Presumably Based on a True Story:
Artistic Responses to The Trend of Truth

Rebecca Anne Peters

ABSTRACT

Something is happening right now, in our contemporary moment – a trend towards truth.[1] Clearly, this is not a *new* trend – to think about the 'true story' and its potential and use within our cultural productions. Within the last 20-30 years, the trend has been steadily growing; it is even being suggested as a movement (Black, 2002; Shields, 2010). This text utilizes artistic responses to the emergent 'trend of truth' as a means of exposing and exploring underlying motivations and potential ramifications of the wider trend; they will be considered from a psychosocial perspective.

The primary focus will be placed on two projects which act in response to the trend of truth: the recent *Fakebook* by Dave Cicirelli (2013) and Lindsay Seers' body of work, *It has to be this way* (2009-2010). Following the discussions of the works themselves, I will attempt to begin to articulate their significance and the distinctive implications and questions that they expose about the wider trend of truth.

After a general introduction and brief consideration of the history of ideas which might shed light on the complicated relationship to truth within this trend (Benjamin, 1936/2006; Lyotard, 1979/1984; Nietzsche, 1886/2003), this text then considers artistic reactions to the trend of truth, and finally returns to the larger trend to consider its possible broader implications. With a primary theoretical underpinning of Berlant's (2011) notion of 'cruel optimism', this project makes use of an eclectic range of theorists to explore the artistic responses to the trend of truth as well as the wider trend itself (Barthes, 1980/2010; Batchen, 1996/2002; Freud, 1923; Lacan, 1949/1977).

---

[1] This project does not attempt to answer the question 'What is truth?' but instead it considers the motivations and potential underlying meaning of the term 'truth' within the context of recent cultural productions (i.e. the assumed priority of 'based on a true story').

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: THINKING ABOUT 'TRUTH' NOW

"Were I in my normal frame of mind, I would stand up, point my finger, scream Fraud, and chase this Chump Motherfucker down and give him a beating. Were I in my normal frame of mind, after I gave him his beating, I would make him come back here and apologize to everyone for wasting their precious time.... I don't like this man. I don't like what he has to say or how he's saying it.... The life of the Addict is always the same. There is no excitement, no glamour, no fun.... There is only an obsession. An all-encompassing, fully enveloping, completely overwhelming obsession. To make light of it, brag about it, or revel in the mock glory of it is not in any way, shape or form related to its truth, and that is all that matters, the truth. That this man is standing in front of me and everyone else in this room lying to us is heresy. The truth is all that matters. This is fucking heresy. The Lecture ends and there is wild applause and enthusiastic cheers..." (Frey, 2004, p.210).

An Introduction to the 'Trend of Truth'

James Frey's *A Million Little Pieces*[2] (2004) makes clear its position on 'truth' and deception (or aggrandizement and embellishment), "The truth is all that matters", especially in relation to important issues and 'real' stories about individual struggle (Frey, 2004, p.210). Frey's anger towards the guest speaker in the book, which we saw above in the introductory quote to this section, reflects a contemporary feeling in regards to the notion of truth; representations of reality are expected to uphold the facts, to overcome urges towards exaggeration, and to show audiences something honest (Rosenthal, 1999). Interestingly, following the publication of *A Million Little Pieces* (2004) there was an extreme backlash against Frey when it came to light that some of his own accounts were actually embellishments.[3] This instance of contradiction, and cases similar to it, necessitate important considerations and critical questioning. How can such conflicting relationships to 'truth' be so widespread within popular culture? What is at the heart of this complicated relationship to truth, and what does it suggest about our society? For now these overwhelming issues will be set

---

[2] *A Million Little Pieces* tells the story of the author's battle to get clean after a drug and alcohol addition tore his life to shreds. He had ruined every relationship in his life, had destroyed his body, and was told that if he ever drank again that he would die. The book is an account of his journey, primarily focused on his time in rehabilitation and the relationships he formed there.

[3] Subsequent printings of the book included an apology letter from Frey as the foreword. He confessed that he had "embellished many details about my past experiences, and altered others in order to serve what I felt was the greater purpose of the book. I sincerely apologize to those readers who have been disappointed by my actions" (Frey, 2006, p.v). He then went on to catalogue the differences between the true events and his fictionalized version. He finishes his apology by claiming the book to hold "a subjective truth" (Frey, 2006, p.vii). This more honest account of the book did not come about, however, until Frey was caught in his lies on The Oprah Winfrey Show (Oprah.com, 2006). While the book remains very successful, it is no longer marketed as a memoir – it is sold as a *work of fiction.*

aside, but they will be returned to and considered once again at the end of this text. Frey's contradiction is used as an example – as a way forward in an understanding of what I will come to develop as the 'trend of truth.'[4] Of particular importance within the trend itself are a desire for factual truth[5] and a simultaneous desire for affective truth.[6] In the case of Frey we can see that because both desires are present, the story becomes torn between being factually accurate and emotionally or affectively compelling and convincing.

Right now, in our contemporary moment, a shift is taking place, and it is distinctive – it is the trend towards truth. While this is not a *new* trend – to think about reality and its potential, necessity, and use within our cultural productions (film, television, literature, and fine art) – it is something that has gone in and out of style within history and storytelling alike. Right now though, it is extremely fashionable – it has even been proposed as a movement (Black, 2002; Shields, 2010). While Shields' (2010) book advocates[7] for a breaking down of the traditional boundaries between nonfiction and fiction, I see the current trend – as it stands within many cultural productions – as maintaining the divide. Further, the trend or movement is prioritising non-fiction, and factual truth – at least in its mainstream iteration. Black (2002), alternately, focuses solely on the film and television industry and connects his 'Reality Effect' to advancements in film technology and special effects, as opposed to underlying cultural changes. While *Reality Hunger* (Shields, 2010) and *The Reality Effect* (Black, 2002) are used to support my argument that the trend of truth is happening, the former's unceasing promotion of 'reality' does not critically consider the difference between factual truth and affective truth – a distinction I feel needs to be made in order to understand the trend of truth in any sophisticated capacity – and the latter largely ignores the underlying motivations at play. This trend, then, begs a great deal of questions: Why now? Why this particular relationship to 'truth' or reality? What might this trend be representative of?

---

[4] The 'trend of truth' is the phrase I have come up with which best suits the discussion at hand; it is used for clarity sake, but also as a means of differentiating my conception of the cultural trend from other theorists mentioned in this text discussing similar concepts.

[5] In this instance and in all future uses, I will come to distinguish *factual* truth from affective truth. Factual truth is meant to differentiate empirically accurate, or verifiable, events from those that are not.

[6] *Affective* truth is to be considered truth determined outside of the boundaries of evidence and verifiable facts. It is in line with the Freudian (1905) notion of psychic reality – that which is believed or felt to be true, and therefore has ramifications for the person believing it to be true. It is meant to encompass situations in which an affective response to something holds *more* power than the factual. This distinction will become clearer as the text progresses.

[7] *Reality Hunger* is an amalgamation of Shields' own thoughts along with an extensive amount of quotes from various sources and people. While the book holds numerous viewpoints from extremely different sectors, there is an overall tone that I believe prioritises 'truth', the non-fiction, reality, and the authentic (or lived) experience; while the book also questions the dichotomy set up between fiction and non-fiction, the breakdown of this divide still largely suggests that non-fiction, or 'truth based stories' hold more weight.

It should be noted that while the name the 'trend of truth' signifies a particular outcome being played out within western popular culture, it also reflects the idea that the origin of the word 'trend' suggests a direction, but not an absolute movement or location (i.e. this is a general tendency with numerous outcomes, and while it is a trend towards 'true' events, many of the outcomes only claim truth in a superficial way). This reflects the suggestions later in this chapter that this trend has a lot more to do with truthiness than factual truth – as we saw very clearly with the discussion of Frey's (2004) *A Million Little Pieces* at the start of this text.

It is important however, before beginning this endeavour towards an understanding of the trend of truth and its ramifications, to consider briefly a few theoretical positions within the history of 'truth' (Chapter 1), especially the work that has been done within postmodern thinking in regards to 'truth' (Lyotard, 1979/1984). Following on is a section broadly considering the theoretical underpinnings of this research, which will bring this chapter to a close. While it would be questionable – if not irresponsible – to overlook the history of 'truth' completely, it would be unhelpful to consider it in its entirety at this point, as this would not leave room for a thorough discussion of the the current trend, which I believe reflects a changing relationship to the commonplace notion of truth; this change could have a significant impact on subject formation within our society and therefore may have implications for the field of the psychosocial.

Following Chapter 1, we will move onto the artistic reactions to the trend of truth (Chapter 2), and finally return to the larger trend with a richer understanding of it that can be used to consider its possible ramifications (Chapter 3). With that in mind, this text will use artistic responses to a growing trend of truth as an anchor and as a means of gaining insight into the trend itself. In some regards, this text will work backwards towards the trend of truth via the artistic responses to the trend (which remains largely indiscernible except for these critical interventions). To narrow the discussion I will focus on two projects which act as examples of two different approaches I see emerging in response to the trend of truth: the recent *Fakebook* by Dave Cicirelli (2013)[8] and Lindsay Seers' project *It has to be this way* (2009-2010).[9] Following a consideration of the details of these two projects as well as the theoretical framework which they might be read through (and which they might simultaneous

---

[8] For the purposes of this text, *Fakebook* (italicized) will differentiate the book itself, from the project that the book documents – Fakebook. For clarity sake, each will be used only in this manner throughout the rest of the text. Both the book (which documents the project), and the project proper are of consequence to the trend of truth; the relationship between the book and the project offers insights into the trend. For that reason, they are differentiated.

[9] This project was comprised of many different iterations and components. The works themselves span from 2009-2010, and are titled with series names which include *It has to be this way*, along with *It has to be this way* [1.5] and *It has to be this way* [2]. For the purposes of this text, when referring to the project as a whole the more simple, *It has to be this way* will be used. In the instance of specific works that fall within specific exhibitions or titling collections, the more exact collection name will be used.

respond to), I will attempt to make clear their significance and the potential effects that the trend of truth may yield. As this is a vast topic, a focus on these two approaches towards this trend will enable a discussion of how these works make the trend visible within wider culture and how they might attempt to challenge it – though it cannot be assumed from the start that these works are not unintentionally complicit with the trend of truth.

The examples were chosen for their contemporary significance and their relationships to current debates. They highlight changes in technology we have seen since the turn of the 21st century, and they also touch on debates about representation and photography/new media artworks. They represent an Anglo-American tradition and therefore their use cannot attempt to claim any universal assertions. Likewise, they are located in the late noughties/early 2010s, and they do not and cannot make claims outside of our contemporary moment; I hope to do them justice by allowing them to stay properly located while simultaneously considering the significance that they, and others working in similar fashions, might possess. Were this project to be expounded on, many more examples would be necessary in order to thoroughly understand the current trend. These two examples only offer a small piece of the puzzle, but as an entry point they offer significant anchor points of theoretical consideration (Barthes, 1980/2010; Batchen, 1996/2002; Berlant, 2011; Freud, 1923; Lacan, 1949/1977).

With regards to the methodology taken within this project, it can be argued that the prescription of academic texts to works of art within culture can easily lead to an over-reaching use of theory in relationship to cultural productions. This has been especially true within the academic application of psychoanalytic discourse (Frosh, 2010). Throughout this project I hope to use a more balanced approach with an immersive stance towards works of art where they are offered an opportunity to 'speak back' to the theory (Felman, 1982; Grant, n.d.). In this way, the works and theory discussed will create a dialogue which will allow for new ways of thinking transdisciplinarily. Likewise, the theoretical framework makes significant use of Berlant's (2011) notion of 'cruel optimism', and takes into account an eclectic group of theorists in order to best suit the works being discussed and the wider trend of truth (Barthes, 1980/2010; Batchen, 1996/2002; Freud, 1923; Lacan, 1949/1977). Taking as a starting point a question about *affective truth* and its relationship to *factual truth* (which we have seen will become important terms throughout this discussion), along with the cases highlighted above, I hope to allow the conclusions to unfold as they may.

'Truth': An Exhausted Notion?

'Truth'-based storytelling holds the potential to be explored from a number of angles within culture. When we tell stories that are about true events, through their

transformation into the narrative form, events become stories and in turn become distanced from the 'truth' from which they began – sometimes to such extremes that they are no longer regarded as truth but *lies*. This concept is reflected in the idea of 'truthiness' – a term coined by the comedian Stephen Colbert (Merriam-Webster.com, 2006) – truthiness is the idea that something is true because it *feels* true, "without regard to logic, factual evidence, or the like" (Dictionary.com, 2014). While Colbert's term came from a satirical angle, it becomes a helpful concept in the exploration of *affective truth.* The relationship between affective truth and factual truth is at the heart of the trend of truth, but before this can be elaborated upon and considered in relation to the examples, a brief consideration of postmodern thinking about 'truth' is necessary.

It is important to clarify that this text does not attempt to answer the question 'what is truth?' but instead it attempts to articulate a response to the question 'How is the word "truth" used in our contemporary moment as seen through cultural productions and responses to those trends?' More specifically, 'Why do we use the word "true" to describe events that are fictionalised versions?' Does a reference to truth hold a different weight for us in a post-internet age – a promise of something we long for (Berlant, 2011)? So much so that we are willing to deceive ourselves (Freud, 1923) or flat-out ignore evidence (Colbert, 2005) to allow for the false promise we are offered by 'true stories'?

With that in mind, philosophical thinkers have done a significant amount of work on the topic of truth. One major theme within Lyotard's (1979/1984) *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* is the breakdown of grand or metanarratives, which were perpetuated throughout modernity, and a replacement of this with competing 'local' narratives, which cannot, and should not, offer absolute truths – as these grand truths are not accessible in any real sense (Lyotard, 1979/1984). He suggests then, that competing narratives can only be judged based on their relationship to examples, leaving some narratives being deemed 'good' or better than others, but never 'true'. This deconstruction of truth has been criticised as leading to complete relativism, but this is clearly another debate and cannot be addressed here in any significant manner. Lyotard is mentioned as a starting point to differentiate the aim of this research from the postmodern aim to unhinge the foundation of society by questioning the validity of metanarratives. However, Lyotard himself makes note of the specific conception of truth that I am attempting to consider when he writes:

> "[T]he narrator's only claim to competence for telling the story is the fact that he has heard it himself. The current narratee gains potential access to the same authority simply by listening. It is claimed that the narrative is a faithful transmission (even if the narrative performance is highly inventive) and that it has been told 'forever'..." (Lyotard, 1979/1984, p. 20).

The notion of a 'faithful transmission,' in the sense that something is an accurate account of an event, is the issue at stake within the current trend of truth, and it is this tension between a 'faithful transmission' and the 'highly inventive' narrativity that the

development which I am naming the 'trend of truth' breaches and problematizes. There seems to be an assumption and a longing for 'a faithful transmission' as Lyotard discusses it, or factual truth, as I differentiate it, but at the same time the importance of an affective truth sometimes hinders these two truths from co-existence within contemporary popular cultural productions.

Were this text to be expounded upon into a larger project, it would also be pertinent to delve into Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* (1886/2003), in which he considers not only the different approaches that art might take within the two categories he defines as Apolline and Dionysiac, but also the complicated relationship between representation and reality or 'truth'. Considering the intricate details of Nietzsche's text would likely not be of benefit here, but a specific focus on the idea of individuation, or *principium individuationis*, would suit this research. Considering the role of individuation in relation to the Apolline and the Dionysiac might enlighten our conversation on the trend of truth and the role that individuation might play within it. While Nietzsche (1886/2003) stresses the truth brought out within the Dionysiac, it seems clear that in his usage he does not mean factual truth, but a truth of passions – of which he suggests is suffering along with a lack of the illusion of individuation present in the Apolline. While the terms themselves (Apolline and Dionysiac) cannot be applied in the same way that Nietzsche used them, as he places a great deal of emphasis on the particulars of the tragedy and music, the general concept of individuation might hold significant interest to the underlying questions present in this project.

More broadly, Nietzsche's general reflections on aesthetics are additionally apt to the discussion at hand and offer a more expansive scope in the history of ideas that might be considered in relation to the trend of truth. Nietzsche also had a great deal to say about the value we hold in 'truth,' of whichever conception of it we might hold – affective, factual, or metaphysical – and he questions the premises that uphold its value. All of these areas could be, and should be, explored further in relation to the contemporary movement we find ourselves in – in which 'true', in the factual sense alone, seems to magnify the importance of a story.

Likewise, Walter Benjamin's (1936/2006) 'The Storyteller', an essay which mourns the loss of storytelling and attributes this loss to the overabundance of information in a world saturated with mass media and technological progress, would also suit this conversation were this a more developed and in-depth work. It will be said, however, that Benjamin's text might be used to consider the trend of truth as having issues rooted much further back than the dawn of the Internet, as this text will come to posit as a potential spark; however, 'The Storyteller' might also be used to support the trend of truth, as the trend itself also mourns the loss of wisdom gained through shared experience and non-fiction storytelling. It does not seem likely that Benjamin himself would support the trend of truth in the typical manner which it has manifested – prioritizing factual truth over an affective one. It is more likely, based on my reading of 'The Storyteller', that Benjamin would see the docudrama and many of

the other manifestations of the trend of truth as equally culpable in the information overload, which he saw to be a cause of decline in the storyteller in his original essay.

Though this was a cursory consideration of the ideas that might affect a larger conversation of the trend of truth, they should be considered in further depth were this text to be expanded; while they cannot be expounded upon in any complete way at present, these theorists will be returned to briefly in the final chapter of this text. With the brief consideration above of Lyotard we will leave the postmodern understanding of 'truth' and its complicated relationship with reality, though the differentiation made above will continue to play an important part in our discussion. In a way, we will reflect instead on a more *common* conception of 'truth'; we will now move forward to consider the tension between factual and affective truth in more detail in the following section considering the broad theoretical underpinnings of this research.

Theoretical Framework

It could be argued that the focus around the '*based on* a true story' trend[10] reflects the lingering Lacanian mirror stage's (1949/1977) impact on our preferences about our conceptions of reality. In the same way that we prefer the 'complete' version of ourselves in the mirror (Lacan, 1949/1977), we also prefer the 'complete' or tidy version of events in a story – even at the expense of accuracy being upheld. Does Lacan hold an angle through which we can consider the promise implied by the true story and our desire for it? The security we find in our own structured self might be a motivating factor for our willingness to accept the trend of truth and ignore the affective truth it often relies on while prioritizing factual truth. In this way we are happy for a story to be 'true' as long as it fits within our given structure of narrative events. However, factual truth is often much messier than the trend of truth allows for – and we do not mind the tidying up if it allows us to ignore the fragmented truth.

Also within the psychoanalytic tradition, Freud's (1923) notion of disavowal might become a useful anchor for our thinking. In 'The Infantile Genital Organization' Freud introduces the idea of disavowal, or Verleugnung, as a dissociation "between observation and preconception"; the individual makes something less anxiety producing by ignoring the observation and recounting to themselves something else which comforts them and fits with their prior viewpoint – unsettled by some shock which was brought on by the initial observation (Freud, 1923, p. 142-144). In this way we might view the contradiction upheld within the trend of truth between factual truth and affective truth as a case of disavowal – we ignore the contradictions and continue to believe that both can be present and that

---

[10] 'Based on a true story' is a significant component to the trend of truth, and a sub-category which both Cicirelli and Seers make reference to within their respective projects.

both can share the priority; or alternately that affective truth does not taint factual truth.

Additionally, the continuity that is offered in the 'true story' hold the *cruelty* of Berlant's (2011) *Cruel Optimism*[11] in that it reasserts a particular vantage point, a completeness which we long for, that we are being promised by the things around us but cannot access. We might consider affective engagement in regards to Lauren Berlant's cruel optimism to be related to Lacan's theory of the creation of subjectivity. The subject for Lacan (1949/1977) believes in his ego – in the complete-ness of the self – which Berlant (2011) would argue is part of the cruel optimism that this deceptive identity holds. This crossroads between a notion of truth and its merits in relationship to theories of affect can afford us a meaningful conversation through which to engage the varying shades of truthful storytelling. As well, Berlant might help to expose the falsity of the promise that we desire in the 'based on a true story.' This also begins a conversation about why this might be broken or questioned in the examples of *Fakebook* (2013) and *It has to be this way* (2009-2010). Berlant's cruel optimism might support an argument regarding the false promise that the Internet holds – its promise that our micro-story matters. Could this be the underlying cause of the reactionary 'trend of truth'? This complicated relationship will need to be more fully considered along with the examples.

While the idea of virtual reality has been around for much longer than the technology has existed (Batchen, 1996/2002), our contemporary world has seen a shift towards MySpace, Facebook, Twitter, and all the others that have promised a new intimacy between reality[12] and technology – a promise of a means to share our own narrative; a promise that *our* micro-story matters. It is unclear at this stage the exact impact that the virtual has on our relationship to the 'true' story and the trend of truth, but it seems to have a significant relationship to the phenomena and therefore it will be further explored throughout the following two chapters of this text. Now that these anchors have been put into place, the next chapter will focus on the works themselves.

---

[11] Berlant defines cruel optimism at the start of her book in this way: "A relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing" (Berlant, 2011, p.1). She goes on to discuss the connection between desire and the promises or projections we invest within them (Berlant, 2011, p.24). She develops the issue further to recognize that even though the desired object is detrimental, its loss would be even more devastating because of the loss of the promises we have placed within it.

[12] 'Reality' here can be defined as that which is not virtual, but rather consists of in-person communication, real experiences, and things which happen or exist in the 'real' world. While this dichotomy between reality and the virtual is not satisfactory, as there is clearly a spectrum of experience and existence between 'reality' and the 'virtual', the distinction is made in reference to the divide often set up between these concepts.

CHAPTER 2: ART AND 'TRUTH' NOW

"We all know that Art is not truth. Art is a lie that makes us realize truth, at least the truth that is given us to understand. The artist must know the manner whereby to convince others of the truthfulness of his lies. If he only shows in his work that he has searched, and re-searched, for the way to put over lies, he would never accomplish anything" (Picasso, 1923).

"In order to understand the cosmic, we must first understand the infinitesimal.[13]"
(Ancient Roman Proverb).[14]

An Introduction of Terms

Before moving forward in our understanding of the trend of truth and its implications, this chapter will explore responses to the trend and evaluate how these responses might expose underlying assumptions within popular culture as well as assess how the critical theory these works engage with might hold additional support for their critiques. The particular artistic practices explored within this chapter make use of parafictional practices (Lambert-Beatty, 2009). Claire Lambert-Beatty (2009, p.54) defines parafiction in this way: "Unlike historical fiction's fact-based but imagined worlds, in parafiction real and/or imaginary personages and stories *intersect with the world as it is being lived*" [emphasis added]. In this way, the fiction which is being lived out finds a place within the world in which it can be believed, and while false, asserts its actuality – because by "intersecting with the world as it is being lived" it has in a way created its own place within the factual. Deception is a key component within parafictional practices, 'the artist' never promised to tell us the truth; there are a number of approaches to this deception, however, which will come to be important in our further analysis. This practice of misleading, however, allows the narrative a place to live within fact – thus holding the potential to break down a barrier between fact and fiction. There are many different potential outcomes to the use of parafiction, two of which will be explored below. By closely investigating the individual instances of the responses to the trend of truth, it becomes possible to locate relevant developments in the conversation being had within cultural artefacts – silent conversations filled to the brim, overflowing with critique not only in the content of the work, but in the media and methods used as well.

As a means of differentiating two approaches[15] which I see as responses to the trend of truth I will consider both 'The Great Reveal' along with 'Pervasive

---

[13] The origin of the word 'infinitesimal' is attributed to the decade between 1645-55 (Dictionary.com, 2014)
[14] No such proverb exists.

Deception'; by breaking down the strategies into definable categories, it is easier to consider what the different aims of each approach are, as well as what they reflect about the trend of truth. Each tactic functions differently as a means of exposure – as a way of making this seemingly invisible, yet extremely prevalent cultural trend of truth visible as well as held accountable (at least this is the goal which I believe they attempt to live up to). By focusing on the details of these tactics, and the specific examples chosen of each type, we might be able to understand the larger significance that they hold to the wider cultural phenomenon – the trend of truth. Importantly, each approach follows a particular pattern, which assists in the differentiation of the two types. These two approaches and their underlying patters will now be expounded upon; however, it is important to remember that these descriptions should not be considered as prescriptive or determining – they are only patterns which remain malleable.

The Great Reveal can be seen in the first example that will be explored in this text, the book *Fakebook* by American writer Dave Cicirelli (2013), but it can also be seen in artistic practices such as The Yes Men, and even Thomas Demand or An-My Lê (though in these two latter examples to a lesser extent). As its name suggests, The Great Reveal perpetuates a deception, which seems real to its audience, but then at the moment of choosing, the truth is revealed (this could be played out in a tangible 'grand reveal'; it might only be noticed upon closer inspection by the audience of the work itself; or it might be discovered when reading a press release or an artist statement). When this reveal happens the audience feels duped, and the artist comes clean – for the purpose of revealing not only their own lies, but the particular context which allowed them to be believed. Likewise this approach attempts to consider the ramifications of claiming a thing to be true, when in actuality it is not; it exposes the underlying biases of a culture in which a claim to truth holds a place of superiority – despite our knowledge that 'based on a true story' does not always equate to factual truth. Scepticism towards this prioritising of the claim to 'truth' is a significant component within much of the work that might fit within this category, and it will be returned to later when *Fakebook* (2013) is dealt with in greater detail.

Unlike The Great Reveal, Pervasive Deception does not expose itself. If the viewer finds it, so be it, but it does not announce itself in the way that is seen in The Great Reveal. In this category it is not the lie that is the important component of the deception. Pervasive Deception allows the audience to feel connected to the story being told, and to arrive at the moment when they discover or suspect the lie, but still not know what to believe. Instead of feeling duped, the viewer ideally questions what 'truth' really means and whether or not it matters if the story is true or not. We will explore Pervasive Deception in the project, *It has to be this way*, by English artist Lindsay Seers, but Pervasive Deception can also be seen in other artistic practices such

---

[15] These two approaches are clearly not the only two strategies in which an artist might respond to the trend of truth. They are, however, very widespread and can be seen within many responses to the trend of truth.

as Simon Fujiwara, Michael Blum, Trevor Paglen, and Aliza Shvarts – and other projects by Seers for that matter. For many of these artists the story is the goal, with the deception acting as a by-product and a lens by which to consider memory, storytelling, and a general understanding of what constitutes reality – facts or our fabrications.

Obviously there is room for a more intricate breakdown of the types of artistic engagements with notions of truth in our contemporary moment, and it goes without saying that some works might somehow function within both categories to an extent, or even outside of these categories all together. For now, however, I have chosen these two tactics to focus on and consider compared to each other, as it seems that they encompass much of the work being made within this movement, and because they allow for a clearer understanding of motivations and responses to the larger phenomenon that I believe they are responding to.

That being said, with the very simple explanation of each approach laid out above, we will move forward and question these two approaches through the examples of Cicirelli and Seers to consider how each tactic might expose a certain trend towards truth within culture. We will first consider the specificities present within each case study to determine their particular relationship to the trend of truth as well as what the works themselves offer up as a response to it. We will then go on to question whether these approaches, and more specifically the works chosen as examples, function as critiques of the cultural trend, or whether they are complicit in the values upheld within the wider trend of truth.

Fakebook by Dave Cicirelli (2013)

In *Fakebook,* an obvious pun on Facebook and its role within the narrative of *Fakebook*, Cicirelli (2013) recounts what the front cover claims to be: "A True Story. Based on Actual Lies." Finding that many of his friends were leading much more interesting lives than himself (or at least their Facebook profiles suggested that they were), Cicirelli decided that he should lead a more interesting life, not through *real* life changes, but through a fictionalized narrative played out on Facebook. He claimed to be quitting his job and "heading West" (Cicirelli, 2013, p.13). The book itself tells the reader the true account, in a way the 'behind the scenes' version of events, but also details the fictional narrative he created for himself.

By avoiding friends from his hometown and falsifying images, largely with the help of Photoshop, he pulled off his con, but at what cost, and for what aim? The premise of the book itself – a 'truthful' account of the lies told to perpetuate the fictional narrative – questions what a true story might be, but it also engages with a question of the virtual and how our lives online connect to 'real-life'. As Cicirelli admits, the falsification would not have worked even a few years later, as the events taking place within the book actually occurred "between September 2009 and April

2010. It was a wonderful time for online pranksters when cell phone cameras were still pathetically bad and 'checking in' was something your mother did when you hadn't called for over a week" (Cicirelli, 2013, p.ix).[16] Does Cicirelli expose a point at which fictionalised truth is no longer tolerated? Does the book express a rejection of the trend of truth or complicity with it? How could an embracing of a new virtual truth, with an acknowledgement of the inherent blurring between fact and fiction, offer an example of criticism of the trend of truth? Conversely, how does Cicirelli's subsequent 'true' account of his deception weaken his initial act? Was his transgression undermined, or is that not the point?

As anticipated by its inclusion as an example of The Great Reveal, Cicirelli always knows throughout the book (and apparently throughout the time in which the real events were transpiring) that he will expose the truth to his online audience – he just does not know exactly when it will happen. He thinks that eventually the audience might find out by accident, and takes extreme precautions to make sure it does not happen; at one point he returns to see his family for Christmas and reflects that he was not able to do anything fun, and that Fakebook was taking over his life. Much the way that Facebook has the capacity to take over our lives, with its ability to manufacture anxieties about our virtual presence and what people see us as doing, or being like, Fakebook became an obsession and controlled Cicirelli. The initial justification for the project was that those relationships online do not really count; they are fake and we are fools to believe that the Internet really connects us to them. Throughout the book there are many such reflections on the superficial nature of Facebook and on Fakebook by extension. Over time, however, Cicirelli changes his mind about social media and starts to question whether the people reading his Facebook page that he never sees in real-life, and are therefore not 'real' friends anyway, might actually care about him and his wellbeing after all.

With a light tone and humorous narrative, Fakebook delivered on The Great Reveal and exposes his online audience and his readers to a number of ideas that force them to question their online activity, and the validity of the activity of others. It forced its viewers to consider their stance on honesty online, but more importantly it pushed the boundaries to a tipping point. This tipping point – after which the audience does not tolerate deception – seems to be present in a great deal of the works which makes use of The Great Reveal. *Fakebook*, however, begins to turn on itself. The underlying assumption within this strategy, which Cicirelli gushingly concludes at the end of the book (and the project), is that the truth *matters*. While the format itself, lying to one's audience, seems to question the tensions within the trend of truth, in the end, The Great Reveal in many ways upholds the foundation of the trend of truth; it asserts the need for factual truth. It questions the blurring of truth and fiction, but in many cases comes out on the side of tradition; even though the divide between

---

[16] In this quote Cicirelli makes reference to the now popular feature on Facebook that allows users to broadcast their whereabouts to others simply by connecting to their phone's GPS. It would not be as simple to falsify your location using this feature today.

fiction and reality can be breached, reality always asserts its importance. This is at least the idea that Cicirelli leaves us with towards the end of the book: "I was also completely ignorant of how intertwined my real life and my online persona were – of how much of what was on that screen was actually part of me. I underestimated how impactful our separation would be and didn't consider what it meant to be estranged from my community" (Cicirelli, 2013, p.292).

The Promise of the Internet, Cruel Optimism, and the Virtual

The Internet made us a promise from its start; it promised not only a democratization of information and a place where everyone was on a level playing field, it has also increasingly promised communication and a means of connecting with others. Berlant does not specify the affective attachment we hold to the Internet as cruel optimism, per se, but by using her criteria for the term we can categorise the affective attachment held to the web as one which is just as cruel as any she details in her book. As a reminder, she defines cruel optimism at the start of her book in this way: "A relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing" (Berlant, 2011, p.1). She goes on to discuss the connection between desire and the promises or projections we invest within them (Berlant, 2011, p.24). She develops the issue further to recognize that even though the desired object is detrimental, its loss would be even more devastating because of the loss of the promises we have placed within it. Mostly throughout the book Berlant (2011) discusses cruel optimism in terms of 'the good life,' but I believe that the Internet and the connection that it offers might function in a similar manner, or even be considered as part of what the good life encompasses today. With its promise of connectivity, the Internet is often seen to further isolate the individual, an issue being talked about by critical theorists and cultural novices alike (Kiesler & Kraut, 1999; Shapiro, 1999; Van den Eijnden et al., 2008). Even Cicirelli discusses the issue, coming out uncertain as to his verdict: "We've never been more connected, yet never more isolated I think. What a crock of shit. The truth is so much more complex and so much more compelling. We've never been so connected" (Cicirelli, 2013, p. 303).

By embracing the virtual, to a large extent we leave 'reality' behind (Batchen, 1996/2002). We know that in many ways social networking and other facets of the Internet are false. For example, within the last few weeks an article was published in *The London Evening Standard* about a new service provided online – the invisible girlfriend (Tobin, 2014). This service will create a fictional girlfriend based on your specifications and tailor public comments on your social media pages, so that you can maintain a fictional girlfriend for whatever reason you might want to do so (Tobin, 2014). This falsification of our micro-stories relates to Fakebook's use of deception, but in this instance there is not a reveal, and it is not done to make a point; it is done to tailor your virtual life to the way you wish your real life could be.

If the 'true' story (in the instance of the docudrama) holds a promise that we might recover this lost reality – that we might find roots again when we feel we are no longer on stable ground – then other cultural productions might supplement the Internet's promise. We find each format supporting one another to feed us promises that they cannot keep. While *Fakebook* examines this exact idea – that the Internet allows us to lie – his final conclusions of the book sadly leave us supporting the false promise that our micro-story matters and that the Internet might be a place where we can connect truthfully with others.

Fakebook, a 'true' story in itself, sets up a situation leading to its own downfall in many ways. The book perpetuates the false promise of the micro-story mattering, even though Fakebook (the project) allowed us to question the merits of this promise. Fakebook opened up a means of questioning why we might believe in false narratives, and what we might gain from the experience of being duped. Likewise, it exposed the false nature of the virtual and led viewers to question their own false personas. We can see then, that the true story upholds the same false promise of the digital age and the Internet – that our micro-story matters – and *Fakebook* played right into the hands of the trend of truth. It has become clear that the Internet and the virtual are at the heart of the false promise of the docudrama and the trend of truth, but this does not denote a causal link, only a web of connections.

It has to be this way by Lindsay Seers (2009-2010)

Lindsay Seers might offer an interesting example of an artist who incorporates fictionality and parafictional practices within her work; her project *It has to be this way* (2009-2010) will act as our example of Pervasive Deception. While her practice is not fully engaged in the perpetuation of the minute parafictions themselves (wider aims are clear in the work), in her series *It has to be this way*, Seers (2009-2010) claims to explore the disappearance of her stepsister, Christine Parkes, after an accident in which she lost her memory. Further, by revisiting and recreating the events that led to her sister's disappearance, Seers' work suggests that this might offer a way to deal with the horrible family tragedy (Hagen, 2010). Considering the complicated story in which somehow Seers knows enough information to recreate the events leading up to her sister's disappearance (following her accident), combined with her claim that her sister is still missing, it becomes questionable whether this scenario is plausible – too much information is known for it to be true – at least the viewer has the right to suspect. The fiction, or in this case the suspected parafiction (since we will never know with certainty), is being perpetuated as truth, as Seers herself denies any fictionality in the work. We are never offered conclusive evidence as to the factual accuracy or alternately the construction of the story, which we are being told only through fragments (an archive of images her sister made throughout her research, postcards, interviews under hypnosis, stage sets, costumes) and recreated images.

Fort Patience, It has to be this way²: Photographic Works, Lindsay Seers, 2010

Of specific interest are the recreations of moments following her sister's accident. These photographs (such as the one above) simultaneously acknowledge themselves as recreations, and also assert themselves as new truths. By recreating the journey that her step-sister took, and likewise wearing a specific colonial themed costume, Seers herself makes the story true, at least in part, by being there herself. By recreating the events surrounding her sister's disappearance (and in a sense her death – at least in the sense of loss), Seers puts herself into the place of her sister. Barthes (1980/2010) suggests this connection between the image and death. He even recognises the duality: the "image which produces Death while trying to preserve life" (Barthes, 1980/2010, p. 92). This complicated relationship between capturing and preserving life, yet always anticipating and representing, even *producing* Death is one of Barthes' major contributions to the understanding of photography.

Seers takes this complicated relationship – between the Death producing and life preserving qualities of the photograph – and furthers it by questioning what counts as real and what does not. By recreating (or perhaps creating) the events surrounding her sister's disappearance, Seers longs to enact a likeness in order to get closer to the truth of her step-sister's disappearance. Likewise, she anticipates her own catastrophe by recreating her sister's – "Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe" (Barthes, 1980/2010, p. 96). While the recreations themselves do not confirm the original narrative of Seers' step-sister, their indexical quality creates a new factual truth: "what I see has been here... it has been here, and yet immediately separated; it has been absolutely, irrefutably present, and yet already deferred" (Barthes, 1980/2010, p. 77).

The other images present in the work come from the archive which Seers has created – they supposedly come from her sister's travels and research. These images also hold the indexical quality of the recreations, but we cannot be sure that these

images really coincide with the narrative which Seers claims for them. The use of photography within the project, which largely acts as a theatrical narrative – consisting of text, photography, video, sound, and installation – makes use of the photograph and in a sense defies its indexical quality while at the same time using it to perpetuate the narrative at play. The project then, not only asks the question of what counts as truth and when does something become fiction, it contemplates the place of photography within our culture today.

What Have We Lost?

At this point, we are left wondering whether the preference for wholeness in the Lacanian (1949/1977) sense is still applicable in regards to Seers or if our sense of affective truth is guiding our response. What is it about the story that keeps us engaged, even if we are suspicious of deception? Parafictional practices then, might bring us closer to a moment at which we might question the mirror stage's lingering effects – a moment full of the potential for clarity as to the fragmented nature of reality – yet we still see an attachment to *affective truth*. While we might actually be shown the complication – the messiness that reality is, a mingling of fact and fiction – instead of seeing the fragmented self, or in this case, the fragmented narrative, we still hold onto the affective truth.

Even in the case of Seers, we arrange and make sense of the narrative in a way that we are able to clarify – we might even choose to ignore those extraneous details of the work if it helps us to make sense of what is happening. Lacan's (1949/1977) mirror stage, and the sense of clarity in the self that it creates, might likewise hold a false promise in line with Berlant's (2011) cruel optimism. Even when the narrative structure (in this case parafiction) allows us to engage in a messy and fragmented self, in order to understand ourselves as fragmented, we need to know – we need the dichotomy between fact and fiction, and we need the clear story. In many ways we need it so much that we are willing to deceive ourselves (in the Freudian sense of disavowal) to have it – even in my own reading of Seers' *It has to be this way*, I have chosen to decide that the story cannot be true, that it is a simple case of deception.

As we saw above with Barthes, things are not nearly as simple as truth or fiction. Seers' work attempts to challenge us, to embrace a sense of chaos and uncertainty. This is what Pervasive Deception at its best promotes – uncertainty, chaos, blurring, and messiness. We might see a challenge in Seers' work to the straightforwardness of the trend of truth; it forces us to reconsider fragmentation, chaos, and the possibility that metaphor can hold an affective truth that can be just as true as factual truth.

Symptomatic or Critical Responses

Do Seers and Cicirelli offer us an entry point into the potential to question the trend of truth, or are they purely symptomatic of it? It seems that they both are attempting to problematize the trend of truth by asking whether affective truth matters more than the factual truth. Whether or not they are successful, or whether their interventions show others a different way of considering what is true, is an important consideration.

It is clear that their distinctive approaches – The Great Reveal and Pervasive Deception – take different stances towards the phenomenon described by Shields and Black. They both, however, point out the trend itself – a focus and even prioritization of the 'true' story, the factual story, reality, and factual truth. This cultural shift, not only in wanting to see stories about real people, but about wanting those stories to be accurate, is the point at which the issue arises. Shields' book seems to advocate for a breaking down of the traditional boundaries between fiction and nonfiction – which seems to have never truly been divided to begin with. However, popular culture shows us time and time again that this blurring makes people uncomfortable when they are no longer on secure ground. It makes people angry when something marketed to them as 'true' turns out to hold inaccuracies, embellishments, or flat out lies. This contradiction, wanting mediated truth, wanting the docudrama (or similar manifestations), the tidy version of a story, but then holding hostility against the very foundational elements of that which they desire – is the issue I want to understand, to consider, and which I hope this text brings to light.

We saw in *Fakebook* (Cicirelli, 2013) an attempt at a difficult balance between challenging the trend of truth and seeing something desirable in it. In his project Fakebook, Cicirelli used The Great Reveal in order to expose the false promises of the Internet, but *Fakebook* undid much that Cicirelli had accomplished. We also saw that The Great Reveal has a complicated relationship with the prioritization of factual truth; by revealing its deception, and the importance of the reveal (the 'truth'), The Great Reveal might be prioritizing factual truth, even though it uses deception as the primary component in doing so. This relationship between factual priority and The Great Reveal is not present in all instances, but it seems clear in the case of Fakebook (especially given Cicirelli's adamant choice to undermine himself in the subsequent *Fakebook*).

Seers (2009-2010) shows us a different angle, one which more clearly criticizes factual truth and its importance. Her work seems to ignore the issue all together – and the narrative she creates is compelling enough for us to stop worrying ourselves. By enacting factual truth through recreating photographs and retracing her step-sister's steps, Seers further blurs the lines for her viewers. *It has to be this way* asks us to consider when something could be made to be 'true' even if it was not in the first instance. Her complicated interrogation of fact and fiction allows viewers to come to their own conclusions, but it nudges them towards an acceptance that the lines of

division between factual truth and affective truth are not clear – and maybe we can gain something from a lack of clarity, even if it is not factual security.

Circirelli and Seers both sought out to challenge the prioritization of factual truth, whether they would put it in those terms or not. While Circirelli's conclusions seem muddy, Seers' do not. Clearly, not all attempts at challenging or undermining the trend of truth are successful. However, it does not mean that the general approaches are flawed, or that the initial instinct does not hold merit. Moving forward in the next chapter, we will take the ideas considered here and begin to unravel what significance they might hold for the wider trend of truth. These examples have exposed to us some of the persistent claims of the trend of truth, and they have also brought into the discussion a number of theorists who might shed light on the trend of truth as well as the ramifications it holds on both an individual and societal level.

CHAPTER 3: WIDER IMPLICATIONS

"When the filmmaker tells us 'this really happened,' they seize our attention and invite us to suspend more easily our disbelief in the performances that follow" (McBride, 1999, p.118).

The Wider 'Trend of Truth'

The docudrama is an interesting genre that holds the potential to begin our conversation regarding 'truth'-based storytelling and the wider trend of truth. It is clear that the need to tell true stories in a dramatized fashion has become overwhelmingly prevalent today – with six of the nine films nominated for Best Picture in the 86th Academy Awards (The Oscars, 2014) being 'loosely based on', 'inspired by', 'based on the true-life tale', or 'based on the memoirs of,' we can see that this is not a case of finding trends which are not actually there (IMDB, 2013; Sherman, 2013; Sixsmith, 2009). Articles have been written speculating why this has become a preference (Gray, 2014), and people are noticing that films they are going to see are more frequently about 'real-life.' We are fascinated with 'true' stories – and more, we enjoy their mediated versions – with soundtracks, close-ups, narrative arches, and attractive actors.

However, outside of the docudrama, based on a true story has become prevalent as well. Of specific interest to me are those stories and works which seem to complicate or problematize this preface – which we saw in Seers (2009-2010) and Cicirelli (2013) in the last chapter. What does it mean to be based on a true story, and what is it about a true story that is more valid than a created one? Is the 'true story' a false promise; and if so, why do we buy into it? Now that we have asked these questions and have begun to grasp possible responses, it seems pertinent to move ahead to a consideration of the trend itself, though these same issues will continue to permeate our discussion.

Two books I have come across in my research discuss the trend of truth, but under different circumstances, criteria, and for different aims. David Shields' (2010) *Reality Hunger* and Joel Black's (2002) *The Reality Effect* both offer support that the trend might exist, but more importantly, they offer alternate viewpoints from my own. While *Reality Hunger* champions the trend, it also considers artistic responses like the ones detailed above to be part of it. By conflating literature, film, reality TV, music sampling, the short story, fine art, pop culture, and everything in between, Shields misses the distinction between those working within the assumption that factual truth is more important than affective truth, and those who use the two to question the validity of the distinction. While I found myself agreeing with certain passages and quotes within *Reality Hunger*, it seemed that the overall argument and collapse of culture was flawed. While all of the areas discussed might very well be connected, I do not see them as the same trend. The cultural trend of truth seems to

be distinctly different from the art that responds critically to it by using the trend's troupes to interrogate it. Shields sees it as one big web, but it is much more subtle than that. However, as *Reality Hunger* was mentioned and briefly discussed within the first chapter of this text and in the above paragraph, I will focus the rest of this section more closely on *The Reality Effect*, as it offers a more focused opinion on the trend.

Black (2002) posits the origin of the trend to stem from a visual advancement in film and television technology – he labels it 'The Reality Effect' and mostly keeps his examples and consideration within the realm of film and television. Unlike Shields, Black (2002) focuses on a specific instance of the trend, without considering the reactions to it and what they might reveal about the trend of truth or our society. However, he considers both sides of things, and in a much more methodical way than Shields. In one passage he questions the efficacy of reality TV in its attempt to show us what is real. While quoting Lincoln Kaplan,

> "'In an era when "reality" TV blurs the line between nonfiction and fiction by recreating events, what people see on [fictional television dramas] get closer to the truth – especially since the events they stage are often taken from the news.' Once again, what is graphic and documentary is not necessarily real or true" (Black, 2002, p.17).

He then goes on to argue back that: "'reality' still counts for a great deal in the movies, and that film has a deeper commitment to, and connection with, the 'real world'" (Black, 2002, p.17). This more nuanced consideration, while focused on film and television, holds the potential to bring about a more refined discussion of the possible consequences of the trend of truth.

Concerning, The Truth

Popular culture acts as a reflection of many of the things that are important to the society that produces it. Considering this we can see that 'truth', in the sense that we discussed it above, is growing more important – at least to Anglo-American audiences.[17] People are noticing the trend: we have seen that artists are responding to this trend of truth, books are being written which acknowledge it through various names and angles (Black, 2002; Shields, 2010), and popular culture is wholeheartedly throwing itself into the trend of truth (docudramas, reality TV, Facebook, Twitter, constant news coverage, etc.). However, from my research there seems to be little theoretical writing concerned with the ramifications that this particular trend might have – though Black (2002) has offered helpful concerns, even if they are not at the forefront of his discussion.

What might it say about a culture that 'truth', in the sense discussed throughout this work, is important to them? Simultaneously, what does it mean that

---

[17] As all of the examples chosen have been Anglo-American it is irresponsible to make generalizations that encompass a wider scope than this within the present work.

truth is desired both in the sense of factual truth and affective truth? What does it mean that this sometimes-contradictory combination actually results in less than factual 'based on a true story' outcomes, which we might actually prefer? Can we have it both ways, and what happens when one gives way to the other? Are we losing something with the shift of popular culture away from fictional storytelling towards a hybrid truth/fiction category that is given priority?

In many ways these questions cannot be answered; they function as a call for criticality and a weariness of an increasingly 'true' popular culture that seems less and less genuine. Going back to the start of our text, it might be pertinent to bring Benjamin's (1936/2006) 'The Storyteller' back into the conversation to remind ourselves not to sentimentalise or memorialise a more traditional format. However, at the same time that the trend of truth is exploding another trend towards what I think of as 'absolute fiction'[18] is blossoming as the other extreme – this includes science fiction, super heroes, dystopic futures, vampires, and zombies. Academics have posited the potential that these genres hold for an exploration of cultural values and for a reimagining of the world (Bould & Miéville, 2009; Luckhurst, 2005). This exponential growth of both extremes at the present moment is extremely interesting, and I am often left wondering if absolute fiction is able to hold onto the metaphor in a much more universal way than the trend of truth is. At this juncture, Nietzsche's discussion of individuation, in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1886/2003) might also help us to understand the loss of the metaphor we might see within the trend of truth. By isolating individual stories and narratives, the personal supersedes the chorus: it flattens and divorces each instance from the whole. In that way, we might see that by focusing on the factual truth, we lose something of the truth of passions which Nietzsche champions. While the trend of truth seems at first to be more connected to suffering, as many of the stories told are about personal pain and individual struggle, often they are overcome in a way that can be recognized in the Apolline – with characteristically illusory naivety, or the implementation *deus ex machina*. Absolute fiction, on the other hand, opens up a wider conversation exactly because it is not tied to factual evidence or specific events; this openness allows for affective truth to take the reins. Not only that, absolute fiction allows us to see a situation from an outside perspective that we might not see clearly were it told in the 'based on a true story' fashion – even if the same message was being aimed for.

The trend of truth focuses on the micro story in a way that flattens and simplifies its message, which I see as an issue that the two artists discussed in this text address within their work. Black (2002, p. 8) reminds us that more and more we can see that literalism and explicitness are developing into the norm within TV and film. This simplification and immediacy leaves little room for questioning, as it seems to attempt to answer the question, not make one. A sentiment oddly used to support the

---

[18] I consider them to be absolute fiction because they are fictional in a way that could under no circumstances be mistaken as 'based on a true story', whereas realistic fictional drama and other realistic fictions might.

blossoming of non-fiction over fiction within Shields' *Reality Hunger* (p.60): "Unlike a fiction reader, whose only task is to imagine, a nonfiction reader is asked to behave more deeply: to imagine and to believe.... Fiction gives us a rhetorical question: 'What if this happened?' (The best) non-fiction gives us a statement, something more complex: 'This may have happened.'"[19] This discussion of a rhetorical question versus a 'complex' statement actually seems to me to be the reverse of what is suggested in the quote. A fictional possibility which asks 'What if this happened?' allows for viewers to think critically not only about a future that could lead to the kind of world imagined in the fiction, but more importantly it allows for a wider application of the social/political/interpersonal issues within it. The metaphor has the potential to more easily provoke questioning and critical thinking than the straightforward and explicit non-fiction. We might even say that the metaphor allows for the potential to ask ourselves, if it could represent not only a possible future – 'Are we headed towards this?' – but maybe more importantly, 'Are we already there?' (in the context of a different situation).

Further, Black (2002) posits that with film and television effects and quality becoming more realistic, the viewer might come to question the validity of the true, and also believe in that which is fictional.

> "If viewers of the common run of reality shows wilfully suspend their disbelief to the point that they can believe the 'candidly, honestly fake,' what's to stop them from doubting the documented truth? Indeed, while a surprising number of people are disposed to believe photographic 'evidence' of UFOs and other fantastic phenomena, others reject filmed evidence of the moon landing or the liberation of death camps at the end of World War II.... Others meanwhile, are disposed to accept whatever they are shown in movies, regardless of its veracity or even its authenticity, as long as the special effects are sufficiently spectacular and graphic" (Black, 2002, p.19).

In discussing D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*, Black (2002) also makes clear a further danger the trend of truth might bring. "He [Griffith] discovered that motion picture made it possible to foist his own vision of history onto his audiences, to make viewers see events as he saw them, to turn people into spectators who experience history and life itself as a series of filmic events" (Black, 2002, p. 145). The maker – filmmaker, writer, artist, musician – always has an agenda, and their true story is not tied to factual evidence even when it claims to be. Just like the news, and every other form of 'factual evidence,' there is a bias – so why does the true story maintain a position that holds more weight than fiction within popular culture today?

---

[19] Originally from Bonnie Rough, 'Writing Lost Stories,' *Iron Horse Literary Review* and appropriated by Shields in *Reality Hunger*.

Conclusions and Closing Remarks

It does not seem right to consider this a conclusion in any sort of final sense, as this research is not 'concluded' – there is much more work to be done and many more facets to consider. That being said, this conclusion will act as a summary as well as a reflection on the questions that need to be considered moving forward. There are many issues left unanswered, and even those preliminary ideas gathered together in this text need further support and deeper roots to gain any ground.

The trend of truth *is* happening, but it is not enough to just suggest that it is happening and support its occurrence through a listing out of those who agree with you (Shields, 2010); likewise, a simple answer to the question of 'why?' is not satisfied by a technological advancement (Black, 2002), though this is probably part of the equation. Something under the surface seems to be in play – a pervasive promise which is never delivered, but always anticipated – a promise that the micro-story matters, that *our* micro-story matters. We can see that Facebook, Twitter, blogs, and many other forms of social networking play into this promise and the silent desire it sparks in each of us. Likewise, the docudrama gives us even more fuel – these stories matter enough to be made into blockbuster hits, so maybe ours could too. The notion of our lives being made into movies – that we might gain our 15 minutes of fame – is not new, but it is increasingly obsessed over. YouTube even gives us our platform – with the uncountable number of vlogs as clear testimony of this. This promise – and the cruelly optimistic attachment that we form to it – is detrimental and "is actually an obstacle to your flourishing" (Berlant, 2011, p.1). While Berlant (2011) primarily discusses her notion of cruel optimism in relation to 'the good life', in our contemporary moment the importance of our story *is* part of the good life, part of the false promise we are fed. This obsession and fascination with being center stage perpetuates the need for the other commodities of the trend of truth – docudramas, reality TV, memoirs, etc. – and they distract us. Even though we know that reality TV is probably just as scripted as a TV drama (or at least edited and cut to create a linear narrative), we would really rather not know – and we often continue to act as though they are real, because the truth matters more that way (Freud, 1923). And regardless of that, we really much prefer that clear sense of narrative in ourselves as well as our stories – and all the better if those stories are 'true' because our clearly defined version of ourselves is something we want to be true as well (Lacan, 1949/1977).

The artistic responses we saw through the work of Seers (2009-2010) and Cicirelli (2013) give us just two examples of the responses to the trend of truth. To varying degrees they attempt to challenge the trend, or at least enlighten us to its presence and falsity. There are many more examples of both The Great Reveal and Pervasive Deception, but even outside of these categories there are challenges to the obsession with the 'true story' and the wider trend of truth. These responses make visible the trend, but also hopefully challenge viewers and makers alike to consider how the trend of truth affects our perception of reality, but also how we might change

our obsession with factual truth, and stop prioritizing it over affective truth – because affective truth is already at play within all of our cultural productions, we just pretend it is not.

The trend of truth is a complicated terrain, and it is important to remember that 'true stories' have always been part of our history; they inform our recent and distant past and allow us to consider experiences outside of our own. The prioritization of factual truth and the false promise it feeds into (that our micro-story matters), is the problem that I have with it. However, those inside of the trend of truth (makers and to a large extent viewers) are not blind to the complicated relationship between factual truth and affective truth that they are dealing with, and maybe the exactness of the current trend matters less to makers than we think. In the words of Tim O'Brien (1990/1991) in *The Things They Carried*[20]: "You can tell a true war story by the questions you ask. Somebody tells a story, let's say, and afterwards you ask, 'Is it true?' and if the answer matters you've got your answer"; he goes on to add, "Absolute occurrence is irrelevant. A thing may happen and be a total lie; another thing may not happen and be truer than the truth" (p.79).

---

[20] *The Things They Carried* is a collection of short stories based on the experiences of the author, Tim O'Brien, during his time in Vietnam. Unlike other published works by O'Brien, this book is considered a work of fiction.

REFERENCES

Barthes, R. (2010) *Camera Lucida* New York: Hill and Wang

Batchen, G. (2002) Spectres of Cyberspace. In N. Mirzoeff (ed) *The Visual Culture Reader* Oxen: Routledge

Benjamin, W. (2006) The Storyteller. In D.J. Hale (ed) *The Novel: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory 1900-2000* United States of America: Blackwell Publishing

Berlant, L. (2011) *Cruel Optimism* Durham: Duke University Press

Black, J. (2002) *The Reality Effect: Film Culture and the Graphic Imperative* London: Routledge

Bould, M., & Miéville, C. (eds). (2009) *Red Planets: Marxism and Science Fiction* London: Pluto Press

Cicirelli, D. (2013) *Fakebook: A True Story. Based on Actual Lies.* United States of America: Sourcebooks, Inc.

Colbert, S. (2005) The Word – Truthiness. *The Colbert Report.* http://thecolbertreport.cc.com/videos/63ite2/the-word---truthiness

Dictionary.com (2014) Infinitesimal. http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/infinitesimal

Dictionary.com (2014) Truthiness. http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/truthiness

Felman, S. (1982) To Open the Question. In *Literature and Psychoanalysis: The Question of Reading: Otherwise* London: John Hopkins University Press

Freud, S. (1905) Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria (1905 [1901]). In *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume VII (1901-1905): A Case of Hysteria, Three Essays on Sexuality and Other Works*, 1-122

Freud, S. (1923). The Infantile Genital Organization (An Interpolation into the Theory of Sexuality). *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIX (1923-1925): The Ego and the Id and Other Works*, 139-146

Frey, J. (2004) *A Million Little Pieces* London: John Murray (Publishers)

Frey, J. (2006) a note to the reader. In *A Million Little Pieces* London: John Murray (Publishers)

Frosh, S. (2010) *Psychoanalysis Outside the Clinic* China: Palgrave Macmillan

Grant, C. (n.d.) Full Profile. http://catherinegrant.wordpress.com/about-catherine-grant/

Gray, T. (2013) Why Reality-Based Films are Flooding the Oscar Race. http://variety.com/2013/biz/news/why-reality-based-films-are-flooding-the-oscar-race-1200731795/

Hagen, O. (2010) Lindsay Seers: It Has to Be This Way². http://www.smk.dk/en/visit-the-museum/exhibitions/past-exhibitions/2010/lindsay-seers/essay-by-ole-hagen/

IMDB (2013) 12 Years a Slave. http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2024544/

IMDB (2013) Captain Phillips. http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1535109/

IMDB (2013) FAQ for Dallas Buyers Club. http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0790636/faq?ref_=tt_faq_1#.2.1.1

IMDB (2013) The Wolf on Wall Street. http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0993846/

Kiesler, S., & Kraut, R. (1999) Internet Use and Ties That Bind. *American Psychologist*, September, 783-784

Lacan, J. (1977) The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I. In *Écrits* Bristol: Routledge

Lambert-Beatty, C. (2009) Make-Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility. *OCTOBER 129,* Summer 2009, pp. 51–84

Luckhurst, R. (2005) *Science Fiction* Cambridge: Polity Press

Lyotard, J. (1984) *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* Manchester: Manchester University Press

McBride, I. (1999) Where Are We Going and How and Why? In A. Rosenthal (ed) *Why Docudrama?: Fact-Fiction on Film and TV* United States of America: Southern Illinois University Press

Merriam-Webster (2006) Word of the Year 2006. http://www.merriam-webster.com/info/06words.htm

Nietzsche, F. (2003) *The Birth of Tragedy: Out of the Spirit of Music* London: Penguin Books

O'Brien, T. (1991) *The Things They Carried* London: Flamingo

Oprah.com (2006) Oprah's Questions for James.
        http://www.oprah.com/oprahshow/Oprahs-Questions-for-James

Picasso (1923) Picasso Speaks. In Barr A. H. Jr. (1980) *Picasso: Fifty Years of His Art* New York: Arno Press (published for The Museum of Modern Art)

Rosenthal, A. (ed). (1999) *Why Docudrama?: Fact-Fiction on Film and TV* United States of America: Southern Illinois University Press

Seers, L (2010) It has to be this way². http://www.lindsayseers.info/work_node/325

Seers, L (2010) Fort Patience, It has to be this way²: Photographic Works
        http://www.lindsayseers.info/work_node/335#5

Seers, L (2010) It has to be this way¹·⁵. http://www.lindsayseers.info/work_node/330

Seers, L (2010) It has to be this way¹. http://www.lindsayseers.info/work_node/333

Seers, L (2009) It has to be this way. http://www.lindsayseers.info/work_node/329

Shapiro, J. S. (1999) Loneliness: Paradox or Artifact? *American Psychologist*,
        September, 782-783

Sherman, T. (2013) Jersey Hustle: The real-life story of Abscam.
        http://www.nj.com/inside-jersey/index.ssf/2013/11/jersey_hustle_the_real-life_story_of_abscam.html

Shields, D. (2010) *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto* London: Penguin Books

Sixsmith, M. (2009) The Catholic church sold my child.
        http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2009/sep/19/catholic-church-sold-child

The Oscars (2014) The Nominees: Best Picture. http://oscar.go.com/nominees

Tobin, L. (2014, September 5) The Invisible Girlfriend should disappear now. *London Evening Standard*, p. 17

Van den Eijnden, R. J. J. M., Meerkerk, G., Vermulst, A. A., Spijkerman, R., & Engles, R. C. M. E. (2008) Online Communication, Compulsive Internet Use, and Psychosocial Well-Being Among Adolescents: A Longitudinal Study. *Developmental Psychology*, 44(3), 655-665