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ABSTRACT
Grierson defined documentary as ‘the creative treatment of actuality’. The aim of this article is to add to existing discussions of this phrase. Attention will be given to documentary as art, and the Griersonian notion of ‘artist’. An examination of the relationship between art, creativity and documentary production and consumption will rationalize and reconceptualize creativity for documentary practice. This reconceptualization of documentary creativity will result from three theoretical perspectives. First, the systems model of creativity presents a holistic view of the creative documentary system at work. Next, the staged creative process theories will be paralleled to the documentary production process. The final theory presents group creativity which accounts for collaborative documentary work. In concluding, a brief discussion on the appropriateness of creativity theories for documentary practice will be presented.

KEYWORDS
documentary creative practitioner art creative process documentary production
INTRODUCTION

The phrase ‘the creative treatment of actuality’ has become a standard definition of documentary.1 The axiom is most often used without attribution and has become so entrenched in documentary discourse that the origins of the quote have become irrelevant (Grierson 1933: 7–9). But for research accuracy, provided below is the original quote, written to focus on the desirable qualities of a documentary producer.

Documentary, or the creative treatment of actuality, is a new art with no such background in the story and the stage as the studio product so glibly possesses. (Grierson 1933: 8)

However, Grierson never fully explained the meaning of the phrase ‘the creative treatment of actuality’ and his omission has led to significant discussion from within the area/field of documentary studies (Austin and de Jong 2008: 284; Barsam 1992: 89; Beattie 2003: 53; Braddeley 1970: 250; Corner 1996: 13; Guynn 1990: 21; Hardy 1979; Montagu 1964: 281; Nichols 2001: 39; Rabiger 1998: 3; Rosen 1993: 76; Winston 1995). Academic explanations of the terms ‘treatment’ and ‘actuality’ seem to be easily achieved within the documentary discourse (Winston 1995) but the explanations and interpretations of the meaning of ‘creative’ are, and continue to be, problematic. Common misunderstandings of the notion of ‘creativity’ and its artistic connotations are prevalent within the documentary and film-making communities. Nonetheless, documentary literature continues to draw on the writings of Grierson and his disciples, who situate the documentary product as ‘art’, thus suggesting that the person making the documentary is an ‘artist’. Given this emphasis, an understanding of what ‘art’ is and how an ‘artist’ creates a product which is acknowledged as being creative is fundamental for future understandings of collaborative and creative documentary practice.

Winston provides one in-depth interpretation of ‘the creative treatment of actuality’:

The application of the adjective ‘documentary’ to film [and use of ‘documentary’ as a noun meaning a documentary film] most appositely flags the fact that, despite claims to artistic legitimacy [‘creativity’] and dramatic structuring [‘treatment’], when dealing with this film form we are essentially and most critically in the realm of evidence and witness [‘actuality’][sic]. (Winston 1995: 10)

Interpreting creativity – as being artistically legitimate – automatically draws on the popular understanding of ‘creativity’, where creativity is perceived as allowing humans ‘the ability to act spontaneously, to freely form ends and choose between means’ (Petrie 1991: 1). The assumption here is that art and creativity are equivalent when in fact recent research into creativity shows that this may be too simplistic and misleading.

‘Creativity’ and ‘Art’ are terms that popular culture has coupled with the Romantic ideal but, as Margaret Boden points out, this is problematic since ‘romanticism provides no understanding of creativity’ (Boden 2004: 15). From this perspective, Romantic understandings of ‘Art’ perpetuate a belief that artists work through mysterious processes. This perception allows the
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artist to be viewed as a ‘divinely inspired creator’ (Zolberg 1990: 116) or ‘quasi-neurotic artists who see their own creative activity as fundamentally self-expressive’ (McIntyre 2008b: 1). However, one of the flaws of the Romantic ideal is that ‘art objects are perceived in terms of the mind of their “creator” rather than material objects in their own right’ (Petrie 1991: 4). Those who have researched creativity empirically and theorized about what constitutes this phenomenon go to great lengths to explain the distinction between a practitioner’s creative process and the product, which is the end result of creative practice (Bailin 1988: 61–86; Csikszentmihalyi 1995, 1999; McIntyre 2003: 2; Pope 2005: 38; Sawyer 2006). Romanticism commonly fails to distinguish between a creative art product and an individual’s creative process, and it also fails to perceive creativity as a rationally accessible phenomenon, instead perpetuating the myth that creativity is a trait that is only found in individual artists. However, many psychologists (e.g. Sternberg 1999) and sociologists (e.g. Wolff 1981) reject Romantic notions of Art and argue that ‘art’, rather than being the product of gifted individuals in touch with their muse is, in fact, a social product. This thought is clearly expressed by Becker, who argues that:

All artistic work, like all human activity, involves the joint activity of a number, often a large number, of people [. . .] The forms of cooperation may be ephemeral, but often become more or less routine, producing patterns of collective activity we can call an art world. The existence of art worlds, as well as the way their existence affects both the production and consumption of art works, suggest a sociological approach to the arts.

(Becker 1982: 1)

By accepting the sociological premise that collective activities create worlds that produce and consume art, it becomes necessary to leave behind research activities that focus solely on attempts to define creativity through investigations focused on the individual artistic genius. Creativity psychologists support this position, in that they too have struggled to provide a conclusive set of determinants that describe the qualities of a creative individual (Nickerson in Sternberg 1999: 392–430). In addition to these explanations, studies of gifted and talented geniuses have also been unable to provide acceptable explanations of individual acts of creativity (Albert and Runco 1999; Weisberg 1993). Instead the multiple factors that contribute to creativity are implicitly contained within Aristotle’s early claim that:

whatever comes to be is generated by the agency of something, out of something, and comes to be something.

(Aristotle 1960: 142)

The idea that creativity is a broad human characteristic derived from a multiple set of factors in operation, and is found in all manner of human endeavours, is now a tenet of the research literature (Bailin 1988; Boden 2004; Dacey and Lennon 1998; Hennessey and Amabile 2010; Paulus and Nijstad 2003; Sawyer 2006; Sternberg 1999; Weisberg 1993, 2006). In the light of this research it would be difficult to argue, therefore, that creativity is solely about Art defined in the Romantic sense. As Keith Sawyer (2006) argues Art, like the activities of science and business, forms one subset of the phenomenon of creativity.
CRITIQUES OF GRIERSON’S WORK

In order to expose some of the conflations of ‘art’ and ‘creativity’ that exist within the way the domain of documentary work has been conceptualized, it becomes necessary to review some of Grierson’s writings (1946: 79–96);

My separate claim for documentary is simply that in its use of the living article, there is also an opportunity to perform creative work. I mean that the choice of the documentary medium is as gravely distinct a choice as the choice of poetry instead of fiction. Dealing with different material, it is, or should be, dealing with it to different aesthetic issues from those of the studio. (Grierson 1946: 80)

Grierson’s writings exhibit his implicit understanding of the fundamental choices and considerations that a documentary film-maker engages in when conceiving and realizing a documentary. He describes processes and choices faced by the practitioner as they ‘pass from the plain [or fancy] descriptions of natural material, to arrangements, rearrangements, and creative shapings of it’ [sic] (1946: 79), thus allowing the practitioner to create documentary scenes which become ‘better guides to screen interpretations of the modern world’ (1946: 80).

Clearly, Grierson advocates a holistic approach to the production of a creative documentary work, where choices made by documentarians are shaped by the production context, the medium and the story. There is little evidence in Grierson’s writings to suggest that he endorsed the documentarian as an artist whose creative process was irrational, mystical and unexplainable. Grierson’s frequent use of the terms ‘art’ and ‘artist’ to describe what the documentarian is and does was appropriate language for that time. Grierson’s rational approach to documentary production is therefore detailed in his explanations of the social film-making process as Grierson and his production house experienced it. The issue being teased out here is not the Griersonian notion of ‘artist’, but the current interpretation of ‘art’, and the artificial connection to creativity that continues to be problematic for documentary commentators today.

In Claiming the Real (1995), Winston argues that there is an obvious contradiction within the phrase ‘creative treatment of actuality’ because ‘the supposition that any “actuality” left after “creative treatment” can now be seen as being at best naïve and at worst a mark of duplicity’ (Winston 1995: 11). Documentarian John Corner critiques Winston’s point and argues that Winston is inclined to make assumptions about how the “creative treatment” necessarily collapses the documentary project into “fiction”’ (Corner 1996: 18). Corner’s counter argument that non-fiction screen works can treat content creatively without jeopardizing the actuality or truth of the content is valid and has been echoed by Bruzzi who argues that:

the fundamental preoccupation is with ‘creativity’ being ascribed to ‘documentary’, but only because creativity is taken, very rigidly, to denote anything that detracts from the document, the truth, the evidence at the heart of the non-fiction film. (2006: 76)

Bruzzi asserts that documentary truth needs to acknowledge the constructed authorship of the documentary form (2006: 163). These arguments expose some of the issues surrounding documentary truth from a research
perspective and they are underpinned by unresolvable epistemological and ontological arguments on subjectivity, objectivity and truth. Instead, the authors feel that the heart of the issue, being interrogated in this article, resides with interpretations of what constitutes the term ‘art’ and, more importantly, what constitutes the term ‘creativity’. When art and creativity are perceived using a mysterious and unexplainable approach that draws on mystical, secretive and almost deceitful, approaches to the creative treatment that are not transparent, as Winston has suggested, then it become obvious that approaching creative documentary production from this position would be problematic. Which is why it is unfortunate that, in summing up, Winston accepts that the only way to interpret the Griersonian notion of artist and creativity is from the Romantic perspective.

I have allowed Grierson’s concept of creativity to keep its place: but I have already indicated that, under the influence of cinema verite, there have been moves to renegotiate the function of the documentarist away from the model of the Griersonian artist. In a sense this is the ultimate commitment for the post-Griersonian documentarist, to transform oneself from creator into facilitator. (Winston 1995: 258)

Winston’s attack on Grierson’s notion of the artist, and consequently Grierson’s understanding of creativity, is, as we have argued, misinformed. Clearly, Winston wants to embrace an approach to documentary creativity and the documentary artist that can accommodate transparent, contextual and collaborative documentary production approaches like cinema verite. But in order to move to this position it becomes imperative that documentarians make the disconnect between art, artist and creativity as they are understood from within Romanticism. To pursue this idea a little further a limited literature review of screen-based texts has revealed inconsistent usages of the terms creativity, creative, and creative process. Each of the 14 texts reviewed discussed creativity with varying subtitles; some confuse creative product with creative process but most pursue creativity from a highly Romantic perspective. In setting out this position it should be stated that this article is not contesting the validity of the information reviewed in these documentary and screen production texts. It is, however, pointing out that these texts rarely define or explain creativity in line with current research-based theoretical perspectives on creativity. There are, however, a few exceptions worth noting as the explanations of documentary and creativity draw on a rational foundation instead of a Romantic one.

For example, Bruzzi presents a pragmatic explanation that draws attention to the process of documentary production while the rational approach also exists in the work of the documentary scholar Mike Wayne, who explains creativity through the renaissance craftworker model. He suggests that during the renaissance period ‘the concept of authorial expression, as we understand it today, simply did not exist’ (Wayne 1997: 14). This approach removes the notion that the craftworker was engaged in a magical or mysterious process. Similar arguments specifically created to support the idea of the social production of art also reject the concept of authorial dominance. Janet Wolff has argued that:

The author as fixed, uniform and unconstituted creative source has indeed died […] But the author, now understood as constituted in language, ideology, and social relations, retains a central relevance, both in
relation to the meaning of the text [the author being the first person to fix meaning, which will of course subsequently be subject to redefinition and fixing by all future readers], and in the context of the sociological understanding of literature [sic] (Wolff 1981: 136).

If artists and art can be seen in rational terms such as these, then it becomes possible to embrace the social factors that are at work on the author, artist or documentary film-makers who collaborate through cinema verite methods. Indeed it is the rational approach to art and creativity, not the Romantic one that makes it possible to accept Grierson’s notion of documentary film-makers as creative artists.

To lend support to this idea, one of Grierson’s contemporaries Ivor Montagu, explained how a documentary film-maker’s production process can be conceived of as a rational one:

In a sense every art work is the creative treatment of actuality. Actuality is the raw material that, as experience, must pass through the consciousness of the creative artist [or group] to become transformed by labour and in accordance with technical and aesthetic laws into the art product. Presumably Grierson is referring not to actuality in that sense but to actuality in the sense that the raw material which the documentary film worker composes is the cinematographic record of visual aspects of reality. (Montagu 1964: 281)

This description, and the distinctions it is making, provides an explanation that is in line with the rational approach to creativity even though it makes use of terms ‘creative artist’ and ‘art work’. What it also specifically does is point to the notion of ‘actuality’ as the raw material that is manipulated, not simply as some bearer of objective truth that cannot be tampered with especially by Romantic artists who are bound to, as artists, fictionalize it and change its significance as ‘truth’.

Similarly the term ‘artistic creativity’ can be interpreted in the post-Romantic age from an aesthetic approach or from a communication perspective. The communication perspective argues that:

[... ] art relies on a working communication being reached between artist and audience in order to succeed. Communication is an activity in which both artist and spectator/reader/listener actively participate. (Williams in Petrie 1991: 6–7)

The aesthetic approach, on the other hand, presents the artist as mediator who [... ] mediates between the problems he confronts as given and the solution as it potentially inheres in his material. If a tool can be called an extension of the human hand, then the artist is an extension of a tool that is engaged in making possible the transition from potentially to actuality. (Adorno in Petrie 1991: 8)

While both these descriptions of art activity eschew Romanticism, they allow for filmic creativity to be defined ‘as essentially an artistic/cultural process which is structured by material constraints’ (Petrie 1991: 1). If Winston had
adopted this understanding of creativity in relation to documentary film-making practice, then it would have been possible to interpret the Griersonian notion of ‘artist’ and ‘art’ without reservation. Petrie’s definition of creativity actually comes from a fiction film study, titled *Creativity and Constraint in the British Film Industry* (1991). The main reason for using this particular definition of creativity in relation to documentary was because, theoretically, there *should be no* difference between the creative film-making process for fiction or non-fiction films. Ostensibly, it is the approach to the content that differs, in that both fiction and non-fiction films have conventions, rules, patterns and processes that are used to create and critique the content, that has been developed over decades and that resides in the practices of the film-makers and the attitudes of audiences. As has been critically discussed, in both fiction and non-fiction film literature these conventions and techniques sometimes overlap, as is the case with Docudramas (Rosenthal 1995). In fact it can be argued that it is the film-maker’s ethical approach to either the fictional or non-fiction film conventions and their interpretations of them that constitutes creativity for those forms. For documentary, it is about the documentary film-maker’s ability to ethically, truthfully and skilfully capture and record a version of actuality on screen and use that to construct a narrative screen-based reality. As a cultural production study of documentary asserts:

> to distinguish and claim a separate space for documentary production practice seems essential, without ending up at the other end of the continuum where one reduces documentary simply to a ‘mode of production’ or digs a post modern hole in which all texts become fictional. (de Jong 2008: 147)

For fictional film-making, the process is essentially about how the elements of story, structure, character and conflict provide the framework and limitations of what is possible as they are dramatically combined to tell a fictional story. Well-known screenwriter Robert McKee explains the creative processes (1999: 117–18) and the significance of creative limitations by asserting that ‘limitation is vital [. . .] The constraint that setting imposes on story design doesn’t inhibit creativity: it inspires it’ (1999: 71). The structures an agent works within provide those limitations but those structures also provide the frame of choice. They do not dictate it. Screen-writing author Syd Field explains creative decision-making in a similar way. He states, ‘choice and responsibility – these words will be a familiar refrain throughout this book. Every creative decision must be made by choice not necessity’ (Field 1982: 15). What is important to note here is that, even though McKee and Field are well-known feature film screenwriters, they are not explaining creativity in relation to fictitious worlds and imagination, they are talking about a screenwriter’s ability to creatively work within the rules and conventions of storytelling, thus acknowledging the screenwriters ability to demonstrate their creativity through screenwriting conventions. This can of course be extended to include a fictional film-maker’s abilities, and by extension a documentary film-maker’s abilities, that need to adhere to the conventions of the genre, style and form of the film. As Bailin asserts ‘one difference between creative and uncreative performances relates to having a real understanding of the discipline in which one is engaged’ (Bailin 1988: 106). From this perspective, a documentary film-maker’s ability to exhibit their masterful understanding of the form, format and medium they are working within *is* creativity.
In some senses this could be seen to be similar to notions of what constitutes authorship. Authorship, according to Wayne, has such a high status in western cultures ‘[i]t is seen as a mark of value in cultural artefacts if an author can be clearly discerned’ (1997: 17). But the notion of authorial voice in a document is sometimes seen to jeopardize the truth claims in the documentary. However, also problematic for documentary is Auteur theory. Bruzzi acknowledges that the idea of a documentary auteur has in the past been challenging for documentary scholarship because it ‘disrupts the non-fiction film’s supposed allegiance to transparency and truthfulness’ (2006: 163). But in acknowledging this, Bruzzi presents a more refreshing and holistic argument that rests on a simple premise ‘that documentary, like fiction is authored’ (2006: 163). From this position it is relatively easy to move forward, to accept that the documentary practitioner is indeed intervening in the actuality he/she is capturing through the very act of filming events or interviews, regardless of whether the documentary film-maker, for example, is in a performative documentary or is making a cinema verite style of film. What any film-maker is doing regardless of the films fictional or non-fiction form is capturing, shaping, manipulating and constructing through the selection process defined by the film’s media form, format or genre and production context.

What is important to accept is the idea that the documentary film-maker/practitioner constructs the documentary from its inception through to its completion. To acknowledge the documentary film-maker/practitioner’s ability to participate in the social construction of reality brings a whole new meaning to the phrase ‘the creative treatment of actuality’. In fact it can be seen that the ‘creative treatment’ they engage in is derived from the practitioner’s understanding and ability to deliberately construct and manipulate the ‘actuality’ that is unfolding. The essence of this point is that when a documentary practitioner possesses an understanding of their practice that acknowledges these levels of social construction and manipulation, then mastery level skill, which is necessary to demonstrate certain creative abilities, should be close to being achieved.

Theoretically, it can be argued that the film-maker/practitioner is situated in a context where their actions have an immediate effect on what they are doing, which further shapes the contextual impact of those actions. Therefore, social, political and cultural forces are operating on the film-maker/practitioner within the production context. The corollary is that it is the contextual constraints of production that influence the creative choices and actions of the film-maker/practitioner. What emerges from this set of influences and actions is the idea that, as Anthony Giddens asserted ‘social actions create structures, and it is through social actions that structures are produced and re-produced’ (Haralambos and Holborn 1995: 904). This duality of structure can be encompassed in the sociologically based term ‘structuration’ (Giddens 1979, 1984) and points the study of creative documentary practice towards observations of the actions of the documentary practitioner as agents working within specific social and cultural structures.

THE SYSTEMS MODEL OF CREATIVITY

Creativity research, which emerged through the latter half of the twenty-first century, identified that individually focused approaches to creativity failed to explain why some highly skilled individuals achieved notoriety while
The ‘creative treatment of actuality’: Rationalizing and reconceptualizing the... others did not (Csikszentmihalyi 1996; Gardner 1993; Sternberg 1988, 1994; Weisberg 1993).

From this concern researchers developed a hypothesis ‘that multiple components must converge for creativity to occur’ (Sternberg and Lubart in Sternberg 1999: 10), and from this research came the confluence approach to creativity. This approach opened the way for researchers to investigate the social and cultural aspect to creativity where creativity is now seen not as ‘the product of single individuals, but of social systems making judgments about individuals’ products’ (Csikszentmihalyi in Sternberg 1999: 314).

While these sociocultural approaches to creativity research explain why some products are deemed creative and others are not gained strength in psychology; momentum for it was also building in sociology. Theories emerged in this discipline which examined the cultural implications of production and how an individual practitioner drew on their cultural understanding of the rules, knowledge and skills of production in order to engage in creativity (Bailin 1988; Bourdieu 1977, 1993; Giddens 1979, 1984). Most of this work was highly theoretical, but some researchers did manage to apply it to specific domains. For example, two research studies completed at the BBC on documentary production practices – one by Roger Silverstone (1985), the other by Phillip Elliott (1972) – used participant observation methodologies and documented the production processes of the documentary film-makers that were in use during those times. Creativity has also been examined using qualitative methods (Csikszentmihalyi 1996) and through practitioner-centred research methodologies (E. McIntyre 2006; P. McIntyre 2003, 2006). Examinations of practitioner’s creative production processes exist for poetry and literature (Csikszentmihalyi 1996; E. McIntyre 2006; Pope 2005), performance (Pope 2005; Sawyer 2006), music (McIntyre 2003, 2008a; Negus and Pickering 2004; Sawyer 2006) fine arts (Becker 1982; Csikszentmihalyi 1996; Wolff 1981) and theatre (Bailin 1988). But there has been very little research to date that connects these rational notions of creativity and creative process theories to the processes of documentary practice. Research into cultural production which draws on Bourdieu’s theories of cultural practice has already been applied to some documentary case studies (Austin and de Jong 2008: 135–51). This is significant because Bourdieu’s approach can be easily compared with the creative theories of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (McIntyre 2008a: 41), especially the systems model.

The systems model is a confluence model (Figure 1) (Csikszentmihalyi 1999; Csikszentmihalyi in Sternberg 1988), so called because it recognizes the confluence of multiple factors involved in creativity, and it explains creativity as a system in operation. It shows how the three components of the model – that is, the domain, the field and the individual – interact.

For creativity to occur, a set of rules and practices must be transmitted from the domain to the individual. The individual must then produce a novel variation in the content of the domain, the variation then must be selected by the field for inclusion in the domain (Csikszentmihalyi 1999: 315).

This model of creativity illustrates how it is possible for the individual to draw on knowledge from a specific domain and use it to interact with a field or social organization, which understands and uses that knowledge when creating ideas, products and processes. Using this model, it is possible to map
creativity with regard to documentary film-making practice; a practice that is situated within specific social and cultural contexts.

The systems model of creativity can thus help documentary scholars to illustrate how film-makers are able to acquire knowledge through mediating social and cultural conventions, and then demonstrate their creative understandings through the documentary films they create. The eminent documentary film-maker Paul Watson is one such example that this model can be applied to.

Watson is recognized as the father of reality television, which he refutes ‘How can I be a father to those little bastards?’ (Baker 2006: 55). Regardless of Watson’s own understandings of his creative contribution to the documentary domain, the field conceived in terms of the systems model continues to herald his narrative construction abilities through the documentary form as being unique, novel and innovative (Baker 2006; Chapman 2006: 55–77; Kilborn and Izod 1997: 74). The development of Watson’s innovation in the domain of documentary films can be traced through his earlier works, most notably *The Family* (1974), described as a ‘fly-on-the-wall’ documentary series to *Sylvania Waters* (1992) which is recognized as the first documentary soap, and subsequently the beginning of reality TV. The field’s opinion of him is varied:

> Even those who criticize him and claim that he intrudes unfairly into the private lives of ordinary people have to concede that he is a brilliant film-maker and a constant innovator always investigating the possibilities created by the new technology. (Baker 2006: 72)

Thus Paul Watson’s recognition from within the documentary field, the cultural inclusion of his documentaries in the domain and his skills as an individual documentary film-maker can be explained using the systems model.

But how well does the model accommodate an individual who is just starting out in the documentary field, someone who is yet to be recognized by the social and cultural systems? Below is a hypothetical example that illustrates how an individual’s creative development can be mapped against the systems model.
model. Although this example maps an individual’s progress, it actually begins in this case with the domain, where a domain is described as being a wealth of knowledge:

A domain in which novelty can be evaluated objectively, and which has clear rules, a rich and complex symbolic system, and a central position in the culture will be more attractive than one lacking such characteristics. 

(Csikszentmihalyi 1999: 320)

Since Csikszentmihalyi argues that creativity can begin anywhere within the model, the documentary domain has to be attractive in order for it to appeal to a beginner film-maker. The rules and knowledge of the domain have to be accessible and an individual has to be able to immerse themselves in it through their own personal experiences and, perhaps, a tertiary education that further cements their knowledge within the creative domain of documentary knowledge. An aspiring documentary film-maker would have watched and studied many documentaries and no doubt would encounter documentaries that changed the way practitioners approach, and audiences appreciate, the documentary form. Examples include *Nanook of the North* (Flaherty 1922), *Seven Up! series* and *Sylvania Waters* TV series (Watson 1992). These documentaries all used cutting-edge storytelling techniques combined with cutting-edge technologies and production approaches which enabled the film-makers to create unique documentary narratives, not seen prior to their public release. With a body of knowledge built on films like these and of course a diversity of others, this hypothetical documentary film-maker would possibly, most often only tacitly, be able to recognize those documentaries against Bill Nichols’ six documentary *modes of representation* (2001: 99–138). Their study of the documentary form would begin to generate an implicit and internalized understanding of these classifications, allowing the novice documentary filmmaker to discuss their informed opinions about documentaries with others. This would inevitably make them a member of the creative field of documentary where they would, in turn, be able to verify other documentary makers work as creative. For example, the social verification contained in the field of documentary filmmakers/practitioners has been normatively described by Nichols:

A documentary practitioner should be able to debate social issues such as the effects of pollution and the nature of sexual identity and explore technical concerns such as the authenticity of archival footage and the consequences of digital technology. 

(Nichols 2001: 25)

Continuing on, this hypothetical documentary film-maker may have graduated from being a novice to being a more respected and experienced field member and therefore should also be able to select story/content that could be created into a documentary. It is important to note that field members are both audience members and cultural intermediaries who have the power to ‘green light’ documentary productions. The main function of the field is for it to demonstrate its authority in selecting worthy ideas, processes or products. By demonstrating this authority the field adjudicates on creative artefacts and processes for inclusion in the domain.

If the documentary film-maker is able to successfully produce their film ideas into a documentary film, then they will have demonstrated their increased
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level of skill where they have reached a point where they have internalized the rules and conventions from the documentary domain and learnt how the social organization known as the field makes decisions. These would be reproduced through their own film-making practice. The then-completed documentary film may, in time, gather more field approval through film festival screenings or broadcasts. The documentary field’s assessment of the documentary product’s narrative, production techniques and content impact on the level of creativity perceived to be contained in the documentary film, consequently contributing to the creative reputation of the film-maker who created the documentary. Once field acceptance occurs, the documentary will itself be culturally documented within the domain. This process leads to further distribution and more recognition, and the documentary can then be used as a further example of how to identify a documentary that contains one or a combination of Nichols’ six modes of representation. In this sense, the documentary domain is a constantly expanding library of cultural knowledge that stores the ‘field of works’ (Bourdieu 1996). The next individual, who wants to make a creative documentary product about a particular topic, or using a particular technique, has to first seek out existing knowledge from the domain through this field of works or domain.

This rudimentary example demonstrates not only how it is possible to map a documentary film-maker’s processes using the framework of the creative system’s model but it also emphasizes how significant it is for a documentary film-maker to have internalized those domain rules, conventions and knowledges contained in film and video production skills, as well as the way the field’s opinions are formed (Csikszentmihalyi 1995: online), which makes their creative process appear to others as being implicit, tacit and seamless.

What these brief examples also show is that the systems model provides a foundation to analyse creativity as not only being an iterative and recursive process but also highlights the fact that it is linked to preceding conditions and structures. The model encourages both documentary researcher and practitioner to move beyond looking only at individuals and their products and refocuses the idea that creativity is:

an activity where some process or product, one that is considered to be unique and valuable, comes about from a set of antecedent conditions through the conditioned agency of someone. (P. McIntyre 2006: 2)

In short, conditioned agency produces a unique or novel product or process.

CREATIVITY AS A STAGED PROCESS

The process aspect of creativity is often exemplified as a staged one (Bastick 1982; Csikszentmihalyi 1996; Nemiro 2004; Wallas 1976). Csikszentmihalyi argues that the creative process is made up of five stages: preparation, incubation, insight, evaluation, elaboration (1996: 83–86), whereas Wallas (1976) argues that it is a four-staged process: preparation, incubation, illumination, verification. These stages can be described in the following way: the preparation stage includes an analysis of the problem that involves ‘conscious work and draws on one’s education, analytical skills and problem relevant knowledge’ (Lubart 2000–2001: 296). The incubation phase is where the mind is thought to be working on the problem below the threshold of consciousness (Csikszentmihalyi 1996: 79). The third phase of illumination is where one has an
insightful thought that represents a breakthrough or a solution to the task at hand (Nickerson in Sternberg 1999: 396). The final phase of verification occurs as a conscious activity which involves further work on ‘evaluating, refining, and developing one’s idea’ (Lubart 2000–2001: 296).

Bastick, on the other hand, argues that the creative process is made up of only two stages: intuition and verification. Bastick’s collapses Wallas’s first three stages of preparation, incubation and illumination into one phase, that is, intuition (Bastick 1982: 310–11). In this case, Bastick defines intuition as ‘non-linear parallel processing of global multi-categorised information’ (Bastick 1982: 215) rather than seeing it as metaphysical or mystical. Essentially, it can be seen that Bastick’s stage of ‘intuition’ is similar to the operation of a zip file – an experienced documentary film-maker is able to, in a short space of time, and almost miraculously, negotiate a complex filming task by instantaneously drawing on their past experiences and knowledge, enabling them to complete said task with seemingly very little effort.

Filmmakers will choose almost instinctively to shoot in eye-catching places; they will study the available light for the best position, think and look around the action, and consider shooting higher or lower, using shots involving windows, door, reflections or mirrors for instance. (Chapman 2006: 87)

This is analogous to the internalized and intuitive processing that a highly skilled documentary film-maker engages in when faced with capturing a sequence on tape that will help to tell the story. The documentary film-maker can be so immersed in the task that if they were asked to explain what they did and why, they may not be able to, or they may just say, ‘it felt like the right place for the camera to be at that time’. The practitioner is often so immersed ‘in the moment’ that they embody it. Therefore a documentary filmmaker/practitioner can be seen as a ‘conditioned agent’ because their body stores practical knowledge that is reproduced, implicitly, through practice. This process is very similar to the operation of a person’s ‘habitus’ (Bourdieu 1993). A well-developed habitus for documentary practitioners requires an implicit and tacit understanding of most of the phases of production, as well as an inquisitiveness and aptitude necessary to learn the unfamiliar phases of production that occur with the introduction of new technologies. It can be argued that it takes years of continued collaborative practice in order for a documentary practitioner to demonstrate mastery and gain an intuitive understanding of the process of documentary production. (See Montagu’s argument used earlier in this article.) This complex staged creative process, which is informed by rules, structures and practices, can be seen to correspond with the staged documentary production process. This general production process also breaks down into well-recognized stages: project development, pre-production, production, post-production and distribution (Cohen et al. 2009: 95). These stages operate similarly to the staged understanding of creativity set out above, in as much as while they appear to be discrete linear structures, this is not literally the case. Csikszentmihalyi argues that in reality the creative stages ‘overlap and recur several times before the process is completed’ (1996: 83). All documentary filmmakers will understand this cyclical and non-linear nature of production. For example, editing can identify the need for more research and more filming, and then the filming has to be followed by more editing, and so on. Thus the documentary production process can also be iterative and recursive, as described by
Given this similarity it is theoretically possible to overlay the five-staged screen-based production process with the five-staged creative process. This approach could thus potentially provide a creative structure against which documentary practitioners or a documentary practitioner/researcher can organize their work.

In order to develop as a documentary practitioner, it is the continued cycle of this creative process that develops as the individual, oftentimes working in highly collaborative group situations, moves from one documentary project to the next. Thus, each iteration of documentary production allows both the individual’s and the collaborative partnership’s combined practical knowledge and experience to be extended, enabling the group to approach their practice in an innovative, novel and creative way.

**CREATIVITY AS A COLLABORATIVE PROCESS**

The collaborative aspects of documentary production are well documented within the literature (Buscombe 1981: 32; Chapman 2006; Nichols 2001). Even with the technological developments of digital video (DV), most documentary film-makers would find it very demanding to make a film by themselves. The statement of Basil Wright, who worked alongside John Grierson, is just as applicable today as it was when films were shot using larger crews:

> a film is created both by the single inspiration of the director and by the collective activity and enthusiasm of a diverse group of experts who pool their skill to the agreed purpose. (Wright 1972: 20)

Creativity researchers make similar arguments about the collaborative nature of many creative activities. Sawyer states that it is a ‘fruitless and impossible search’ to find a single creator for many of these modern creative products (2006: 134). From a practical perspective this argument is simple – ‘in the information age it has simply become impossible for single individuals to possess all the relevant information, knowledge and expertise’ (Paulus and Nijstad 2003: 339). While digital technologies have enabled documentary film-makers to multi-skill and multi-task production crew roles, the multitude of skills needed to make competent films can sometimes be lost if an individual insists on taking this literally. For example, Paul Watson who uses a DV camera to film his own documentaries states ‘if I have to sacrifice something in picture or sound quality, so be it’ (Baker 2006: 63). Irrespective of the potential reduction in quality of the recorded materials at the point of production, Watson still acknowledges the need for the collaborative contributions of a film editor (Baker 2006: 61), although what is missing from this example is the support of the commissioning institutions and distribution platforms. The concept development, funding, post-production and distribution phases cannot be successfully undertaken by a sole film-maker. Successful negotiation of these stages of the process require the combined knowledge of ‘communities of practice’ (Austin and de Jong 2008: 146–48; Nichols 2001: 25–26). How the communities of documentary practice, and the individual documentary film-maker who is immersed in those communities, mediate ‘the variable, open-ended dynamic quality of the form itself’ (Nichols 2001: 26) elucidates the cultural and creative convergences that have to be negotiated to produce a documentary product.

If this is the case, theories about group creativity should also be useful in more accurately explaining how an individual film-maker’s creative
documentary process works within the group context of a community of documentary practitioners.

Group creativity research is drawn from ‘diverse traditions of cognition, groups, creativity, information systems, and organisational psychology’ (Paulus and Nijstad 2003: 5). Paulus and Nijstad have drawn together some of the group creativity research and identified aspects of group functioning, which has allowed a generic model for Group Creativity to be developed (see Figure 2).

This group creativity model highlights how the individual’s knowledge, skills and abilities are used in collaborative group work. Unlike the systems model, Paulus and Nijstads’ model of Group Creativity has a clear starting point; the external acquisition of information (arrow 1) which is processed at the individual level before it moves out to the group for collaborative assessment (arrow 2), evaluation and verification. Then a cyclic process can occur, which means that the knowledge can cycle either back through the individual members of the group (arrow 3) for another iteration or be pushed out through the group (arrow 4), and eventually the creative product reaches social verification, which occurs outside the creative production group (arrow 5), also known as the audience.

However, while the diagram appears superficially to be quite different to the systems model of creativity, it can be seen that the movement of ideas, knowledge sharing and critical feedback on processes and products is comparable to the systems model in that it also identifies individual, field and domain interactions necessary to produce artefacts. This model, related as it is to the system

![Figure 2: A generic mode of group creativity (Paulus and Nijstad 2003: 334).](image-url)
model of creativity, therefore offers to the understanding of documentary creativity, a more rational and research-supportable understanding of creativity than that supplied through the Romantic perspective.

CONCLUSION

In summary, the exposition of these rational approaches to creativity should allow for documentary practitioners to reject Romantic notions that perpetuate a mythical and irrational link between individuals, art and creativity. It should then become possible to realign the practice of documentary film-makers, working within collaborative production contexts, with the current research-based understandings of creativity as outlined above. In doing this, it should also be recognized that documentary film-maker’s practice is simultaneously enabled and constrained by the documentary production and distribution contexts they work in. Individual and collaborative choices made in these contexts are the result of the possibilities on offer to them. Furthermore, their actions, conditioned by the structures they necessarily engage with, bring into being documentary products and processes which are built on the creative collaborations and actions of all preceding documentary practitioners and film-makers. This set of creative actions take place in social and cultural environments that have profound effects on the work itself. This fundamental reconceptualization of creativity makes it possible to approach creative documentary production from a collaborative film-maker’s perspective, where individuals who form a film-crew can be recognized both individually and collectively for their ability to draw on their previous knowledge and skills and turn this into creative output. It is this rational process, and not some mystical one, that allows them to be seen as being creative.

Therefore, a creative research approach that investigates acts and contexts of creation, as well as exposing tacit and explicit demonstrations of skills, knowledge and methods of documentary practice could help researchers to tease out the creative forces that are at work for documentary practitioners.

Finally, to return to Grierson’s phrase, ‘the creative treatment of actuality’, it has been argued that if we reconceptualize what the term ‘creativity’ means it then becomes apparent that we should agree with Grierson’s definition of documentary provided we see creativity as a systemic, staged and collaborative process as current evidence-based academic research does. If we persist with interpreting Grierson’s definition through a highly Romantic and mythical understanding of creativity, we will miss the rich possibilities that are evident in documentary film-maker’s actual daily practice. By bringing together current research into creativity and documentary discourses, as seen above, it is possible to confirm that the idea of ‘creative treatment’ in documentary film-making can be legitimately used. Therefore, let Grierson’s definition of documentary as ‘the creative treatment of actuality’ stand as the judicious foundation from which documentary communities of practice can revisit, in order to reconceptualize, the link between art, creativity and documentary practice.

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