmmaker lets the viewer see how he acquired the information, audiences are given the impression to have witnessed the process of the procurement of information. This form of transparency helps to back up any statement and assumption the filmmaker makes. The veracity of facts are convincingly demonstrated, rather than solely alleged (Hissen 2005: 43). Theroux does not necessarily seem to push a certain type of agenda, since he goes out into the field with a very unspecific aim, rather than with the intention of proving or disproving a postulate or unmasking a specific person. All he seems to do is meet with people to find out more about what makes them who they are.

Immersion seems what Theroux is all about. There does exist the option of shrugging immersion off, due to every documentary being an immersion into a topic. The events are being tracked and filmed by the filmmaker with a camera over a longer extend of time and finally reconstructed on the cutting room (Grassl 2007: 32). Since the use of immersion dictates the construction and organization of the film, it could be possible to deduce the criterion of immersion from the context of the film's structure (Haas 2004: 61).

Since investigations of a subculture, as Theroux does it, take a considerable amount of time and asks for the necessary funding, which the BBC covers, the only unresolved problem that remains is an ethical one. Subjects should be informed of Theroux's stylistic choices, those being his participatory observation, which is his journalistic form of inquiry, which the subjects should understand as such and have agreed to it's airing. Although Theroux does not want to be known for having been embraced by Ms Hamilton, as he shared in his IAB Mobile Exchange interview in May 2012, his subjects are given the opportunity to view one of his previous programs before they fully commit to the project. It does seem, especially in more recent interviews, that Theroux is reluctant to speak off the faux naive persona he took on in his early shows. In several interviews, as for example in

his Five Minutes With Louis Theroux back in 2010, he tells Matthew Stadlen, that the only persona he put on is that of a journalist, which he considers a professional persona. Adding that even his parents reckon that who is on screen is indeed their son, since off camera he is inquisitive and likes to wind people up. His unique style, he says is marked by his incompetence, resulting from him not being a smooth or accomplished performer. It is his “fumbling and stumbling” that has worked best for him and has become his signature style, yet he is earnest about mainly trying to understand his subjects, when he stands across from them. To the criticism of him taking advantage of his participants by acting as if he were on their side, while in fact mocking them for the amusement of the audience, he responds by agreeing that this criticism might apply to his earlier work. This stemmed from his first television experience on Michael Moore’s satirical program TV Nation, where the idea was to attack people, who had made themselves deserving of such treatment, by for example being a member of the Ku Klux Klan. His recent programs he specifies as being “very humane and mature”(Stadlen 2010).

The immersion of the filmmaker can be very useful to the viewers, since it determines the construction and composition of the documentary. The process identifies the source and the procedure of acquiring information and impressions, its also makes the filmmakers interpretations comprehensible, which ensures the authenticity, originality and value of the footage. In this manner of reconstructing the research, the viewer is included in the developing story, since the filmmaker’s gradual acquisition of information and detail takes on the character of an unfolding novelistic plot, that the viewer can follow with ease and so little by little gain understanding of the context and facts (Haas 2004: 61).

The high visibility of the documentary filmmaker can also bring him celebrity. “Celebrity depends on regular media exposure” as well as the willingness of the individual to “seek fame and recognition”. In short the activity of a person must be circulated by the media (Leslie 2011: 11). Theroux does not think it right, even if he wanted to, to present himself as the subject of a documentary. It would stand to question what ends would be achieved (Docville May 2012). Theroux says he is reluctant to enter the celebrity realm in any way outside of his shows. It is important to him that his coming into the public be only down through the medium of documentary films, which are his to control. Since documentaries are what he is about, he decided against going on chat shows, panel shows or doing an excessive amount of interviews, except for the purpose of promoting his current program.

Doing chat and panel shows to Theroux seems self regarding, a form of attention seeking at moments which are job unrelated or a form of product promotion, which comes off as tedious. During the interviews Theroux does give, he opposes the sharing of details on his private life. Not wanting to break down the “barrier of mystique” led Theroux to turn down the offer of being on the first Celebrity Big Brother and feel reluctance at joining twitter, which he then only ended up doing, due to several people having impersonated him on the micro blogging website. With one impersonator attracting 10 000 followers and the other 100 000, Theroux realized remaining behind the curtain was not doing him any good. His girlfriend Nancy then took it upon herself to leave an unpleasant twitter message asking the impostors to stop their activity, while signed in as Theroux (IAB Mobile Exchange May 2012).

Theroux does own up to his celebrity during his programs. He does add the name of his employer, maybe in hope of the credentials making him appear more serious rather than frivolous. During the Weird Weekend episode on Bodybuilding, while asking about for how much he could sell his underwear for, a practice that allows bodybuilders to earn a lot of money on the side, Guy, whom he has come to interview, suggest Theroux could sell his back in Britain. This makes Guy’s agent ask whether Theroux is very well known back home, to which he responds with a short “mhmm”, which he then corrects to “reasonably well, BBC 2”.

His profession, Theroux thinks, demands of him to partially remain in the shadows. Starting to treat himself as a celebrity is something he would not permit himself. Being a celebrity could be an impediment, but he does not feel that he has reached a degree where it has become a hindrance, since he does not work in Britain and is not well known in America (Docville May 2012).

4.3 Ethnography

Theroux’s work could be seen as a type of ethnographic output. Classical ethnography seeks to represent the culture of foreign societies, rather than gather data on it, which is similar to what Theroux does. His shows shower the viewer with qualitative rather than quantitative results. Ethnography can either mean a product or a process. Products take the shape of articles or books, written by scholars of anthropology, while the process

simply designates participant observation and fieldwork. Stress is put on the observation being participatory, since descriptions are not enough due to ending up being one sided (Sanjek 1998: 193). Though some see ethnography as being used as a methodology to become familiar with, interpret and represent cultures and societies, the idea also exists to remove ethnography from the function of a method of gaining data and to rather realize it as a process of generation and representation of knowledge of societies, cultures and individuals, which primarily relies on the experiences of the ethnographer (Pink 2007: 23). This form of ethnography does not lay claim on delivering a objective and truthful observation of reality, but instead should attempt to pass a rendering of the ethnographer's experience of reality that is most faithful to the circumstances, dialogue and intersubjectivity that produced the information. Here reflexive, collaborative and participatory methods may come into play. Since a reflexive element dominates this approach, it is important to note that the ethnographer is one interpreting, experiencing subject out of many and his subjective cognizance and the questions emerging from it become the chief motive of ethnography. The researcher acts as the channel that creates and represents ethnographic information and is so tasked to compose ethnographic fictions from representations of reality. After all, reality is not objectively accessible and hence can not be recorded using scientific methods of research. It is through subjective experiences of individuals that reality manifests (Pink 2007: 25).

The ethnographic documentary film naturally has it's own problems when facing the demand for a clear and acceptable definition. Most commonly the ethnographic film is taken to reveal cultural patterning, which means that the content or form, sometimes both make it ethnographic (Brigard 1995: 14). Since Theroux's films mainly work to reveal as much as possible of the life of sub culture members, it would be possible to qualify them as ethnographic. Then again some critical voices insist that the ethnographic film does not exist as such. Instead in the area of ethnography there are numerous possibilities of looking at film and even more possibilities of a filmic implementation (Engelbrecht 1995: 147). This would not necessarily negate the taking of Theroux's shows to be ethnographic in character, it might even green light an ethnographic reading of his work. The ethnographic film is classified as a genre of the documentary film, that displays a cultural difference in its unfilmed and filmed reality. It has the purpose of serving material for an analysis, collection of data, verification of ethnographic hypothesis and to be a substitute for a student's fieldwork (Hohenberger 1988: 146). To describe Theroux's work the word

educational might not be on top of the list, but his shows do provide data from a selected few subjects, who being meth addicts, prisoners, thai brides or black nationalists, are individuals not easily approachable to the average person, making Theroux's work the ideal fieldwork substitute.

Any film that occupies itself with representing or self-representing one culture for another is an ethnographic film (Nichols 1994: 66). Since Theroux's shows document the lives and practices of members of subcultures, which are then aired for the benefit of people positioned on the outside of these minorities, Nichols' requirement could be said to have been met. Ethnographic films, due to their objective, are said to be essentially western (Bensmaia 1978: 28). If western is to be understood, as meaning the more complex, widespread and modernized, which stands in opposition to non western, such as indigenous people for example. In Theroux case this might apply in a metaphorical sense, since the filmmaker does leave his home country to enter a different world, that is governed by different rules to which he is unaccustomed. The use of the word weird, which he use in one of the series titles, *Weird Weekends*, and in abundance in interviews to describe the subcultures he dives into, could be understood to be part of the process of othering, if not a sign of superiority, which would imitate the western and non western dichotomy.

An intercultural encounter takes place between Theroux and his subjects in two ways, on one side he as an European, representing the Old World opposing the Americans, and him being part of the politically correct mainstream meeting with subcultures on the fringe of society. In older programs it did not seem a problem for him to buy into the Other as portrayed by the media stereotypes. Otherness, as Judith Butler puts it, usually is made up of that what can not be shown or said. So it happens that the representations in the big media are devoid of "what is most human about the Other" (Chanan 2010: 151). Being the Other, does necessarily have to be seen as something negative. Tourism rests on the desire to make oneself be a stranger. At a superficial level spectators at performances have commonalities with tourists. Spectators want to be entertained, refreshed and gain knowledge by observing an atypical situation, an exceptional vision or fictional setting. Similarly to a traveller visiting a new place, the spectator is confronted with a performance through the gaze, which indicating a distance between viewer and object. Tourist and spectator both briefly enter another domain and are expected to return the ordinary world,

while recognizing the object as a commodity and accepting themselves in the role of the consumer (Kennedy 2009: 94). Dean MacCannell in his work *The Tourist: a new theory of the leisure class* (1976), saw tourism as the pursuit of the “authentic other”, since traveling for leisure has the purpose of coming upon something that is different from the self. Tourists, as paradoxical consumers, want experience instead of merchandise and the world, they hope to discover, holds the promise of sensation, restoration, inspiration or variation. Experience, hard to commodify since it is so variable as it depends on the person, leaves the touristic sites as the opportunity for adventure, leading to the meaning of a performance being born in the mind of the spectator (Kennedy 2009: 95). For the tourist the disconnection between self and other is not complete. Seeking the other one may discover that the other has become alike or that oneself has unknowingly assumed the form of the other. Tourism as an interrelation which turns difference into the familiar, grants the opportunity to savor the other on ones own terms (Kennedy 2009: 113). So there is a possibility of Theroux’s viewership wanting to see worlds that are utterly different than their own, either to gain an impression of alternative life styles or to feel invigorated by the weirdness.

The meeting between the European and the Americans does not end in the portrayal of an inferior Other. It merely bares their otherness and eccentricity. For the most part when Theroux displays his cheeky faux naive streak testing his subject’s threshold of endurance, they do respond with good humor, amiability and some even seem to be ready to give in to the stranger, who works hard at bushing their buttons. Pastor Phelps, in the program on the Westboro Baptist Church, asks whether Theroux is stalling for time, when Theroux asks him how many children he has, which according to the Pastor is known to everybody in the civilized world. This is an interesting observation, but Theroux clearly seems to enjoy making his interviewees squirm. This question on how many children the pastor has, is in a way othering in process. Theroux admits to knowing that the pastor has 13 children out of which 4 have fallen away, yet he wanted to know how the pastor would react. Another member of the church makes Louis aware that by not asking a sincere question pertaining to the scriptures and the word of god he has missed an opportunity. Clearly Theroux does not seek to embed himself in the thinking of the subculture, he could have after all discussed religious matters in an effort to explore their reasoning behind their behavior, but chooses to remain on the outside. By asking this question, he in a way tries to gain distance and point to the negative effects of their believe system, which is the

breaking up of a family, which seems to cast Theroux as a moral instance. The question was bait the pastor did not take. Of his granddaughter Theroux offers praise, for he discovered “a more human side to their personalities”. Here, he goes against the nearly expected condemnation of the entire family other media outlets voice. Theroux finds a balance between pointing to the vices of subjects and acknowledging their amiable personality traits, not losing sight of their humanity while othering his subjects.

Ethnographic films are also said to have two recognizable aspects, those being the documentary or ethnographic on one hand, and the artistic or cinematographic on the other (Banks1998: 232). The ethnographic film belongs to the realm of visual ethnography, which lives on the assumption that culture can be expressed by the means of visible symbols. These are found in the usage of the natural environment, in terms of artifacts and in behavior patterns of people (Haller 2005: 153). Those behavioral patterns Theroux seems to be interested in, since he immerses himself into the strange worlds through performance.

4.4 Performance

Performance seems at the heart of Theroux’s style, so a brief sketch of the theoretical concept shall now follow. Performance can be used to denote the being in process of the subject (Reinelt 2002: 201). In light of the death of the author, insisted on by post structuralists, performance no longer focuses on authority but on effect, no longer on text but on the body and the viewers right to make and alter meaning. Since the 1950s, with the help of anthropologists Milton Singer and Victor Turner, performance has also become applicable to aspects of culture, such as rituals, sports, dance, politics and elements of everyday (Reinelt 2002: 202).

Performance may be said to rely on the ritual mode of communication, defined by James Carey as “a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired and transformed”, here communication does not serve the purpose of transmitting information but of representing shared assumptions. These assumptions are articulated in common ideals and actualized in tangible forms, such as dance, plays, architectonics, broadcasts and speech (Bell 2008: 8).

Assumptions about performance depend on conceptions. Mimesis, one of them, sees performance as an imitation or mirroring of the world, an opinion similar to that Aristotle held in his *Poetics*, where he wrote that a play on stage has to emulate the action in life. Although mimesis is affiliated with pretension it does have the power to inspire very real feelings, attitudes and values within the audience. Plato perceived the oral poet to be second rate since he only offered an imitation instead of genuine knowledge or experience, which gave rise to the antitheatrical prejudice believing performers to be untrustworthy (Bell 2008: 12). The anthropologist Victor Turner conceived of performance as *poiesis*, “making not faking”. Turner thought culture to be made by performance in the shape of traditions, communities, discussions, significance and views on the world. Dwight Conquergood understood performance to be based on breaking and remaking. This process of *kinesis* “movement, motion, fluidity, fluctuation”, may “transgress boundaries, break structures and remake social and political rules” and can be explained as a way of cultural intervention, since performance can also cause a break down of traditions (Bell 2008: 13).

Performance has many definition, some see it as communication, capable of marking identities and telling stories, both process and product, in turn productive and purposeful, it is dynamic and generative, an activity with the power to influence others, and it can both be traditional and transformative to the extent of cultural resistance. What all definitions seem to agree upon that performance is an action generating an effect (Bell 2008: 16-17). Performance may be something a person can be actively aware of. The term performance consciousness denotes the “reflexive awareness of oneself as performing”. This reflexive awareness separates causal behavior from acting (Bell 2008: 43). Reflexivity, may have a very positive effect since it engages the viewer, creating a participant hermeneutic in which deconstruction serves as part of the process by which discourse takes place (O’Brien 2006:192).

Performatives, according to Austin, are utterances constituting action in themselves. The difference between performative and constative utterances, Austin claims is that uttering a performative sentence “is not to describe my doing of what I should be said in so uttering to be doing or to state that I am doing it: it is to do it”. Similarities between language and photography can be drawn. Commonly performance documentation is seen as a statement detailing performances and asserting that they have taken place. The

performance documentary can be viewed as having a performative nature, since the documentation does not bring forward images or statements, which chronicle a performance and act as proof for its occurrence, but it creates an event as a performance and the performer as an artist. Richard Bauman sees a performance as a communicative act, during which the audience is signaled by the performer, that he wants their attention. This leads to the supposal of the performer feeling responsible for showcasing a communicative skill. In accordance with this view of performance expression as an act itself is composed as a display, that is turned into an object and somewhat taken out of context and inviting audience's interpretation and evaluation of underlying qualities and associational reverberations. The distinct semiotic way used by the performer to regulate the performance frame, simply put, indicating on a meta communicative level that the performance is on, will alternate between places and time periods. The audience's cooperation is an indispensable constituent of the performance, regarded as an interactional achievement (Auslander 2006: 5). The performance art documentation's object is to open an artist's work to a wider public. Accordingly it can be said that performance art documentation adopts fine art's tradition of reproduction of works (Auslander 2006: 6).

In the case of first person media a merger between modes of fact can occur when the personal is turned into the content of public entertainment. Though documentaries have often focused on personal and domestic matters, the difference is marked by the pervasiveness and range of modern media outlets, which offer the possibility of turning any private person into a performer in his own "freak show". Individuals aspire to perform and display difference, which insinuates difference being performance (Dovey 2000: 4). Personal output presents infinite variety, while the difference performed is a kind of participation. Subjects of two kinds seem to exist, those who remain authentic and unaffected by the presence of the camera and those who intentionally engage in performance, which creates tension. The immersion of the self into a documentary, regardless of how natural or personal it may seem, is a performance and a expression to be interpreted by the viewership. With the personal becoming the new public sphere (Dovey 2000: 4). Executing and reading performances should be of importance, which might prove a tricky task since observers may turn performers and vice versa. Consideration demands the involvement and the motivation it is born from, of agents and their performance within the documentary. Three stories, those of the filmmaker, the film

itself and the viewers, are interwoven in a documentary (Nichols 2001: 61). But it is usually the subject's story that takes predominance. In the documentaries examined here, the subjects as well as Theroux realize themselves as active participants. This would indicate that a fourth story can be added to those three already identified by Nichols, namely that of the the subject, although in Theroux's case one might argue that the subject's story can be a part of that of the filmmaker, for the documentary presents the story of Theroux's interactions.

The documentary, may not have a definition, but certainly tries to follow the ideal, of truth or integrity being precisely proportional to the participation of subjects (Feldman 1977: 23). This documentary ideal could be corresponded to a participatory ideal, in which the amount of contribution to a media correlates to the end product's authenticity. So the more Theroux steps back, ditching the role of a provocateur to assume that of the quiet observer, the more likely it is for the viewer to see the what is most likely the subjects unaltered natural way of being.

The content of a participatory documentary is generated by it's subjects. The participatory documents, earlier labeled as interactive documentary by Nichols, has the filmmaker interacting with the subjects through interviews, being open about his participation in their world and there is a frankness about his control over what unfolds in front of the camera. The film becomes the product of the interplay between filmmaker and subject, which evidences the turning over of textual authority to the enlisted social actors (Nichols 1991: 44). For the participatory documentary the subjects are a cardinal element while the filmmaker lays the foundation, but abstains from being the focal point. Nichols wonders whether it could be possible for the filmmaker not to butt in or to reach out (1991: 44), which suggest the belief that it would be possible for the filmmaker not to step in. This might not really be possible, which is a point also Bruzzi's criticism targets, when she accuses Nichols of depicting a counterfactual succession in the typology of documentaries, from author to subject centered (2000: 2). In the participatory documentary as described by Nichols sees the participation of the filmmaker only in being the point of departure, which does not apply entirely in the case of Theroux. Though Theroux, does retain control over what happens, he himself, through his transparent immersion into the worlds his subjects occupy, becomes one of them. When he goes on television to sell a paper shredder in his show on Infomercials, when he buys a car and enters a banger race

in his show *Demolition Derby*, when he signs up at a Bangkok marriage agency and actually meets marriage willing women in his show on *Thai Brides* or when he undergoes cosmetic surgery in his show *Under the Knife* are all instances of him becoming a subject that experiences the reality people within the subculture call their own. Theroux holds the dual identity of filmmaker, in search of answers for exact questions, and the experiencing subject, yet in a strange world. So the term participatory documentary may not describe Theroux's work best. So the term "perform-director" (Bruzzi 2006: 208) could be considered a viable means of description for Theroux. Nichols in 2001, added the performative documentary to his list of possible modes. Here, the filmmaker is positioned centermost within the story, as perfectly exemplified by Michael Moore or Nick Broomfield. The performative documentary documents the communication of filmmakers with their subjects, but it is the filmmaker at whom the limelight is directed. The rather more recent phenomenon of the performative documentary, could moderate the story of the subject to the effect of infringing on the participatory elements. Nichols, referencing Michael Moore's *Roger and Me*, does see the risks of characters being cast into stereotypical confining roles such as that of donors, helpers or villains. This will end in social actors being unequal to the as a protagonist manifested filmmaker (1991: 71). The definition of the participatory documentary given by Nichols is a welcome addition to the description of the interactions taking place between subjects and the filmmaker seeking them out, which is such a common practice nowadays. The performative mode, on the other hand, though it features the perform director more heavily, does not result in an increase of time spent on interactions between filmmaker and subjects, since the camera will rest for longer on the filmmaker for the sake of a comedic effect, as in the case of Theroux's older pieces.

In his program *Living with Louis*, Theroux receives feedback from the subjects he had done previous shows on, here Theroux is the subject that is being evaluated. Jean Rouch, a filmmaker laying emphasis on the ethical and aesthetic side of the collaboration with the subjects of his documentary films, perceives his work to be "shared anthropology" or "participatory ethnography" (2003: 45). Since his preferred method of production is a collaborative one, Rouch sees himself inspired by Robert Flaherty, the pioneer of the approach of which the "participatory camera" is an essential stylistic device. This term delineates two separate ideas, the first being a reaction to Flaherty's practice of "feedback" and the second being knowledge obtained from Rouch's very own practice. During the production of *Nanook of the North* Flaherty would let his subjects view the

material they had shot so far. This was done to give his subjects the opportunity to contribute with greater awareness and independence (Rouch 2003: 32). To Rouch feedback, an additional means for subject participation, is the practice of participatory camera. The terms other meaning intends to stand for the immersion in the process of filmmaking, which can take on the intensity of a “cine trance” (Rouch 2003: 39). This close affiliation between the filmmaker and the camera bears a resemblance to Vertov’s “ciné-eye”. Here the documentary maker participated through the medium of the camera, since he is immersed in the world he is pursuing to understand and in the action of capturing the scenes on film.

In *Living with Louis*, his previous subjects state that before working with Louis they had seen some of his programs and then try to give reason why they had agreed to do it, thinking it a good idea to show themselves as they really are, albeit having been warned by others of Theroux. They are then given a chance to speak about his personality, describing him as coming across as being “naive like a fox”, which they recognize as an act. Most subjects do seem to speak of the interaction with Theroux in terms of a power play, asserting themselves as having been in on the act and being sure of being capable of gaining the upper hand. During his stay at their homes he is perceived as having been “nosy” and looking for something “salacious”. Theroux is then given a chance to defend himself, while sitting at his desk, what might presume to be his office space, he says that he does not perceive himself as being nosy, but does leave room for the possibility. All in all, it is not much of a proper defense, Theroux rather just returns the favor of analyzing the character of his subjects, remarking that a subject is happily willing to share information if Theroux does not expect him to answer a particular question, but will put up walls once Theroux starts pressing the matter. His subjects do feel that Theroux can be particularly confrontational, making the interview seem like a boxing match, in which he tries to make the other look bad. Theroux admits that finding faults with others has something awkward about it, which Theroux finds amusing. He does come across as slightly apologetic when he finishes with the words “I think. I don’t know”, while pulling up his shoulders and the corners of his mouth into a faint smile. Subjects confirm this by recalling that Theroux once having found their weakness, dwells on it, which makes bonding impossible. But since he presents himself as docile, people find it easy to open up at first. The entire program, *Living with Louis*, which was a one time only special, most probably since the then involved subjects were British celebrities, can be regarded to have

been a form of Rouch's first meaning of participatory camera, for the opportunity to give feedback further encouraged subjects to participate. In addition Theroux reflecting on the received feedback lead him to ponder the implications for the program, causing him to be reflexive and introspect on his own practice. Participatory documentary filmmakers are usually separated from their subjects, due to the subject being subordinated to the control of the filmmaker, which does not allow for an expression without encumbrance. Since subjects seem to not respond to Theroux directly, during the show *Living with Louis*, they, not having do struggle with the power imbalance Theroux usually seemed to aim at in his older programs, a different but important line of communication is added, in which power relations are addressed. Theroux positioning himself in accordance with the charges brought up against him, reveals himself as a participant, who is subjective and aware of his own persona, to which he only coyly owns up. Theroux's own reflectivity, which give insight into the documentary filmmaker's process, could be seen as Rouch's second meaning of participatory camera, in practice.

In summary it can be said that, as if following the idea of cine-eye of the man with a movie camera Theroux witnesses the new and strange world for others. He does so often with his own body, exposing himself to sensations of his subjects, such as the training of wrestlers or plastic surgery, which means that he choses his own over the lens of his subject's gaze, yet he refrains from analyzing how the world perceives him.

5 Old Shows

This section will deal with Theroux's older work, that is marked by the heavy use of his faux naive persona. Light will also be drawn on how the programs come into being, by recounting how Theroux finds a topic to investigates. Then his persona is assessed in terms of different facets. Though Theroux might have mainly resorted to humor and provocation in his older programs, his eagerness to bond with his subjects is easy to recognize.

5.1 Theroux on his Persona

Theroux is ready to confirm a difference between his newer and older works. In his older programs he admittedly sometimes exaggerated being out of his element, adding a naive

quality to his performance. He does insist on this having been based on a real part of his character, which he then simply allowed to become more intense. In his more recent programs, listing the ones on the St Quentin prison, plastic surgery and extreme religious groups, he says that when watching these he feels like he sees himself being his actual self. While being on location as a journalist doing his work, he does not feel like he is “taking on an obvious persona”. Theroux insists on being a shy person, even having had to stop acting in school due to suffering from severe stage fright. Adding that not being one of those people to speak at great length at dinner parties, he prefers listening over talking, which according to him is quite boring. Although claiming to not be the focus of his documentary programs Theroux is central to these. Theroux, growing up never perceived himself as a geek, and when the first reviews of his programs started pouring in, the term geek or nerd did crop up numerous times, which he at first ignored and now has grown to accept. What makes his shows work, Theroux acknowledges is him getting a little bit humiliated, with which he sees nothing wrong since he is humiliating himself, especially if he is poking fun at himself with the goal of uncovering “a greater truth about the world that [he] is in” (Canvas+ Interview 2008). Something he still struggles with are the responsibilities of appearing on television. Being natural on demand is something he does not enjoy, although it is in a way is part of his work requirement. This requires his production team to try “to create conditions through a lot of work and planning in which spontaneous and natural things can take place, where people feel comfortable”, which also allows for the the surprise by the unexpected to set in (Docville May 2012).

In the persona he has created Theroux seems to take little pride. After watching a clip of himself in his program on Fundamentalist Christianity, he says that besides feeling embarrassed as an outsider he would not be sure whether to think it funny or whether he was being “a tool”. Early on in his career, he had tried to emulate Michael Moore, by trying to pose “ludicrous questions” with the aim of initiating “ludicrous conversations”. He does wish to distance himself from his past work, and his image of a prankster in the format of Ali G, and so does not wish to even enter the headspace he must have been in back then, to explain his past work. Now Theroux prefers establishing “real, sincere relationship” in which people are allowed to express themselves, and admits that it was “strange and stressful” making programs the subject in the end would not like, since they would perceive themselves as having been set up. This was something he did “not feel that happy about”, his preference after all is “not to hurt people’s feelings wherever possible”.

He does find it preferable to make shows, about which the subjects have positive opinions on. The series *Weird Weekends* was not only meant to have a comic tone and the occasional “outlandish” person or conversation, but the wish was there for casting at least one person with whom Theroux, as well as the audience, can have rapport with (Docville May 2012).

On occasion Theroux has defended his faux naive persona. In an interview with Rachel Cooke for the guardian.co.uk back in 2007, Theroux reckons the question about how much of his faux naive persona was acting is silly. Being in a professional situation, he behaves differently from his everyday self, who would never ask such intrusive questions as why Debbie McGee, the wife of Paul Daniels, remained childless. On camera he regards himself as doing his job, which includes asking insensitive questions. Being a journalist, to Theroux, does not entail being freed from the responsibility “of the obligation to be a decent human being” (guardian.co.uk 2007).

5.2 A Program's Inception

When talking about how a show like *Weird Weekends* came about, Theroux shares that it was never easy to find a topic. The first program of the series was about survivalist in Idaho in the mid nineties, a topic that he came across by reading newspaper articles. Especially the article in the *New York Times Magazine* by Phillip Weiss, became the template for his show and even mentioned the main characters, which he would later meet while filming. The next program, about the porn industry, was inspired by an article titled “Waiting for Wood” in the *New Yorker* by Susan Faludi, detailing the difficulties of performing for males. Feeling strange at giving away his secrets, he confesses that all he did was adapt the article's core idea, that of a seemingly attractive profession proving terribly stressful. Mostly the ideas are his own, since he needs a personal connection to the story in order to make it work. After a few weeks of research and the identification of one area, so revisits of subjects could be possible to give the show a “novelistic quality of getting to know someone and deepening the relationship”, with each visit allowing for a return with a second opinion. To facilitate such a setup one geographical area has to be chosen. Then the director and assistant producer fly out to the location for the time span of two weeks with the intention of meeting and filming all the key players in the area. Back at the office the material is reviewed to see who would work best on the actual show. A journey then is mapped out for Theroux, based on who has been selected. In his recent work no detailed

plans are made, since Theroux wants to remain open to the unexpected. In the past his role, all the instances of his involvement in the action, were plotted out for him before hand, like going to the porn agent to take a nude picture or building a shelter out of hay bails with the survivalists (Docville May 2012).

The subjects he then follows, need to have made decisions he finds intriguing, “strange or counterintuitive”. They need to occupy a world which is very unlike his own but still allow for journalistic purchase. He looks for some part to play since he does not just want to gawp, he explained in an interview with Euan Ferguson in April 2010 for guardian.co.uk. No subject is too controversial, according to Theroux, as long as the right approach is taken. Never would he want to be an aider and abetter of a crime, which would make him feel uncomfortable. If for example Neo Nazis had extended an invitation for him to come to a non white area with the intention of causing residents bodily harm, Theroux would not take them up on the offer. He thinks it important to carefully think over one’s own role in contributing to circumstances. When he was investigating the vigilantes of Johannesburg, one individual he had met, kept a profusely bleeding man he had beaten in his car. When his subject was dragging the injured man out of his car, Theroux admit to not being sure whether he should proceed with the interview or call an ambulance or even the police. Theroux then opted for talking to the injured man to see if he needed help (IAB Mobile Exchange May 2012). Although nothing seemed to have come of Theroux turning to the injured man, since first aid was given by the filmmaker this does show that Theroux can slip out of the role of a journalist and into that of a caring neighbor.

5.3 The Persona

He insists that people who have seen his programs will agree that he is not the focus. He seeks out extreme subjects, people doing things that to him seem outrageous, because he is very much unlike them, in the way he presents himself on film, which is the reason why he is drawn to them. His shyness or hesitancy contributes to what attracts him to these subjects. When asked in an interview whether the Louis Theroux present is the same as the one visible on screen, Theroux answers that he believes that it is possible for a person to be any number of different people in one day, since every person inhabits several roles which depend on the setting, such as the office or while being around loved ones. So during his programs he is aware that what he is doing is his occupation, of which soliciting

information is a part of, so he admits that he takes on a journalistic persona (Canvas+ Interview 2008). On a different occasion he folded to the fact that in earlier shows he had morphed into a kind of persona, which he chose over being himself. There was a “tongue in cheek quality” to how he posed his questions. Theroux sees himself as “capable of pretending not to know”. His reactions, such as remarking that the habit of beating up a snitch in the Miami jail is “brutal”, are always those of a journalist, and never acting. He feels that given he arrives at the scene as a journalist, people should assume that he is informed on the subject, so it is not necessary for him “to impersonate a position of ignorance” (Docville May 2012). Time after time, Theroux defends his faux naive persona, which he adopts as he enters strange territories, yet he never denies it’s actual existence.

5.4 Participation

Before Theroux steps into foreign domains to experience them for himself, the filmmaker tries to make a picture of the subculture’s landscape for himself, by simply engaging his subjects in conversation, which helps him connect and bond with them. Evanescent landscapes have the ability to engender assumed interiority, that is a representation of the inhabited material surrounding (Ames 2009: 51). The physical world a person inhabits has the ability to reveal much about their character. So it is unsurprising, that Theroux seems to make it a habit of meeting his subjects in their homes. He explores the working area of one of the struggling actresses in Off Off Broadway, goes through the record collection of a Neo Nazi, looks at the covers of adult videos belonging to performers, looking at the sleeping area of institutionalized pedophiles and tours the play room of a swinger couple. Referring to items in their homes acts as a conversation started. When looking at the closets of the Phelps girls, their clothing style as opposed to that of their fellow students, acts as an opener which allows for a segue to a conversation about their isolation from non-members of their church. In his *Weird Weekend* episode on self-fulfillment and hypnosis Theroux goes through magazines with a subject to collect inspirational pictures for his dream board, Theroux breaks the ice by sharing what kind of pictures he is looking for, which causes him to end up with a picture of the perfect chiseled body, an inspiration for writing, camping and a better relationship with loved ones. The subjects helps to cut out the pictures out of the magazines for Theroux, which allows them to work as a team. Once a pleasant atmosphere has been established, Theroux, seeming even more casual by

sitting on the floor, leaning his back against the wall, starts interrogating his opposite about his responses to critical situations in life. After a conversation has broken the ice, Theroux will seek to further develop a bond with his subjects and the subculture by asking to be put to a task, like he does in his program on swinging, where he helps carry the groceries and does dishes. In the episode on the brothel, Theroux first puts himself in the role of an active participant, when he sits on the chaise lounge next to Susan, the madam, sitting in the usual customer seat, to watch the girls practice their entrance. He allows a “wow” to escape him while a smile spreads across his face. He then further immerses himself in the daily life at the Wild Horse, by working the phones. This seems to be his tactic of immersing himself in the ongoing and enables him to connect with his subjects.

Theroux immerses himself in the subcultures not only through interviews, but by participating in activities typical of the scene. This often means that he will undergo physical experiences, which also often involve the buying of proper gear or spending money in some way. In his show *Demolition Derby* Theroux, seeking to become a derby driver, finds himself purchasing the appropriate car. When he hears the asking price of \$300, Theroux is reluctant to agree, since it seems like a rip off. Admitting that since he works at the BBC he is well funded, allowing him to over \$350. Budgets are never an issue, Theroux explains. During the filming of *A City Addicted to Meth*, the first time he had ever directly been involved with actions that were against the law, although having made three trips they had not gotten anyone actually consuming the drug on camera. So a fourth trip was necessary, for which the budget was stretched. Never has he been in a situation, where the story was made to suffer due to a lack of money. Being on a BBC budget also allowed him to once abandon a story on cage fighting or mix martial arts, as it is also known, simply because Theroux did not find it interesting, bringing them to take the plane home after day four (Docville May 2012). Certain bills Theroux had to pay out of his own pocket, which shows that as a journalist he is prepared to go the extra mile for the sake of his craft. The liposuction procedure cost him \$5000, since the BBC, unlike as he hoped, did not cover the bill. Theroux vehemently insists that he did pay for the elective surgery himself and was also made to gamble with his own money during the making of the program on casinos in Vegas. Since the BBC is funded by the public, who pays license fees, so “the British public, quite rightly, is quite protective of what the money gets spent on”. This leads Theroux to believe that resistance could be anticipated to the spending of the public's money on the plastic surgery performed on him (Canvas+ Interview 2008).

The medical procedure he had done due to his journalistic conscience. Doing something once he might not necessarily enjoy during the course of a job and a “certain perverse sense of integrity about what the job demands” were in part what lead him to do it. This led Theroux to be the first journalist to ever get a liposuction while talking to a camera, explaining how it feels. It was uncomfortable and he “did not really enjoy it”, and he does “have mix feelings about having done it”, since his “preference is not to get to involved”, but he did it, due to feeling that the program required it of him. It being his decision, he was not talked into it by anyone and even if there had been the weight of an expectation on him, he would not have succumbed to it. Initially he had thought all the work he would get done on him would either be a lip filling or Botox, “something temporal and trivial”, but during a consultation the doctor he was interviewing told him he would qualify for a liposuction, which came as a shock to Theroux, who had thought of himself as a skinny person (Canvas+ Interview 2008).

During the interactions with the subjects, in whose world he tries to participate in, the filmmaker persona becomes obvious. Theroux’s persona has several sides to it, going beyond only the faux naive. Especially in his old work he is particularly provocative, with interviews taking on the form of a contest of wits. But also more pleasant aspects of his personality, such as humor, kindness and awkwardness seem to all make up his on screen persona. The explicitness of these aspects will be attested by selected instances of their visibility, found throughout the documentary films Theroux has put out over the years.

5.5 Theroux the Provocateur

Especially, during the program in which Theroux sets out to submerge himself in the Nazi subculture, he chooses to be excruciatingly provocative, with one of the first questions he puts to his interviewee being: “Are you a Nazi?”. Although, seeming to try being polite, his subject does voice politically incorrect opinions of a racist nature, such as : “Most black men are ugly”. When Tom Metzger answers that he does indeed believe to be more handsome than Denzel Washington, Theroux shoots back: “Do you really believe that, that seems delusional”. Tom’s use of the n-word, a rather new addition to his vocabulary as he himself admits, but only uttered in the privacy in his own home, has Theroux blatantly

letting the man know that he now thinks less of him. Tom Metzger states that he and his like minded want “them all out”, since they are not needed and a pain. It would be preferable for the people his condemnation is directed at, to have their “their own nation, their own police, their own military”. After a while Theroux abruptly cuts him off by asking his girlfriend of 10 years whether it is shocking to see the image of a black man being lynched on an album cover. Metzger tries to give reasons for his convictions, yet Theroux again interjects with: “That is such bull!” and makes it very obvious that he finds Tom’s attitudes exhausting. Although not agreeing with any of Metzger’s views, he does seem surprised that he views one of his clients the peruvian Oskar as a friend. Later Tom dusts it off as common curtesy, politeness and an unwillingness to hurt the other person’s feelings. Theroux, on the basis of this, calls Tom out as a hypocrite, who all the while trying to present himself as a dangerous man reacts very calmly by saying he does not need Theroux to quantify who he is. During this encounter Theroux really takes a dig at Tom, something the presenter perhaps only does because he knows the situation will not escalate thanks to Tom’s rather complaisant temperament.

When he talks to April the mother of Lamb and Lynx, not only does one notice that the conversation has undergone heavy editing of its sequencing, since the clock on the microwave can be observed as going back and forth, Theroux also allows himself to become somewhat insolent in his directness, especially when he advises the mother of twins to go into therapy, since she must be pathological. His advice not having gone over smoothly, she responds that he himself should check in for some therapy, since he seems brainwashed by multiculturalism. Stubborn and unyielding, he keeps at it with the remark that she is outvoted by civilized thought and to further set himself apart, he takes a few steps away from her and leans against a counter, in an attempt to put as much space as possible between them, while she just looks on, wearing the most forced smile she could muster, a moment of awkward silence ensues.

Theroux’s provocations reach unnecessary heights when he goes to visit Skip, a skinhead. When at his place, he asks whether it be a problem if he were to reveal that he is jewish. It should be noted, that Theroux has admitted to not being jewish during an interview at a documentary festival. If he indeed is a christian, as his father is, then him suggesting that he might be of jewish descent was only meant to artificially cause conflict. Being a Neo Nazi, his host says that if the camera was absent he would physically hurt

him and see him off his property. Theroux shows a lot of gumption or folly by insisting on not giving a decisive answer to whether he is Jewish or not, since he believes that it is wrong to be a racist and by acknowledging either being or not being a Jew would contribute to this differentiation, which he regards should not be made. Probably not having expected for Skip to be so persistent on finding out whether he is Jewish or not, Theroux starts to look scared and worried, but sticking to his guns, insists on not revealing the answer, and points to the fact that he has tried to be respectful to his host and that if they were not ready to answer one of his questions he would accept that and move to another one. His volunteering to change the subject if desired by his subjects, is in this case clearly based on fear of getting physically hurt, since in other situations with other subjects he has had no reservations about perusing a certain topic. His fear is made even more obvious by the way he shrinks back from Skip and his family when they ask for the camera to be switched off.

During his show *African Hunting Party* Theroux tries to understand the appeal of trophy hunting in South Africa. Although the majority of people find the idea of hunting offensive, Piet Warren, one of the men he interviews, divulges that on his land 30 years ago orange trees would grow and between them cattle would roam, but American being prepared to pay a lot of money, now only bush and game can be found on his land, which he has turned into a hunting reserve. Theroux's participation suffers, since all through the documentary he struggles with the idea of killing animals for sport. Warren by the end has had enough of Theroux's attitude and shoving the camera to the ground starts getting severely upset, telling him that he should stop asking the same questions. Warren, swearing, tells him in unkind terms that the game farms are a way of making money in South Africa, which is a place where there is, according to him, no other way of securing an income. Warren clearly is a subject, who does not have the nerve to put up with the faux naive attitude of the presenter.

Being as provocative as he is towards people who make unusual or even dangerous life style choices, Theroux is no stranger to fear. As the scariest moment in his working life Theroux considers the skinhead rally he had to attend. The BBC has tried to obtain security from Pinkerton, a private security guard, but they did not want to provide services if it meant going unarmed. Theroux was warned that he might come against problems for looking "kinda Jewish". Although "all revved up" and nervous he decided to go, with his

director who happened to be Jewish (IAB Mobile Exchange May 2012). The only time his work has gotten him in serious danger of suffering a subject's revenge, was after having completed a documentary on South Africa's white separatist, which resulted in him being listed at number 18 on a combat list. Since he was ranked at a double digit number, he claims to have not been worried, after all "they had a lot of names to get through before they got to me". That some people simply dislike him and are irritated by his faux naive style Theroux is aware of. Asking questions to which he already knows the answer to, he explains is a standard in journalism. On other occasions he does it to be funny, while anticipating his interviewee to be "in on the joke". His faux naive style does happen to back fire at him, during the shooting of his piece on the porn industry he asked the male performer TT Boy what skills are required to succeed in the industry. As a reply he received an unfocused, vacant stare and the remark: 'I don't like your attitude.', which brought Theroux to the conclusion that "sometimes people just don't like" him (Docville 2012).

5.6 Theroux the funny Man

Some say that sensationalism and humor in documentaries have the power to capture viewers, as the work of Michael Moore attests (Ellis & McLane 2005: 319). But Theroux's type of humor might not always have benefited him, in his show on Michael Jackson televised in November of 2003, one of Jackson's unofficial handlers Uri Geller did not let Theroux meet the singer, due to the filmmakers tendency to ridicule, and Geller believes that Jackson had been "hurt so much by the press, by television" causing a reluctance on his part to inviting the media into his life. Geller does reveal that he did arrange for an interview with ITV instead, on the basis of believing in the credibility and honesty of Martin Bashir, the other journalist. Uri Geller tells Theroux to his face that he has a "snaky manner". One can most certainly understand where Geller is coming from, since Theroux indeed has mocked his subjects in the past. In his earlier shows, his *Weird Weekends* episode for example, in which he tries to meet with Indian Gurus, he dresses in a doti and kurta to dance and chant the Hare Krishna mantra with other devotees. He is shown to be skeptical and does not feel that he has been "spiritually enhanced". Later while walking with one of the gurus, Theroux asks whether the devotees they pass are bowing to their guru or to him, he follows this remark with a "I'm just kidding". His humor is that of the sarcastic kind. Asking whether someones guru was "a nice guy" or singing the song

"Karma Chameleon" to a bunch of Hare Krishnas just seeps with sarcasm, but admittedly is laughter inducing to a viewer with a different believe system.

On occasion humor is conveyed by cinematographic means and the way the shot is constructed. During his show on UFO Hunters Theroux meets with Thor Templar, who claims to have killed 20 extraterrestrials, who rape, molest and make adult men wet themselves. At night they decide to look out for aliens, so an armed Thor, his friend Liz and Theroux lean against a rock in wait, the decision having been made that if under an alien, attack Theroux would shoot and Thor would hack. The hopefuls bide their time, with the wind blowing through their hair and the soundtrack of a western playing while the viewer get to enjoy cinematic close ups of each person, this sets the very light hearted tone of this particular piece on UFOs. Believers tend to sit out under the night sky in hope of an UFO sighting. As the people sit in their white plastic lawn chairs sending light signals up at the sky in the middle of the night, the filmmaker quietly participates and does not snigger or make fun of the UFO hunters. He rather starts to share the same sense of humor of the people he mingles with. On the way to area 51, where Theroux and his companions want to annoy the guards of the secret base, Ennio Morricone's Ecstasy of Gold blares from the car radio, which adds to the comic tone. Theroux seems to respect the participants' believes and does not seek to ruffle any feathers, but does not relinquish the right to put out witty lines. Later on Theroux goes to see a man who for 50 bucks is ready to channel his extraterrestrial contact named Korton. Theroux buys into the act and puts forth questions directed at the alien. Such as whether there is an alien invasion on the way, whether he is going to experience any travel problems, or whether Korton has any message for the BBC 2 audience and lastly whether Theroux will get to lay eyes on a mutilated cow during his stay. Unsure about how much he could allow himself to believe, his mood improved when he " got a call from Chris, my cattle mutilation friend".

The show on the brothel contains some interesting satirical shots of Theroux inserted into the narrative. In one shot, at night he is seen from the outside through the interior window shutters, sitting up in bed, his back leaning against a pillow reading the book What's so Great about America by the former White House policy analyst Dinesh D'Souza. With only the light from the lamp on his night stand to illuminate the pages, he does not lift his gaze off of his reading material, making it seem as if he were unaware of the camera, which pulls him into the center of the viewer's voyeuristic focus. This scene is voiced over by

Theroux, who shares that after having spent three weeks at the establishment things, which had previously seemed strange, now had become normal and part of a routine, and that he had come to realize that these women were not merely selling sex but a kind of relationship. Here the tone of image seems to be out of synch with that of the voice over commentary. Although Theroux takes a dig at American culture, he expresses acceptance and understanding of the life style choices of his subjects.

Theroux's special brand of humor has gotten him into hot water on several occasions, although he wears innocence as a disguise, his intention of making fun of the people he interviewed shines through. This has also led him to change his tactic in more recent programs, in which he ditches the humor for empathy.

5.7 Theroux the Clueless

The evening before he set off on his journey, Theroux usually spends doing domestic chores, such as unloading the dishwasher or cooking meals for his children, to make his girlfriend feel that he did his share of housework. This only gives him time to go through his notes on the plane, since he does not think it necessary to be "hugely, massively well informed on the subject", that he will be dealing with. There is a limit to what a person can know, he insists, adding that he thinks it important to react in a "contingent and surprising" manner to the information offered to him within the moment. This is possible with or without prior knowledge on the subject matter, as long as one is aware of the boundaries of one's own ignorance, so to be able to direct the conversation accordingly. While on location, he does use his time to inform himself better on what he is covering. His feelings when approaching a new topic are a mixture of excitement, trepidation about its success, relief at getting to do work and sadness due to having to leave his family behind. One thing is clear to him, that he would not be "a happy person" if he did not have the job he does (Docville May 2012).

At the beginning of his *Weird Weekends* episode on Wrestling, one of the men he meets, calls him out on his lack of information. Theroux is told off for not knowing who he is although doing a documentary on wrestling. When Theroux tries to defend himself by stating that they had only just begun, his counterpart wants to know whether Theroux does not do any research, which only meets with a simple "No" from Theroux. In his *Weird*

Weekends installment on Indian Gurus, Theroux does oversimplify the belief system of the Hare Krishna's he has sought out in India, by saying that all it takes to attain enlightenment is to chant and dance. During the program on Michael Jackson Theroux tries to negotiate an interview with the Jackson family through Majestik Magnificent, who calls him a "fucking idiot" for not knowing what "terms and conditions", which need to be met in order to obtain an interview, mean although he as a journalist, should be a professional.

The unpreparedness has been a part of his faux naive persona, which has disappeared or at least been extremely reduced in his newer shows. With topics such as Autism, Dementia, child medication Theroux displays a great knowledge on these, his true knowledge he reveals in interviews rather than in his documentaries. During interviews Theroux even hits his listener with numbers. So he shares that since no one pays for porn in recent times, porn production has gone down from around 300 or 400 to 10 or 15 a month, leading the profession of the porn actor to be on the brink of extinction (IAB Mobile Exchange May 2012).

5.8 Theroux the nice Guy

During the program on Nazis Theroux meets Metzger's manager, who has spent 3 and a half years in prison for cocaine trafficking, he tells the filmmaker that he is not as sneaky as he thinks himself to be and adds that the presenter is a really nice guy. Although Theroux is pleasant, in his newer programs even more so, he initially displays some distrust towards his subjects in the show *Behind Bars*, when he dons a bullet proof vest to protect his heart area and vital organs from getting speared or darted, during his two week long visit of the St Quentin prison outside San Francisco, that holds nearly 3000 murders, sexual predators and small time criminals. He soon abandons his protective vest to chat to one of the level four inmates, qualified as such by having been involved in murder, rape, robbery or extortion, and considered extremely dangerous.

No matter how terrible the crimes committed by the inmates, Theroux displays little to no judgment and is very respectful to everyone he meets. While talking to David Silva who received 521 years in prison and 11 life sentences, for brutal home invasions and using

torture methods, such as holding a person's head underwater in a hot tub or sexually assaulting a person with a pistol, Theroux remains very polite and always lets Silva speak his piece. Once Theroux has established a friendly connection, he does dare to test the waters by putting forth more risky questions. So during his second meeting with Silva, the filmmaker does ask him if he ever suspected something being wrong with him mentally. Silva smiles and does admit to that thought having crossed his mind. Theroux does seem to have a good sense of boundaries and abides by them, when coming up against them. About certain crimes a secrecy seems to be enforced, the inmates and the prison wards do not wish to speak of them, Theroux guesses that they may pertain to the child molesters, to which the guard only replies: "You can say that." The criminals defend themselves by alleging that they had been possessed by the devil. The conversation was brought to a stop when other inmates began heckling Theroux by yelling at him to get out of their yard, once they saw him with them. While talking to them Theroux remains calm and does not press the matter by interrogating them any further. Later, he sits down to have dinner with a gay inmate Chris Mitz and a transsexual named Didi and specifically shows interest in the experience of jail, from a gay perspective. The image of the girl, makes things go a little bit smoother, making them receive less negative attention if they do not try to hide their homosexuality. Mitz said that other inmates want and seek that feminine aura, although he admits that prison is an unhealthy place to have a relationship. In an interview with Andrew Williams for metro.co.uk Theroux shares that he made the program on jails in Miami out of a fascination for criminality and systems which reduce life to its most fundamental. He did acknowledge that as an onlooker it kept getting more strange, with the strangest occurrences being the amount of fighting going on and the unembarrassed masturbation at the female prison wards. He describes the inmates as having been appreciative of him lending his ear to them, but one of the inmates did press Theroux's fingers against a chain link fence just to hurt him, a scene not caught on camera.

Theroux does try to put his best foot forward on a number of occasions. His acceptance and even respect for the people, whose life he investigates, often can also be recognized in the way he adopts their practices. In the show on Hypnosis, Theroux watches one of the men working for Marshall Sylver telling a woman, hoping to expand her massage business, that it is not a financial challenge but a challenge of the heart, and that she should let herself love, encouragement he tops off with a hug. After having looked on Theroux approaches him and remarks: "You just worked a little magic there." The usually

very down to earth presenter seems to have adopted their language, which is further noticeable by his usage of their more positive “no challenge”, their dupe for “no problem”.

Making his second documentary on the African continent in 2008, *Law and Disorder in Johannesburg*, Theroux is excruciatingly polite and withholds any kind of strong judgment. When he speaks to one of the people working in the private security industry, who had just beaten a man accused of theft bloody, he just gently insinuates that this would have been “too much” in Britain. Theroux also plays by the rules of the head of the private security service, who wishes for the wounds of the beaten man not to be shown on the show, since it would encourage the injured party to tell the police, which in turn would put the private security service in a tight spot. With his hands deeply stuck in his pockets, motionlessly standing and looking down at a severely wounded man, who had fallen victim to the private justice system, it becomes obvious how passive and powerless Theroux can be. The long shot held for a few good long beats, voyeuristic in its nature, mainly seems to communicate sadness and a warranted defeatism.

In summary of Theroux old person it can be said that his inclination to provoke, mock and tease for kicks and for laughs, has made for some interesting television but also has cost him valuable interview opportunities, as in the case of Uri Geller establishes as fact. His behavior also puts him at odds with the principles of a serious documentary. Nichols saw the documentary’s authoritative voice as part of a “discourse of sobriety” (Torchin 2008: 54). Theroux’s playfulness, which would result in the mocking of his subjects, had little to do with sobriety. His interview style, based on provocation, draws attention to the limitations of knowledge elicited by the means of a documentary interview, due to the form and significance of the interview being the responsibility of the interviewer. True knowledge can be hard to gain from Theroux’s documentaries, since it does happen that he will not let an interviewee finish their piece, making a bid for complete authenticity, truth and reality unreasonable. The perfect example would be not letting a member of the Westboro Baptist Church, who had made a picket sign displaying Princess Diana and some unkind words, explain why the royal is deserving of his hate. The filmmaker, who has an abundance of redeeming qualities, does display an excellent sensitivity for boundaries, refraining from overly irritating behavior in especially fragile situations. Although it might happen that a subject does not take to kindly to him, Theroux seems to try and hear people out and does not seek to harm them.

6 New Shows

In his more recent work, Theroux has discontinued being the principal character of his documentaries and has so given more space to his subjects, which allows them to tell their story in a more unfiltered way. By removing himself into the background, the cheeky and playful humor that defined his early work has become scarce. Instead his programs have become more and more thought provoking and astute. Documentaries are often criticized for exploiting “real” people for their own ends. The unpaid participants have little editorial control and are often in a powerless position (Roscoe 2006: 210). This to a certain degree no longer seems to apply to Theroux, who has softened his act over time, he no longer is as bent on playing for laughs but seems to try to establish a friendly relationship with his subjects. When asked how his programs have changed over time, Theroux thinks that they have become “a bit more serious and intense”, there is no “aim for them to be funny”, he is “less arch” and the “darker side of life” is shown he says during his Docville interview.

Theroux has never tried to please the critics. The change in the tone of his programs and the subject choice, are the output of the production having matured and him having grown older and having become curious about different topics. His age paired with having become a parent has made him more invested in social relevant issues. But it was his growing trust in their ability to tell compelling stories and having covered a lot of “traditionally weird” stories, so he feels the need to move on to new interesting topics he has not previously been confronted with. Now he covers stories, which had always held his interest, but had him think that he could not pull an audience for them. The thought that no one would tune in for his shows on Autism and Alzheimer’s did cross his mind, but he did not have any other ideas at the time, leading him to make these programs anyways. Weirdness, can also be found in the life of people and their families affected by Alzheimer’s. (Docville May 2012).

He does not believe that there is a trick involved in his style of journalism, insisting that he makes “more or less straightforward, first person journalistic experience based documentaries about fascinating worlds”. Theroux points out that he works under his own name, unlike Ali G or Borat and anyone he interviews has the possibility to goggle him.

They are also sent a tape of a program made in the past, so to get a good sense of how Theroux works and how the finished program will look like. So far the filmmaker has not experienced any obstacles during production and subjects, for the most part, being content with the end product, he feels that participants, along with their stories have been treated fairly. Theroux hopes that his profile, no matter how high, will never create problems and allow him to continue his work. Saying no to a Louis Theroux news night or chat show, Theroux promises no uncharacteristic projects in the future, since anything else would make him nervous and he enjoys “going out into the wild world” to have “experiences and making it into something” (Canvas+ Interview 2008).

At the end of the day Theroux sees himself as establishing rapport with his subjects and allowing for the unfolding of a honest exchange to be his aim. Particularly the reversal of power during interactions, him being “at the mercy of the people” he is among, is what Theroux considers working best for his programs. Being convinced that “there is enough smugness on TV” he sees him “being given a hard time” as a “valuable contribution” (IAB Mobile Exchange May 2012).

It is through participation that often rapport is created. Theroux’s participation would originate from his expression of the wish to become involved in his voice over, such as wanting to be in a porn scene or meeting an alien. Apart from the real life Theroux not wanting to meet an alien, he shares, that he wanted to come closer to a “more naturalistic way of working”, which resulted in participation in the faux naive way had to be abandoned. This caused the attention to shift to the formation of relationships, turning his participation into an emotional one through understand their lives and psychology. This meant that stories could no longer be as controlled and the duration of filming was increased, to three or even four weeks sometimes. Only a rough idea of where the story might take him could exist under these circumstances. His participation would deepen with the progression of the story. Theroux would arrive as an observer to a new surrounding with its own rules, in which he would seek to make relationships and to boost understanding. Only two thirds in does Theroux feel that the need arises for him to become “the object of the dilemma or the drama that is unfolding on screen”. Now it is he who experiences first hand the motions of his subjects daily lives. During his program on autism, Theroux meets Brian, a teenage boy living in a group home due to his unmanageable autism, Theroux has felt as if he had occupied the position of a mother,

taking care of the child while his parent is out getting food. With time Theroux starts to warm up to Brian, making him an agent in the scene. Dynamics also change in the scene in which Nicky, after having discovered Theroux Wikipedia page, starts to interview him about his work. When the nature of the relationship changes through the reversal of roles, Theroux thinks his technique really begins to work. Over time Theroux has learned not to prepare lists of questions any longer, now he will write five to seven topics down on an envelop or a piece of paper, just to help him remember. Being reactive, rather than being sure where the conversation could go, helps him to be more organic. He will also refrain from pulling out a piece of paper during an interview, dismissing it as being too artificial. So preparing for an interview with an inmate in jail, for example, he would note down the following things: death penalty, since the inmate had it looming over him, code of fighting, yard time and romance. He will then memorize the first letters of each word on his list and this mnemonic will then help him navigate the interview (Docville May 2012).

6.1 On Rapport

When the question is put to him whether he can actually have a real honest relationship with his subjects, or even a friendship with the person he is trying to uncover or expose information about, Theroux at first struggles to find the right words. He then says that the issue of him either being a friend or a journalist was something he really did wrestle with for a substantial amount of time. This apparently was also part of the reason that years after having made the shows, he took to writing a book about his encounters, in which he describes how he felt about some of the people he had interviewed in the past, because he was plagued by guilt about having exploited the people that he had met. Though having felt sincere for the larger portion of his time spent with them. After putting the shows together, in a certain way he did end up with the feeling of having tricked or even conned his subjects. In all journalism he admits there is an element of manipulation, in the sense that an encounter is then repackaged as something else, the new package might bear great similarities to the original but no longer is the original. In the end Theroux realized that it is not about friendship but journalism, which the people he then is around have to understand, so he tries not to be overly critical of his behavior. His relation to the camera is an interesting one, since Theroux feels more comfortable doing his journalistic work with a camera behind him, since due to his shyness only the presence of a camera can bestow

upon him the impression of being more official, which licenses him to act in a different way than he normally would. "Carrying the calling card of the BBC" makes him believe that he is allowed to "ask questions which are a bit more cheeky" and it allows him "to take the conversation to a place to if [he] where there as a private person [he] would not presume to do". What he enjoys about making his documentary programs is being driven to interact differently. Times did come when Theroux found himself in a situation in which things got out of hand and he became uncomfortable, like in his documentary on wrestling, especially when Theroux asked about how the wrestling bouts are fixed. Also, at the training facility of the wrestlers, where he had hoped to partake in their work out in a "sort of fun way", things got a bit too rough, since they would not allow him to cease doing his exercises. Sarge, the man in charge of the gym, kept him going and even dragging Theroux back to the ring when he tried to run away. Theroux, all the while hoping it would end, was forced to continue till he hurled. Though not feeling "in danger of sort of mortal peril" it did seem to him to be "pretty weird and not very comfortable" (Canvas+ Interview 2008).

It has happened, that Theroux felt that no connection was made with a subject, causing him to leave after two days, but once he got a look at the footage he discerned that the material was "very explosive". During the making of the show about Neo Nazis, the relationship was combative rather than friendly, but it was "that clash" which turned out to be "very helpful". Some material even felt too cosy, but most of the time Theroux has a feeling for what works and what does not. Making at least two trips is very important to Theroux. After one week he will return to the office to regroup if some of his subjects are not working and needs to be substituted with someone new. So only after new strategies are laid down he will return for a second visit, which may take longer than a week, especially the newer shows have been shot in a longer time span. For how long he will remain with his subjects to shot is usually discussed in the preliminaries and mentioned in the contract that is drawn up, but on day eight the good will of his subjects starts to wane, Theroux admits (Docville May 2012).

In the past Theroux had felt obligated to call his past subjects every six months to catch up, but as he made more shows this became a practice hard to upkeep. Writing the book *Call of the Weird* for which he interviewed ten of the people he had been most fascinated by, made him realize that his sense of obligation was excessive, since it did not matter to

the people he had interviewed whether or not he kept in touch. One of the girls from the Phelps family, he had met during the making of America's Most Hated Family, did write to him, telling him that she had left the church because of the conversation she had had with her, which opened her mind to a different way of thinking. Although Theroux does not feel the need to rescue others he was pleased to have saved a person. He also did question himself whether he would be obligated to stay involved, since he had played a part in her cutting ties with her family. A year later while in England, Theroux took her out for a meal and to catch up, which led to a follow up program on the family. It was due to keeping up Theroux was allowed back to interview the family for a second time (Docville May 2012).

Meeting all these different types of people, Theroux feels has given him a more nuanced view of human psychology and has called the unfairness of the world to his attention. Making a show on children with Autism, meant making a show on people who had not made the choice to live this way, unlike people who decided to be part of a cult or to work in porn. These encounters made Theroux conscious that people are not always in command of their own lives and all that they are left with is to deal with the circumstances they are given. This realization did not make him pessimistic, but rather appreciative of how difficult life can on occasion be. He thinks that one should not be afraid to go to the darkest places, and that acknowledging the awfulness can be comforting. When he, for example, asks the father of an autistic son, who is prone to throwing tantrums, whether he loves his son any less, the father responds with a brief moment of ambivalence followed by the declaration that he does love him as much as he would love a healthy child, Theroux thinks that painful moment acted as a provider of relief of tension and honesty (Docville May 2012).

6.2 Writing as part of his Transformation

William Grimes reviewing Theroux's Book On Call of the Weird for the New York times online edition, published on February 7 2007, speculates that Theroux has revisited the same people he had first meet during his "Louis Theroux's Weird Weekends" show for the sake of either nostalgia or a quick paycheck. Grimes considers this undertaking bringing low risks since it does not require much of a journalist to let his heterodox subjects speak, but simultaneously Theroux might have taken high risk in revisiting those subjects who had been inclined to violence and seen his show. Reflexive, Theroux was open to evaluating

his trip as a “referendum on my own methods”. Upon meeting his subjects again, Theroux is confronted with the fact that they find him highly irritating. Theroux overstayed his welcome asking bothersome evident questions and harping on questions subjects are eager to avoid. Grimes finds Theroux to be a “terrible interviewer”, since he does not allow for a build up to the heavy questions but rather burst out with them hoping for the fast sound bite.

In the Belgian interview Theroux is asked whether he wrote the book, due to feeling that his television personality was finished. He replies that he had made the decision to take a break from television after having made the program on Clifford. With several things having happened and programs on the Hamiltons, Clifford and Jimmy Saville, he felt burdened by a weight of expectations, that made him feel pressured to deliver celebrities having reached a higher degree of fame. The realization hit him that the more time he spent on doing profiles on celebrities the more attention was put on him, which he began to dislike, since it made him lose touch with what he enjoyed about producing his documentaries, which what “was about making relationships away from [his] normal life”. All this had the effect of him having the idea of going back to America to meet the people he had previously interviewed to discover what had become of them, “figuring out what [his] responsibility was as a journalist” and “to go on a journey of self-discovery”, which he admits sounds cliché. What was supposed to take him six months ended up taking him out for two year. Theroux is then asked whether it was confronting to meet some of these people for the second time without his camera, to this he answers that it was odd, since he had felt a sense of responsibility, creating a problem for himself in his own mind that did not really exist. He realized that when he approached people for an interview with a camera, they are fully aware that he is there doing work and do not “expect to be life long friends” and even if the programs he makes are “a bit cheeky”, some might display anger while the majority will “take it with a pinch of salt”. The hardest part to him it seemed was accepting how little prestige he had, once he no longer was working for television and the BBC in particular. When on his own only armed with a pen and not accompanied by the cameraman, sound man, director, the interviewees where challenging the reasons for his presence, he noticed that people became a lot less excited about him trying to write a book. This to him was a wake up call, he explains. Looking back at the book, he feels that it was important that he had done it. Feeling about 85 percent happy with it, and having done it so uncynically and “almost as a personal thing more than an exercise of making a

book". All in all he had needed this experience to "clear the decks" and gain a clearer idea on what it is that he does. What made him return to television after completing his book, which was a welcome break from it, was the knowledge that he would someday return to the medium, especially since he feels that television is his "natural home". With his father being a prolific travel writer, to whom writing comes easy, Theroux realized that he was "not that kind of a writer", having worked very hard on making his book readable, which had involved a lot of revision. Theroux feels real enjoyment in genuine encounters, where he cannot really be obsessive about the beginnings and ends of paragraphs and sentences, since all that counts is being there and having an experience. All this and the collaboration with a team made him happy to return to doing television (Canvas+ Interview 2008)

6.3 Evidence of a new Persona

Especially his two Extreme Love shows have been very different from his previous work and exemplify best how much his style has altered. In Extreme Love: Autism Theroux is clearly finding it challenging to establish rapport with his subjects. While talking to Justin, a teenage boy with autism who with his back turned clearly is not very interested in sustaining a dialogue, Theroux admits that he in his train of questioning might in deed be "boring". But Justin is not the only child, who is shown to be unresponsive to Theroux. His attempts at starting a conversation are ignored and the children simply walk a way from him. This once prompts him to ask the mother of autistic twins whether he had done something wrong. At the house of the 13 year old Joey, the filmmaker witnesses the child's tantrum, during which his parents need to restrain him by keeping him pressed to the ground. Theroux looks on seeming incredibly uncomfortable even offering to leave, but stays after the mother insists, for the sake of allowing people to see "true autism". There are several shots in which Theroux is shown just standing, looking on, trying to speak but then obviously deciding not to. Not giving up and being truly inventive he does find non verbal means of communication, with the children he exchanges looks, smiles, high fives, uses drawings to engage them and even does a little bit of sedentary dancing in the car. When the twins are at the hairdressers, Marcello starts acting out, while his mother remains calm and focused, Theroux eager to help out by diverting the boys attention to a video on his iphone, is seen stressed and sighing. His iphone, that he had used to distract

Marcello with a video of Pepper Pig, which the boy did not fall for since he was not familiar with it, or his iPad allows him to distract his own children when they are acting up. Theroux reveals in an interview with Richard Eyre at IAB Mobile Engage on 17 May in 2012. Him using his own parenting techniques on other people's children, in an effort to contain themselves, could be seen as further evidence of him engaging in a more organic authentic way.

When Nicky, another autistic child, reads up on the filmmaker online, and asks for verification of Theroux being best known for his *When Louis meet...* and *Weird Weekends* programs, as well as being the son of a famous travel writer and of Italian descent, Theroux grows uneasy and expresses the wish for him to stop, this extent of transparent subjectivity clearly is uncomfortable to him. One morning when waiting for the school bus to arrive Nicky is gripped by anxiety, to which Theroux reacts by offering a reassuring hug, which Nicky first does not want to accept, but then gives in commenting it with "hugged by a celebrity". Nicky introduces Theroux to one of his friends as being from the BBC, being "popular in the UK" and even having a Wikipedia page, to which the girl with a healthy dose of awe comments that Theroux "must be lucky". While Theroux does not wish for an immersion of his own private person, he does not mind addressing the children taking note of the film equipment. Although, whereas he does allow Brian to play with the microphone, he does remind Joe of the fact that he is "supposed to ignore the camera", when he waves and greets the man behind it, which breaks the fourth wall.

On his BBC 5 Live radio show on Thursday 19 April Richard Bacon talked to Louis Theroux about his work and the children with autism, he met while filming the first part of his programs titled *Extreme Love*, in particular. Theroux explains that audiences are familiar with autism through films such as *Rain Man*, where the affected has special abilities. Such films construct autistic kids as "quirky and eccentric but still verbal and often highly intelligent". Theroux instead shows children who are "much more challenged", with several of them only being able to produce a small number of words, prone to violent outbursts and directing their tantrums in the form of attacks at their parents. Here Theroux admits that this program is a departure from his previous shows which dealt with people having chosen to live alternative lives, but in the case of autism no such choice was made. He does believe that people in such a situation are faced with a choice, the most difficult one, that being what the next step to be taken is. When recalling the conversation with Nicky

and his mother, Theroux admits that he was not surprised at Nicky's mother stating that she would not take away her son's autism if given the possibility, because Nicky "was a very funny, appealing and lovely and warm guy". He also remarks that Nicky, who represents the best case scenario out of all the people Theroux spoke to, might not be himself without the condition, as Nicky can not be separated from his condition. Not all those affected by autism have savant abilities. The illness being compensated by exceptional gifts is a rarity, although it is an appealing idea that the media perpetuates, Theroux explains. Having posed the question whether parents love their autistic child less, Theroux concedes that it being "an awful question to ask" and that he does "not feel especially great about asking" questions of such a type, but as a journalist he feels it is mandatory for him to "go to these difficult places". Trying to turn this into a positive, he says that asking such questions also "gives the parents an opportunity for their feelings to be known", adding that from the darkest of places the positive can be extracted. Richard Bacon mentions that some TV critics have described this particular program as Theroux's "best work yet", in particular he refers to a review in the Observer, where Theroux is described as toeing the line between "intrusion and observation". Theroux replying to the question whether he felt that way, while making the show says that one needs to be aware of treading that fine line with these personal stories. At this point he reveals that during the scene in which Carol, the mother of an autistic son had to physically retrain him during one of his tantrums, he felt "embarrassed" and "unsure" to whether he should be present or not, which prompted him to ask if he should leave. But she wanted him to remain so to be able to see "true autism", and Theroux agrees that during his research of the topic, which also included watching previously made documentaries on the topic, such scenes had not been shown before. The rationale behind this, he offers, might be "that people really do not want to think that hard about what is really happening because it is so difficult" (Bacon Interview April 2012).

The discomfort Theroux felt when one of the children living with Autism discovered his Wikipedia page, had two reasons, he explains. Firstly, he does not feel that the shows he makes are about him, he fails to see the point in finding out about himself while going off to New Jersey to find out about Autism for example, since he knows that his father is a travel writer and that he is of Italian heritage. Secondly, he remembers that he has made shows in the past that were received as being "a little bit teasing", some of his shows on subjects such as UFO believers might be considered to be less "serious", which caused him to be

“afraid of being unmasked as the guy who does stories about wacky people”. This might cause his subjects to become skeptical, since he “was represented as a serious journalist from the UK - BAFTA Award winning”, but instead they find themselves confronted with “this kind of clown”. Having evolved over the years, he does not see himself as doing “lighthearted stories about Americans with funny believes”, but realizes the possibility that this might be his tag forever. He hopes that the Extreme Love programs could revoke this perception (Bacon Interview April 2012).

In *Extreme Love: Dementia*, Theroux, is seen wearing a tag displaying his name, when he tries to experience the daily life of the elderly riddled with Alzheimer's and their families living in Phoenix, Arizona. The program begins with an older lady, struggling to remember, asking several times “Who is that? Who is Louis?”, which in a way is rather humorous, since Theroux has, at least to audiences in Europe, become a household name. Just, like in the first part Theroux does not spent all to much time speaking to the people living with autism or dementia, but directs his questions mainly at family members and care givers, which in the case of *Dementia*, he gets reprimanded for. The lady in charge at the nursing home, steps into the conversation to caution him not to speak about these individuals as if they were not present, he is directed to either include them in the conversation or not to speak at all. Theroux then reacts by talking the discussion outside.

While interacting with the elderly Theroux becomes very agreeable, gentle and polite, frequently asking whether he can be of help or whether he is being annoying, he seems to try very hard not to agitate them in anyway, even using the American English word cookie, instead of his native British biscuit. He even redirects Garry, a former dentist, when he stands in front of a locked door wanting to go out, by asking him to examine his teeth, and so plays along with the man's belief that he still practices. Nancy's husband John, is described as having been keen to have Theroux take care of his wife for one morning, to experience first hand what it takes to provide someone with care. John is really though on the filmmaker turned caregiver, telling him to improvise, when Theroux asks for advice how to redirect Nancy to a happy place. While with Nancy, to a positive reaction, he tells her multiple times that she is beautiful and touches her on her shoulder, something he is not seen doing very often with previous subjects. In this program some of his responses might be less for the sake of transparent subjectivity but rather to make the other feel comfortable, when Nancy for example, says that “everybody is a nut”, he responds with “I

know the feeling”, to which Nancy voices gratitude. But when the 49 year old Celinda finds it hard to dial her home number on a mobile phone, Theroux flares up a little and rather sharply points out without “trying to be perverse” that she can still read and that the number she was looking for is right in the middle of the keypad.

Both parts of his *Extreme Love* program, show Theroux connecting more with family members rather than those affected by the diseases, discussing emotional interpersonal relationships. Also, in comparison to previous programs there are fewer shots of Theroux pulling faces or working his faux naive schtick. Though the amount of voice over narration seems to have increased, as if to make up for the cutbacks, it only sheds light on points in question, trying to present the issue at hand in an objective manner, while the viewer is left to his own devices in making a judgment on what is presented to him. Though Stella Bruzzi in her book ‘*New Documentary: A Critical Introduction*’ might label narration as distorting and an impure form of representation (2000: 11), an exact narration may enhance the viewing experience and Theroux’s piece greatly benefits from it since the viewer is being informed, while the the actual play between presenter and subject does not suffer from the exposition.

In an interview on the 25th of April 2012 with Lorraine Kelly on ITV, Theroux spoke about his two-part documentary *Extreme Love*. Commenting on a short excerpt from his documentary on dementia, in which Nancy is shown kissing the pink ball Theroux had just thrown for her to catch and saying that she has nobody to kiss, Theroux acknowledges that it did seem like an invitation to kiss her and adds that she “is eccentric but there is so much warmth there”. Alzheimer’s, he explains, though being a disability still allows it’s sufferers to enjoy life. Of his trip to a care home in Phoenix Arizona, he said that the staff would agree with the patients instead of contradicting them to minimize their distress. In the world of Alzheimer’s, Theroux tells, forgetting one’s marriage and forming new attachments is something common. Carla, wife to Gary who had found himself two new girlfriends at the home, had “taken a very loving, very mature attitude of accepting [...] the new reality” of them having a different relationship at this point. Having done the show on dementia out of the two parter first, Theroux admits it having been “a leap into the unknown”, since he had been “known for doing stories on more controversial subjects or subjects in which people are perceived as being up to no good”. After having many conversations in the office and admitting his interest to himself, he thought that his

genuine curiosity would help him to “just attempt to tell the story”. “Charming monsters and showing a human side and a vulnerability” has been “a stocking trade for” him, Theroux admits. So what was strange making the documentary on dementia was that “they are regular people, they are in no way monsters, just people who have had this trust upon them”. It has been easier for him to talk to so called monsters, a term Ms Kelly had supplied, than to people suffering from this disease. Stories he had done in the past, he reckons, pale in comparison to trying to establish a connection with patients, while feeling “a sense of anxiety while being immersed in the world of the mentally challenged”. Interviewing a person who is prone to forgetting was a big issue especially in the case of Nancy who would turn to him more than once during the day he spent with her, asking who he was and what he was doing here. After answering his question she would not seem annoyed but ask the camera man who Theroux was. In the case of Gary, who believed he still was a practicing dentist on a military base, whenever he would become confused the caretakers would ask him to take a look at their teeth, which would then cause him to take off his mind of being distressed. Theroux describes the place as being “quite inspirational”, and adds that when him and his team were looking at exposes of care facilities they did try to find the best one that “really is leading the way in terms of technique”. The disease being very bleak, they tried to “contextualize that in a more positive way and say lets see what people can learn from this” (ITV interview 2012).

In summary, it can be said that Theroux has let go of his faux naive, mocking and teasing ways and has become a more quiet, respectful observer. In *Extreme Love* Theroux still acts like his usual friendly, playful self but seems to mainly aim at engaging his viewership on an emotional level, making the documentary take on an emotive narrative. It could be argued that Theroux has moved from the performative mode to a expository mode, which “emphasizes the impression of objectivity, and of well-established judgement” (Nichols 1991: 34-8). By no means am I trying to claim that the filmmaker has done a complete 180, since the certain traits he has displayed in the past still remain part of his character. The following sections will explore which characteristics have not been shed along with the old faux naive skin.

6.4 Theroux the Aimless

Documentaries can have aims, be it finding answers, raising awareness or even political opinions. The perfect example for this being *Fahrenheit 9/11*, on which \$10 million were spent in advertising, made \$21.8 million at the box office in over 80 theaters on opening weekend, and had the intent to vote Bush out of office (Ellis & McLane 2005: 320).

Theroux's aim is not to bring change, come to the rescue or lecture. On the other hand, he does seem to deem it important to present a different opinion, especially one which he thinks right. Hearing some of the stories his subjects tell him, especially those concerning crime, have made Theroux feel shock and incredulity, since he is not sure whether the person he is interviewing is "just impersonating a hoodlum for television". Never does he feel the need to hide his feeling of revulsion or strangeness. It is not his aim to show less emotion than he feels, but he simply tends not to have strong emotional reactions, since he does not feel the drive "to argue, reprimand, to change peoples mind". More important to him is the journalistic responsibility of shedding light on his subject's stories and the presentation of a counterbalancing opinion, which he feels is correct. Though perhaps causing the impression of uninvolvedness, Theroux does like most of the people, who he meets (Docville May 2012).

Not only is his aloofness alone that makes him come off as unaffected, it is his perception that undergoes a shift when being with unusual people. Theroux says that "the weirdest thing about weird people is to see how normal they are". Being around these kind of people, Theroux also notices "a slight Stockholm syndrome" beginning to set in, rendering him less sensitive to the opinions being voiced. Especially in the case of the Phelps family, running the Westboro Baptist Church, due to them not engaging in any violent acts, they to Theroux began to seem "normal". From time to time he thinks one is in need of a reality check to bring the extent of how shocking ideologies are to the foreground of ones attention (IAB Mobile Exchange May 2012).

Keeping away from sermonizing, Theroux still manages to make his values and moral code known. In his show on *Hypnosis* Theroux is seen to be skeptical of hypnosis, when the hypnotist and pick up artist, he interviews, tells him to change the representation he gives himself when he sees a woman. To which Theroux responds with a disgusted face that this makes him feel like throwing up. His lesson with the pick up artist leads to Theroux's most cringe worthy moment of his career, when he runs around the streets

trying to pick up girls by first throwing them a cheesy compliment, then asking about their favorite celestial constellation and then finishing with trying to get their number. After having called it a day, he admits that he felt strange, since he feels manipulating people could be very destructive and that it could make people feel very powerful. Although having played along, his opinion is a negative one, for Theroux comes away thinking he has learned how to use people without feeling guilty.

For his program *A Place for Pedophiles*, Theroux has gained access to Coalinga Mental Hospital in California, containing and treating 800 convicted pedophiles, all having served sentences for child molestation and rape. This installment shows Theroux at his most serious, he does not smile, refrains from cracking jokes, constantly frowns, and is always very focused in his questioning. During this episode he does advocate for his specific moral belief that child molestation is wrong. This can be sensed in his conversations with the men committed and treated there, although polite he asks one man whether he is aware that some viewers would feel the desire to kill him. Theroux gets particularly riled up about a suggestive picture with homoerotic undertones, displaying young male ballet dancers, which one Mr Rigby, one of the individuals in the facility, has chosen to hang on his wall. This triggers staff members to investigate the image further, but after the New York City Ballet has been contacted for validation of the displayed boy's ages, one of them apparently being Peter Martins once one of their principal dancers, the picture nevertheless was taken down by Mr Rigby. When talking to one of the social workers there, he asks if he likes these "individuals", who are not to be called "patients", there, describing getting close to describing them as "insane", then quickly correcting himself to say : "the least likable in the world". Theroux sees the need to form some kind of a relationship with the individuals for the sake of filming the documentary, but is wary of the possibility that viewers would be upset at his showing of kindness to these people, given what they have done and because of 70% of the offenders being unwilling to enter the rehabilitation program, since though many were diagnosed with psychological and sexual disorders, the majority reckons they are sane.

Theroux although presenting and defending his moral code, never steps in to admonish someones manner. During an interview with one of the men, who had just broken off one of the tests the individuals are required to take at certain intervals, he ,clearly upset and abrasive, lashes out at the female head of the psychologist staff, saying in ungentle tones

that he does not understand why she is present, or why she is asking him questions and so interfering in his conversation with the BBC and then, as the cherry on top, he tells her she is not much liked by him. The lady is speechless and after a few moments of silence Theroux admit that he does not know how to proceed in such a situation, stymied by the outburst neither does she. But regaining his composure, with some strength in his voice, he suggest to end the interview now and the individual leaves the room.

His unwillingness to get involved and remain in the shadow has a voyeuristic component to it. During his show on America's Medicated Kids Theroux did move in with the family of Hugh Kelly, diagnosed with ADHD, Asperger's syndrome and bipolar disorder. They do not mess around in this family, so just to be thorough even the dog is given anti anxiety medication. Living inside the home of his subjects, allows Theroux to become a voyeur to the family life. Right in the morning with sleep barely rubbed from his eyes Theroux standing in the kitchen firmly holding on to his coffee mug for some support, witnesses the mother, clad in a fluffy white bathrobe trying to tell her defiant 10 year old to go have a shower. While Theroux remains standing in the kitchen the camera is pointed at the family members, allowing the viewer to watch as the mother threatens to take away her sons Wii if he does not shower. Upset the child tell his mother that he hates her, which later on causes her, an anti-depressants guzzler herself, to cry, which Theroux just quietly observes rather than combat her despair with efforts to cheer her up. After Hugh had been warned that if he engaged in a fight his Wii would be taken away, he leaves his controller and the games tapped together on the kitchen table with a note, which his parents decide to decipher as a 10 year old's suicide note, strongly believing that at a later stage he might actually throw himself out of a window in a gesture of "I'll show them". In the moment he does not try to talk the parent down or argue. In a voice over Theroux does remark on being unsure whether his parents were melodramatic or showing parental concern. At no point was Theroux offensive in his remarks, trying his best to find characteristics of the children he could praise.

Theroux shares, during African Hunting Party, that he finds being around dead animals difficult. While inspecting Warren's tigers the camera always tries to pick up some of Theroux's reactions. As the lions pace very close to the fencing, one of them growls which makes the presenter jump back, his hands shooting up to his face in fear. In an effort to to play it cool, Therox quickly tries to correct himself by crossing one hand over the chest

while the other moves to support his chin, then he throws in a head nod in an attempt to look suave. Theroux does not only ask the Americans having arrived in South Africa for the purpose of the hunt, how they feel about their perceptions but also voices his own views, that he would feel upset and guilty after shooting an animal. The exposure to hunters he admits, made him question his instinctive resistance to hunting. He decided to book a crossbow lesson with a professional hunter called Client Taylor, during which he tries to engage Taylor in a philosophical conversation on hunting. Theroux previously having seen a 6 year old girl shooting an animal, thinks it must be easy. Taylor unfazed by Theroux pondering, remarks in a bored manner that the kill is the easiest part, the way to get there being the hardest. Theroux in a somewhat melancholic manner says that people seem to possess the nature of predators, making people enjoy killing animals, this he says not without a heavy sigh. Taylor, still seemingly bored out of his mind, simply says that some people enjoy killing, after several long breaths he adds that others do not, since every person is different and draws his own line. Later in the program Theroux does point a gun at an animal, but refrains from pulling the trigger since, as he explains, he does not feel the urge to do it. Ever the gentleman, he even apologizes for sparing a life.

Theroux will never be called a social reformer, but it is his rejection of pushing for change, admonishing whoever does not agree with his worldview or commenting over much, amplifies his position as a voyeur and in a way reduced his subject immersion.

6.5 Theroux the Voyeur

Often it seems Theroux prefers to observe, rather than participate, this casts him in the role of the voyeur. His interaction with the world becomes one sided one might say. It is believed that through senses people position themselves in relation to others. Based on this, it could be said that one of society's building blocks includes sensory interactions (Seppänen 2006: 63). Some of these sensory communications might end up being very one sided. Voyeurism is a criminal offense, that will cause the offender to be put on a sex offender registry, which also holds names of pedophiles and rapist, and carries potential jail time for a conviction. Yet somehow the term voyeurism has been appropriated by cultural studies. The voyeur is in search of a spectacle, the exposure of the object of his curiosity, which needs to be spread out for his examination and contemplation. No disclosure or openness is reciprocated, since the voyeur stands in need of staying hidden.

With the wish for concealment being very strong, the voyeur may be willing to put up with poor viewing conditions. This asymmetry reveals the central incoherence within the voyeur, he aims to be and not to be in the target's presence. This way invisibility and inaudibility become a major concern for the voyeur. Voyeurism can also be interpreted as an instance of aggression or more specifically invasion and as something the voyeur himself wishes to avoid. The interpretation as a violation has led psychoanalysis to interpret the viewing as a form of coitus. Viewing to the voyeur also contains an element of destruction, since reducing an object to a voyeuristic spectacle divorces it from the possibility of touch or interaction, since the voyeur needs to remain unrevealed. Hence, no symmetrical relationship based on reciprocation can be entered. With fundamental human objectives always being desired, the voyeur is yet again faced with a paradox, where he aims to take in and wreck the spectacle, but simultaneously he will strive to safeguard the object of view (Rudinow 1979: 176). What feeds the paradox is the voyeur wish to be near and away from the object of interest. The Paradox can be expressed in spatial terms, not necessarily location but rather intimacy or mutual presence figures here. Essentially voyeurism is not only visual, since eavesdropping of any kind of intrusive and asymmetric spying is voyeuristic in nature (Rudinow 1979: 177). The consumption of representation is considered in general to be voyeuristic. The consumer desires the smallest possible distance from the subject without it disappearing completely, as the consumer, if coming to close, would lose his position of spectator and would so melt into the artwork. Representational media has certain structural features which particularly well lend themselves to voyeuristic purposes. This is based on the assumption that consuming representations is an act of voyeurism (Rudinow 1979: 179).

The pleasure of looking can be further broken down in two kinds. So the question arises in how far the elements of epistophilia, the desire to know, and scopophilia, the pleasure derived from looking, come into play in Theroux's persona. Epistophilia suggests learning and so can be seen as a form of an advancement, while scopophilia implies a kind of penchant, which leads to consumption. The first may have educational tendencies, while the second is a cruder impulse (Torchin 2008: 61). Theroux invites voyeuristic witnessing of obscure parts of society, making depravity and goodness plain, but never grants the gaining of knowledge. Viewers come away being suspended between the joy of voyeurism and the repugnance they are made to feel at images that contradict their politically correct sensibilities. Theroux is very good at exposing inconstancies within the workings of the

subculture he sets out to investigate. Rather than hilarity often sadness ensues, as during one of the pickets organized by the Westboro Baptist Church where he asks a seven year old girl whether she knew what the sign she held meant, to which she replies in the negative. A positive reading of this scene would be that hate is not inherent, hate is taught and that especially children live what they learn, which still leaves a bitter aftertaste.

Theroux's voyeuristic tendencies become eminently apparent in his second program on the now struggling porn industry. *Twilight of the Porn Stars*, starts with Theroux reminding his audience that he had already previously made a program on male performers involved in the production of pornography in 1997, he emphasizes how hard the job can be on the men, a job that many seem to believe to be incredibly easy. Now 15 years later having heard of alleged big changes in the industry on account of internet piracy, Theroux decided to return to Los Angeles to investigate for a second time. The evolution of digital technology and freely available pornography, so easily found on the internet, have hit the industry hard, causing a sharp decline of adult DVD sales over the past decade.

At a porn shot, while Theroux, hands in his pockets, looks on from a certain distance as the two performers in their period costumes slowly walk up to each other to consummate a kiss, the song *Garbage* by Chairlift is heard in the background. The lyrics "so much garbage will never ever decay" paired with Theroux's disapproving look show him to have undergone a change of heart, 15 years previously he had displayed a playful curiosity for the subject matter. Yet Theroux has not completely lost his sense of humor, when the pornographic director insists on the actress sticking with the script by asking Alexia to repeat a line when she substitutes "this" for the word "it", the actress makes the same mistake again and lets out an expletive, Theroux, casually leaning against a chair, is shown breaking into a huge smile. Alexia going through the motions makes the usual noises, which are cut through by the director demanding them to be altered with the words: "a little less porno". This marking the current transition from the stereotypical porn performance to a more romantic one, easier gestated by the couples market. As Alexia modulates her exclamations with accordance to the directors wishes, first he and then Theroux are shown standing off set looking on with critical expressions. There are no traces of humor there, just a silent voyeuristic gaze.

Theroux, breaks his voyeuristic character, when he acts as a moderator between a porn star, getting ready at her home to do a life show, and her boyfriend, who also doubles as her full time assistant, who seen putting her clothes on hangers, does want his input to be accepted. When she starts going off on how his preferences make her lose money, money which they could use for a vacation and to buy the clothes he wears, Theroux does advice her to respect her boyfriends feelings, in overly polite terms. Theroux then slips up by saying that she should take notice if something upsets Montaine, to which the girl responds by mockingly asking whether her boyfriend is upset. Montaine insists on not having said that he was upset and Theroux quickly admits that it was him who said that and not Montaine. Even with the best intentions Theroux on occasion misjudges a situation.

Theroux still has not given up on asking painfully obvious questions. During his second show on porn he asks a director, who now specializes in high end superhero porn parodies, what prison was like. The reply Theroux receives : “It’s prison”, what else did anyone expect Rob Black to reply, I ask? Theroux has done three programs on prison and so the viewer is well aware that at this point in time Theroux is well familiar with the way things run in prison.

Though Theroux may have become more voyeuristic and less outspoken, delicately his opinions are still conveyed. The use of editing, especially in his second of on the porn industry seems to articulate his disdain for the profession. The way scenes are cut between the two performer Gunn and Tasha, who on a personal level do not jell well together, are indicative of this. What is interesting about the editing is that again Gunn is shown working on Tasha, and then the big broad inauthentic smile Gunn had previously flashed while talking about putting on a face, is shown for a second time, as if in an attempt to lay out that this is all an act and nothing about it is enjoyable. The scene fades out with the two actors producing their lines in character, most probably, about the experience having been “memorable”. Editing wise this again seems to be pure irony, since Theroux during the entire programs seems to have been on a mission to prove that nothing about porn is memorable or intimate.

In summary it can be said that *Twilight of the Porn Stars* is the perfect example of Theroux having made a transition to a quiet voyeuristic observer, who has retained some of the

qualities he is famed for, those being his sense of humor, his strong moral convictions, his innocent asking of simple but painful questions. His programs have indeed become more mature, yet have not lost that old mischievous spark his viewers have come to enjoy.

7 Conclusion

The initial idea of the thesis was to see whether Theroux can be considered a documentary filmmaker. So a brief run down of the history of documentary film was given in an attempt to place him within a tradition. A definition of the documentary film was attempted, but the concession had to be made that none can be given in clear and definite terms. Yet most certainly the claim that Theroux's work does qualify as documentary can be upheld.

This paper is mostly descriptive, since Theroux's work could not be strictly classified as belonging to any one type of documentary film genre. So what has been focused on is the subjectivity in Theroux's programs and its ramifications on the rapport between him and his subjects. Different modes of representation, like those described by Bill Nichols or direct cinema or cinema vérité have been considered, in hope of discovering a dominant form that Theroux's work possibly emulates. Here the conclusion was reached that Theroux's shows can be categorized as most likely being performative, but especially performative elements can be identified as well. Problems that arise from Theroux's style have been recognized, which the filmmaker has resolved by abandoning the heavy use of his cheeky persona. It is important to note that Theroux has never made his subjective view point a secret. Looking for a descriptive category that would go beyond the vague label hybrid, Theroux was proposed to take on the role of the autobiographical narrator in his work. Additionally, on the basis of his on screen presence, Theroux could be assigned the reporter persona, which is one of his more obvious stylistic device. His on screen appearances also effecting the gain and confirmation of insights, which are made to come alive for the audience, was diagnosed.

A lot of attention was given to Theroux's persona, its aspects and change over time. Between 2003 and 2012 he had made 22 specials for BBC2, which have been well received and have not brought out the worst in critics. Critics too have picked up on and

commented on Theroux's shifting persona. Most perceive Theroux not to have lost the ability to irritate or mock his subjects, but in most reviews this is only mentioned in passing, since critics prefer to either comment on the subject matter or praise the filmmaker.

Earlier critics would mention and comment on Theroux's own particular style of interrogation, which may happen to chafe nerves. In 2003 Rupert Smith wrote for the guardian.co.uk that he assumes the "Louis Theroux Method" to be being taught in university media studies courses. He considers Theroux's "rumpled sexiness, the pregnant silences" and "all that disarming business with mugs of tea" to be most productive means to the journalistic end of drawing out trust from even the most unwilling subjects. In *Louis and the Nazis*, Theroux is unable to sustain a "goofy sangfroid" and is seen with a look of fury, which gave this program "an adrenaline edge", which one of the others possess. Theroux is ascribed the power of making viewers feel empathy for a Nazi and of rehabilitating Christine Hamilton, by Smith. Theroux on television is described as "playing a gauche, mild-mannered English ingenu", who either charms or irritates the people that he interviews into submission, by Sean O'Hagan writing for the Observer on November 20 2005. It is his nerdiness along with the prestige provided by working for the BBC that leads people to divulge personal information, they would not think of sharing with more barefaced investigative journalist. Theroux's stomping ground is American weirdness, of which he is the "undisputed clown prince" making use of a reporting technique "that was more geek than gonzo" O'Hagan continues. Theroux is praised for his successful use of his "faux-naive shtick" in a review of the *Ultra Zionists* for the Telegraph by Patrick Smith. But it is this "ingenious interviewing persona" that is seen as the cause for people to speak freely and candidly. Smith finds this opinion confirmed by the admission of Jimmy Saville, to having tied up and locked people up in the basement, and by murderers and drug dealers having admitted him along with his crew to their homes. Theroux's becoming friendly with some of the Jewish settlers Smith attributes to his "charming, disarming way". Responses as straightforward and uttered without shame as Theroux could draw out, Smith views as "a tribute to Theroux", which no other reporter, coming on strong, could obtain. What makes the programs original and enthralling is Theroux's impromptu narrative style, which gives him leave to remain open minded, making it easier to extract more information from his subjects, than other journalist with rigid preconceptions. Smith does concede that other critics might be right in pointing out that Theroux shies away from confrontation and challenging his subjects to be more

reflexive about their viewpoints. But it is exactly his rejection of polemics that Smith sees as the documentary filmmakers strength.

Having interviewed Theroux, Euan Ferguson wrote on April 18 2010 on the guardian.co.uk, that he perceived the filmmaker to be “the very opposite of judgmental or preachy and his style – listening, re-evaluating his own prejudices, trusting his subjects and winning trust back”. Theroux is seen as never being judgmental, writes among many others Tom Sutcliffe for The Independent on June 11 2012. But not everyone sees Theroux to refrain from pronouncing his judgment, although wordlessly he does. In *African Hunting Party*, quietly and mostly dumbstruck, the filmmaker observes a practice he disapproves of and when he does attempt to engage in the practice of shooting at animals the viewer never had “any doubt about where he stands”, writes Paul Kalina on May 19, 2008 for smh.com. Also in *America’s Most Hated Family in Crisis* Rhiannon Jones writes for the website On the Box on April 3 2011, that Theroux chose to challenge the family’s hateful opinions, rather than be “his trademark, benign objectivist”.

Some even find Theroux to be disagreeable, which many others refute with their own positive experiences. In the 2007 interview for the guardian.co.uk Rachel Cooke describes Theroux as being “a nightmare to interview” despite being “charming, in a donnish way”. He seems to invite silence between questions and tends to act patronizing by at first acting as if he had not understood the question to then proceed with phrases such as “OK, to throw you a bone ...”. Cooke does not think it right to outright label him a hypocrite, but does see it as “pretty rich coming from a man who asked Ann Widdecombe whether she was a virgin”. Having interviewed Theroux for the *Yorkshire Post* on October 10 2005, Sarah Freedman writes that although Theroux spends a lot of time around very eccentric people, he does not seem to have picked up any of their habits, leaving him “disappointingly normal”. She also attributes the success of the *Weird Weekend* series to the aspect of voyeurism the programs clearly feature.

The name Theroux might at one time been synonymous with faux naive, but this has slowly changed as the reviews show. Critics started to pick up on slight alterations, the emotional tone of the shows had began to shift from cherry to sad and even profound, yet Theroux did suffer relapses. Phil Hogan reviewing Theroux’s *America’s Most Dangerous Pets* for the *Guardian’s* website back in 2011, wrote that Theroux “was back doing what he

does best – encouraging the deluded and vain to be themselves in front of a camera”. Theroux wondering about breeding 176 tigers in captivity to their owner, Hogan conjectures as having been executed “with his trademark pretend artlessness”. But maybe the way Theroux’s persona is perceived varies from person to person. In his review of America’s Most Dangerous Pets Harry Wallop for the Telegraph online, remarks that all of Theroux’s documentaries are laced with “an undercurrent of profound sadness”. This program in particular seem to incite this feeling in viewers, which Sam Wollaston, reviewing the same program only for the online edition of the Guardian, also identifies. This “lingering sadness” is only countermanded by Theroux’s interplay with the animals. During the program Theroux is further perceived by Wallop as not being ashamed of acting like a coward and takes the “geek act” as being genuine, when around the animals which usually are not kept as pets. Although Wallop finds Theroux attempting at a straight interview with a monkey on his shoulders playing with his hair as “television gold”, his “goofy glances to the camera” along with the shots of dangerous looking animals started to feel overused. The review ends with the conclusion that the documentary tried to reveal what was a given, namely that the animals were unhappy. Instead, Wallop, reckons Theroux “failed” to focus more on the personal lives of the owners, pointing out that the “intriguing ménage à trois” involving the three male zookeepers was given to little attention.

Theroux in his programs has started to show more empathy and seems to take great pains to phrase his sentences with politeness. In his show on the brothel Theroux is said to have held on to his naive questioning style but adds a more sympathetic note to it, writes, Daniella Miletic on October 2008 for theage.com.au. Theroux is described as “asking politely worded questions” and being the “master of faux-naive inquiry” in Tim Dowling’s review of Law and Disorder in Lagos for guardian.co.uk on October 11 2010. Dowling considers Theroux to be displaying “a peculiar kind of bravery” in continuing with his awkward, bemused and clarification seeking persona. Particularly “foolhardy” is Theroux asking a bleeding man whether everything is alright, while amidst running people and in the crossfire of blazing guns. But not everyone seems to appreciate Theroux’s bravery or his politeness, which can be interpreted as stupidity. Zoe Williams in her review of Miami Mega Jails for the Guardian online on May 22 2011, using the quote “Do I infer from that, that the guy who was beaten may have been a snitch?”, calls attention to Theroux’s “ironic high style”. She observes that Theroux adopts a more “courtlier” manner, the more

improbable it is that his opposite will understand him. But the prisoners do not treat him much different, she states, by pointing out that Theroux garners their “open amusement” due to his “stupid questions”, yet they do treat him with “protective warmth”, due to his obvious unknowing.

Especially his most recent output also lead reviewers to take note of the obvious character changes Theroux now displays. The documentary film maker has not morphed into a completely new person, since trances of his old self can still be seen, which are now overshadowed by empathy in particular. His old *Weird Weekends* series was “a typically quirky Theroux production”, wrote Gerard O`Donovan for telegraph.co.uk on June 10 2012, this description no longer holding true for his newer work. In his review O`Donovan believes to have noticed that the documentary filmmaker’s second show on pornography, reveals less about the evolution of the industry but more about the changes Theroux has undergone himself. This he supports by mentioning Theroux’s switching from “crank-baiting and celebrity-seducing” to more somber themes, and no longer ignoring moral ambiguity in favor of a joke. Writing for *The Independent* online on April 23 2012 Simon Osborne, holds Theroux’s *Extreme Love* as having been “classic Louis”, since it showed him standing while saying very little but making numerous facial expressions, “generally awkward”. It does not pass the critic by, that Theroux has indeed made a career transition, moving from “vulnerable freaks to the afflicted”. The article mentions that some parents had objected to Autism receiving the “Theroux treatment”, which critics see as the duping of subjects to embarrass and debase theses by adopting a faux naive persona. Laura Hyde wrote for nerditorial.com on June 14 2012, that Theroux, who had made public his internal battle concerning the ethics and authenticity of his work, has reduced his showy behavior, his air of detachment or his subtle mocking to instead match the appearance of “the concerned relative looking to persuade” his subjects to make better life choices, rather than a journalist in his professional capacity. Hyde too is off the opinion that especially *Twilight of the Porn stars* is more telling of Theroux’s personal transformation than that of the industry he is investigating.

The majority of reviews seem to be uniform in tone and agree upon Theroux’s subject matter lying outside of the typical canon and his interview techniques being somewhat quirky and ironic. Some reviews mention previous negative reviews, but those or truly vicious ones seem impossible to unearth from the limitless depths of the internet. That

does not mean that praise necessarily is the strongest sentiment conveyed, often reviewers seem to marvel at the strangeness of the subject.

A closer look at Theroux's output has can be said to have revealed a unique style, that has undergone changes through the course of time. Where he earlier had been enthusiastic about inserting himself in the action, highlighting his subjectivity, he later seems to have decided to abandon his role of the faux naive provocateur in favor of a more mellow and quiet voyeur. His goal has become to make honest and organic connections to his subjects as to assist the disclosure of truth. Yet Theroux, in the words of Zoe Williams, epitomizes Theroux work by describing him as coming into a new world "without agenda, without influence, just to point and stare" .

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Louis Theroux's Weird Weekends Indian Gurus (BBC, 2000)

Louis Theroux's Weird Weekends Body Buildings (BBC, 2000)

Louis Theroux's Weird Weekends Thai Brides (BBC, 2000)

Living with Louis (BBC, 2002)

Louis and the Brothel (BBC, 2003)
Louis, Martin & Michael (BBC, 2003)
Louis and the Nazis (BBC, 2003)
Gambling in Las Vegas (BBC, 2007)
The Most Hated Family in America (BBC, 2007)
Under the Knife (BBC, 2007)
Behind Bars (BBC, 2008)
African Hunting Holiday (BBC, 2008)
Law and Disorder in Philadelphia (BBC, 2008)
Law and Disorder in Johannesburg (BBC, 2008)
A Place for Pedophiles (BBC, 2009)
The City Addicted to Meth (BBC, 2009)
America's Medicated Kids (BBC, 2010)
America's Most Hated Family in Crisis (BBC, 2011)
Miami Mega Jail 1 & 2 (BBC, 2011)
America's Most Dangerous Pets (BBC, 2011)
Extreme Love: Autism (BBC, 2012)
Extreme Love: Dementia (BBC, 2012) [Video]. America: Louis Theroux
Twilight of the Porn Stars (BBC, 2012)

9 German Summary

Diese Arbeit untersucht das dokumentarfilmische Schaffen von Louis Theroux. Grundsätzlich kann dieser einer Gruppe von Dokumentarfilmern namens "Les Nouvelles Egotistes" zugeordnet werden, zu welchen auch Michael Moore, Nick Broomfield und Jon Ronson gezählt werden. Ihr Werk zeichnet sich durch Reflexivität und die starke Einbindung und Sichtbarkeit der Filmemacher in ihren Dokumentationen aus. Zudem ist das Genre dadurch gekennzeichnet, dass die so zur Schau gestellten Filmemacher im Rahmen ihrer Recherche eine naive Rolle annehmen, um die im Film dokumentierten Personen zu bestimmten Verhaltensweisen und Reaktionen zu evozieren.

Im Rahmen dieser Arbeit wurde Information über Theroux gesammelt, welche vor allem aus zahlreichen von ihm gegebenen Interviews stammt. Nachdem er als Person im Fokus dieser Arbeit steht, sollte es seine Stimme sein, welche in ihr am deutlichsten zu tragen kommt.

Ein Fokus der vorliegenden Arbeit liegt auf den historischen Entwicklungen und wichtigen Vorreiter_innen im Bereich des Dokumentarfilmes liegen. Die ersten Teile der Arbeit widmen sich theoretischen und historischen Aspekten, um Definition, Gattungsgeschicht und Entwicklung des Dokumentarfilmes darzustellen und um wichtigen Vorreiter_innen im Bereich und ihre Beiträge zu identifizieren.

Nachdem versucht wurde die Dokumentarfilme von Theroux in ein theoretisches Schema einzuordnen, was leider keine eindeutigen Resultate hervorbrachte, widmen sich die restlichen Seiten, der Nachzeichnung des Wandel von Performativität zu Voyeurismus in Theroux' Werk. Es wird versucht darzulegen, inwiefern und wie der Filmemacher mit den in den Filmen auftretenden Personen interagiert und wie diese Interaktion vom Thema der Sendung beeinflusst ist.

10 Curriculum Vitae

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