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Creating Change Through Documentary Film: An Examination of Select Films

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Creating Change Through Documentary Film: An Examination of Select Films

*A Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Masters of Liberal Studies*

By

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Dedication

To my Mother: Carol Patricia Blain Riley.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Radically altering or expanding the worldview of an individual or the collective of society requires the interacting media to engage and invoke an emotional response. In many instances, film, educates and elucidates—thus facilitating a shift of perspective. By challenging the status quo and creating a definitive alteration in perception when circumstances and information prove the former viewpoint or worldview is no longer valid. Documentaries that are related to causes can be part of this process. As cause related documentaries hold the potential to provoke action and evoke an emotional response. Through film, we discover the human face of climate change as well as the poignant and tragic consequence derived from the toxic debt load on our environment. .

The foundation for building a new framework through an application of knowledge is shaped as visual connections are created in the viewer's mind by the documentary. Shifting an individual's fixed perspective requires an alteration in thinking. Through film, a collective shift in worldview can be activated when enough individuals throughout society know and understand that change is imminent and necessary. Deliberate activation of this process is the goal of the cause related documentarian. Film and media are instrumental in creating and implementing shifts in viewpoints that foster change within the individual and the collective of society. The documentary is a vehicle for change serving us by facilitating our hopeful return to our own fidelity of being.

Most notably, the vehicle of the documentary film is a means to develop a comprehensive and empathetic perspective; this is achieved when a documentary creates an argument through narrative and story, a compelling visual presentation that speaks to the need for change. The old viewpoint no longer applies; a hoped for shift in thinking is

attained through viewing the documentary. Through examination and analysis, corollaries can be noted on the effects of documentary film on both the individual and society.

The ultimate goal of documentaries is not merely to elicit a reaction, but to provide an impetus to realign thinking to a new referential place; there is an expectation that the viewer will be altered and transformed in a deeply profound fashion. The challenges that exist for documentarians in our post 9/11 age of imagery are significant.

A cacophony of information crowding the airwaves ejects multiple competing pieces of information contending to grab the attention of the public. It can be argued that due to globalization and the streaming effects of the internet, media saturation has compelled the individual and society to perform a forced triage of an assigned level of importance on a topic or a cause. The emotional and rational bond created between the viewer and the documentary can be significant.¹

Through examination of select films: *An Inconvenient Truth*, *The End of the Line*, *Climate Refugees*, *Sempre Fi*, and *Gasland* the role of the documentary as an agent of change can be studied. Exposing the ramifications of global warming, (as in the case of *An Inconvenient Truth*) is one of the most essential functions of this documentary. The need for conservation and the plight of overfishing becomes apparent in the film *The End of the Line*. In *Climate Refugees*, the destabilizing effects of climate change on the world's population become the central argument.

The film *Gasland* focuses on the gas industry's impact on the environment in local communities across the nation. Through film, we grieve in tandem with those who have suffered from the wholesale abuses of industry and blatant malfeasance as exposed in *Sempre Fi* and *Gasland*. Through film we also view the process of how laws and

¹ Postman, Neil, *Amusing Ourselves To Death*, (London: Penguin Books, 1985), 8.

policies can be changed by the dedicated efforts of the few. In turn, the documentary can request that we become part of this process by demonstrating how significant our own individual choices can impact the issue at hand.

Through examination, it is possible to argue how significant these films are in their ability to effect change in the world. Through individual action, film promotes a desire to take personal responsibility; this process contributes to activism in the community. Change is cumulative; the documentary serves a vital role in this process. Documentaries achieve this by serving as a focal point for the causes they represent.

Interacting and engaging with the storyline and narrative in a documentary is the goal of the filmmaker. Through film, we are encoding new realities and creating innovative reconciliations with our old ideologies. Deciphering a documentary involves links that extend beyond a superficial visual engagement; revealing old blind spots and filling in new information. Gestational process is defined by the first shifts in perception that evolve from the initial viewing of the documentary. Deep internal structures of assumptions and knowledge must be confronted and reconciled.

1.1 Creating Change

Acting as a portal into another's reality is the role of the documentary. Defining these parameters becomes the task of film theorists. Bill Nichols who conveys these notions in his book entitled *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts*, Nichols provides insight into the intricate realm of the human mind: "Ideologies, beginning with those of gender, will attach themselves to this imaginary sense of self."² The documentary is one means by which we gain a view into a portion of another's reality. This concept also encompasses the emerging interaction with our own complicated and complex world.

² Nichols, Bill, *Representing Reality*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University, 1991), 8.

Nichols asserts that the individual's thinking is potentially mutable through film's influence: "Ideologies will also offer representations in the form of images, concepts, cognitive maps, worldviews, and the like to propose frames and punctuation to our experience."³ Media attempts to alter our perceptions on a wide range of topics. This is achieved through a variety of methods; the documentary through the presentation of both visual filmed realities alongside of the human story creates a filmic narrative supporting and connecting the viewer to a cause.

Creating a bond between a viewer and a cause is one of the primary goals of the documentarian. If the individual is not aware of the issue, the documentary serves as the first introduction to the topic. The viewing of the film can be considered the gestational process in a transitory shift of viewpoint. The change can be immediate, or take place over time as the newly informed individual seeks information on the subject looking beyond the film to sources on the internet and social media.

This post-modern era is not unlike the shift heralding the Enlightenment; an age when society can no longer, without question, disregard the obvious. Defining the obvious could be applied to significant climate change causing civil unrest due to mass migration, or the collapse of fishing around the world and pollution and desecration of sources of clean water. These clues signal to our society that deep internal value structures require change; we have no other alternative despite our best efforts at corporate complacency or personal laziness. Multiple sources attempt to inject into our consciousness vital information we should be compelled to acknowledge. Our own personal and civil society is at stake in the face of dire need, and we are dependent on an evolutionary alteration.

³ Nichols, *Representing Reality*, 8.

Collectively, society has reached a nexus; we as individuals have been laboring under the illusion that our individualized compartmentalization is functioning independently from the intrinsic reality of the whole. Many dystopian theorists have signaled our demise or decay as a species. Fritjof Capra discusses this concept in his book entitled, *The Turning Point* in which he posits our society's grim predicament, "As a consequence of this overwhelming emphasis on reductionist science our culture has become progressively fragmented and has developed technologies, institutions, and life styles that are profoundly unhealthy."⁴ This fragmentation in our post-modern society causes us to cling to old, outworn worldviews. We would do well to heed the warnings while still maintaining a resolve of cautious optimism.

The media issues the threat of societal and/or environmental collapse so many times it has begun to lose its significance. Our global culture is one that has grown rapidly in the ways of technological advancement. We are all bound by individual human experiences; the visual form of the documentary plays off of this concept. Nichols asserts, "Questions of magnitude carry us into the realm of ideology, contradiction, paradox, and excess."⁵ According to Nichols, "The utopian longing for actual community, which rhetoric frequently evokes, risks being sent on a detour to the kingdoms of narrative and myth, away from heightened awareness and a raised consciousness."⁶ The documentary when it serves the role as a force for change forges new paths cutting into new ideological frontiers and asserts innovative alternatives.

⁴ Fritjof Capra, *The Turning Point, Science Society and The Rising Culture*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988), 234.

⁵ Nichols, *Representing Reality*, 262.

⁶ *ibid.*

Understanding how these shifts in perception happen requires an examination of how media itself functions within our society.

Neil Postman theorizes in *Amusing Ourselves to Death* on the shift from a culture of text to one that driven by imagery, and in his example television, Postman does touch on the computer and by extension the internet. However, from his perspective in the 1980's, he had the prescience to note the power of the internet, although he did not anticipate that eventually our western society would relegate the television to background noise as the allure of instantly streaming data is now the norm. We have shifted to a visually driven culture, evidenced by a revolution fueled by cellphone footage posted to a social media web site. The “Arab Spring” in Egypt is an example of this effect.⁷ This speaks to the influence of social media and the visual format; as the realm of the documentary has now been co-opted by the individual.

Postman establishes the parameters by which this process begins its gestational stage, “Orwell and Huxley—that is, as a prophesier, and I have remained steadfast to his teaching that the clearest way to see through a culture is to attend to its tools for conversation.”⁸ The documentary is a powerful tool that can be used as a conversation starter, one that activates powerful modes of questioning, which will create significant momentum into a series of shifts both on the individual and within collective reality. Postman succinctly brings this topic into focus, stating, “Writing freezes speech and in so doing gives birth to the grammarian, the logician, the rhetorician, the historian, the scientist – all those who must hold language before them so they can see what it means,

⁷ Nadine Kassem Chebib and Rabia Minatullah Sohail, “The Reasons Social Media Contributed To The 2011 Egyptian Revolution”, *International Journal of Business Research and Management* 2 (2011): 139.

⁸ Postman, Neil, *Amusing Ourselves To Death*, (London: Penguin Books, 1985), 8.

where it errs, and where it is leading.”⁹ Writing continues to freeze speech although the power of the digital age is shifting the focus of information dissemination onto other areas. Reading about an experience is rather one dimensional in comparison to viewing film in an intense and visceral way through documentary footage.

The invention of the Gutenberg printing press heralds the process by which a new informational model can alter a culture. Postman elaborates on the evolution of technology, “trembling shift from the magic of writing to the magic of electronics.”¹⁰ World War Two marks a significant time in which the form of the documentary uses film to quell public fear and alter ideologies.¹¹ Television and next generation of electronics will determine how our world is interacting and obtaining information.

Elizabeth Cowie in her book on the subject of the documentary titled *Recording Reality, Desiring the Real*, expands on Postman’s tools for communication describing our ability to shift between the matrix of the internet space and physical space. Cowie expresses the idea that, “Modern technology has given us an array of prosthetic devices that enable us to transcend time and space.”¹² We are transforming from users of electronics to a reality in which the electronics define how we identify and express ourselves. Cowie requires that we begin to grasp these ideas to understand how indelible the visual has evolved in its impact on filtering reality. Cowie continues to expand on these concepts, “Communication devices—the telephone, two-way radio, the Internet, and the mobile phone—involve a “doing” in an exchange of words and, now, images in a

⁹ *ibid*, 12.

¹⁰ *ibid*, 13.

¹¹ Patricia Aufderheide, *Documentary Film: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), (Kindle Locations 1179-1182).

¹² Elizabeth Cowie, *Recording Reality, Desiring The Real*, (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 32.

present “real” time but separated by space. They are interactive.”¹³ The form of the documentary is now interactive, through the use of social networking sites and the internet; documentaries assist to build support with their respective causes.

Defining the exact processes that initiate a shift in viewpoint is a multilevel response. The questioning process begins at the initial viewing creating a gestational phase for the viewer. These rhetorical questions, once posited, are part of the first steps in the process of an evolving worldview. Nichols articulates the viewer’s shift in perception, “Documentary offers access to a shared, historical construct. Instead of *a* world, we are offered access to the world *the* world.”¹⁴ This process creates an opportunity for the viewer to look beyond superficial information and narrow confines of an old viewpoint and gain the opportunity to observe and potentially be influenced, Nichols continues, “The world is where, at the extreme, issues of life and death are always at hand. History kills.”¹⁵ Through careful and effective use, the documentary provides a method by which we can become aware and cognizant of issues that are of greatest and most immediate significance.

Nichols goes on to elaborate, “Though our entry to the world is through webs of signification like language, cultural practices, social rituals, political and economic systems, our relation to this world can also be direct and immediate.”¹⁶ We can never simply decipher our world through superficial interaction, is too complex a creation. Although, it can be argued that film does provide one of the most powerful means by which we can gain access to another’s viewpoint.

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ Nichols, *Representing Reality*, 109.

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ *ibid.*

At the onset of the industrial revolution and entry into the age of the visual medium of television and film, society engages in a streaming dialogue of incoming information. We have few ways offered to quiet the noise and focus on the most critical issues impacting our lives. Each of us has competing personal areas of importance unique to our own experience. Unfortunately, future events will dictate to us their own circumstantial levels of importance. Documentary film provides the viewer with a place to reset and a chance to regroup by providing a juncture between personal experience and the needs of society.

The following defines Nichols' parameters of the mutable nature of the documentary, "Documentary as a concept or practice occupies no fixed territory. It mobilizes no finite inventory of techniques, addresses no set number of issues, and adopts no completely known taxonomy of forms, styles, or modes."¹⁷ Nichols demonstrates the indefinable nature of the documentary, by showing how the form is adaptable in its ability to connect to a cause. The documentaries fluidity of form is perhaps one of its strongest assets.

Creating a change based documentary is not a formulaic process, although, the form does rely on the power of narrative. Documentaries essential significance lies in its ability to convey authentic experiences. Those experiences are woven together to create a visual storyline that captivates and compels audiences to shift their perspective. Beyond perspective, the ultimate goal of the documentary is to elicit a change in how individuals actively respond to issues that are presented by the film. Often, the documentary provides solutions and remedies relating to the film's message.

¹⁷ Nichols, *Representing Reality*, 12.

The documentary acting as agent of change allows the viewer the role of the universal citizen and the engaged global activist; by providing solutions and remedies through the film's message. Nichols continues on the power of the documentary, "The status of documentary film as *evidence from* the world legitimates its usage as a source of knowledge."¹⁸ The filmmaker brings the truth as he/she perceives it back to the viewer. Discovering power in the realm of the real creates an authentic connection between the viewer and film; honoring this process allows for a level of investment on the part of the viewer.

Many theorists attempt to create the parameters that frame how the documentary functions within society. Elizabeth Cowie in her work entitled, *Recording Reality, Desiring the Real*, sets about this task, "Documentary, in recording historical reality, incites a desire for the real both as knowable, and hence mastered by our knowledge of it, and as prior to and evading our mastering of it as the radically contingent."¹⁹ Many filmmakers combine visual historic footage of the actual events alongside the thread of narrative to create a sense of urgency. This building tension is perceived as immediate and elicits a stronger reaction. This can be seen in the visual sobering delivery of the actual events as in the case of Hurricane Katrina in *An Inconvenient Truth*.

Cowie considers the creative devices filmmakers utilize to obtain the effect they desire. Cowie firmly inserts the documentary on equal footing with other forms of news media. She writes, "Contemporary documentary film and video, however, as well as reality television, and indeed news and current affairs programs, deploy marked stylistic devices such as slow motion, freeze-frame, and the use of striking camera angles that

¹⁸ *ibid*, ix.

¹⁹ Cowie, *Recording Reality, Desiring The Real*, 3.

indicate the presence of the camera, which reflexively signal reality offered as spectacle.²⁰ Theorists and filmmakers have illustrated it is necessary to utilize the shock value of spectacle to establish a point and create causal connections between the viewer and the subject.

Cowie differentiates between the realm of the real and the unreal, fiction and non-fiction and the duties and the assigned obligations imposed by the form of the documentary, “The moral—and political—requirements to distinguish between the real and illusory is central to modern Western culture and is part of a privileging of the serious over illusion, the imagined, and fantasy, which are usually assumed to be the domain of fiction.”²¹ Conversely, the documentary can devolve into propagandist discourse. Richard Taylor in his work entitled *Film Propaganda*, defines this visual influence as, “Film was the first universal mass medium in that it could simultaneously influence viewers as individuals and members of a crowd, which led to it quickly becoming a tool for governments and nonstate organizations to project a desired ideological message.”²² The documentary can travel two-ways; from the top levels of government to deliver a message to the masses or it can travel from the source of the independent filmmaker to the public and the media.

There is an underlying hope that propaganda can be discerned by the viewer, although, the ability for audiences to determine between propaganda and the truth is a debated topic. Documentaries can perform the function of the visual essay effectively

²⁰ *ibid*, 4.

²¹ Cowie, *Recording Reality, Desiring The Real*, 21.

²² Richard Taylor, *Film Propaganda: Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany*, (London: Croom Helm Ltd, 1979). 30-31.

wielding power within society. This is evidenced by *An Inconvenient Truth* and *Sempre Fi*, films that create and further their cause; by inspiring law and policy changes.

Cowie expresses some of the elements inherent to this shift, “The documentary film is not only an assemblage of facts and of a filmed reality but also an interpretation that may draw upon established understanding, or it may challenge such ‘interpretations’, renegotiating established and conventional meanings.”²³ This is in alignment with the idea that our reality is so complex a construct that we must draw upon a variety of sources to deduce specific underlying threads of truth. The mutable and subjective is sifted from the valid and proven realities as deeply embedded beliefs shift into new realms of understanding. These threads of complex realities are found in documentaries like *Climate Refugees* and *An Inconvenient Truth*. Each of these films has a unique ability to demonstrate multiple viewpoints and narratives that provide the larger argument on a topic or issue.

Nichols and Cowie describe the aspects of the documentary that formulate the process of change in viewpoint on the individual. One of the most powerful parts of this is found in the presentation of knowledge interwoven with the human experience of those affected. Many times the problem or situation can seem insurmountable as in the case of global warming. The documentary has a capacity to create hope or deliver despair; as it is between these parameters that the documentarian creates an argument on behalf of a cause.

The documentary plants the seed performing the task of increasing public awareness and interaction on a topic as in the case of *Gasland* or *The End of the Line*. The goal is to educate and to create changes in thinking but also to initiate specific and

²³ Cowie, *Recording Reality, Desiring The Real*, 63.

measurable changes in action. Documentaries become the banner under which a cause can rally, through expert testimony and personal narratives. Those on the front lines of a cause report back to the viewer the conditions our world is striving to reconcile. The driving forces that continue to fuel the momentum of the movement are as integral to the process as the film itself. Understanding how a documentary can launch a successful campaign to create change has become the focus of many ecological and humanitarian organizations.

A world that once understood itself via the written word we have now traveled to a new place of orientation and a differing means by which we digest and make sense of our own current reality. In her book entitled *The Art of the Documentary* Megan Cunningham defines this, “[documentaries] today are cultural reference points through which people learn about one another’s human experience, and ultimately better understand their own.”²⁴ We not only understand our own human experience but the concept of reality from a larger landscape. We are all subject to the same forces; as in the case of climate change or pollution and the overfishing of our oceans. No one is exempt from reality. The documentary serves to remind us of our universal connection with one another, we cannot separate one reality from another. If we acknowledge that we share a singular destiny, we can become more cognizant of our mutual predicament.

The act of crafting and conveying a story is one of the oldest and most powerful tools used by humanity. In Louise Spence and Vinicius Navarro book entitled *Crafting Truth, Documentary Form and Meaning* defines the conceptual notion of storytelling by expressing, “Documentary makers are not mere purveyors of evidence. Evidence only hints at the story. It doesn’t tell it.” Combining the voice of narrative and expert authority

²⁴ Megan Cunningham, *The Art of the Documentary*, (Berkeley: New Riders, 2005), 91.

within a documentary creates a more persuasive argument. *The End of the Line* uses experts and visual evidence to establish definitive proof of the potential collapse of the fishing industry.

The documentary occupies many roles in the process of “hinting” at a story as Spence and Navarro emphasize. They do present the ethical aspect of the process of creating a documentary, “It is up to the documentarian to examine the evidence critically and imaginatively. Since what emerges from this scrutiny can never be the absolute and total truth, the documentary maker faces many ethical concerns.”²⁵ To identify a documentary as truth or not truth, assigns too simplistic a role to a complex concept. The documentary can create a central core argument from a position of balanced perspective adding credibility and authority to a topic or a subject. In the film, *Climate Refugees*, truth is defined by the visual proof of vast numbers of people who are homeless and without food around the world due to the associated effects of climate change.²⁶

Spence and Navarro clarify this concept, “This pursuit of credibility makes documentaries close to legal discourses. In their most conventional forms, legal discourses assume that we can prove the truthfulness of a particular assertion based on the availability of credible evidence.”²⁷ This credibility in a film that has a specific platform is vital. Documentaries filter information to society, conveying truth is an essential task, if this is not done well it can hurt the cause the documentary is attempting to help. *Sempre Fi* performs this task by presenting scientific evidence captured from the

²⁵ Louise Spence; Vinicius Navarro, *Crafting Truth: Documentary Form and Meaning*, (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers, 2011), Kindle Locations 85-87.

²⁶ *Climate Refugees*, <http://www.climaterefugees.com/>

²⁷ Spence and Navarro, *Crafting Truth: Documentary Form and Meaning*, kindle location 518-520.

internet leading to the United States Marine Corps' eventual acknowledgement of responsibility.²⁸

Spence and Navarro continue to elaborate on this notion, “Traditional documentaries follow a similar pattern. They seek out evidence to justify their claims. But documentaries deal with evidence in ways that are both more accessible and more complicated.”²⁹ To illustrate this point, the effect of global warming receives oppositional and suppressive media treatment from biased news sources. This is evidenced by *An Inconvenient Truth* and other films on global warming, which continue to play vital roles in presenting their predictions and potential outcomes.

Creating and maintaining authority is central to establishing credibility for a documentary, many times history is relayed, and historical images and references are made. Spence and Navarro differentiate between written history and filmic history, “Documentaries, of course, are different from history books. Historians tend to privilege written sources, while documentary makers rely mostly on sound and image.”³⁰ This notion refers to Postman's concept of the written word, “freezing speech”; the documentary lives on the other side of this dynamic. Sound and image are oftentimes considered irrefutable sources of information. There should be great consideration made in how a shot is framed and translated to the viewer as this determines how the material is interpreted and digested.

As Spence and Navarro determine, “For that reason, documentaries are more likely to give the impression that history is not constructed but merely recorded by the

²⁸ *Sempre Fi*, <http://semperfialwaysfaithful.com/>

²⁹ Spence and Navarro, *Crafting Truth: Documentary Form and Meaning*, kindle location 518-520.

³⁰ *ibid.*

filmmaker.”³¹ Constructing truth and crafting individual narratives into a comprehensible structure creates a more significant impact on the viewer, “the documentary seems to ‘speak’ in a distinctive way and from a particular point of view.”³² Spence and Navarro demonstrate the multifaceted process involved, “In fact, both film and literary theorists have taught us that authorship in general involves not one but many voices, all of which contribute to the construction of meaning.”³³ Multiple voices in concert are the bailiwick of the documentarian. They not only serve as documentarians of the historical but the arbitrators and interpreters of what they compose on film. The film *The End of the Line* is a documentary format that effectively uses the technique of multiple voices.

The documentary filmmaker is in “dialogue” with his world and potential future audience with the intention of setting in motion the catalytic forces of change. Spence and Navarro assert these concepts; “However, unique or innovative it might be, the creative gesture usually presumes some form of “dialogue” between the creator and the social world, and the creator and the spectator.”³⁴ This is a conversation carried to the viewer oftentimes with the specific goal to initiate change, and as Spence and Navarro assert, “[as the] filmmaker records and represents the thoughts and opinions of others.”³⁵ There is great power within the documentarian’s scope in how they frame the shot or edit their work; acting as the concert masters and composers over their creation. Film’s such as *Climate Refugees* and *An Inconvenient Truth* employ the technique of filming expert opinion to convey knowledge; alongside the story narrative of those who have been affected by the actual events of global warming.

³¹ *ibid.*

³² Spence and Navarro, *Crafting Truth: Documentary Form and Meaning*, Kindle edition 896-897.

³³ *ibid.*

³⁴ *ibid.*, 843-845.

³⁵ *ibid.* 980-982.

Spence and Navarro reveal, “documentaries tend to play with our expectations, raising questions and putting off answers, forestalling closure, so that the last minutes in the film will coincide with the resolution of a particular issue or problem.”³⁶ Building a good argument establishes the foundation of a successful documentary. In *Sempre Fi*, the viewer interacts with the narratives throughout the duration of the documentary thus building a sense of connection and compassion with those who have been affected.

Our lives are punctuated with degrees of dramatic events some greater and more profound than others. For those individuals who are interviewed in *Sempre Fi* and *Gasland*, there is an everyman connection created with the American public. What 9-11 was to global terror, Hurricane Katrina was to global warming. This serves to further emphasize we no longer live in an insulated reality. *An Inconvenient Truth* to *Climate Refugees* and beyond performs the task of allowing the public to travel closer to an actual reality and away from a buffered existence.

The stories and personal accounts of those who have been interviewed reveal a tragic and poignant pain, demonstrating a deep and profound suffering. Their narratives are offered as *memento mori* to a singular cause. The memories preserved on film become a lasting testament building a connection with the viewer. Documentary film germinates within the viewer a gestational process culminating in an informed awareness.

Becoming aware is only the first steps in change and if all conditions are favorable actions can be set in motion, which creates actual change. This process propels momentum that drives a cause forward. This progression goes deeper than storytelling for its own sake, becoming part of a holistic process connecting events recorded on film to a specific cause. Spence and Navarro articulate this process, “More than simply provide a

³⁶ *ibid*, 1836-1839.

structuring model for direct cinema, however, the crisis formula actually favored a particular worldview.”³⁷ Beyond even favoring a worldview one could go so far as saying the world view is being destroyed and recreated by films end.

Specifically, if little is known about a topic; the more profoundly the viewer’s opinion can be influenced. This is evidenced in Jess Search’s *The End of The Line* study.³⁸ Spence and Navarro continue, “It submitted the contingency of social reality to a relatively simple plot, in which courage and individual determination served as an engine for real-life events and the protagonists were supposed to meet the obstacles they faced.”³⁹ Spence and Navarro expand on the concept of how important the individual’s concept of resolution: “Even if triumph was less than certain, the value of individual resolve was never questioned.”⁴⁰ These essential elements are instrumental in creating both authority and power to documentaries.

Media theorist Marshall McLuhan expressed the seductive position our modern society finds in itself. In some way, we have “lost” our connection to ourselves and are almost unable to grasp the severity of the situation these films convey. McLuhan posits, “The message of the movie medium is that of transition from lineal connections to configurations.”⁴¹ Each of these films provides authority through the voices and narratives of experts. Each film produces visual documentation on the suffering wrought by their respective cause. McLuhan continues, “[the] lines of force in structures and in media become loud and clear.”⁴² This is the point in which we cease being the passive

³⁷ Spence and Navarro, *Crafting Truth: Documentary Form and Meaning*, Kindle edition 1957-1960.

³⁸ Search, *The End of the Line* Valuation. Conclusion.

³⁹ Spence and Navarro, *Crafting Truth: Documentary Form and Meaning*, Kindle edition 1957-1960.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

⁴¹ Marshall McLuhan, “The Medium is the Message”, (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 107

⁴² *ibid.*

receptors of information and media dialogue and become proactive forces within our own individualized reality.

Each of these films represents an individual cause; call for actions both large and small. No cause has ever been started or maintained through apathy. Through awareness and discernment, there exists a potential for solutions to be in alignment to a new more sustainable reality. The public must first become aware and then acknowledge its own role in the toxic debt-load that has been placed upon the world. After this has been achieved, be it through information, film and other forms of media, can a process of positive change result.

These following films were chosen as each follows a common thread, such as climate change and ecological issues combined with human accountability; each plays a role in exposing differing global dilemmas. Each of the films examined within this work has achieved significant recognition, and some have been instrumental in creating noteworthy change, both locally and globally.

Creating change is part of a process and these films serves this process admirably, winning awards, gaining media attention, and providing momentum for the causes they represent. Beyond entertainment value, these films conveyed in the following case studies both knowledge and consequence. Each of the documentaries mentioned in this thesis provides a depth of viewpoint. These films have the capacity to shift perspective and create a foundation a new worldview. Each of these films acts as representatives for their individual causes. *The End of the Lines* conveys a message of responsible marine stewardship, *An Inconvenient Truth* and *Climate Refugees* carries a message of reducing the individual and world-wide carbon impact. These documentaries also have the

capacity to rally everyman in joining the crusade to reinstating our right to have clean water and a safe environment as illustrated by *Sempre Fi* and *Gasland*.

Chapter 2: Case Studies

2.1 The End of the Line: Coordinated efforts in transforming worldviews

The documentary *The End of the Line* was first a book written by Charles Clover. This film marks a growing trend of a coordinated partnered approach with non-governmental organizations working to fund, promote and propel the success of a documentary. The ensuing research has proven this method to be viable one and demonstrates how cause related documentaries can use utilize multiple resources in relaying their message to the public.⁴³

Clover in his book, *The End of the Line* writes of the task he undertakes in conveying his message, “It comes with the realization that in a single human lifetime, we have inflicted a crisis on the oceans *greater than any yet caused by pollution.*”⁴⁴ When *The End of The Line* was published overfishing was largely under reported. Clover’s book is the maritime equivalent of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*. Clover gives his readers compelling reason to be alarmed about the fate of marine life, “As a method of mass destruction, fishing with modern technology is the most destructive activity on Earth.”⁴⁵ Clover goes on to elucidate that the impact of overfishing on those who rely on fish as the mainstay of their diet in developing countries is severe. Clover writes how overfishing off of waters in developing nations “[robs] the poor to feed the rich”.⁴⁶ *The End of the Line* campaign represents a coordinated effort, combining multiple media sources, such as websites and social media, all working together to create change on behalf of overfishing.

⁴³ Jess Search, “The End of The Line Valuation Report”, (BRITDOC Channel 4 BRITDOC Foundation, March 2011) http://issuu.com/britdoc/docs/the_end_of_the_line_evaluation_report

⁴⁴ Charles Clover, *The End Of The Line*, (New York, London: The New Press, 2006), 4.

⁴⁵ *ibid*, 4.

⁴⁶ *ibid* 4.

“*The End of the Line – Social Impact Evaluation*” was produced in the United Kingdom by Channel 4 BRITDOC Foundation.⁴⁷ This report concluded an eighteen month long study using solid empirical data extrapolated from a variety of sources. The study examined the concepts behind the critical mass needed to implement a “tipping point” within the public and the corporate zeitgeist. A tipping point is defined as when a situation such as sustainable fishing has reached a point in which a measurable number of individuals create a causal effect that ripples through society.⁴⁸ In turn, this creates a response from both corporations and government entities to alter their policies.

Their goal was to create awareness on the importance of providing sustainable fish to an educated consumer in addition to fish suppliers, and fishermen who also understood the need for responsible marine stewardship. Laws and legislation along with marine sanctuaries combined with social media activism supports and moves the cause along in a multidimensional approach. By using stunning images that portray the ocean as a healthy vital living ecosystem, combined with harrowing images of wasteful industrial fishing, a strong message is conveyed to the viewer. Through this process, the documentary *The End of the Line* became a filmic jewel—a visual focal point for over-fishing—a beautiful evocative homage to the plight of marine life.

The news cycle on a topic or a cause requires coordinated efforts as well as the ability to determine anticipated waves of support. *The End of the Line* is a successful example of this process. According to Cowie there exists a bond between filmmaker and viewer, ““John Grierson, drawing on these debates, was concerned with the education of

⁴⁷ http://issuu.com/britdoc/docs/the_end_of_the_line_evaluation_report

⁴⁸ Oxford English Dictionary Online; Define; Tipping Point: the point at which a series of small changes or incidents becomes significant enough to cause a larger, more important change.
<http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/tipping+point?region=us>

the new citizen.”⁴⁹ Grierson a wartime documentarian understood the value of the visual in relationship to his viewer. His goal was to offer up actual people rather than actors living within their own natural environment, and allow the viewer to be guided by the experience and the narrative. This allows the viewer opportunity to draw an informed conclusion. This is the power of the human voice reaching out to the audience to “tell” a story of their reality. Cowie expands on the parameters of this process, “What these polemics produced was a struggle around representation, of what should be filmed, that is, what should be “seen,” and how it should be shown.”⁵⁰ *The End of the Line* performs the task of revealing the plight of marine life by providing important information woven within the film’s storyline.

The End of the Line documents Charles Clover’s attempts to convince the prominent London sushi restaurant Nobu to cease serving endangered fish, such as blue fin tuna. Clover’s efforts through the film illustrate how these fish’s very existence is tied to our understanding their plight. Charles Clover the author of the book *The End of the Line* is portrayed at the beginning of the film as a lone voice, an informed journalist attempting to convey his message of overfishing across to the public. Clover meets with resistance and something even worse than rejection—apathy in *The End of the Line* we observe as apathy is shifted to awareness and finally transformed into activism.

Clover’s quest to get Nobu to take the endangered fish off their menu threads throughout the film and by film’s end there Nobu does concede by placing an asterisk next to the endangered fish on their menu. This may not seem much of a victory, but it does illustrate how important persistence is in changing a situation. The film

⁴⁹ Cowie, *Recording Reality, Desiring the Real*, 45.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

demonstrates how each small act is cumulative, adding to a shift in awareness and perception. The film never discounts the power of the individual and equates their investment to the issue as important at any of the larger solutions offered in the film.

The End of The Line provides multiple filmic messages, first to protect marine sanctuaries, places for fish to spawn and recover their numbers. Secondly to illustrate the need for ocean policy reform around the world as well as gain compliance from both developed and undeveloped countries in ocean management and third to educate the public and restaurateurs as well as suppliers on what are the most sustainable fish to eat and buy. Each of these messages served the larger goal to protect marine wild life and ecosystems, demonstrating how essential it is to catch fish in a responsible manner. *The End of the Line* demonstrates effectively to the viewer, that technology has provided us with highly efficient ways to farm the oceans. The film further illustrates our ability to eradicate or collapse a species has increased exponentially.

The End of the Line campaign takes on the challenges of educating the public by deliberately setting out to manifest shifts in buying and selling habits through social media and an online presence. Keeping the topic of sustainable fish current and relevant continues the conversation between the media and the consumer as well as the individuals who influence others in their buying habits. Along with *The End of the Line* web page they also created the Fish2fork website⁵¹ reviewing restaurants in the United Kingdom on their sustainable fish offerings, as well as providing ongoing information and awareness. This top-down and bottom up approach allows for an educated public to know what to ask for as well as educating an informed distributor to provide easy to identifiable and sustainable fish the public.

⁵¹ Fish2Fork, <http://www.fish2fork.com/default.aspx>

Jess Search asserts these findings in her study; “*The End of the Line* is a film which punched way above its weight in terms of press attention and awareness, above and beyond the size of the film audience.”⁵² Search goes on to reveal that, “[for] every person who had watched *The End of the Line*, another 510 people had heard about it.”⁵³ This is a point in which a documentary can be considered a measurable force for change.

Charles Clover summarizes in the final chapter of his book that there needs to be unified and widespread efforts on the part of fish sustainability. Clover writes that the sea is in need of greater protective measures as the “[time] has come to change the laws of the sea so they are more like the law of the land.”⁵⁴ The sea is a great and vast common resource shared under the stewardship of all of mankind to value and hold secure for future generations.

Clover eloquently argues on behalf of the sea and its inhabitants, “It may seem paradoxical to suggest that the citizen is the true owner of the sea and that we should grant secure long-term rights to fish. With these rights, however, should come new responsibilities and a new citizenship ethic.” Clover’s book can be compared to Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* both produce a solid argument on the rights of nature in relationship to man’s use of them. Clover recognizes the two sides offered to us by progress; by reminding us that technology that created the crisis can also be used to resolve the problem as well.⁵⁵ This can be achieved as Clover illustrates by creating methods that monitor the oceans through satellite technology.⁵⁶

⁵²Jess Search, “The End of The Line Valuation Report”, (BRITDOC Channel 4 BRITDOC Foundation, March 2011)

⁵³*ibid.*

⁵⁴ Clover, *The End of The Line*, 326.

⁵⁵ Clover, *The End of The Line*, 327.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*

2.2 *An Inconvenient Truth*: Initiating the Dialogue on Climate Change

Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth* is often the first film brought to mind on the topic of global warming. This 2006 documentary is widely considered to have introduced awareness of this subject to a wider audience. Presented by a former Vice-President filling the role of a right time, right place documentary; Gore's easy going charm was one of the most notable aspects of the film. Both environmental activists Laurie David and producer Lawrence Bender play an instrumental role in bringing Gore's power-point presentation to film. They both realized that film was the only way this topic could be translated to a larger audience. After attending a Gore lecture, Laurie David developed a conviction in Gore's ability to transmit his message to the masses: "I felt like Al Gore had become the Paul Revere of our times," says David, "traveling around the country calling out this vital warning that we really can't ignore."⁵⁷ David realized Gore's persona and authority could potentially create a platform through the format of the documentary to inject the severity of global warming into the cultural machine.

Thomas Rosteck and Thomas S. Frenz succinctly sum up the processes behind the blockbuster documentary in their journal article entitled "Myth and Multiple Readings in Environmental Rhetoric, The Case of *An Inconvenient Truth*", in which they assert "In what follows, we place the genres of science documentary, personal narrative, and political jeremiad within the larger mythic frame of the monomyth. By so doing, we show how elements from all interface with and reinforce the rhetorical efficacy of the entire film."⁵⁸ In *An Inconvenient Truth*, Gores' quixotic figure is delivered to us, as a

⁵⁷Paramount Specialty Films presents; *An Inconvenient Truth*
http://hollywoodjesus.com/movie/inconvenient_truth/notes.pdf

⁵⁸ Thomas Rosteck & Thomas S. Frenz, "Myth and Multiple Readings in Environmental Rhetoric: The Case of *An Inconvenient Truth*", *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 95 (February 2008): 10.

man who failed against the mechanisms of an election. Utilizing the venue of the documentary, Gore undertakes the Herculean task of transforming old worldviews about the realities of global warming into new, hopeful visions of a sustainable reality.

An Inconvenient Truth elicits within the media a Pandora like reaction of raging debate on issues related to global warming. Even six years after the film's release, political and corporate resources consistently amass to debunk the science behind the film.⁵⁹ Filmic images reveal melting ice sheets as well as rising ocean levels. The viewer is presented with knowledge and narrative via the conduit of *An Inconvenient Truth*, this visual evidence is far more compelling than dry data for an audience; convincing the viewer to make a choice on what changes they are willing to undertake in decreasing their carbon damage on our world.

Many documentary films create solid arguments on a particular issue but offer little in the way of solutions. Films such as *An Inconvenient Truth* offer options to the viewer. These changes involve individual choices, as well as global changes involving corporations' domestic and international policies, all involving the need for international laws to decrease the carbon debt load. *An Inconvenient Truth* offers ideas on how important actions both large and small can contribute to the whole. A collective shift in world view is created when a significant number of people begin to shift their awareness. *An Inconvenient Truth* continues to contribute to the media dialogue on the topic of global warming and still manages to garner mention in the media as the film currently

⁵⁹ Warren Meyer, "Understanding the Global Warming Debate", *Forbes*, 9 February 2012
<http://www.forbes.com/sites/warrenmeyer/2012/02/09/understanding-the-global-warming-debate/4/>

remains useful within the field of environmental education due to the informative qualities inherent to the film.⁶⁰

An Inconvenient Truth is a first step in a dialogue that inserts into our reality a belief that we are reaching a place that will no longer offer (humanity) any degree of environmental flexibility. The most profound message of the film poses a poignant question to humanity on our fate; asking this current pivotal generation if they are willing to wake up and make a difference; or slumber and ignore the subject of global warming to the peril of us all.

Jess Search addresses the impact of *An Inconvenient Truth* in her study “Beyond The Box Office” in her analysis of the documentary. Search writes, “It uses an art form to try to have an internal effect on the viewer’s mentality, which will in itself have an external effect on the world due to that person’s new actions and changed habitual (sic) behaviour.”⁶¹ The “value” of a film, calculated from a different perspective – a position of social value as documented in the “Beyond the Box Office” study.⁶²

Search continues to expand on the greater changes, “It uses an art form, documentary, to affect (sic) behavioural change.”⁶³ The United Kingdom is leading the way in proving that the form of the documentary is a powerful mechanism in which to influence and create an alteration in thinking. Acquiring the attention of the distracted public of today takes consistent and concerted effort, as evidenced by *An Inconvenient Truth* and *The End of the Line*. The public can be influenced through a variety of media

⁶⁰ “Can a Film Change The World?”, Time, 6, March 2008, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1720100,00.html#ixzz1qKIGimeL>

⁶¹ Jess Search, “Beyond The Box Office, New Documentary Valuations”, (BRITDOC Channel 4 BRITDOC Foundation, May 2011) http://britdoc.org/uploads/media_items/aninconvenienttruth-beyondtheboxoffice.original.pdf

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ http://britdoc.org/uploads/media_items/aninconvenienttruth-beyondtheboxoffice.original.pdf

venues as both *The End of the Line* and *An Inconvenient Truth* demonstrates. Search's study expands the notion that "In economic terms any behaviour changes that came around from viewing the film can be seen as externalities and attempts can be made to calculate their value. Let's consider the changes that might be made by both individuals and companies."⁶⁴ Persistence and perseverance and the ability to keep a media presence on a topic are essential; as proven by the aforementioned *The End of the Line* documentary and its support campaign on sustainable fishing.

Documentary is flexible in its ability to focus on the macro as illustrated by the satellite view of *An Inconvenient Truth's* shot of the expanse of hurricane Katrina covering New Orleans. Documentary can also bear witness to the microcosm of experience by revealing individual suffering. Taylor writes on the role of media in his a collection of essays entitled, *Žižek and the Media*: "While there was some critical reporting-coverage . . . in general the US media failed signally to recognize the US establishment's descent during Katrina's immediate aftermath, into its own Kurtzian heart of darkness."⁶⁵ This leaves the documentary to fill in our gaps in knowledge that have been left out by the news media— by allowing the public access to information in understanding why Hurricane Katrina happened at all, as evidenced by *An Inconvenient Truth*.

Although, to state the obvious, there was a failure in Katrina's wake and the only way to inject the problem with any hope is to provide solutions on how to alleviate future situations. Katrina was "the perfect storm," one that was in many ways similar to the reality-gripping events of 9/11. Too big to ignore, it can be argued that our media is

⁶⁴ *ibid.*

⁶⁵ Paul A. Taylor, *Žižek and the Media*, (Cambridge: polity, 2010), 135.

saturated and distracted as our western culture seems only to respond to cinematic wake-up calls like category five hurricanes, catastrophic tsunamis and devastating earth-quakes.

Cowie provides insight into this process by describing the events of 9-11, “Moreover, it is just such a spatial separation that can produce trauma, as it did for many of those relatives and friends and viewers overseeing the events.”⁶⁶ This process creates a feedback loop of information forever tied to one particular seminal event. Cowie continues, “For what may be brought into play, unconsciously, is of a past infraction that is now remembered—flashed back to—in the experience of imagining a possible future infraction.”⁶⁷ A powerful place of reference signals a warning to the viewer; such as viewing film footage from Hurricane Katrina as demonstrated in *An Inconvenient Truth*, or the mass migration of refugees as conveyed in *Climate Refugees*.

Patricia Aufderheide in her book entitled *Documentary Film: A very short Introduction*, Aufderheide stresses elements supporting the vital core of the film’s central argument, “The genre of documentary always has two crucial elements that are in tension: representation, and reality.”⁶⁸ These elements are inherent to *An Inconvenient Truth* although the film continues to maintain its authority within the media. The representation of reality is done in such a smooth fashion there is a potential for the audience to pause for a moment and consider the information being presented. The film’s message through Gore’s calm voice creates space to convey a large, very significant issue. Reality is packaged with enough of the factual to get the point across while keeping

⁶⁶ Cowie, *Recording Reality and Desiring the Real*, 35.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*

⁶⁸ Patricia Aufderheide, *Documentary Film, A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) Kindle edition 9-10.

the tension within the realm of bearable. This is one of the most significant aspects of this film's power of persuasion.

Aufderheide writes specifically on *An Inconvenient Truth*, "In Davis Guggenheim's *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006), Al Gore and Davis Guggenheim, in an easy-to-understand presentation, let scientific data speak to the urgency of the issue."⁶⁹ Ironically the power-point aspect of the documentary has been oft mentioned and holds a simplistic power in its representational force. Aufderheide continues to elaborate by quoting those with significant authority in the realm of the scientific regarding the film's impact, "The director of the NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies, Jim Hansen, noted the public value of the work: 'Al Gore may have done for global warming what *Silent Spring* did for pesticides.'"⁷⁰ Connecting a cause with a seminal work such as *Silent Spring* denotes the power of the written in manifesting change.

This comparative statement gives authority and a place of reckoning to *An Inconvenient Truth*. Aufderheide also understands Gore's mythic task in challenging the "political" issue with a scientific reality, "He will be attacked, but the public will have the information needed to distinguish our long-term well-being from short-term special interests."⁷¹ Informing the public on matters essential to their survival and well-being is a task well served by the documentary format. *An Inconvenient Truth* demonstrates that its message must often undertake the onslaught of naysayers who challenge the science of global warming. The fortunate aspect to this film is that other documentaries have taken

⁶⁹ *ibid* 7-8.

⁷⁰ *ibid*.

⁷¹ Aufderheide, *Documentary Film, A Very Short Introduction*, Kindle edition 7-8.

up the cause to rally on the topic of global warming; as this may be one of the most important issues facing mankind at this time.⁷²

Measuring a film's effects can be challenging, the results are often cumulative over time. *Time Magazine's* 2008 article "Can a Film Change the World?" examines this idea, resulting in some interesting returns, "Three months after the film's U.S. release, California passed sweeping legislation to curb greenhouse gases."⁷³ These corollary examples such as law changes are large scale results. The film's primary goal is to obtain and keep the attention of the public in an effort to convince them that global warming is an issue. *Time* magazine article continues to illustrate the scope of Al Gore's film, "For policymakers, the release of a movie becomes a focusing event, like a natural disaster," says Matthew Nisbet, professor of Communications at American University.⁷⁴ Cause related documentaries such as *An Inconvenient Truth* are truly "focusing events" that bring media and public attention to an issue depending on the current news cycle.

One of the most succinct and rather cynical quotes made in the conclusion of the *L.A. Times* article by journalist Rebecca Winters Keegan is "Do movies make a difference? They can, but often not in the way filmmakers hope. They're not for nonbelievers."⁷⁵ Were we all nonbeliever's at one time through ignorance or misinformation? It seems what may define a "nonbeliever" is one who out of conscious and deliberate choice rejects the validity of a topic presented in a film or a documentary.

There are apocalyptic consequences in global warming and they are illustrated in *An Inconvenient Truth's* demonstration of extreme weather patterns. These realities can

⁷²Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, <http://www.ipcc.ch/index.htm> (April 2012)

⁷³ "Can a Film Change The World?", *Time*, 6, March 2008, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1720100,00.html#ixzz1qKIGimeL>

⁷⁴ *ibid.*

⁷⁵ <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1720100,00.html#ixzz1qKIGimeL>

create a massive disconnect; a desire to return to a state of complacency. Keegan continues, “They don’t make bigots tolerant, Hummer drivers conservationist or burger eater’s vegan. Movies make advocates out of supporters. They change the world, not in wide swaths of multiplexes but one popcorn bucket at a time.”⁷⁶ This statement does have a measure of truth. Although, it can be argued the film did fulfill its intended purpose by introducing a complex scientific notion into the mainstream cultural dialogue.

Measuring the success of documentaries has begun to gain momentum in recent years. The 2011 “Journal of Environmental Economics and Management” published an article entitled “The Al Gore effect: *An Inconvenient Truth* and Voluntary Carbon Offsets” Author Grant D. Jacobsen writes in his conclusion, “From an environmental policy perspective, awareness campaigns offer the potential to improve public welfare by inducing individuals to limit negative externalities associated with their consumption or inducing individuals to contribute directly to a public good.”⁷⁷ By awareness campaigns, Jacobsen is referring to *An Inconvenient Truth* and the media attention surrounding the film’s release and subsequent run. Jacobsen studied the purchase of voluntary carbon offsets in over a thousand United States zip codes surrounding areas of the film’s release. Carbon offsets are defined as appliances, vehicles as well as ecologically minded household items like light bulbs that reduce the carbon foot-print of the individual.

Jacobsen attempts to measure how effectively the public responds to the film’s ecological message in the months immediately following its release and again over a one year period, Jacobsen continues to assert “In certain situations, awareness campaigns may offer a way for policymakers to increase the uptake of goods that reduce carbon

⁷⁶ *ibid.*

⁷⁷ Grant D. Jacobsen, “The Al Gore effect: An Inconvenient Truth and voluntary carbon offsets”, *Journal of Environmental Economics and Management* 61 (2011): 78.

emissions, such as fuel efficient cars or appliances, in a manner that is cheaper than implementing a subsidy or tax-credit program.”⁷⁸ This study does offer solid well-grounded empirical evidence in providing data on *An Inconvenient Truth*'s ability to alter or change an individual's actions. Jacobsen asserts his findings, “This paper provides further evidence that awareness campaigns can influence household behavior.”⁷⁹ The study's research initially reveals an increase in the purchase of carbon offsets; noting the effect did eventually taper off after one year. The important aspect of the Jacobsen study provides empirical data that cause related documentaries do have a measurable effect on behavior.

At first glance, the Jacobsen study might seem rather pessimistic in relationship to long term change. This is not entirely the case as behavior did change in a measurable way and took two years for the habit to fade. This is very hopeful—as these individuals changed their behavior once and will be far more likely to do so again—if provided with other media sources of information and knowledge. The implementation of other carbon offsets creating environmentally supportive measures is much easier to promote to a public that is already aware of the need for such interventions.

There is an amassing reactive force in the media that attempting to spuriously argue that the information in the film is “bad” science. The task of future documentaries and the media is to continue to refute these baseless claims that have no bearing on scientific research that is evident from credible sources.⁸⁰ Around our nation, there is currently a battle being waged over what science teachers can and cannot teach. At the

⁷⁸ *ibid.*

⁷⁹ *ibid.*

⁸⁰ <http://www.globalchange.gov/publications/reports/scientific-assessments/us-impacts/full-report/global-climate-change>

release, of *An Inconvenient Truth* climate deniers (as termed by the media) argued against global warming remaining part of the school curriculum. According to a Huffington Post article entitled “Climate Change Causes Heated Battles for Science Teachers”⁸¹ the January 2012 article asserts that climate change is under attack in much the same way as evolution.

This is a battle of science suppression due to economic and political factors. There is mention in the article of science teachers being discouraged by the administration and parents in allowing *An Inconvenient Truth* to be viewed in the classroom. These efforts to debunk hard evidence may have disastrous results for our future ecology as it is difficult to create change in those who are denied access to this vital information. This is an example of scientific censorship, this serves to prove that the form of the documentary is an important tool to combat suppressive forces in media and education.

Causes attached to noted public figures can be harnessed for significant benefit; *US News and World Report* published an article on the documentary film’s ability to influence change,⁸² *US News* journalist Alex Kingsbury expressed the Gore’s scope of influence, “Gore’s an articulate translator of high scientific ideas, able to explain complexity easy to understand terms. That will be important as complex debates swirl around issues like carbon trading and regulating greenhouse gases.”⁸³ Through competing media sources, global warming issues are challenged from political non-scientific sources.

⁸¹ Huffington Post, “Climate Change Causes Heated Battles For Science Teachers”,(January 18,2012) http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/01/18/climate-change-skeptics-science-teachers_n_1214049.html

⁸² US News and World Report, “Al Gore Wields More Influence Out of Government” 31 March 2009, <http://www.usnews.com/news/energy/articles/2009/03/31/al-gore-wields-more-influence-out-of-government>

⁸³ *ibid.*

An island is a world in miniature; author Carol Farbotko presents the image of sinking countries as a mirror for our world's current climate predicament published in the journal *Asian Pacific Viewpoint* entitled, "Wishful sinking: Disappearing islands, climate refugees and cosmopolitan experimentation" Farbotko interjects the image of the sinking islands as an external source, " In particular, low-lying islands are being described as 'litmus tests' for global climate change by cosmopolitan environmental activists and in the media, a discourse which thus far has operated largely under the radar of critical analysis." According Farbotko Tuvalu gets no voice as to how it is depicted on film. The solution to this would be to convey a message from the Islanders of Tuvalu to the world requesting our collective and individual participation in reversing the effects of global warming.

An Inconvenient Truth performs well in regards to the larger concept of global warming. As noted in this journal article, *An Inconvenient Truth* garnered some degree of criticism from the media representation that it was already "too late" to save Tuvalu as a means to galvanize the rest of the world. Farbotko elaborates further on this topic, "On the other hand, it is a site of 'wishful sinking', in the discourse Al Gore and some other environmentalists who turn their attention towards Tuvalu."⁸⁴ Farbotko's posits an inequality in regards to the tiny island's fate, "Representations of Tuvalu as a laboratory for global climate change are constitutive of an unequal relationship, projecting Tuvalu in terms of cosmopolitan hopes and anxieties."⁸⁵ The larger message should remain constant; we should all struggle collectively as a world community to stave off the sinking of an island nation.

⁸⁴ Carol Farbotko, "Wishful sinking: Disappearing islands, climate refugees and cosmopolitan experimentation", *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 51 (April 2010): 58.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*

At no time is it ever acceptable to trivialize the loss of one's country. It is doubtful the filmmakers of Gore's film felt they had done any disservice to Tuvalu in relation to their film. Yet, it could be posited that this dialogue does divert an argument away from its intended purpose—global warming is everyone's problem and the responsibility of all. Perhaps Farbotko is correct in assuming that only viable and valuable land is a priority to save.

In reading, this article one of the primary messages is the need for sensitivity on this topic. Other films speaking from a global perspective have been produced such as *Island President* (2012); this is encouraging as the President of the Maldives has entered the global conversation on the fate of his own disappearing nation.⁸⁶ It is hard to ignore a sinking nation. Those who are affected perhaps should have some recourse in their lost lands. Farbotko continues to illustrate her position, "The disappearing island becomes expendable to the onward sweep of both climate activism and its opponent, capitalist modernity."⁸⁷ This criticism creates room for a more complex dialogue on the topic as *Climate Refugees* creates a broad narrative on the fate of those who are caught in the hot zones of climate change. Farbotko's argument is for a more democratic treatment of Tuvalu's fate, she articulates, "A new mythology of Tuvalu as the climate canary is produced in the pursuit of other interests: to save Earth or to create newsworthy accounts of the disappearing islands."⁸⁸ The western perspective should not be the only conversation offered to the media Farbotko's argument only serves to prove that global

⁸⁶ *The Island President*, <http://theislandpresident.com/>

⁸⁷ Farbotko, "Wishful sinking: Disappearing islands, climate refugees and cosmopolitan experimentation", 58.

⁸⁸ *ibid.*

warming is a universal issue. Yet, as evidenced by the Copenhagen Initiative⁸⁹ the question is not of how global warming is addressed; it is who will have the greatest voice in deciding all of our collective, ecological fates.

A February 2012 *Forbes* article provides articulate summary on the issue of global warming. Summoning much of the genesis of the debated topic, journalist Warren Myer writes, “When skeptics raise issues about climate models, natural sources of warming and climate feedbacks, advocates of global warming action run back to the left side of the chart and respond that the world is warming and greenhouse gas theory is correct.”⁹⁰ The action of running to the left side of the chart illustrates the political forces at play that muddy the issue of global warming. The *Forbes* article definitely determined that global warming is underway requiring significant measures to stave off the impending results.

Myer reminds the “Forbes” reader that ultimately it is each individual’s best interest to acquire an education on these very important topics, “At best, this is a function of laziness and scientific illiteracy of the media that allow folks to talk past one another; at worst, it is a purposeful bait-and-switch to avoid debate on the tough issues.”⁹¹ As the scientific community implements efforts to inform the public, a true and deep understanding on this topic requires some degree of significant and potentially radical change on the part of the entire world. *An Inconvenient Truth* reminding us that the actual change needed to reverse global warming still remains our collective responsibility.

⁸⁹ Mediators Beyond Borders, <http://www.mediatorsbeyondborders.org/what/mbbcopenhagen.shtml>

⁹⁰ Understanding the Global Warming Debate, “Forbes”, 9 February 2012
<http://www.forbes.com/sites/warrenmeyer/2012/02/09/understanding-the-global-warming-debate/4/>

An Inconvenient Truth initiates the conversation of global warming; while other films like Michael Nash's film *Climate Refugees* illustrate that beyond the importance of good ecology, our own survival and stabilized reality is inescapably tied to finding methods and a means to create resolution on matters of peace and ecology. All are situations of vital importance that supersede our own individualized reality and become issues of global importance.

Nichols delves into the process of creating change via the documentary, "In general, then, we can say documentary is about the effort to convince, persuade, or predispose us to a particular view of the actual world we occupy."⁹² In the areas of climate change, there is a great deal of suppressive effort invested in discrediting advocacy issues of global warming. Multiple polarized sources in the media report on the phenomena leaving some of the public bewildered and conflicted. The need for persistence overrides all other considerations as the tide of public awareness and understanding slowly turn. Evidence continues to be transmitted via the form of the documentary as well as other media sources to support this collective shift in perception.

Currently, complex media relies on multiple sources of information. A single documentary film can no longer combat other competing sources of information that attempt to refute or deny its claim, as in the case of global warming. If we have a war on terror, it can also be posited that we also have a war on truth. Nichols elaborates on this process, "Documentary work does not appeal primarily or exclusively to our aesthetic sensibility: it may entertain or please, but does so in relation to a rhetorical or persuasive effort aimed at the existing social world."⁹³ If we are conduits for culture then

⁹² Nichols, *Introduction to the Documentary*, Kindle edition, 69.

⁹³ *ibid.*

documentaries such as *Climate Refugees* and *An Inconvenient Truth* are attempts to inject into our awareness a more sophisticated grasp on an issue.

Planting a seed to take root into our social consciousness is a process requiring certain ideal conditions. Nichols continues, “Documentary not only activates our aesthetic awareness (unlike a strictly informational or training film), it also activates our social consciousness.”⁹⁴ The process beyond “activating social consciousness” is a consistency of action on the part of the collective of society. This is achieved by the power of documentaries such as *An Inconvenient Truth* and its ability to create a measurable change in habit, as evidenced by the purchase of carbon offsets in the Jacobsen study.

The forward momentum of furthering a cause is underway, and as Nichols expresses, “They use deliberative, judicial, and panegyric rhetoric, among other strategies, to persuade us of their orientation, judgment, or particular argument.” Through metaphor, *An Inconvenient Truth* can successfully utilize imagery such as a frog in boiling water to deliver a very important message about global warming. Gore delivers metaphoric images, and as Nichols posits, “Metaphors help us define or understand things in terms of how they look or feel; they establish a likeness that involves our own physical or experiential encounter with a situation rather than our knowledge of a standard dictionary definition.” We have been bequeathed new visual clues in defining our reality. Images from *An Inconvenient Truth* resonate within our reality; as individuals we begin to equate a boiling frog to what we know and understand about global warming. Once we view a film and interact with another person’s story we gain an alternate viewpoint, and a potential to alter our own.

⁹⁴ *ibid.*

2.3 Climate Refugees: The Human Face of Global Suffering

Climate Refugees is a testament to attempt to depolarize a political position, and transform a global issue into a human situation. An August 12, 2011 New York Times article entitled, “Film on *Climate Refugees* Strikes a Chord” describing the scope of the film and, “By focusing on the consequences of climate change rather than its scientific causes, some experts suggest that Mr. Nash succeeded in circumventing a divisive political debate over global warming and the extent to which human activity contributes to it.”⁹⁵ *Climate Refugees* takes the visual power of the obvious, shifting the argument away from the why of global warming.

In this way, global warming becomes the less charged term of climate change. Nash deftly creates a focus on issues of international security that spawn from changes in weather and the rising tides around the world. The article continues to expand on simple, irrefutable visual images, “Whether it is man or nature causing the climate to change, we still have to deal with islands going under water and people running out of food,”⁹⁶ *Climate Refugees* delivers the territory of the real to the viewer in an authentic and powerful manner. Yet, we are left with one nagging question: is this too much reality for our western psyche? Does this film’s message create a cognitive disconnect by providing too much of the actual problem? Our culture’s struggle between grappling with issues of global warming and ignoring reality will be tested in years to come. As weather extremes continue to increase it will be far more difficult to ignore the issues of global warming.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Film on Climate Refugees Strikes a Chord, “New York Times” 12 August 2011, <http://green.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/08/12/film-on-climate-refugees-strikes-a-chord/>

⁹⁶ *ibid.*

⁹⁷ Justin Gillis, *New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/27/world/study-hints-at-greater-threat-of-extreme-weather.html>

Michael Nash's *Climate Refugees* circumnavigates the globe and places the human face on wholesale suffering caused by global warming. In an ABC interview with journalist Dana Hughes, Nash answers questions pertaining to his film, "A climate refugee is basically someone who is forced to leave their land because they really can no longer survive there, and is forced to move somewhere else."⁹⁸ Nash's film focuses on hot spot areas around the world that suffer from weather extremes such as drought and flooding.

Excess water in one area and too little in another contribute to massive numbers of people migrating in large numbers to other neighboring areas seeking food, shelter and medical care. Nash elaborate on this concept in his interview with ABC, "The film really is about the human face of climate change , and how the intersection of overpopulation, overconsumption, lack of resources and a changing climate are all colliding now within civilization—and what's happening is climatic migration."⁹⁹ This collision is creating conflicts and destabilizing effects along with limited resources in bordering countries.¹⁰⁰

An Inconvenient Truth touches on the topic of refugees in crisis with imagery from Hurricane Katrina. By following the plight of mass migration *Climate Refugees* can be considered a more in-depth conversation on this topic. *Climate Refugees* illustrates in greater detail how issues of international security become complicated as a direct result of extremes in weather (drought and flooding) caused by climate change.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Dana Hughes " Filmmaker Takes on Plight of 'Climate Refugees' at Copenhagen Millions Already Fleeing Climate Change -- and It's Likely to Get Worse" ABC New, Nairobi Kenya, Dec. 13, 2009 <http://abcnews.go.com/Technology/JustOneThing/filmmaker-takes-plight-climate-refugees-copenhagen/story?id=9315405>

⁹⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁰¹ <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/27/world/study-hints-at-greater-threat-of-extreme-weather.html>

Nash uses actual cataclysmic events and sobering numerical statistics to illustrate the validity of his film's argument; "For example, in Bangladesh [if it] got hit with a large cyclone, or like they did in 1997, or if the sea level rises, you'll have 155 million people, Muslims, who are either going to move into China or India."¹⁰² *Climate Refugees* graphically reveals the human domino effects enacted when significant numbers of humanity stream into other available areas; serving to increase the load they place on the multiple relief and peacekeeping agencies around the world. Due to their size, the numbers and statistics are staggering and sobering; as the word global village no longer seems like a benign expression. A new definition of this apocalyptic "village" evokes images of destabilization, a collective reality affecting us all. Nash presents the viewer with a large and inclusive conundrum cognitively connecting us to this potential outcome by demonstrating to us the process by which this destabilization can occur. *Climate Refugees* leave us without the insulated comfort of the western illusion of remote stability. Our well-being is tied and bound with all of humanity. Creating solutions for those on the other side of the world are an imperative mutual investment.

Nash illustrates that even in America along the Alaska coastal regions we are losing land in rising tides. Native populations are being forced to move inland. On a smaller scale, our nation witnesses the creation of 300,000 Katrina refugees¹⁰³ migrating into cities around the United States; straining resources in much the same way as other larger scale migrations have affected other countries.

Climate Refugees uses powerful imagery and statistical data to demonstrate the negative, reactionary processes that are created through a series of interrelated tipping

¹⁰² *ibid.*

¹⁰³ *ibid.*

points; poor farming practices and overgrazing leads to soil erosion and creeping deserts lead to deeper drought conditions. The *Climate Refugees*' footage taken in Africa provides evidence of the actuality of the problem. The film provides authentic documented evidence that the issues of climate refugees are not future possibilities but current realities. Each trickle of an issue becomes a deluge of problems that multiply into a hydra of epic proportions.

The daunting aspect of Nash's film is that it is definitely not filmic hyperbole. How would our world handle 150 to 250 million climate refugees, the projected number expected by 2050? Posed with that question *Climate Refugees* provides ecological solutions along with its massive wake up call. Alternative power such as solar, wind and other "green" sources of energy are some of the ideas cited as potential for creating a revolution.

Climate Refugees uses the tool of authority to gain and maintain the attention of the viewer. Known public figures such as Senator John Kerry and also with those in the government and military speak out on the topic of national security. Narratives play an important role in this film and are used extensively to emphasize the depth of the issue.

This film poses a far different tactic than *An Inconvenient Truth*. *Climate Refugees* uses the argument of competing need and destabilization that results from overstrained resources. This process builds a solid filmic argument. Visual graphics throughout the film superimpose numbers and human suffering is utilized to connect and demonstrate an argument. The long shot establishes the vast implications of the sheer numbers of those who are suffering; it shifts to the next scene by moving into focus, and captures the ravaged faces and stories of those who have lost children and loved ones. Nash's film

encompasses the macrocosm of statistical proof and the microcosm of pain and human loss resulting from the consequences of famine, drought and flood due to climate change.

In *Žižek and the Media*, Paul Taylor writes of society's relationship with the media, as truth and reality diverge in the delivery of factual truth based information creating an odd disconnect with reality. Both *An Inconvenient Truth* and *Climate Refugees* deliver a solid documentarian promise of an informative argument based on a position of solid, authoritative source. Taylor provides some insight into this phenomenon through the use of Žižekian logic, "In Žižek's analysis, media causes are delusive."¹⁰⁴ Our society states a desire for the unvarnished truth. Yet, when that truth is delivered, forces within society reject the evidence. Oppositional forces functioning in the media and the government use divisive methods and means to distract the public. By attacking the proven scientific evidence that has accumulated, results in an unfortunate outcome. Collectedly, as a nation and a world we will suffer the consequences for corporate greed and profit. The most fundamental question to Taylor's argument is what catastrophe will be the focusing event that will bring our culture out of denial and into engagement on the issue of global warming?

Taylor elaborates on this notion, "Their apparent exceptionality disguises how the sense of unease they produce comes from the way we are reminded of something we already know but neurotically tend to avoid admitting to ourselves."¹⁰⁵ Both filmmakers Nash and Guggenheim have delivered as promised, visual proof of a situation in dire need of alteration. This is a hopeful future reality begging to be born—a potential cooperative tipping point that has the possibility to be activated. The opposite is a

¹⁰⁴ Taylor, 19.

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*

potentially dark and dystopian reality too frightening for popular culture to reconcile. In the grand tradition of past civilizations that have fallen from great heights, will society be seduced by the spectacle of media circus as Rome burns?

As a species, it can be argued that we will endure although in some greatly altered fashion. Eventually the signals of climate change will become too prevalent to ignore, and a new reconciliation with our reality will ensue. It can be posited—as a species if pushed to a certain point we can be adaptive; our past up to this juncture has proven this concept. As evidenced by the policy changes enacted after the initial release of books like *Silent Spring*.¹⁰⁶ We have used technology in a haphazard manner and due to our own stubborn and noncompliant nature, our society will most likely continue to experience global discomfort manifesting as earthquakes and severe weather due to global warming.

2.4 Environmental Toxins and the legacy of *Silent Spring* an examination of *Sempre Fi* and *Gasland*

Sempre Fi and *Gasland* are the revelatory narratives of everyman who in the face of government and corporate abuse take up heroic roles and persevere toward the goal of creating change. These films are clear and evocative testaments to their individual causes and their stories are creating seismic shifts across the media mainstream of the American public. The process of environmental awareness has now entered the domain of the average American. *Sempre Fi* exposes Camp Lejeune's contaminated drinking water long ignored by the base for decades revealing the means by these wrongs is now beginning to be addressed.

Sempre Fi has been shown throughout the country and garnered media and public attention setting in motion a transformational effect. Through this process, elected

¹⁰⁶ Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (New York: Mariner Books, 1963)

officials and the United States Marine Corps are no longer able to stonewall those who have been damaged. *Sempre Fi* chronicles one man's crusade to create reform and assist in providing information and benefits to the service men and women and their families who have suffered loss and illness by the polluted drinking water. Crafting a *memento mori* for the unlived lives of those affected by contaminated water was one of the motifs contained within *Sempre Fi*.

Gasland demonstrates the universal notion that we are all downstream. One of the core issues of the film illustrates how once gas and oil rights have been relinquished entire communities are subject to the potential consequences of toxic contamination. *Gasland* is the story of those who have been adversely affected by hydraulic fracturing otherwise known as "fracking". Hydraulic fracturing is created by inserting pressurized fluid in the surrounding rock layer.¹⁰⁷ This is one means by which gas and petroleum can be obtained. The film *Gasland* uncovers the resulting toxic ramifications of a loophole bill, "[passing in] 2005, the Bush/ Cheney Energy Bill exempted natural gas drilling from the Safe Drinking Water Act."¹⁰⁸

This Energy Bill had serious consequences on those who live in areas impacted by hydraulic fracturing. "It exempts companies from disclosing the chemicals used during hydraulic fracturing."¹⁰⁹ These loophole bills circumvent the Environmental Protection Agency's ability to protect the public's drinking water.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷U.S. Geological Survey (USGS): Water Resources and Natural Gas Production from the Marcellus Shale <http://frack.mixplex.com/content/us-geological-survey-usgs-water-resources-and-natural-gas-production-marcellus-shale>

¹⁰⁸ <http://www.gaslandthemovie.com/whats-fracking>

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ <http://frack.mixplex.com/content/us-geological-survey-usgs-water-resources-and-natural-gas-production-marcellus-shale>

The legacy of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* is currently at the half century mark the book was published in 1962 becoming the genesis for the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Ironically this "loophole bill" has become a method to circumvent the protective authority of the EPA and the Clean Water Act. To some who might consider clean water a basic human right, *Gasland* reveals otherwise, "Essentially, the provision took the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) off the job. It is now commonly referred to as the Halliburton Loophole."¹¹¹ Connecting the science to the story is the essential task of this film. *Gasland* has provided evidence that a cause related documentary can be an effective tool to translating complex scientific data to the media and the public.

Historically in the past the form of a book written for the non-scientific layperson could translate vital information to the public resulting in the banning of DDT and the creation of a protective governmental agency. This is no longer a reality; today, to achieve these same results today requires a mechanism that will keep the topic current in the news media cycle. Today, change of this magnitude requires multiple sources and significant and empirical proof to stand out in the crowded media landscape. Films such as these must be able to undertake oppositional forces that attempt to debunk the information they contain. Films such as *Sempre Fi* and *Gasland* are vital in creating and maintaining a powerful argument that is accessible to all.

Josh Fox in an interview with a journalist explains how documentaries are used both at the local and national level of government. Fox is quoted as saying, "The EPA's been screening the film, regional EPA, Federal EPA. They've been screening the film in

¹¹¹ <http://www.gaslandthemovie.com/whats-fracking>

Congress, at the Department of Justice.”¹¹² Films such as *Gasland* create an instant focal point for both lawmakers and the media to refer when they attempt to articulate their cause. Fox’s film provides a platform for complex environmental science that the layman can decipher. Fox in his interview relays the outrage of the government regulators inability to protect the public and the environment.

Fox expands on their blocked efforts, “All of the regulators are shocked, but they also feel very disheartened in that their hands are tied, because they don’t have laws to enforce.”¹¹³ As Fox continue to extrapolate on the dismantling of the very laws that *Silent Spring* inspired, “The Safe Drinking Water Act should pertain to the gas industry. They’re exempt.”¹¹⁴ This is a direct reference to the aforementioned Halliburton loophole. Fox continues, “The Clean Water Act, they’re exempt. The Clean Air Act, they’re exempt. The Superfund law, they’re exempt.”¹¹⁵ All of these basic and fundamental American public-health protection laws, the sweeping reforms that stemmed from *Silent Spring* are now being eroded by sophisticated corporate mechanisms working to obtain exemption through orders of Congress.

This is firm evidence that films such as *Gasland* create a causal cornerstone building foundational support in translating an issue to the public and the media. Fox continues, “the lawyers who enforce our environmental laws on behalf of DOJ [Department of Justice] have said time and time again, we have no laws to enforce. And

¹¹² *City Paper*, <http://citypaper.com/film/em-gasland-em-director-josh-fox-talks-fracking-chemicals-cancer-and-lies-1.1189239>

(April 2012)

¹¹³ *ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*

that is the problem.”¹¹⁶ This is going to take an act of Congress or a presidential executive order or governors’ orders.”¹¹⁷ The fifty years following the publication of *Silent Spring* and its ecological revolution we find issues are in an even greater need of intervention and reform. Written material about ecological matters serves to provide information on ecological issues, although, they tend not to maintain the public focus. Films such as *Gasland* have proven themselves to be compelling enough to maintain the focus of the media and in turn the public.

With *Silent Spring*, one book inspired law changes and a Presidential investigation on the effects of DDT. President Kennedy ordered his Science Advisory Committee to investigate the claims made by Carson. Paul Gilding in his book entitled, *The Great Disruption*, writes of the quick response to Carson’s book, “Within the year, they had returned a report that substantially accepted and agreed with Carson’s findings. Shortly after this, Carson was called to testify before Congress on the issue and was well received.”¹¹⁸ Far from being lauded by Congress as Rachel Carson was fifty years ago, director Josh Fox was arrested by Capitol Police in February 2012 for trying to film a congressional hearing on hydraulic fracturing.¹¹⁹

Josh Fox later released a statement regarding his arrest eloquently summing up the task of the documentarian, “Lastly, in defense of my profession, I will state that many, many Americans get their news from independent documentaries.”¹²⁰ Fox

¹¹⁶ City Paper, <http://citypaper.com/film/em-gasland-em-director-josh-fox-talks-fracking-chemicals-cancer-and-lies-1.1189239>

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹¹⁸ Paul Gilding, *The Great Disruption*, (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2011) Kindle location 277-280.

¹¹⁹ L.A. Times, ‘Gasland’ director Joshua Fox arrested filming House panel, February 01, 2012 <http://articles.latimes.com/2012/feb/01/local/la-me-gs-gasland-director-fox-arrested-filming-house-subcommittee-20120201>

¹²⁰ *Huffington Post*, ‘Gasland’ Journalists Arrested At Hearing By Order Of House Republicans http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/02/01/house-republicans-order-j_n_1246971.html

attempted and was denied a press clearance to attend this meeting. Fox expresses concerns on the notion that independent filmmakers should have the same rights and privileges as the mainstream media.¹²¹

Fox continues to assert the right of the independent journalist, “The Hill should immediately move to make hearings and meetings accessible to independent journalists and not further obstruct the truth from being reported in the vivid and in depth manner that is only achievable through long form documentary filmmaking.”¹²² This is further evidence that the visual power of the documentary is vital in its ability to create a foundation of support on important topics such as environmental reform. Films such as *Gasland* use startling images to illustrate a point. As evidenced, by the home owner who is able to set their sink on fire, due to gas leaks from hydraulic fracturing.¹²³ These images are used in the film to establish a compelling argument for the case of environmental reform and transparency. Films such as *Gasland* become referential filmic messages serving both the media and the public in providing free access of information.

Through the use, of narrative and story in *Sempre Fi* and *Gasland* both convey this process. Aufderheide illustrates the power of story; “A shared convention of most documentaries is the narrative structure.”¹²⁴ *Sempre Fi*'s central figure is Jerry Ensminger's who lost his daughter Janey to leukemia. *Sempre Fi* chronicles his quest to bring her story, and the story of others to the media, demanding a public acknowledgement and protective law changes; along with restitution for those who have been and continue to be affected.

¹²¹ *City Paper*, <http://citypaper.com/film/em-gasland-em-director-josh-fox-talks-fracking-chemicals-cancer-and-lies-1.1189239>

¹²² *ibid.*

¹²³ <http://www.gaslandthemovie.com/whats-fracking>

¹²⁴ Aufderheide, 12.

Sempre Fi is a documentary, relying on the power of the personal narrative to reveal the human impact of toxins. Aufderheide illustrates their parameters, “They are stories, they have beginnings, middles, and ends; they invest viewers in their characters, they take viewers on emotional journeys. They often refer to classic story structure.”¹²⁵ *Sempre Fi* uses emotional journeys to emphasize the poignancy of the individual story juxtaposed against serious data. The combination is significant, and the power of the storyline builds as the film progresses. By the end, the viewer is invested in each individual. *Sempre Fi* at its core is a film about human experience and loss, speaking eloquently to those who have suffered so grievously by an alarming lack of information.

Sempre Fi exposes a history of long term toxic exposure, “Between 1957 – 1987 an estimated 750,000 to 1,000,000 people may have drank and bathed in tap water containing extremely high concentrations of toxic chemicals at Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune in Jacksonville, North Carolina.”¹²⁶ Spanning thirty years of toxic exposure to men, women and children this film exposes what, “[is] believed to be one of the largest water contamination incidents in US history.”¹²⁷ Rachel Libert and Tony Hardmon both co-directors and co-producers bring to the screen the power of the personal to highlight a private tragedy.

Sempre Fi uses the narrative focus of Ensminger following his mission to gain ground on his quest to bring the issue of Camp Lejeune’s toxins to the media and the public. The central theme of the documentary itself is “Don’t give up ground; No person left behind” This tenacity holds focus throughout the film. *Sempre Fi* follows a story narrative following Ensminger’s efforts in his efforts to enact institute laws protecting

¹²⁵ *ibid.*

¹²⁶ <http://semperfialwaysfaithful.com/facts>

¹²⁷ *ibid.*

those who have been affected this has led to the creation and implantation of an important landmark bill: THE JANEY ENSMINGER ACT (HR 1742) the status of this act has been now referred to committee pending its approval into law:

112th Congress, 2011–2012 To amend title 38, United States Code, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a presumption of service connection for illnesses associated with contaminants in the water supply at Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, and to provide health care to family members of veterans who lived at Camp Lejeune while the water was contaminated. Sponsor:Rep. Bradley “Brad” Miller [D-NC13]¹²⁸

Films such as *Sempre Fi* are essential in gaining enough support to create a campaign with enough momentum to propel lawmakers into action.

Sempre Fi at its heart is a tale of lost children and families injured due to toxic contamination. *Silent Spring* also uses the motif of lost children through toxic exposure. The film treads on sacred ground as it conveys a journey to a cemetery near Camp Lejeune to reveal the headstones of babies. This juxtaposition between battling for a cause and revealing profound loss is done in a gentle, yet fierce, manner throughout the film. Through the narration of this film combined with visual evidence elicits a strong sense of empathy and believability with the viewer.

¹²⁸H.R. 1742: Janey Ensminger Act, <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/112/hr1742>

Through the process of making and showing *Sempre Fi*, significant support was gathered. The “S.277, the Caring for Camp Lejeune Veterans Act of 2011”¹²⁹ is pending. After four decades of exposure, these laws can provide some adequate degree of restitution.

Films such as *Sempre Fi* and *Gasland* attempt to inject the power of awareness into the mainstream American zeitgeist. *Sempre Fi* documents the Department of Defense’s ability to circumvent the authority of the EPA.¹³⁰ The pending laws do not repair all of the damage they do address some of the ongoing issues. Although, in the case of *Sempre Fi*, laws are pending that will reverse this trend and establish a hopeful precedent. Documentaries provide a point of reference in ongoing ecological issues in films such as *Gasland* and *Sempre Fi* the media is provided with a source of information as well as the poignancy of the individual story to present to the public in a sound-bite.

In an interview with journalist Marcia Yerman co-director and co-producer, Rachel Libert provides her own discoveries in the making of *Sempre Fi*, “Ensminger’s search for the truth rippled out into an examination beyond water contamination and illness. Libert expresses how far the boundaries of the documentary can extend, “Our first question was, ‘What can we do?’ Film is a very powerful tool to reach people you wouldn’t normally reach. It has the ability to do that. It’s a pathway to action.”¹³¹ This is a film that has extended beyond the film festival circuit and entered VFW halls and town halls of the nation. Those who have been impacted have galvanized larger segments of the public on issues of environmental awareness and human health.

¹²⁹ http://www.opencongress.org/contact_congress_letters/33204-S-277-Caring-for-Camp-Lejeune-Veterans-Act-of-2011

¹³⁰ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/marcia-g-yerman/camp-lejeune-contamination-_b_939628.html

¹³¹ *ibid.*

Social media is used effectively in this film's virtual "take action link", urging those who are interested to contact their local and state representative to support the pending legislation.¹³² *Sempre Fi* is creating new benchmarks on the process to promote and incite public action. Due in part to the media attention of *Sempre Fi*, the United States Marine Corps is now going about the task of informing all past and present military as well as their families about the toxic water supply.

Both *Sempre Fi* and *Gasland* can be compared to *Silent Spring's* example in demonstrating the powerful effects of toxins on the natural environment and their consequence on humans who have been subjected to their devastating effects. Carson writes of modern man's disconnect with his natural world, "Intoxicated with a sense of his own power," she wrote, "[mankind] seems to be going farther and farther into more experiments for the destruction of himself and his world." DDT was one of the primary concerns for Carson a marine biologist and eloquent and persuasive writer. Carson's work had a catalyzing effect in her time by inspiring an environmental revolution.

Carson predicted a growing division between humankind's ability to progress and reconciliation and need to maintain a considerate fidelity towards the preservation of our environment. The preface of her book articulates the issue of uninhibited advancement, "Technology, she feared, was moving on a faster trajectory than mankind's sense of moral responsibility."¹³³ Each of these films can relate to *Silent Spring's* ability to invoke an eloquent cry for government accountability and the visual representation of our post-modern struggle with ongoing issues of accountability and full disclosure.

¹³² <http://semperfialwaysfaithful.com/facts>

¹³³ Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (New York: Mariner Books, 1963), xiv.

In fact, it could be argued that both *Gasland* and *Sempre Fi* occupy a larger metaphor for our own American reconciliation with our natural world. Our society simultaneously longs to return to nature and yet conversely continues to be at war with our natural environment. Our Nation passes laws to protect the environment and the public, then, conversely circumvents those very same laws to protect the interest of corporations. These two competing concepts create cognitive dissonance within our society.

We must find a way to understand our place within the natural order and rationally and emotionally grasp how much damage we are doing to our ecosystem. Brigitte Nerlich in her journal article entitled “Tracking the fate of the metaphor silent spring in British environmental discourse: Towards an evolutionary ecology of metaphor,” she posits, “Over four decades [now five] the book *Silent Spring* has thus permeated public consciousness and the image of a *Silent Spring* has been used repeatedly as a rhetorical resource and a mine for metaphors and images in debates about the impact of science on society and on the environment.”¹³⁴ It can be argued that we have yet to have reconciled ourselves with our own industrial past.

We continue to trudge forward to our next technological advancement without first dealing with previous residual contamination to our ecology. We make progress as evidenced by the ecological reforms inspired by *Silent Spring* and then create laws to circumvent those very same protective measures.

¹³⁴ Brigitte Nerlich, “Tracking the fate of the metaphor *Silent Spring* in British environmental discourse: Towards an evolutionary ecology of metaphor” <http://www.metaphorik.de/04/nerlich.pdf> 121.

Rachel Carson uses Robert Frost's familiar poem to illustrate humanities future position, "We stand now where two roads diverge."¹³⁵ In the near future, the metaphorical fork will no longer be offered, leaving us with dystopian vistas. This lack of adaptability stems from a naive belief that our government will without our participation create regulatory laws that will protect us from ourselves. Collectively it is important that our society take heed of Rachel Carson predictions and take action on behalf of our world.

¹³⁵ Carson, *Silent Spring*, Kindle Location 3882-3889.

Chapter 3: Creating Connections

When we create meaningful connections, our individual lives will become useful contributions to whole. We have the capacity to persuade, inform, and relay valuable and vital information to others about the causes and missions we perceive as important. In watching documentary film we as the viewer are, first the passive observer; and once engaged with a topic we have a vast number of choices are available to us. The viewer can choose to continue the process of gestational awareness translating that knowledge into action adding their efforts to the whole.

Once becoming aware of the effects of culture and media in our lives we can choose to become discerning critics to a greater end, joining the world of the “Real” as posited by theorist Taylor who conveys, “The Real is what lies beyond the immediate reach of language. It is capitalized to distinguish it from the conventional notion of reality, which is used as a catch-all phrase for ‘everything we consciously experience’.”¹³⁶ Documentaries inform us and hopefully engage our empathy and if all conditions are right cause us to act or think differently. Taylor continues to illustrate on the realm of actual reality, “The Real cannot be grasped, it cannot be measure. It is experienced only through its ‘effects’ and ‘affects’.”¹³⁷ Documentary film attempts to influence our choices by providing us with information and education on a topic. As an individual, we learn that we are conduits of incoming and outgoing information. Once we begin to learn how our thinking is influenced from these sources we are able to become more cognizant and deliberate in our actions. Mindfulness is always the goal of an informed society to obtain this reality requires a shift from previous states apathy and simplistic reactions.

¹³⁶ Taylor, *Žižek and the Media*, 64.

¹³⁷ *ibid.*

Jill Godmilow in her journal article entitled “Kill the Documentary as We Know It” provides sage advice to filmmakers: “Here’s the big question: how do we know what we ‘know’?”¹³⁸ We are creatures of spirit and form and at times rational intellect. Understanding and interacting through the domain of the documentary provides a depth of experience that is unique to film. Asking the difficult questions and Godmilow expresses, “Philosophers, psychologists, and cultural critics have many answers to this question, but classical documentary always answers it this way: if you see it with your own eyes, hear it with your own ears, you can understand it, and thus know something.”¹³⁹ The films *The End of the Line*, *Sempre Fi* and *Climate Refugees* fulfill this role, and as Godmilow reveals, “And you can know it especially if you have seen it in a quasi-scientific, sober form, like the documentary film.”¹⁴⁰ Through the senses of sight and sound we gain entrance into another’s reality and as Godmilow reveals, “The documentary film implicitly speaks of the world as knowable, because it is observable. And of course if it is observable, it is filmable. So if I show it to you in my film that is enough.”¹⁴¹ We live in a world begging for our critical analysis and interactive participation.

The messages contained within *Silent Spring* echo forward in films such as *Sempre Fi* and *Gasland*. *Silent Spring* once brought awareness to the public on the dangers of the toxins found in the modern chemical industry. This activism initiated the birth of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Films such as *Sempre Fi* now perform these functions as Cowie terms, “The documentary is an embodied storytelling

¹³⁸ Jill Godmilow, “Kill the Documentary as We Know It”, *Journal of Film and Video* 54(Summer/Fall, 2002): 3.

¹³⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁴¹ *ibid.*

that, while narrativizing of reality in images and sounds, engages us with the actions and feelings of social actors, like characters in fiction.”¹⁴² *Sempre Fi* and *Gasland* are both vehicles for the everyman saga. The single voice is magnified in the documentary through both narrative and story.

Gaining new insight through the process of viewing documentaries is a first step removing ourselves from the Platonic cave of illusions. We now understand that fish are not in endless supply. Global warming is not a simplistic issue and has far reaching human consequences, in that people are dispossessed. Toxins in our environment can and do shatter lives and create far reaching ramifications. Nichols articulates on this process, “[at] the very least we can say that rhetoric is an indispensable ally in those situations where we must speak about issues for which widespread agreement does not exist.”¹⁴³ Specifically documentary occupies the role of creating a mediated transformational effect on a cause or a topic; adding to our knowledge of a situation. Rhetoric empowers the documentary with the ability to persuade, motivate and activate the viewer.

Cowie illustrates the process of how information is obtained and organized in both a rational and emotional manner, “What is required is a documentary narration by which the threads of causality can be revealed so that actions become motivated and the contingent of reality and the unknowableness of the unknown [is] organized into knowledge.”¹⁴⁴ Establishing an argument and defending a position documentary film has a specific and definitive role in creating change within the parameters of society. *Climate Refugees* and its mass migration of humanity is a visual example of this process. The

¹⁴² Cowie, *Recording Reality, Desiring The Real*, 3.

¹⁴³ Nichols, *Introduction To the Documentary*, 69.

¹⁴⁴ Cowie, *Recording Reality, Desiring The Real*, 38.

viewer is persuaded by the visual proof of film and narrative combined with the statistical data models.

Our worldview through the viewing of a film can be altered. Yet, conversely we must translate that shift of viewpoint into intent and action. Nichols illustrates the gestational first step, “Put differently, if an issue has not yet been definitively decided, or if agreement cannot be definitively achieved, documentary film is one important means for disposing us to see that issue from a specific perspective”¹⁴⁵ We are now newly disposed to think and act differently. The complex mechanisms within our society await our individualized choices.

In the case of *An Inconvenient Truth*, it could be argued that it was performing its intended task with extreme success if the reactionary suppressive campaigns to debunk the science behind global warming. So in effect a film such as *An Inconvenient Truth* could be measured by its opposite reactionary measures rallied to discredit and derail the film’s message. It can also be posited that no other documentary film has received this equal level of debate from corporate or political sources.

Nichols expands on the notion of how society responds to film collectively, “Documentary film as an organized sequence of sounds and images constructs metaphors that assign or infer, affirm or contest values that surround social practices about which we as a society remain divided.”¹⁴⁶ We become aware and in turn react to the proven validity of global warming the severity of environmental toxins or the realities of sustainable fisheries. As a social collective, we use both our own private media and the media at large we have entered the conversation and by our participation we have created

¹⁴⁵ Nichols, *Introduction To The Documentary Film*, 69.

¹⁴⁶ *ibid*, 75.

a causal effect in the outcome. As evidenced by *Sempre Fi*, *An Inconvenient Truth* and *The End of the Line* all of these films have been instrumental in the passage of laws.¹⁴⁷

Sheila Bernard provides us with a balanced viewpoint on the role of the documentary, “Documentary filmmakers, increasingly, offer a powerful addition to or contradiction of mainstream media. Trust your audience and give them the appropriate evidence, even—or perhaps especially—when it allows room for doubt.”¹⁴⁸ Today’s reality is complex, and our future choices will be determined by sources that stream to us from competing directions. The digital age has provided too much in the way of ease and instant access of information. We have knowledge of the ages at our fingertips. As informed individuals, we battle the inconsequential and the unimportant; we must use our discernment to determine both as individuals and as a society the best and most productive course of action.

The documentary is one format that can solidify and enhance an argument. When a cause-based documentary is viewed, connections are created with the viewer, there is a heightened potential for a cascade of resulting actions and reactions relating to the cause in question. Fifty years ago, a single book could initiate an ecological revolution as in the case of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*. To shift the thinking of the public today, currently requires coordinated and sophisticated media mechanisms—documentary film is a part of this vital role. Today those who oppose ecological safety measure have vast and complex resources and methods to cloud or divert the public’s attention.

The visual impact of a film is powerful and significant; studies have proven that consumers can be influenced by viewing a documentary and can and will change habits

¹⁴⁷ <http://endoftheline.com/>

¹⁴⁸ Sheila Bernard, *Documentary Storytelling*, (Oxford: Focal Press, 2007), Kindle Edition 10.

as evidenced by the Jacobsen study and consumers have also been informed they can learn to ask right questions when they buy fish. The local and state politicians will no longer have uninformed constituents. The politicians will learn through pressure both on local and state level that the public has become aware and informed requesting definitive answers to their questions; be it on topics of contaminated wells or the need to implement positive measures to preserve the climate. From this evidence, we can determine that the documentary is one of the most significant sources of truth and knowledge available to us.

As our resources continue to be strained, oil and natural gas reserves will continue to be an area in which the form of the documentary will deliver a message to the public. Loophole laws circumvention of environmental protective bills has damaged both humans and the land; as Josh Fox in *Gasland* has relayed. The desecration of our water table is at risk and communities will no longer be able to obtain water from their wells, feed their crops or water their livestock. Documentary film is a medium that reveals emotional stories of loss, alongside of scientific evidence. This process provides authority and conviction to the viewer.

Without the documentarian, who else will tell the stories of those who have been impacted beyond the slick journalistic sound bite? Documentary film by portraying a truth and creating a filmic argument uses the human voice to convey a message. The filmmaker of *Gasland* continues his efforts in educating the public as he/she is currently filming *Gasland 2* his new focal point western Pennsylvania and its huge reserves of natural gas. Perhaps with the first film's visual evidence and the stories of those affected new laws will be created protect all of us. The battles for the hearts and minds of the

public are in balance as filmmakers' plays a significant role in providing information and knowledge.

With rapid travel and instantaneous methods of communication, we live in a world that is ever more interconnected. Economies and ecologies are dependent on each other as evidenced by *The End of the Line* and *Climate Refugees* and most significantly *An Inconvenient Truth*. Fritojof Capra in his book *The Web of Life: A new Scientific Understanding of Living Systems* articulates this concept, "As the diversity and richness of our human relationship increased, our humanity—our language, art, thought, and culture—unfolded accordingly."¹⁴⁹ Our inner reality expands while we ignore our own ecology to our own peril as in the case of *Sempre Fi* and *Gasland*. One of the most significant messages that can be derived from these films: how essential it is to combine a spiritual reverence and a scientific diligence in caring for our earth.

Capra continues to illustrate this divide, "At the same time we also developed the ability of abstract thinking, of bringing forth an inner world of concepts, objects, and images of ourselves."¹⁵⁰ We remain subject to the same interconnectedness ties us to every other living thing on this planet. Through documentaries, we begin to discover ourselves as a part of a greater whole. Capra reveals to us that we must reintegrate with our ecology: "Gradually, as this inner world, became even more diverse and complex we begin to lose touch with nature and become even more fragmented personalities."¹⁵¹ Around us, the media delivers competing messages and information adding to this fragmentation. Through the documentary, we are able to create space if only for a short

¹⁴⁹ Fritjof Capra, *The Web of Life: A new Scientific Understanding of Living Systems*, (New York: Random House, 1996), 294.

¹⁵⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁵¹ *ibid.*

span of time and contemplate things beyond our own reality. This process brings us back into connection to a greater participation with our natural world. We begin to understand that we have been and always will be part of a complex ecological system that is subject to myriad number of consequences.

The salvation of our earth and of ourselves is left to a small number of committed and tenacious documentarians who deliver to us multiple messages conveying a deep need for change on a myriad number of topics. Documentary filmmakers are the truth filters of our society; through film they provide the human face alongside the power of story. Documentarians are on the frontlines, reporting back to us on issues of great need; they will continue to support our right to know what we are up against, be it global warming, responsible marine stewardship or polluted drinking water from hydraulic fracturing. The documentary is a vehicle for change serving us by facilitating our hopeful return to our own fidelity of being.

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