



## Post-Documentary and the Art of Truth: Steve Jobs as Icon(bio)graphy

**Dr. Constance Goh**

Lecturer, Department of Communications, Curtin University, Singapore

### Abstract

Theoretically reconsidering the biographical film as prototypical of post-documentary, this paper insists that “biography” despite being the minor subgenre has become the conceptual premise upon which the “documental” rests. Attending to the notional hybridity between *historie* and *discours*, this creative approach to life-writing reworks “documenting” by examining the temporal treatment of the stated biographical film creators. This paper also asserts that the genealogical approach of Danny Boyle’s filmic biography of Jobs’s life not only auto-reflects the converged space that contemporary documentary must inhabit; what is more crucial is the performative dimension that necessarily underpins any writing on the life of the Apple co-founder. Thus, analytical attention endows these filmic biographies not merely as “truthful” representations of an icon but also the illuminating acme of a new type of documentary that is non-exclusive, bringing to life the figurally converged Steve Jobs with Michael Fassbender (the actor playing the titular character for Danny Boyle’s critically acclaimed 2015 *Steve Jobs*) and Jobs with Ashton Kutcher (Joshua Michael Stern’s 2013 *Jobs*) with an elaboration on how the aforementioned biographical films aesthetically and visually interpellated the individual whose life is on display. I engage with Bill Nichols’s, Carl Plantinga’s and Noel Carroll’s concepts on documentary to address the hybrid characteristic found within these biographical films with the following research questions. First, what ideas can one draw from biography’s accommodation of death (Jobs’s unfortunate demise in 2011 arguably prompt these two biographical films) in its sense of “life-writing”? Second, how does the genealogically inclined films address the discursive and the historiographical grounds upon which life-writing is itself based? Most importantly, how does the biographical film interpellatively rework the concept of the performative found within Nichols’s modes of documentary, especially noting that the performative mode rests within the observational during his 1991 publication, *Representing Reality*, whereas his 2001 publication rightly gives this mode its own space? An address of the *puissance* of iconography of which Jobs is arguably a symbol gives this writer opportunity to write on the robust visual writing of his life.

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Every work of art must present not only objective reality but the subjective personality of the artist, and this personality includes his way of looking at things, his ideology and the limitations of the period. All this is projected into the picture, even unintentionally. Every picture shows not only a piece of reality but a point of view as well. The set-up of the camera betrays the inner attitude of the man behind the camera.

-- Bela Belazs, *Theory of Film* (cited from Noel Carroll's "From Real to Reel")

## Introduction

Robert J. Richards' *The Role of Biography in Intellectual History* aids the conceptual reconsideration of Danny Boyle's *Steve Jobs* (2015) more than a year after its conference keynote address on temporal structuring, one that arguably mirrors what life-writing entails and indicates its contemporary cultural slant. As a critique against the biographical contextualisation of the figure, Richards indicates how contexts are not necessary to the understanding of the intellectual endeavours of the "great man". By re-marking William James's intuitive elaboration: "[t]he recesses of feeling, the darker, blinder strata of character are the only places in the world in which we catch *real facts in the making*, and directly perceive how events happen, and how work is actually done" (1902, p. 501), he foregrounds the artistic and creative facets upon which Nichols's observational mode of documentary rests. This has relevance not only to the characterisation of Steve Jobs but also the auteurial stylistics of Danny Boyle's 2015 documentary, *Steve Jobs*. Italicising the significance of James's words on how facts can emerge from differing viewpoints or through distinct discursive strategies, the article anchors itself on the archaeological, thus indicating the conceptual crux – "negotiations" – of this paper, which also brings to mind the performative. Boyle's 2015 self-explanatory *Steve Jobs* reflects upon itself as the culturally emergent: both as an innovative nonfictional film and as a nonfictional film on innovation, explaining too the focus of this paper on the performative. Apple's latest technological innovation, a prodigious consequence of its intense race with the other big technological firms to develop the latest Artificial intelligence (AI) software makes Boyle's use of theatrical staging as a filmic strategy advantageous for this writer's decision to rework Nichols's documentary mode of the performative, first elaborated in *Representing Reality* (1991) under the observational mode. Nichols's *Introduction to Documentary* (2001) then rightly gives sectional space to the performative, which is pertinent to this writing on the life of a technological visionary whose lifework (arguably including the leadership grooming

of Tim Cook, Apple's latest CEO, to carry on his vision posthumously) has as its latest innovation the iOS system imbued with AI, which when integrated with human intelligence can evince the much-anticipated superintelligence.

Notwithstanding the invigorative underpinning of the word "life", digital technology premised on AI emphasises 'doing', actions accompanied by reflective practicality that leads to learning processes (Yampolskiy, 2016), again indicating the performativity encapsulated by the dimensions of agency and autonomy as promised by digitisation and technological convergence. John Corner's elaboration on the various documentary functions in "Performing the Real" further aids this thesis that Apple Intelligence is tied, first and foremost, to "action" and thus "performativity". Evidently crucial to my take on how the biographical as a subgenre of documentary is prototypical of what Corner calls "post-documentary", elaborated especially with his sectional subtitle "*Documentary as Radical Interrogation and Alternative Perspective*" whereby "techniques of disruption and distancing" (Corner, 2002, p. 259–260) provoke thoughts on how theatrical staging could actually shine a light on the empirical precedence of "doing" before understanding or learning, a pedagogical strand pertinent to understanding how AI may complement our ways of learning. In fact, the direct cinema used with this function may attest to modes of dramatisation (this ties us to Simondon's concept of *transduction* whose psychic strand is premised on the dramatic) that include styles of observations paramount to our understanding of lived experiences. The etymological source of "biography": *bios* in Greek denotes "life" (coupled with the thought-provoking possibilities of theatrical staging is attention given to the animating potentials of such techniques) and *graphia* resonates with writing that *genealogically investigates* a filmic subgenre to which not much academic attention has been given due to its cultural status. This archaeological emphasis effectively grounds the biographical films and redirects attention from the objectivity of *historie* to the figural subject himself from which the enunciations are not merely the filmic focus; the conversational facet of *discours* renders clear the recontextualisation of life-writing. Therefore, this article on a new type of subjectivity uncovers the constitutive salience of the *subjective-objective* (a term that Lacan reworks psychoanalytically) to the making of the biographical that effectively overcomes the fiction-fact dichotomy of documentary: it attests not just to biography's hybridity of *historie* and *discours* but also the converged space of the "real" of actuality, the "believed" from the Lacanian Symbolic and the "imagined" of the Lacanian Imaginary.

This encourages not only a creative approach to life-writing; it too highlights the

presence of the Symbolic within the Lacanian triadic entanglement as support for the critical analysis that stylistically imbues biography as the authentic approach to documentary, genre wise; moreover, the temporal treatment of the biographical auteurs, once genealogically approached, locates space for analytical affiliations between the subgenre and its overarching term. These biographies do not merely indicate the memorious conventionally aligned with the documentary, a style that Boyle's version arguably makes clear, thus aiding the research here that the renewed attention to, and an altered sense of, "objectivity" should abide with the word "documentary", founding concepts with the same characteristics that underpin journalism: truth and authenticity. This paper also asserts that transmediation, penetratingly rethought in and through the Simondonian transduction is perhaps the best approach to life-writing because the media transition from print to screen invites dynamic modulations and enlargements already encapsulated in the word "biographia": the analytic techniques of archaeology reworked via the genealogical to give us the contemporary historiographical sensibility (Oxford Reference for the word "archaeology") necessary to this media specificity. Theoretically reconsidering the biographical film within the genre of documentary, this paper insists that "biography", despite being the minor subgenre, has become the conceptual premise upon which the "post-documentary" rests: it is indicative of the documental values within biographical materials. Attending to the notional hybridity between *historie* and *discours*, this creative approach to life-writing reworks "documenting" by examining the temporal treatment of the stated biographical film creators. This paper also asserts that the genealogical approach of Danny Boyle's filmic biography of Jobs's life not only auto-reflects the converged space that contemporary documentary must inhabit; what is more crucial is the performative dimension that necessarily underpins any writing on the life of the Apple co-founder. Thus, analytical attention endows these filmic biographies not merely as "truthful" representations of an icon but also the illuminating acme bringing to life the figurally converged Steve Jobs with Michael Fassbender (the actor playing the titular character for Danny Boyle's critically acclaimed 2015 *Steve Jobs*) and Jobs with Ashton Kutcher (Joshua Michael Stern's 2013 *Jobs*) with an elaboration on how the aforementioned biographical film visually interpellated the individual whose life is on display, albeit a non-clichéd reiteration of "seeing is believing". I engage with Bill Nichols's, Carl Plantinga's and Noel Carroll's concepts on documentary to address the hybrid characteristic found within these biographical films with the following research questions. First, what ideas can one draw from biography's accommodation of death (Jobs's unfortunate demise in 2011 arguably prompts these two biographical films) in its sense of "life-

writing”? Second, how do the genealogically inclined films address the discursive and the historiographical grounds upon which life-writing is itself based? Most importantly, how does the biographical film interpellatively rework the concept of the performative found within Nichols’s modes of documentary, especially noting that this specific mode rests within the observational during his 1991 publication, *Representing Reality* whereas his 2001 publication rightly gives this mode its own space? An aesthetic address of the *puissance* of iconography which Jobs is arguably a symbol gives this writer opportunity to write on the robust visual writing of his life.

With responses to these inquiries, this paper places emphasis on the filmic auteur with a wordplay on Dennis Bingham’s “Whose Lives are They Anyway?” and insists on “Whose *Truths* are They Anyway?”, a wordplay that appositely interweaves Simondon’s *transduction* into the transmedia conception to invoke the idea of invention, having cultural and existential implications, with conceptual boosts from Tim Ingold’s preface to Roy Wagner’s *The Invention of Culture*. With the aforementioned assertion in mind, I argue for the (r)evolutionary impulse that motivates Steve Jobs, and Steve Wozniak as the geeks who helped change the world of communication. Biographically represented as cultural icons, the article here heightens the fact that they are also indexes to the innovative crux of the new millennium (additional to the indexicality of Michael Fassbender as the actor roleplaying the 2015 filmic Jobs or Kutcher the 2013 filmic Jobs) as well as the very symbol of the technologically emergent. This question of legitimacy that underscores Jobs’s beginning as a technological whizzkid (evidently a psychological chip on the latter’s shoulder) informs his own relation with his daughter, Lisa Brennan-Jobs. The iconographical *puissance* that attests to Nichols’s overlapped modes of documentary, of which Steve Jobs, the person, is arguably a symbol, also alludes to Boyle’s version as “the new biography” when compared to the outrightly documentary style of “History of Steve Jobs” (2008), aptly entitled and created by Greg Wyatt Jr. Besides the detectable differences between the two versions, not just the expository tone of Wyatt Jr.’s documentary, the required neutrality of the nonfictional is given to us by Boyle, the biographical auteur, with the visual and auditory strategy of staging. As firm believers of filmic objectivity, both filmmakers move their biographical takes to Bazin’s photographic realism. An addendum to the “truth”, “comprehensiveness” and “accuracy” of journalistic documenting, words that recently replaced “objectivity” within the journalistic world, my address of Corner’s “post-documentary” redirects attention to the word “objectivity” as included in Mark Deuze’s 2005 list of journalistic criteria that responded to “What is Journalism?”, an objectivity that accounts

for, and does not elide, the articulatory expressiveness and presencing visibility of the event staged.

Turning my attention to Boyle's 2015 biographical film first (Mark Kermode from *The Guardian* gives the film a four-star rating because of its *creative treatment* of Jobs's life), this critical examination, whose theoretical crux lies in the strategies of performative narratology, refers to John Grierson's short but oxymoronic definition of documentary as a "a *creative treatment* of reality" (emphasis mine) so as to provide an intimate insight to the Apple co-founder's life, one that dwells on the personal and the private rather than the public and professional. The latter is strangely absent (it is odd due to the fact that Jobs's onstage videos proliferate online) by virtue of Boyle's filmic fade-outs whenever Jobs takes centre stage presenting the latest Apple product, unconventional biographical characteristics because it emblematically indicate how much we know of this particular cultural icon whose onstage presences have had such inspiring laudability. Boyle's refusal to work with the Hollywood intensified continuity, contrary to Stern's version, insists structurally a Bakhtinian dialogic engagement with the championed Bazinian photorealistic spontaneity and deep focal naturalness.

Noteworthy to this paper on "invention" rather than "convention" is also Jobs's superb leadership and vision, significant insights arguably giving birth to the metamodern address here and also fodder to our insatiable need for superheroes, even real-life ones, albeit contrary to the democratic future envisioned by Sir Tim Berners Lee, not unless research attention is also given to Steve Wozniak's computational contribution. Thus, the transduced iconography of the biographical with the convergence of the Peircean icon, index and symbol becomes a form of semiotic realism that not only takes up but also supersedes Andre Bazin's theoretical emphasis on the filmic recording of uninterrupted slices of life. What follow are conceptual elaborations on how the subgenre of biography informs our perceptions of the documentary, technologically affording the innovative that prompts cultural changes, most of them dynamic and beneficial to the contemporary emphasis on creativity, whether filmic style, narrative or structure. Instead of considering the writing of life (with focus on the auteur) as protean and capricious, it should be understood that digital transitions brought forth by the new millennium may be a series of development returning the cinematic attention to the auteur's creative direction and cinematographic mastery so necessary to film production. These depictions of factual events inevitably show up their factual underpinnings, what I shall call "fictionalised fact", a noun phrase indicating the significant focus on "fact" with "fictionalised" taking the adjectival



position of describer, effectively adding to Grierson's "creative treatment of reality". Any filmic analysis must take into account the various takes on the cultural icon, overlooking the subjectivity implied by creative transmutation, what Mario Sluga and Enrico Terrone (2021) termed "analytical aesthetics". This analytical evaluation renews the urgent heightening of this converged process recognisable as the Simondonian psychic transduction with productions to contemporary transindividuality, a concept founded on critical/creative contribution rather than merely consumption, cultural encounters evoking and encouraging a thoughtfulness going beyond immersion. Notwithstanding the subjective underpinnings of auteurship, any cultural focus on media production must reconsider the reasoned *discours* of film criticism, made evident by Nichols's espousal of the experimental and *avant garde* aspects found within the poetic and the performative modes of documentary, modes prompting inquiries "about what is knowledge. What counts as understanding or comprehension?" (2001, p. 130). Nichols's analyses on the "knowledge" and "understanding" produced by the various modes of documentary approach cinematic realism in a manner that is advantageous to the way I ethically aver the authenticity inherent in the writing of another's life.

### **The Veracity of Experimental Biography**

Even as the contemporary interpretations on documentary films have moved beyond the divide between fiction and nonfiction films, my own investigation of Boyle's and Stern's biographies (both creatively reworked Hollywood intensified continuity) provided opportunity to examine the very concept of interpretation itself with focus given to the conversational implications of computational communication; Wyatt's linearised account of Jobs's life, although at odds stylistically with Stern's version that heightens Jobs's achievements, is also distinct from Boyle's version the focus of which is arguably on "reading". Stern's Hollywood tribute to Jobs, aptly criticised as "fan service" by Moylan for *The Guardian* examines visually Jobs's life from his days at Reeds College to the 2001 introduction of the iPod (mostly in the Hollywood intensified continuous style except for the introductory scene) messianically increases the myth-making propensity that inheres with documentary filmmaking. *RogerEbert.com*'s reviewer gives this film two stars due to Stern's *Jobs* turning out to be a regular biopic, albeit I was watching it for different reasons. Stylistically comparable to Matt Johnson's 2023 *Blackberry*, it lacks the creative panache and frenetic pace required for a substantially engaging narrative production on the technological machinations of big-tech firms, as the filmic *historie* of Blackberry is underscored by the visual finesse of sophisticated camera work and the temporal manipulation necessary to plot suspense. By comparison, Wyatt's "History of Steve

Jobs” is a straightforward account of the subject’s life, merely providing the significant details of the subject’s life as facts. Striving to be nonfictional, it is still underpinned by the viewer’s reception of the visuals Wyatt gives with Boyle’s version obviously rendering clear the filmic straddling between fiction and fact, the “fictionalised fact”, bringing forth the *discours* within *histoire*. If we were to look for veracity in the presumed neutral or objective tones of life writing (here gesturing to Noël Carroll’s term for nonfiction films, “presumptive assertion”, we must heed Kermode’s (November 15, 2015) astute conclusion to his review of the 2015 biographical film: “if we find truth in the drama [and he does], then that truth belongs to Sorkin [the scriptwriter]” (*The Guardian*). This truth, (un)fortunately the truth of *cinema vérité*, is a truth at which Aaron Sorkin arrives after intensive consultation with Lisa Brennon-Jobs, Jobs’s daughter, and Steve Wozniak, Jobs’ co-founding partner at Apple, a truth arrived at after dialogically considering the various voices on the icon himself. This is further reinforced by Nichols’s discussion on representing reality in the chapter “Telling Stories with Evidence and Arguments”:

Their respective orientations, toward *a* world and toward *the* world, sharply distinguish fiction and documentary. But the effect of providing, as if for the first time, a memorable form for experiences and concepts that the text purports only to reveal and reflect is a common bond between them... We are offered a world but a world different from any other by dint of its basis in history itself... In representing it we introduce the subjectivities and vicissitudes, the issues of style and form that govern discussion of any text. (1991, p. 113, emphasis mine)

This, in effect, simply renders clear what follows later on *realist approximations* (reality shows or biographies): the knowledge one achieves of someone’s life will always be “a particular way of seeing” based on a truth claim.

Boyle’s 2015 *Steve Jobs*, by going beyond the neutral and objective characteristics detected in Wyatt’s recount, instantiates a felicitous reflection on how Nichols’s six modes of documentary can be regained via a different route. It definitely reveals the documentary as both an indexical record and an assertion, thoroughly elaborated by Carl Plantinga’s (2003) “What a Documentary is, After All”. Biographical films cannot be tagged with the conventional features of documentary because of the functional autonomy of this subgenre, again indicating the auteur’s creativity. Both as an indexical record as well as *an assertion* (this phrase is italicized here not only because Boyle’s biographical film can be considered arguing for invention, cinematographically reflected from the transitions made from his use of 16 mm



filming to 35 mm and then to digital filmmaking to represent the three major Apple events that occurred during the 1980s and 90s; it is also a prime example of transductive manoeuvres within Media and Communications), *Steve Jobs* carries within it the very thesis for the innovative vision that the subject embodies himself overlapped by the obvious iconography of an individual's life. Temporally, a genealogical attestation to the iconically brilliant, it is spatially reworked to enable insightful glimpses into the subject's character, penetrating into James's "recesses of feeling, the darker, blinder strata of character are the only places in the world in which we catch *real facts in the making*, and directly perceive how events happen, and how work is actually done" (1902, p. 501). It, thus, affirms the intuitive within life-writing and consequently reflects upon itself as a subjective meditation of the objective occurrences underpinning the factuality of the departed's existence. This correlates with Nichols's "asymptote congruence" which he expounds in "Representing Reality", a mathematical spacetime curvature whereby the coming together of multiple refracting perspectives endows *empirical import* to the contrary terms, *discours* and *histoire*, signalling constitutively to the respective "subjective" and "objective" when psychoanalysing film according to the theoretical conceptions of Emile Benevise's (1966) aesthetics. The biographical draws out and renders clear the juxtapositions between the assertive and the suggestive dimensions with the analytical facet of the essay film prioritising the assertive, conceptually inverting Carlos Ruiz Carmona's (2019) "The Fiction in the Non-Fiction Film". Correlating Plantinga's, Carroll's and Nichols's writings on the documentary, the biographical film is thus read as inscriptive approximations of truth (as the *aesthetics of asymptote congruence* make evident [author's emphasis]), pointing to conceptual core of empirical manifestations, again teased out by filmic analyses. While the empirical is not the same as the material aspects of filmmaking, biographical or otherwise, the experimental filmmaking of Jean Luc Godard's essayistic contribution, *Histoire(s) du cinema*, similar to Eisensteinian montage, has something to say about film visually figuring critical analysis. The structural composition of images when connected to Godard's themes not just analytically reworks visual simultaneity to instil critical deliberation; his films too are critical filmic enunciations of filmmaking.

Contrasting the Bazinian brand of realism, positioned historically as the essence of documentary filmmaking, Godard's essayistic films do not sacrifice the material dimensions of his cinematographic method for the increased intellectual attention required in assessing or evaluating his imagistic manipulation. The material aspects of Godard's films become more starkly present with the use of imagistic juxtapositions, altered appropriations of Vivian

Sobchack's view of filmic materiality. Sobchack's approach is prompted by "the problematics of the professional gaze" also cited in Nichols's take on documentary, the introduction of which refers to the necessity for a body as evidence, appositely suggested by the Latin term, *habeas corpus*, which not only informs the cadaver requirement for any legal homicidal proceeding but also its legitimate necessity as the iconic embodiment of documentality. To her, "the concern for getting a clear and unobstructed image, and the belief that it is possible to strip that image, that representation, of human bias and perspective and ethicality so that it is 'objective,' indelibly marks the inscriptions of the professional gaze with their own problematic ethical perspective in the fact of human mortality and visual taboo" (1987, p. 14). This clinical gaze, in a way, directs our attention to how biography, as part of the umbrella term 'documentary', cannot be completely subjective despite its creative approaches to the subject's life. As the bone to filmic materiality, it bears testimony to Gregory Currie's (1999) "traces" (another term for the indexicality of the photographic) that furthers the factual premise underscoring his concept, "testimony", and more, given that, while it correspondingly strives to indicate filmic denotation rather than connotation, it also casts light on the material composition of the mediation. Plantinga's (2003) comprehensive attempt at defining "documentary" aids my endeavour to find a fresh approach to "biography" with the former's examination of its underdetermined premise. It argues for a "new ethos of authenticity" with its attendant focus on performed selves as "forms of play around the self-observed and the self-in-performance" (Corner, 2002, p. 265) and its subsequent conceptual determination, even psychological, that underscores the director's "creative manipulations and staging". It is, again, this desire for authenticity that I embarked on this research, investigating the possibility for legitimate appropriations that would point to the biographical film as something added to the something experienced, and, consequently something sensorial.

### **Boyle's Diametrically Visual Staging of Time**

Boyle's vertical version reworks the theatrical technique of staging by harnessing the moments surrounding the three major campaigns of Apple during the twentieth century: the 1984 launch of Lisa shot with 16 mm filmstock, the 1988 release of Apple II in 35 mm, and the 1998 Mackintosh promotion with digital filming. Employing Wozniak as a consultant, Sorkin has the advantage of a first-hand account of the former's relationship with Jobs and Jobs's relationship with his daughter. Cinematographically different, Boyle makes analogous Apple's technological innovations with the progress made in filmmaking with a refocused attention on the deictic which, according to the Oxford reference dictionary, would be *discours*, the

significant conversations underscoring the backstage drama. Currie's (1999) notion of "testimony" has conceptual purchase too when this analysis turns its attention to the illocutionary force of the performative. The performative aspect of the word "moment" becomes relevant with its focus on the synonymous relation to the word "stage", appositely linking its temporal significance with Kermode's use of the phrase "three-act structure". These "moments" correspond to the Simondonian transduction whereby the human, always *with* technics, contributes socio-culturally, here in the form of (the two Steves' *Eureka moment*) democratised and personalised devices that provided human interactions connectivity despite spatial and temporal disconnections. In fact, one can even say that their invention of the personal computer ushers in the digital age, another reason why this paper is on Jobs whose life is one defined by creativity, communication and collaboration, the very characteristics of digitisation and media convergence. These cinematographic uses not only spotlight the durational ground of this filmic biography but also reflexively ties it to the technological innovations implied by the etymology of "moment" derived from its Latin source "momentum" with semantic connotation to "movement", and the transitions made as cinematic adaptations of Walter Isaacson's enlivening biographical book on Jobs, released immediately after the latter's death in October 2011.

If the significant events that occur at the Apple campaigns are given to us in the backstage in a three-act structure, it is the performative force of the word "stage" that becomes Boyle's version, where the invisibility of Jobs's personal life belies the visibility of his professional one. Even as we analytically consider the dialogical possibilities of Plantinga's "testimony", whereby Apple's backstory, bound tightly to Jobs, is strangely and palpably featured backstage, and stylistically indicative of Boyle's relentless ploughing into Jobs's motives for his actions. Moreover, this auteurial attention on the theatrical backstage signals too access beyond Jobs's professional persona that seems always to take centre-stage (as championed by Stern's 2013 and Wyatt's 2008 versions). Corner's rather invocative use of "documentary diversion" could be reworked as diverting attention to the multidimensionality of "truth", proposed by my use of "aesthetics of asymptote congruence". These "authentic" depictions (authenticity guaranteed by the balanced approach of the dialogic), ironically challenging the *verité* of direct cinema, renders clear the medium's covert want of truthful guarantee, a notion further aggravated by digital manipulation and media convergence, unsettling Anders Fagerjord's genre discussion that views documentary's reliance on the photographic real as a guarantee of truth (2010, p. 7). Therefore, what truly resounds has to be

the dialogic underscoring of “interpretation” whereby biographical authenticity could be reached through *discours*.

Corresponding to Plantinga’s exposition on “the use of staged and re-enacted scenes” in the early versions of cinema vérité, the staged and re-enacted elements of both biographies do more than Currie’s “traces”, the accurate visual presentation of the scene, and therefore are not just Plantinga’s “asserted veridical representation”, a term comparable to the former’s use of “traces” (2005, p. 112), both indicating the fidelity of the photographic. Further corroborated by Sluga and Terrone’s “markers of truthfulness” (2021, p. 108): the translated “unplayed” of Soviet film theorists’ “neigrovoi” to the “play” of “igrovoi”, signal the nonfictional element inferred from the Russian term, conceptually giving us what I would call “aesthetics of authenticity”. While “igrovoi” gestures to the creative function of the imaginary in the Lacanian psychoanalytic triadic structure, the “neigrovoi” is crucial to Carroll’s notion of presumptive assertion or Currie’s concept of “traces”, that ties the illocutionary within Lacanian Symbolic to the facts or truths upon which biographical writing engage with to render realistically the figure concerned. And it is the assertion here that the illocutionary act of saying and showing, also the premises of the essay film as defined by Laura Rascaroli in “The Essay Film: Problems, Definitions, Textual Commitments” iconically actualises Jobs. The glossary to *Life-Writing* (1995) defines the “essay” as a “later application to biographical works it suggested an easy or cursory handling of a life story, limited to a few aspects of a life and abandoning the narrative, or chronological, approach” (p. 22), this paper retrieves the portion “limited to a few aspects of life and abandoning the narrative, or chronological, approach” in order to enhance the essayistic “History of Steve Jobs” and Boyle’s biographical experimentation, an approach that invites a type of viewing that makes us move from seeing the biographical film as mere “presumptive fact”, thereby not just merely Noël Carroll’s (1997) “film of presumptive assertion”, also cited in Plantinga’s article. However, Boyle’s version cannot be said to evince the “transgressive” dimension of the essay film because contemporary American filmmaking has borrowed extensively the cinematographic elements from experimental European films. Rascaroli (2008) alludes to Theodore Adorno’s concept of ‘heresy’ in the latter’s *Notes to Literature*, a literary technique that signals the indeterminacy, openness and non-fixity of the essay film and by extension the new biographical film, which could be described as borrowing from the experimental and arthouse facets of the essay film. These filmic emergences (the word “emergence” is used with conceptual care that binds itself to the aesthetics of asymptote congruence) evidently do not only adhere to *historie*; they rework

the conversational, or, more appropriately the dialogic, aspect of *discours* in a transductive manner, indirectly showing the staged quality of the visual writing of Jobs's life, one hinging on creative cinematography, and the dialogic features of Boyle's biographical rendition of the key figure's life, making more pronounced the curation, manipulation and edition of details here. Notwithstanding these filmic disruptions of the Hollywood intensified continuity editing, which simulates the linearity of rational and objective thought, these cinematographic processes inevitably give, what Carroll calls "*authentic point-of-view*" (1983, p. 4, emphasis mine), appositely describing his approximation of objectivity, a topic he dedicated a number of pages. It is the interruption of the intensified continuity editing that indicates how Stern's version, structured more likely the way fiction films are made that makes it act as a foil to Boyle's version. In fact, Rascaroli's (2008) discussion on the essay film is advantageous to my insistence that biographic films are not merely Plantinga's "asserted veridical representation"; its genealogical premise is given creative force by the paper: Jobs's life is given to us (given in the sense of "gift") by way of iconographic interpellation, a conceptual transducing of both Rascaroli's (2008) "interpellation of the gaze" with Nichols's sense of the iconographic, which "[significantly and paradoxically] incarnates... [the] body as a precarious balance of person, persona and narrative agent that cannot be any one of these possibilities entirely" (1987, p. 13). Taking Nichols's use of iconography to the level of realism, Boyle's and Stern's films arguably instantiate the interweaving of both the Peircean use of "icon" as "resemblance or likeness" such as Michael Fassbender as Steve Jobs merging with the iconic status of Jobs himself, further enhanced by their symbolic reputations as technological visionaries who transformed the way we engage with one another globally by shifting the contemporary emphasis from transportation to communication infrastructure. Thus, it is not just the semantic synonymy of "movement" (also prodigiously indicating the visual writing of motion pictures, the *graphia* of biography illuminated here) as indicated by my earlier espousal of the "momentous"; it is more significantly the momentous inventiveness of Jobs's visions with Wozniak's materialisations of those visions.

Using the term "iconographic interpellation" here means a conceptual departure from Louis Althusser's term which means the hailing to being of a subject who freely subjects himself to the dominant ideology of the society within which he is embedded. This innovative and invocative implication within the word is brought to the fore, focusing on the "coming into being" of the subject as a visual writing of his life. This adds to Rascaroli's (2008) definition of interpellation that emphasises how the viewer is called upon to visually partake of the filmic

content of the documentary, an engagement that relies on Nichols's "ways of seeing" in *Representing Reality*, manners of approach that consider both the objectivity of a historical take and the subjectivity of the directorial auteur at once, thereby allowing one to infer through this interpellative gesture the performative force of the illocutionary mentioned earlier. According to Plantinga (2003), the "saying" could be inferred as being more assertive than the "showing", a characteristic of the ethnographic documentary, but most film theorists would insist that both the acts of saying and showing can be assertive. This paper, however, concerns itself with how the viscosity of the showing and the verbosity of the saying provide presence to the absence of the actual person, further enriched by the notion of performance which also suggests the possibility of an interlocution made evident with the communicative presence of a "you" to an "I", the actor communicating with another actor or the audience or the character interacting with the viewer, the filmmaker with the actor et cetera, an illocutionary demonstration. The "I" as identified cannot be actualised unless there is the "you" in any communicative act, because the process of identity formation in any communicative situation necessarily involves speech acts that have always as its fundamental the more than one. More importantly, biographical accounts are not subjectivation but interpretative freeing of lives as (subjective) acts of mourning: any biographical creation is a memorious event even if this person whose life is written is still alive. It is, of course, more poignant when the individual whose life is depicted has passed away. Noteworthy is the fact that Jobs is the very symbol of the insatiable desire for innovation that is defining of this contemporary age. While a Heideggerian being-toward-death underpins life-writing, life itself unveiling with its move towards death, it paradoxically affirms life with an honest reckoning of one's mortality. This, for Jobs, occurred in 2009, when he was confronted with his possibly fatal illness, an experience that most likely informed his inspirational advice on not wasting time.

### **The New Millenium's Culture of Invention**

Time is, indeed, of the essence here because of my emphasis on "invention" rather than convention. Ingold's tonal description of "convention" within his introduction to Wagner's *The Invention of Culture* indicates the inevitability of conventions within culture and yet it inadvertently implies how "invention" should take precedence, not due to its novel nor progressive inferences (both significantly crucial to our existence) but how it signals the passing of time correlating to life as a mutable flow, only to be momentarily fixed when identified. Lukac's words on discursive films ring true for the new biographical film: "the essayist must now become conscious of his own self, must find himself and build something



of himself” (2008, p. 26), words of the profoundest reminder that we invent so that extensions of ourselves, as Marshall McLuhan would have it, could be found, extensions reflective of who we are. It is part of the argument here that Wyatt Jr., Stern and Boyle, through their filmic representations of Jobs’s lives, unwittingly respond to Bingham’s title on the biopic. More significantly, the deployment of Lukac’s words here point to the existential transduction at play when remarking visually others’ lives. It is not just Jobs’s life but theirs too even as they write the former’s visually; a part of their becoming enacted transductively through the biographically making of Jobs. Thus, something of the same could be said of the biographical: it is not merely the filmmaker nor scriptwriter finding himself but us, the audience, collectively finding ourselves via the individual whose life is exhibited. This interpellation as a type of definitive rediscovery that calls forth not just the definiteness of identity but also the transmediation implied in the word “biographia”, the textual refiguring of the real hybridised with the filmic reenactment coming forth as cultural production, an iconographic (re)presentation, of a person’s scripted life. This transmedia reenactment oddly attests not to the objective recount in the sense of documenting, whether Nichols’s expository, observational, performative, reflexive or poetic, but the creative employment of signs, textual or otherwise. In fact, the various biographical versions exemplify our incessant pursuit of the authentic Steve Jobs. Therefore, can one say that only Plantinga’s asserted veridical versions present truthful accounts, or do more creative portrayals contain within themselves the potential for another type of veracity? Plantinga’s (2003) article alludes to the objections posed by a number of documentary theorists against using the hybridised notion of the objective and subjective to describe documentaries, concluding with a somewhat facile comment that the fuzziness of boundary is not a good enough argument for propounding this hybrid. This position, however, invites a rejoinder: the fuzziness of this border may not be an effective argument for championing the hybrid but the elastic boundary between the objective and subjective can be reworked favourably for a more authentic visual accommodation of the historical figure’s life. Boyle’s biographical film evinces Lacan’s notion of the subjective-objective, whereby his psychoanalytic explanation suggests how the process of identification as interpellation works. The filmic identification with the subject of the nonfiction film occurs with an iconographic “suture”, a concept that Jacques Alain-Miller, Lacan’s successor, uses to describe the ego ideal.

Reworking Alain-Miller’s suture to direct attention to the specular and affective identificatory processes of psychoanalysis, comparable definitions could be found too in *Life-Writing, The Glossary*. Boyle’s *Steve Jobs* presents these identificatory processes as double-

bind, threads that double between the viewer and the subject of the biographical film wherein the ideal image is also an idealised point of view from which the subject sees the image, one which renders clear the imperfections of the image which then repels him even as he is attracted to it. The iconic reflexivity is evident when the viewer sees the filmic subject as the ideal ego via the imaginary and then the ego ideal via the symbolic, both the ideal image for which the subject strives as well as the inherent flaws that make the ideal image not that perfect after all. And this is detected in Kermode's review when he writes: "but it's hard to imagine either of them matching Fassbender's capacity to engage and repel simultaneously. We are at once appalled by Jobs's denial of his daughter, yet somewhat swayed by Sorkin's sympathetic suggestion that his own adoption was the traumatic key to both his success and failure" (*The Guardian*).

### Conclusion

Ending this paper with Simondonian *transduction*, I would like to foreground the innovative dynamism associated with the altered pedigree of this term that signals the illocutionary convergence between the "I" and "you" of my genealogical address, revealing the multi-layered agency elaborated above, supported by Nichols's use of Peircean semiotics, a networked approach that indicates the new objectivity addressed here. This objectivity works well with the transindividuality upon which the Simondonian ontogenetic process is based, a process describing the nature of all life. Key to Simondon's transindividuality is the creators' transductive contribution (transductive because the source code itself is a hybrid between the real and representative, human and technics) to the community, writing the lives of individuals whose lives become visual tributes to lives well lived. Boyle's 2015 *Steve Jobs* is testimony to the developmental process of the key figure's technological success as well as his personal failures. Memorable they may be, the content of these biographical films matters because they represent lives that are no longer present as such, absent bodies that require performative presences of simulations, imitations and representations, the bodies with which to mourn. One can even assert that the absences of the subjects of life-writing are the very *raison d'être* of the inscriptive presencing itself. All sorts of information could be found about Jobs as well as authored by him online, indicating the type of legacy he has left behind. Forbes' "Steve Jobs' Legacy Still Drives Apple's Current and Future Products", written by Tim Bajarin, attributes Apple's ever-innovative philosophy to Jobs's own vision of a "culture of innovation". This "Apple way" is the argumentative crux of the biographical elaborations here. If false information proliferates together with authentic information on Jobs, these testimonies are

indicative of the psychological impact exerted by a man who dared to live life to its fullest.

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