

**DON'T HIDE THE MADNESS**  
*PERCEPTION, BIPOLAR AND THE FILM FORM*

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## ABSTRACT

Human perception is a process that begins with sensory input that is organized and then interpreted. During this process there is a movement of information about an event in the real world, into information that represents that event in the mind. This movement of information in the form of perception is similar to the filming process; where the event, sensory input, organisation and interpretation is like the pro-filmic event (that which exists in the world before or regardless of whether it is filmed), the light entering the camera lens, and, the editing process and audience experience, respectively. When these systems are influenced at any stage of the process, there is an alteration in the resulting representation. The pro-filmic event can be influenced through the filmmaking techniques used to record it that may influence beliefs that concern the event. For example, the recording of films that concern mental illness need to be approached with caution because treatment of the pro-filmic event can either reinforce or challenge stereotypes about the mentally ill. Bipolar is a mental disorder of mood that is often represented with wild inaccuracy in films. The biographical drama, *Shine* (1996), for example, attempts to represent the life of David Helfgott, a musician who suffered a mental breakdown and spent subsequent years in mental asylums. He is portrayed as an imbecile, always mumbling indistinctly. In the film, the connection between psychopathology and creativity is supported, heavy-handedly. This demonstrates how the intervention (by the filmmaker and his filmmaking techniques) can transform meaning and influence viewer perception through the film medium.

For the case-study documentary film, *Don't Hide the Madness* (2017), I use recording and editing techniques to portray a personal account of bipolar in a way that challenges mainstream beliefs about the disorder. I argue that this application of the film medium has the capacity to confront stigma and change perceptions about mental illness.

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## INTRODUCTION

**Most misunderstandings in the world could be avoided if people would simply take the time to ask, “What else could this mean?”  
(Alder, 2017)**

This study investigates the film medium and the process of human perception as intersecting at a critical juncture in combatting stereotypical assumptions that surround mental illness and its portrayal in documentary film. The creative production that this study is accompanied by, *Don't Hide the Madness* (“the film”), is a documentary film that portrays a young woman who is searching for a tool to explain to her parents what it feels like to have bipolar disorder. The film is an autoethnographic text because it is both process and product (Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2011). Through the film and the thesis, I critically analyze my behavior in an attempt to describe bipolar.

The film endeavours to initiate a more informed awareness of mental illness through the creative presentation of a personal account of bipolar disorder, as well as challenge negative and uninformed beliefs surrounding it. *Don't Hide the Madness* serves as a platform to capture and share my experience of creating a film, the management of my bipolar diagnosis and the challenge for me as a filmmaker to communicate my subjective experience of bipolar.

The film does not function to give a complete description of bipolar disorder - it is not a recitation from the *Diagnostic Statistical Manual* (DSM) of psychological disorders, instead it is an attempt to communicate my individual experience - like the visual system that “does not trouble itself to give a perfect description of the world” (Walsh & Kulikowski, 1998: p.3). In the film, the “ideal never was to pretend that the camera was not there - the ideal was to try to [...] record ‘normal behaviour’” which allows the “total portrait” of my experiences as an individual with a mental disorder to be authentic to actuality (Young, 1975: p.101).

The film aims to “reveal and reflect truths, and invoke social change” (Blick, 2015: p.2). It is my opinion that when we blame films “for the status of public opinion towards mental illness” we circumvent our own responsibility in sustaining harmful representations that maintain stigma and ignorance in society (Anderson, 2003: p.304).

The human perception process uses the sensory system (and its organisation and interpretation of sensory input) in order to have awareness about our internal and external world (Foley & Matlin, 2015: p.2). In the visual system, one of the five sensory systems that allow us to adapt and survive, light falling on the eye's visual receptors (sensation) is converted to neural impulses that which send information about the light to be interpreted (perception) by the occipital cortex (Grieve, Mojapelo-Batka, van Deventer, 2006: p.285). The argument in this study is that human perception, that begins with sensation, is a process similar to the process of creating a film: from recording the pro-filmic event to editing as an artistic tool.

A psychological approach to understanding perception is that it is a meaning-making process. Gestalt psychology, a school of thought emerging from Germany early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, stressed that the “whole can be greater than the sum of its parts” (Weiten, 20\_\_ : 138). An instantly recognizable image is one that looks like a vase or two silhouetted faces: the Ruben's vase. What makes this image notable is that opposite spaces (positive and negative space) are existing simultaneously, however we can only perceive one reality at time. Usually, a film's choice of shot or angle shows the audience a singular point of view. But are we not seeing? The use of a split screen challenges this tradition of a singular viewpoint by forcing the audience to expand their meaning of a filmic event to include more than one perspective. This use of editing supports the film's intention to challenge preconceptions of the mentally ill.

. This image describes the relationship between depression and mania with regards to bipolar, and appears in *Don't Hide the Madness* (2017).

The process of human perception follows a path that leads from the retina to organisation and interpretation of the sensory stimulus in the brain. Perception and film both introduce new information to the person who perceives the sensory input, and the audience who witnesses a cinematic world, respectively, for the purpose of acquiring “new” knowledge that challenges ideas in “old” knowledge. This process assumes that beliefs systems are influenced by knowledge. Usó-Doménech and Nescolarde-Selva (2016: p.147) assert that beliefs “arise through experience [where] experience [needs] previous beliefs and reason to be assimilated, and reason needs experience to be formed”. In this way, when the audience experiences the film, their beliefs can be challenged by the “new” (and authentic) representation of individuals with bipolar disorder.

Freyd (1993: p.109) asserts that “‘representation’ refers to the correspondence between

information in the world and information in the mind”. Therefore, in creating a film it is important to be aware of the meaning of shots and sound and how the viewer could perceive them. This end will inform the process of the recording and editing of the film.

Aufderheide asserts that:

[V]iewers certainly shape the meaning of any documentary, by combining our own knowledge of and interest in the world with how the filmmaker shows it to us. Audience expectations are also built on prior experience...

(2007: p.2)

The idea of “prior experience” is important because the film relies on misguided preconceptions to achieve its goal. A shift in information in the mind occurs when this sensory input is acted on by an external force. The role of *Don't Hide the Madness* is to motivate a shift in the viewer's existing impression of people with bipolar disorder by presenting an insider view of bipolar disorder (sourcing from personal experience, rather than expert views), instead of presenting mental illness in a manner that is dispassionate and detached. It is in this way

that *Don't Hide the Madness* hopes to shift mainstream opinions of people who have bipolar disorder.

Using qualitative approaches, this essay is focused on four things, namely: (1) the processes of human perception with regards to its visual system and interpretive processes; (2) the film medium and its production (recording and editing) as similar to the process of perception; (3) the topic of mental illness, specifically bipolar disorder, and (4) the production of a film as case study in representing subjective experience of a mental illness.

The research methods used include direct observation based in my personal account of bipolar disorder, the case study of *Don't Hide the Madness*, and, a literature review of the first three topics listed above. Using these methods, the essay asks how a filmmaker can use the documentary form as a platform for self-expression when they are the subject of a film. This relates to an important goal of *Don't Hide the Madness*, is the hope of positively affecting common social outlooks about mental illness. I hope to achieve this by challenging the viewer's pre-existing perception of bipolar disorder through "new" knowledge from the film.

It is my main argument that, through using the techniques of creating a film that parallels the process of human perception, and applying these concepts to my own bipolar disorder in a documentary film (as the filmmaker and the subject), I can create a film that is geared towards shifting viewers' ideas about bipolar disorder.

## CHAPTER 1: PERCEPTION AND FILM - FROM THE EYE AND THE LENS

**The world is full of magic things, patiently waiting for our senses  
to grow sharper**

**(Yeats, 2017)**

The endeavour to re-produce something as closely as possible to its natural state is thwarted by the very process of re-production. The *Online Etymology Dictionary* (2017c; 2017d) provides useful definitions of “art” and “nature” where “art” is traced back to the Middle English, meaning “human workmanship” (“art”), and, “nature” comes from the Latin *natura*, “[the] course of things”, or, as something existing prior to human intervention (“Nature”). In this way, art is the opposite of nature. However, the act of perception, even of something in nature, requires a human, physiological process. In this way, art is a result of reproduction, requiring firstly *perception*, and secondly the mental processes that enable one to *construct* the piece of art, both of which are a function of the mind and its systems such as its visual system. For this film to be created, there had to be the experience of “nature” (bipolar disorder) so as to inspire “art” (the film).

Ann Marie Barry writes in *Visual Intelligence: Perception, Image and Manipulation in Visual Communication*:

[We] draw on our past experience to give us a workable image of our world. This image orients us, allows us to comprehend [a] situation, and helps us to recognise significant factors within it. [...] The image that appears on the retina... [is called the] ‘visual field’, and the mental creation [of the image is...] our ‘visual world’ (1997: p.15)

This highlights a complication in determining what reality is. If the visual field is a result of light, then the visual system is the tool that recreates the actual world as a projected image onto the screen of our minds. There is a second complication in that perception happens over time. Thus, what we perceive is a fraction later than what we experience as reality, since a *process* has a time value. The figure below illustrates this process (Fig. 1).

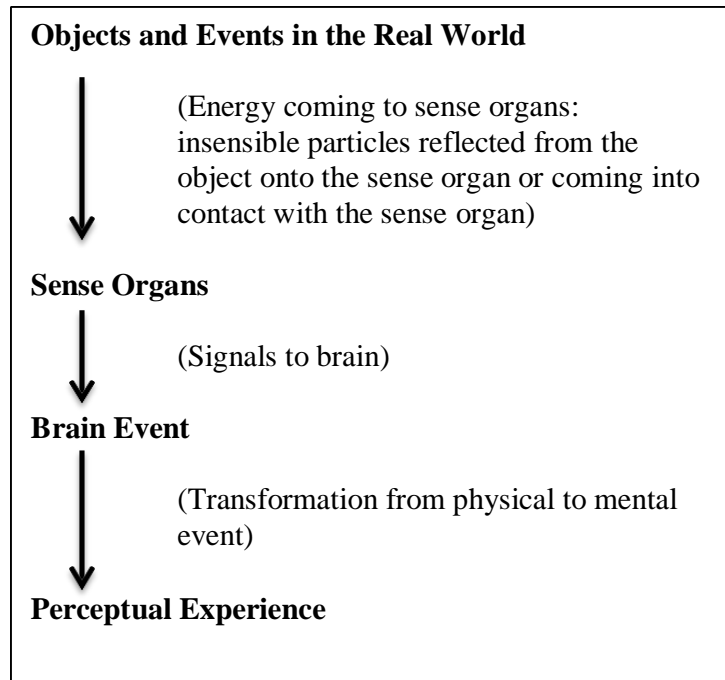


Fig. 1 Diagram showing the process of perception. (Pojman, 1999: p.76)

This demonstrates that perception is a succession of events that begin at the retina and end in a mental image produced by the visual system. Therefore this system is a translator for understanding our environment, which enables interpretation of the environment.

Similarly, a completed film has followed a process (of recording the pro-filmic event through to its edit) that begins with the camera and ends in an on-screen representation of that event which is registered through the sensory faculties (such as sight and hearing) which is then interpreted by the audience. Thus, perception involves two processes: (1) low-to-high-level transformation of sensory input information, and, (2) the processing that applies to a person's knowledge and attention (Bernstein, 2013). Therefore, perception is the way "organisms visually receive, organise, and structure information from the environment" (Washburn, 1999: p.550). Comparably, film organises shots and audio in the editing process so that the audience can perceive the film's subject matter that is structured in a coherent way.

Our ability to perceive our environment is no accident; it has developed through evolution, and is influenced by an individual's physiology and past experience. This suggests that every person's perception is to some extent shared, but at the same time uniquely

subjective - like the subjective nature of *Don't Hide the Madness* (B. Barry, 2003).

Physiologically, the amygdala, the brain's emotional centre, plays the primary role in perception, and is crucial for our emotional processing of and response to cues from the environment (B. Barry, 2003). This influences our behaviour. Fiske and Taylor (2013: p.11) understand social behaviour as "a function of people's perceptions of their world". Since perception influences behaviour, a change, or even challenge, to perception can result in a change in behaviour, or even in attitude.

The processes of "expression through art [...] are perceived [...] through the [...] visual sensory and perceptual channels, and then are processed for their affect, associations, and meaning through cognitive and verbal channels" (Lusebrink, 2004: p.125). Interestingly, besides the creative definition of art offered above, the word art can also be used as a verb "to be", as in "thou art" (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2017c). In this way, art is a verb that describes a state of being. Based in these definitions, this study suggests that an art form, such as documentary film, reflects the act of experiencing a state of being, while it entails a process of creation that is communicated through one's senses. Furthermore, the state of being can relate to ourselves: "I am". If the self exists in the pro-filmic world, and in this argument it does, then the "human workmanship" is in creating a reproduction of this self. In other words, art (the creation) by art (the being) is an act of self-discovery: the uncovering and observing of what the self is about. This relates strongly to the function of documentary film, which to my mind is to shed light on a topic or topics and to connect the viewers to the content of the film thus establishing a relationship between the social actors and the audience. Furthermore, this establishes an environment in which the viewer situates him/herself in relation to the projected world portrayed in the film, where the film represents "motion in cinema [that] cannot be distinguished from the visual experience of motion in the real world" (Hopkins, 1994: p.55). Erik Barnouw (1993: p.3) asserts that "[the] crucial aspect of documentary film [is] its ability to open our eyes to worlds available to us but, for one reason or another, [is] not perceived". So in terms of *Don't Hide the Madness*, it hopes to invite the audience into a world that they cannot usually physically and mentally access. This has a deeper effect in that the audience is relocated from the position of distanced, observer to a position within the narrative that unfolds

unpredictably. Therefore, the audience is taken from a place of safety into a space that is unexplored. This drives home the subjectivity of the film and emphasises the unpredictability of mood swings, an out-standing, if not characteristic symptom of bipolar I experience. Because this film is delivered from a subjective perspective, there is an implied “I”, and since the film is in dialogue with the audience, they are the implied “You”. This “dialogic” relationship emphasises the audience as subjective, and as having an opinion - of which can be addressed and challenged (Lebow, 2012: p.3). In this way, the theme of subjectivity is extended to the audience of whom are “implicated in the notion of subjectivity [...] subjectivity, then, is the process of knowing a story - telling it and perceiving it” (Branigan, 1984: p.1).

## CHAPTER 2: THE FILM FORM AND DOCUMENTARY

**It's not what a movie is about, it's how it is about it**

**(Ebert, 2017)**

It is worth reiterating at this point that human perception, divided into three processes (sensory input, organisation and interpretation), is like the process of recording and editing. The retina is like the lens, the brain's computation is like the camera creating the film footage, the organization of this information is like editing, and the interpretation is like the experience of the audience. To be more exact: the pro-filmic event ("objects and events in the real world") sends signals of light that are received by the lens ("sense organs") and computed through the camera ("brain event") to produce film that is assembled and which is experienced by the audience ("perceptual experience") (See Fig. 1). This describes the relationship between perception and film that are processes occurring over time. After all, a process is a series of steps toward an end. Therefore, a process is a journey through which meaning is created.

In film, meaning begins with the camera. Does the physical, mechanical camera itself understand a story? No it doesn't, but Barry asserts that "advances in technology have provided the means for cameras to perform computation in the moment of capture" (A. Barry, 1997: p.1). What is the reasoning behind the camera's computation? Why does the camera record as it does? When set on automatic, the camera adjusts itself to be able to clearly see the pro-filmic event unfold. Following a similar process, there is also auto-focus, and the opening and closing of the aperture. Finally, the camera calculates the zebra pattern, which is a tool that helps the cameraperson to identify which parts of the shot are over-exposed. In other words, the camera "[adapts] to new inputs and unexpected situations" (B. Barry, 2003: p.1). Is the camera itself being objective? Certainly not, there is still interference by and through the camera - therefore, what we see on-screen is not actuality, but rather a representation of it, a reproduction. The very presence of a recording device entails a *manipulation* of variables such as light. However, this film emphasises an intervention by a person, rather than that of technology.

In post-production, the element of editing is crucial in deepening and expanding the making of meaning in the film (B. Barry, 2003). In *Don't Hide the Madness*, editing is an indicator of subjectivity, because it creates focal points, such as inter-titles. For example, the inter-titles are shots that are inserted between the end of one act and the beginning of another that anchor the ideas explored in the proceeding act. They define the stage of the creative process of making the film. The film's inter-titles act like chapter markers in a book whose function is to divide up separate thoughts that make up a whole. In this way, the film is expressing relatedness on a structural level. This is important for creating a sense of "cause and effect" in the film: when one approach of filmmaking (to express my experience of bipolar disorder) reaches an impasse, an alternative method is pursued (Wiggins, 2014: p.14). This functions to push the narrative forward and to reveal more ways in how I try not to "hide the madness" - thus supporting the overall theme of the film. Furthermore, in terms of bipolar disorder, this embodies my attempt to focus my thoughts (of which are characteristically erratic) in order to locate myself in the narrative. Lastly, the inter-titles are in black-and-white, which stresses the extremes in bi-polarity, depressive and manic, respectively.

Editing, in essence, takes the recording of the pro-filmic event and arranges it to further the film's goal(s), as well as, "hide the mechanics of its own production" (Hopkins, 1994: p.59). "[A]spects of the production" include, but are not limited to, "shot selection, setting, sound, lighting" and movement (Wilson et al., 1999: p.241). Fig. 2 shows the shot of the word "reality" while drawing attention to its self-reflexivity. The cropped shot refers to the idea that "reality" - in film - has been recorded and is therefore a constructed one. This is an example of the use of self-reflexivity in the film to remind the audience that what they are watching was created by someone, the filmmaker - indicating subjectivity. This shot is also more cropped than the rest of the shots on either side of it, suggesting that reality is reproduced on the film screen. Furthermore, it gives a sense that reality is experienced as detached according to the first person narrator. This is foremost a "mode of address" that "endeavours to articulate rather than occlude [...] the position of the filmmaker" (Lebow, 2012: p.2).

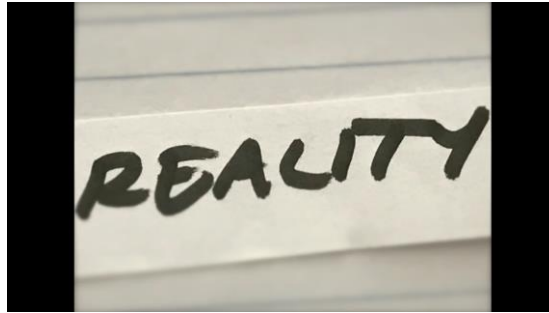


Fig. 2 Image to illustrate self-reflexivity: “reality” shot (*Don’t Hide the Madness*, 2017)

In *Film Editing: The Art of the Expressive*, Valerie Orpen (2003: p.1) defines film editing as having three stages: “the selection of takes and their length; the arrangement and timing of shots, scenes and sequences; and their combination with the soundtrack” that is a “connective process”. The film’s structure is deliberately fragmented - *within* a framework. The film is divided into four acts: (1) film planning, (2) the cymatics experiments, (3) the *film noir* genre, and (4) footage of my journey in creating the film. Various editing techniques are used, such as (a) fades (Fig. 3 a + b), (b) colour grading (Fig. 4), (c) split-screen (Fig. 5), (d) non-linear editing (Fig. 6), and (e) super slow-motion (Fig. 7).

Since perception is a process, it has a time value, which suggests movement. In *Don’t Hide the Madness*, movement relies on the “*succession* of shots at twenty-five frames per second, and this motion signifies film space and time [...] and gives continuity and unity to the film narrative, and [structures] the cinematic place”, hence the term, motion pictures (Hopkins, 1994: p.55). In the example below (Fig.3), successive shots (3a) and (3b) show me turning my head and going to sleep. Because shot (b) is barely distinguishable, it relies on shot (a) for its visual persistence, and in this example, there is a persistence in colour and subject. In this way, then, it reasons that in a sequence of shots, each shot should contain a driver that logically pushes the first frame to the second (B. Barry). Therefore, the meaning of the first frame in a shot “depends not only on its content but also on how that content is perceptually treated”, where the second frame gives the first frame its “direction and helps to place it in a meaningful context” (B. Barry, 2003: p.191).



Fig. 3 (a) + (b) Image to illustrate “going to sleep” shots (*Don't Hide the Madness*, 2017)



Fig. 4 Image to illustrate colour grading: four sections (*Don't Hide the Madness*, 2017)

(a) Overall the first section of *Don't Hide the Madness* makes use of an orange/yellow colour scheme (Fig. 4 a). Since these colours are analogous, they suggest a flatness that expresses the protagonist's lack of ideas and an emotional numbness. The *film noir* section (Fig. 4 b) of the film, goes further by removing all saturation from the images, using black and white images with high contrast. This scheme was chosen for three reasons. Firstly, the black and white symbolise the contrast between depression and mania, the two mood states that characterise bipolar disorder. Secondly, the absence of colour suggests the numbness that some patients feel. There is an “inhibition of emotion manifested in visual expression through the decrease in colour usage, size of forms, and spatial arrangement seen in depression” (Lusebrink, 2004: p.130). And thirdly, this absence is more effective than a saturated image at this stage because the fields of form and depth are isolated from a third space (colour) which “allows one to direct attention more effectively to [this]... source of information”, where the regions of high contrast are “more attention grabbing - more ‘interesting’ - than homogenous areas” (Ramachandran & Hirstein, 1999: p.24-25). Act four, the last section of the film, delivers an orange/blue combination, which is a common colour scheme in most films - signifying everyday life - or a return to what is conventional and safe (Fig. 4 c). In terms of the content of the film,

this suggests emotional stability, and, in terms of context, this suggests a synthesis of my ideas to the extent that I have successfully produced a film. A consistency in colour palette signifies a temporal consistency, and, since the colour palette used in the film is inconsistent, there signifies temporal inconsistency - much like the variation in mood that characterises bipolar disorder.

(b) Films “work because they model or simulate mental states: a close-up shot is akin to focusing our attention; a flashback mimics remembering; soft focus connotes a feeling” (Shimamura, 2013: p.3). Transition effects such as fades provide sub-text for the film where the fade-ins/outs represent the dissociation that is experienced, in varying degrees, by some individuals with bipolar disorder. This state of “being” (or a feeling of *not* being) is translated into film when the shot on screen is in a state of absence (black screen). The black screen (as opposed to a white screen) further represents emotional darkness or hopelessness that can be felt in episodes of dissociation. Secondly, shot (a) and (b) (Fig. 5), the fade-to-black transition emphasizes memory loss. Visually, the movement from shot (a) to shot (b) demonstrates a decrease in luminance, or brightness. Loftus (1985: p.342) explains, “lowering luminance reduces the amount of available information in the stimulus”. The movement from shot (a) to shot (b) gives context to memory and bipolar. Typically, my memory decreases during times of depression, which is visually emphasized by the fade-to-black that eventually overwhelms shot (b) in darkness.

A second example in *Don't Hide the Madness*, is the shot sequence of me gazing into space (Fig. 8), sitting in an empty pool, is intercut with a blurred image of my father and I watching a screen. Wolf Koenig asserts that cutting is “a lie” that is told “in order to tell the truth” (Koenig qtd in Biesterfeld, 2016: p. 7). The “lie” was that I appeared peaceful, whereas the “truth” was that I was obsessing over speaking to my parents. Furthermore, the connection between shots (8a) and (8b) suggests an internal thought, an idea, that is supported by my voice-over. The reason that I use a voice-over instead of expressing my thoughts out loud, in-shot, is to demonstrate that the voice of bipolar in society, and mental illness, is either muted or unheard or both. Here is an example where the synthesis of shot and sound reinforces the film’s overall theme of subjectivity “into an accurate and

readable recounting [was] a difficult experience (O’Connell, 2010: p.xi). Furthermore, the interjection of the blurred image into the shot sequence (with the voice-over) invites the audience into an internal world (my internal world) that they might otherwise not be aware of. The film attempts a private “diaristic” gesture (Livingston and Plantinga, 2008: p.532) In my experience, it is difficult to communicate my experience of bipolar, and this segment in the film enables me to do so. Here, the film’s role is one that “actually changes the experience of a [...] space in a positive way” (Langanier & Van Der Pol, 2012: p.723). In this way, through editing, a film becomes a space where transformation of ideas and attitudes towards mental illness is possible.

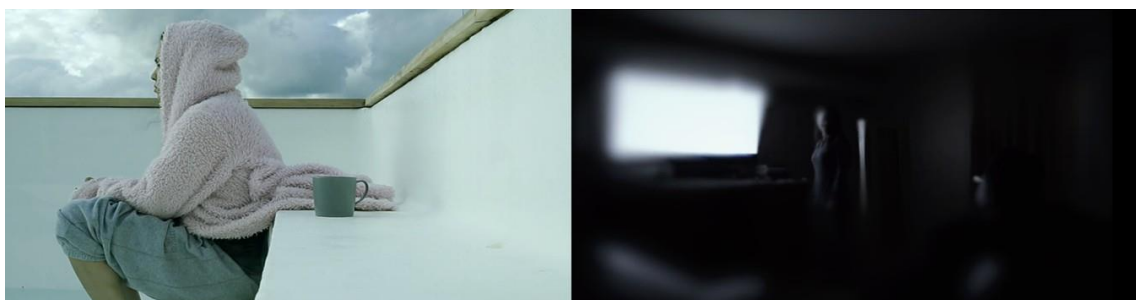


Fig. 8 (a + b) Image to illustrate “pool and dream” (*Don’t Hide the Madness*, 2017)

(c) The split screen symbolises the division of bipolar into its two mood states. For example, the same event can be perceived through the lens of two moods that change the way the event is perceived. Therefore, these two perspectives of the same event are visualized by showing two different shots of the same event (the exporting process of the film in section four). These are presented side by side in a split screen to emphasize the rapid cycling of bipolar mood states that sometimes appear as happening at the same time.

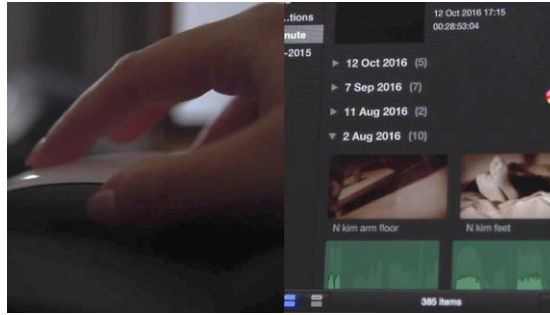


Fig. 5 Image to illustrate split screen: scene: exporting the film (*Don't Hide the Madness*, 2017)

(d) The non-linear structuring, that is, non-sequential presentation of events, in the fourth section of the film is used to represent the memory loss (or at least disordered memory) that is symptomatic of bipolar disorder. This extends to problems with attention, resulting in disorganised thoughts. Thus, the non-linear ordering of the “process of filmmaking” section represents these problems with cognition.

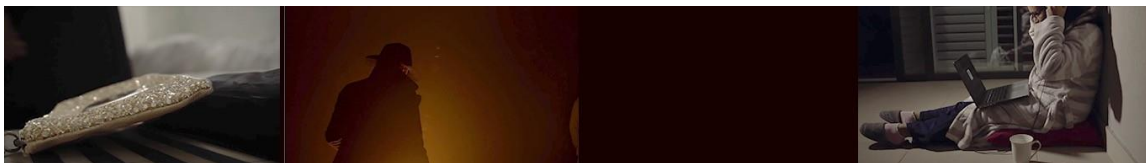


Fig. 6 Image to illustrate non-linear editing: assembly of images in the fourth section, “The Filming Process” (*Don't Hide the Madness*, 2017)

(e) The medication scene features super slow-motion and overlays of different clip speeds (of the same clip) to produce the effect of being heavily medicated. This scene visually disorientates the viewer because this imagery is not usually seen in the real world, unless heavily medicated on psychiatric or possibly other drugs. Here, I am *showing* a feeling that is un-sharable through words. The consequence is that the visual form “can initiate relations of recognition that move beyond an undifferentiated ‘we’ of spectatorship toward conditions of mutuality” (Cross, 2004: p.204). The film form is used in an attempt to draw the viewer into the experience of the protagonist, to create identification and so lead to understanding. This is important in the film industry where the social “treatment of the

mentally ill [in the] past appear exploitative, sensationalist, crude and ignorant of the realities” that people with bipolar disorder deal with (Blick, 2015: p.2).



Fig. 8 Image to illustrate super slow-motion: the medication scene (*Don't Hide the Madness*, 2017)

On a physiological level, the human mind is like a film. Where there is a group of cells that make up the physical perceptual network, so there is a sequence of shots that make up a film (B. Barry, 2003). Münsterberg posits that film acts like our minds (qtd in Langdale, 2002). There are definite divisions in shots according to duration - such as the long take. In the film, duration of the shots vary according to the phase of bipolar they demonstrate. The beginning section (“film planning” section) that speaks about mania is presented in a quick succession of shots. This tension is relieved when the duration of the shots becomes longer in accordance with the characteristics of depression - prolonged and persistent (end of the “cymatics” section). Here, the “minimal motion content [...] serves as a good index of the lull” in emotion (Wang & Cheong, 2009: p.1532). Finally, the pace finds a middle ground as it evens out towards the end (“last days of filming” section). In this way, the editing rhythm mimics my emotional journey that follows a “dramatic construction [such as] the variation of shots for impact, including the [...] close-up” - concepts that D. W. Griffith contributed to film editing in an “attempt to move the camera closer to the action” so as to “enhance the audience’s emotional involvement” in his films (Dancyger, 2014: p.5).

Assessing the role of the filmmaker is not as simple as Barry argues, that a documentary filmmaker’s intention “is to record real world events, then organize recorded fragments

into a coherent story for an audience” (B. Barry, 2003: p.1). This can be motivated by bias or intention. Bias suggests a prejudice in favour of one thing over another, whereas intention suggests a plan, or, in addition, a method for executing that plan. Most filmmakers would reject the idea that they are biased, yet such an investment of time in film projects, particularly those that continue over several years, must be motivated - personally or financially. Either way, there is some kind of personal agency about it. It is my opinion that most independent filmmakers are aware of their bias, particularly when their films revolve around a social issue. The premise of *Don't Hide the Madness* is to reveal the present condition of mental illness, and how it relates to film, in order to motivate a future where society approaches the mentally ill with compassion - I have to apply a method in making the film because there is an “absence” in authentic representation in documentary’s cinematic place that needs to be filled, (Plummer, n.d: p.5).

### CHAPTER 3: EXPLORING MENTAL ILLNESS, CREATIVITY AND ART

**Behind every exquisite thing that existed, there was something tragic**

**(Wilde, 2017)**

Saying that those with mental illness are mad, sad, or bad is an idea that they appear as different, an idea rooted in the Ancient Greek's description of the humors where it is thought that there is a connection between personality and health, both mental and physical, that stresses "internal balance" (Friedman, 1990: p.5). The concept of the humors is basically a system of medicine that associates a balance in four essential fluids (black bile, yellow bile, phlegm and blood) in the body as being healthy, where it is possible that an excess of black bile in the body is a contributing factor to a melancholic temperament (Gould, 2012).

This idea of visually apparent madness, which can be considered a stereotype, is rooted in misconception that mentally ill patients are associated with "wild, unkempt hair; tattered clothing; red-veined, staring eyes [etc.]" and this point of view of mentally ill people reinforces the idea of "them" and "us" (Cross, 2004: p.199). For example, the mental institution scene towards the end of the fiction feature film *Requiem for a Dream* (2000) depicts Sara Goldfarb as unkempt and snot-nosed, repeatedly mumbling wild claims.

Since not all filmmakers who represent mental illness in their films are themselves mentally ill, I would argue that there tends to be a lack of authenticity and subtlety in these representations. This is how *Don't Hide the Madness* is different. I, the filmmaker, have bipolar myself. In this way, there is potential for the film to be highly authentic to the actuality of bipolar disorder. A notable contemporary documentary called *The Secret Life of the Manic Depressive* (2006) is presented by Stephen Fry as narrator and subject. Similarly, *Don't Hide the Madness* features narrated events through voice over. This type of narration comes from traditional documentary films. It is often used to express subjective opinion, and is therefore an indispensable tool in communicating the social actors' experience surrounding bipolar.

It has long been held that creativity is linked with psychiatric disorders, and more recently, with bipolar (previously known as manic-depression). Artists who were diagnosed with or are believed to have suffered from mental illness include Vincent van Gogh (painter),

Antonin Artaud (dramatist and actor), Sylvia Plath (writer), and Ludwig van Beethoven (composer) (Ludwig, 1994).

The results of a study conducted by Ludwig of some 1004 participants who were writers and non-writers, identified that those of a profession in the creative arts “had higher lifetime prevalence of depression and mania” (as well as comorbidity with drug use, panic attacks and eating disorders) (1994: p.1650). Ludwig concluded that these writers’ “emotional difficulties seem to [have] become enmeshed with their work, not only fueling their motivation for expression but also providing them with the basic ingredients for their art” (1994: p.1654). As a product of these experiences, it is possible that these creative individuals perceived life as composed of intense experiences, which they were able to translate into their art - there is a positive correlation between mental illness and art.

It appears that when these individuals create, in some way it represents an unburdening where their internal narrative communicates as a narrative in their art, which could be perceived as them making sense of their internal, and indeed external, world since they possess “a greater ego strength [in the psychological sense] to deal with their problems” (Ludwig, 1994: p.1654). Essentially these individuals undergo a transformation whereby they translate their emotional and mental chaos into a thing of physical, artistic beauty. Therefore, the purpose of *Don't Hide the Madness* is to bring about a catharsis for the filmmaker. Secondly, the film was “made for action”, an address to a society that is resistant to acknowledging mental illness. The film is indeed a subjective account, however its intention is to use this account to affect the audience so that they will come away with more information about and awareness of bipolar disorder that aims to evoke a greater sense of compassion. This sentiment is reflected in the final inter-title of the film: “The world has always been loyal to misunderstanding. The journey to understanding begins with compassion” (Rai, 2017).

In this way it is important that *Don't Hide the Madness* (and indeed film as a whole) be recognised for its social implications because it contributes to perception, a process that enables us to appreciate the world (Corner, 2008).

## CONCLUSION

**Art provides the only antidote to the absurdity [of] our existence -  
the only escape [...] from this vale of tears**

**(Ramachandran & Hirstein, 1999: p.16)**

In the process of perception the sensory input is organised and interpreted in the brain. The editing of the film, *Don't Hide the Madness*, employs certain editing techniques (super slow-motion, fades, non-linear editing, split screen and colour grading) in order to emphasise the subjective nature of bipolar disorder. This post-production process provides a space for interpretation of the film, which is vital in stimulating thoughts and opinions surrounding mental disorders. It is a topic that has suffered under negative perception that has been generated and sustained by being ill-informed. Films often sustain this negative perception. *Don't Hide the Madness* offers an alternative view to this perception by situating the film in actuality, rather than a romanticised version of what the disorder is really like. In this way, the film is a tool for portraying bipolar with accuracy and authenticity to bring about awareness that helps all individuals with mental disorders. In this way, the film is both a “self-portrait” and a “portrait of another” (Lebow, 2012: p.1). The film seeks to influence the audience’s belief systems by challenging mainstream stereotypes about how the mentally ill face life’s challenges, how they cope, and how they create. Therefore, *Don't Hide the Madness* is an example of taking social responsibility because it highlights the experience of mental illness. People with mental illness that recognise societal stigma often conceal their diagnosis (Hawke, Parika & Michalak, 2012). This stigma has an impact on the individual herself, and can lead to a “looking- glass” self which has internalised stigma (Cooley, 1902: p.126). *Don't Hide the Madness* attempts to challenge this by bringing to light the parameters of the diagnosis and the real

world experience that accompanies it through personal narrative by socialising mental illness. We must try to understand the present to bring about change in the future. We must, however, examine our misconceptions in the past using an autoethnographic approach which is as central to the film as it is for avoiding problems moving forward.

In the film, my narration is point-of-view whereas the camera is in opposition to this because it fixes its gaze on me. In this way, as the filmmaker, I am both the “bearer” and “maker of meaning” (Mulvey, 1989: p.1). Alternatively, the “gaze is precisely that part of the visual world that refuses to be controlled or mastered” (Samuels, 1998: p.3). This notion can be the subject of further research into first-person documentary film as a space of the relationship between power and representation of self.

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