

A brief analysis of the self-therapy documentary

Jingwei Deng

School of Communication, Royal College of Art, London, UK

Abstract: *To analyze the self-therapy documentary, the thesis firstly introduces the knowledge of trauma and the healing process based on the theory of psychoanalyst Lacan, which laid the theoretical foundation for the documentary. Then it tracks the originate of documentary and the development of self-therapy film, to see the growth of this subtype film from the prototype. To illustrate the style of the self-healing documentary more, there are two film examples listed to detailed interpretate the making of therapeutic film.*

Keywords: *film, autobiographical documentary, first person documentary, psychoanalysis, therapeutic filmmaking*

1. Introduction

The American scholar Paul Arthur defined the self-therapy documentary as a subtype of the documentary in 2007, being a branch of the personal storytelling since 2000. As Paul mentions, in self-therapy film the director describes a traumatic incident, family secret, or the unresolved emotional injury—often dating from childhood or adolescence—which are then explored and analyzed through the on camera dialogues with parents or the other family members[1]. With regard to the director himself, the prime intention and the ultimate aim of making this kind of film often lies in the healing of his own psychological traumas.

This thesis is aimed at highlighting the issues involving the discussions around the contention about how the directors are cured through the process of creating a self-healing documentary? The thesis shall also endeavor to examine the relationship between truth and fiction in this process.

Regarding trauma and healing, I intend to explore the issue using the Freud and Lacan's psychoanalysis theory to explain what is trauma and how to heal from a psychological standpoint, while comparing the process with the self-therapy documentary. Though the word trauma originates from the ancient Greek meaning wound, it refers to a physical wound. Nevertheless, according to the interpretation of Freud and developed upon by Lacan, this word completely has no relation with any form of bodily impairment rather is favorably inclined towards mental disorder or an impaired state of mind.

Coming to the type of documentary itself, I shall be analyzing how this documentary develops historically in the following chapters, and which cinematic techniques are used or applied by the documentary film directors to represent their traumatic experiences. I intend to use the theories of film around the filming style of *cinéma vérité*.

As is well known in the pertinent field, *cinéma vérité* is a famous documentary style, in which the director operates a camera without the participants in the film being aware of its presence. The purpose of this technique is to depict an objective or to have an observational perspective on the topic, aiming to arrive at the truth. I shall be analyzing how the directors of self-therapy documentaries use this *cinéma vérité* technique to arrive at the truth of their story.

Through *cinéma vérité*, I intend to explore how the film directors of self-therapy documentary deal with the truth of their own stories, setting up an observational camera on the one hand, while treating their stories as fiction on the other.

With regards to the fictional attributes of a self-therapy film, it seems to be in a way similar to the other documentaries like the first-person documentary and the autobiographical documentary, that are embedded with strong subjectivity. This is where the fiction emanates from. Hence, I shall be partly explaining the features and developments of those two kinds of documentaries, juxtaposing them with the self-therapy documentary. This shall be examined specifically through the analysis of the Taiwanese self-therapy documentary *Small Talk*, which is a self-healing documentary directed by

Huizhen Huang in 2016, arguing the potential juxtaposition of fictional and documentary cinematic style.

2. Methodology

2.1 Trauma and Healing

When researching about psychological healing, it is pertinent to understand the concept of trauma and to trace it back. "What is trauma?" The classic definition of the phenomenon can be found in Freud's works. Jean Laplanche, a French psychoanalyst arrived at a general interpretation of Freud's perception of trauma as, 'An event in the subject's life, defined by its intensity, by the subject's incapacity to respond adequately to it and by the upheaval and long-lasting effects that it brings about in the psychological organization' [2]. According to Freud, such an event as an external trauma is bound to provoke a disturbance to a large extent in the functioning of the organism's energy and sets into motion every possible defensive mechanism[3]. He describes as 'traumatic' any incitement from external forces, which is sufficiently powerful to pierce the shield of protection. When excessive mental stimulation penetrates self-defense, trauma gets traced back. That is to say the first moment of trauma could only be recognized through the understanding of the retrospective action of the second moment, as trauma always becomes happens after a series of events. For example, famous commentary of French psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan who is the student of Freud, of *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*[4] written by French novelist Marguerite Duras in 1964, also has two scenes of the protagonist Lol. One is the original scene where the boyfriend leaves, while the other is the secondary scene she wants to experience the moment repeatedly later. This leads to Lacan's definition of trauma.

As Freud's student, Jacques Lacan inherits Freud's perspective to some extent, however, there is also a divergence in the theoretical direction concerning the notions about trauma. To Lacan, a trauma transpires when it encounters with the Real, which negate its significance. Before exploring these ideas precisely, it is vital to understand what according to Lacan's definition is the Real, nonetheless, which is not similar to the meaning of 'reality'. Figure 1 shows the relationship of the three aspects.

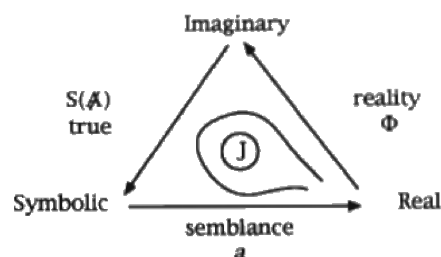


Figure 1: (Jacques-Alain Miller)

During a seminar named "Le symbolique, l'imaginaire et le réel" (The Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real) in 1953, Lacan explained the Real as, the bonding with the Imaginary and the Symbolic. To explain these three terms briefly, let us take the example of an animal, for them there is no specific difference between real and fake. This distinction comes from language, which actually is Symbolic. To be specific, the Symbolic arises from the symbols of language, law, culture, etc. which are intended to explain the natural environment. On the one hand, there is no Real without Symbolic. On the other hand, there is a wide gap between the Symbolic and the natural world, indicatively, between the interpreter and the listener. The reason is that the Symbolic uses its own systems and logics to explain everything, while the natural world has its own independent laws. At best, the Symbolic can only identify the superficial phenomenon of things in the form of abstract thinking based upon its own logic. Time and space itself form the foundation of our understanding of the outside world, nevertheless, the concept of time and space itself is an abstraction of matters.

Briefly, to Lacan, the real world is always at a distance away from the world we understand which splits it into the Real, the Symbolic, and the Imaginary.

Contemporary philosopher Slavoj Žižek applies 'agnosticism' further elaborating on this distance in an interview[5]. The rational understanding of the abstract concept is at a distance from the objective world itself. The interpretation of the world through rationality is based on the logic of thinking, not on the object itself. In other words, our understanding is based on our visual and auditory impressions, not on the basis of the essence of things. The essence of things is unknown to us.

Coming back to Lacan's perspective of trauma, following up with Freud's theory that Trauma becomes traumatic only when it re-emerges in a metaphorical or metonymical way backtracks. His discussion of trauma has been generally based on the happening of an external event, and the relationship between trauma and the subject is intermediated by the exterior happenings. Why is it that an event does not become traumatic the moment it happens, while it becomes traumatic immediately after it is over? From Lacan's perspective, since 'past' belongs to the Real, any event once it becomes 'past', it immediately becomes traumatic because it encounters the Real that is unbearable and unacceptable. He is convinced that trauma is a chance between the intolerable real and the self, which cannot be described, written, or characterized, and is beyond both the Imaginary and the Symbolic. It is this reality of impossibility that invades our lives, to break and to make our life full of contingencies.

Literally, trauma dispels all meanings and values yet itself does not get dispelled. Its incomprehensibility triggers a series of 'interpretative' activities. In order to alleviate the impact of trauma, people can only create a screen of fantasy to cover it. According to Lacan, "This anxious illusion summarizes the truth of all the most impossible directions. It cannot be mediated or faced. Once touched, all languages stop, all categories disappear, leaving only excellent anxiety." [6] This leads to the basic distinction between Lacan and Freud in terms of healing, which they based on the different logics of time.

The methodology of Freud for treatment is based on a series of questions: What happened to me in the past? What caused me to suffer so much now? What is my fate? Is this fate a curse or a gift? Nonetheless, Lacan's psychoanalysis is not based on the past, but in the future. If you consider Lacan's psychology a basic question arises, what will be the conclusion in the future, to explain my present state of affairs and the history of my life. From a classic Freudian perspective, the structure of the symptoms is linear, that is to say, my past determines my future identifying 'determinism'. However, in case of the logic of Lacan it is not all symptoms caused by the reason that gets triggers, and vice versa.

With Lacan's perspective, for people who are suffering from trauma, every event in the symptoms is a result of the symptoms, independent of the symptoms themselves, which in turn provides a 'p priori' framework to the structure. Though, the impact of the event as the cause of the traumatic results always depends on the future, the logical future, and the time of the conclusion in the future, has not yet been determined. In psychoanalysis, the analyst would not try to reduce the impact of past traumatic events, rather liberate the person from the historical dungeon meanwhile re-dispatching it into the distant past.

Following the Lacan perspective, Slavoj Žižek believed, my vision, my perceptual intuition, is of course my original unconscious symbolic system, which is constitutive to me. When we want to get meaning, we have already been a part of the meaning, which we cannot change at this level. Due to the lack of a meta-language, we do not have a truly comprehensive and objective perspective that can face all our desires. Hence, the sight of our symptoms can never be eliminated, which is because of our symbolic system being constitutive to our symptoms fundamentally.

Applying Lacan's theory in clinic stages, all the words of the past will have a new meaning given to them and the new meanings could be traced back to previous memories. Hence, Lacan rewrote the psychoanalysis by Freud's from the 'present perfect' to his 'future perfect', which became the most ingenious part of his theory.

In other words, the meaning of past history depends on the interpretation of the future. The truth of symptoms I analyzed depends on something happening in the future. In the future, the analysis will conclude that their past is free, and their lives are glorified.

2.2 Overall Historical development of the documentary

Since long, the documentary has been deemed as a secretion of real life, capable of delivering 'verifiable knowledge' or 'visible evidence'. According to a Soviet documentary pioneer Dziga Vertov who influenced the *cinéma vérité* style of documentary, which shoots real life scenarios directly without any scripts written in advance, and no professional actors, the film was the ideal medium, because it captured the truths of real life, it did not deceive or divert the people [7]. But can the reality captured by the camera be reckoned as the real truth, or is it the subjective reality that the film is trying to project? In this chapter, I intend to explore how *cinéma vérité* influenced the development of the documentary historically and culturally and discuss the contentious question of the relationship between the documentary and reality.

Unlike the fiction film, documentary is based on real life. However, the documentary is not

completely real life. It is a reflection of the real society, deconstructing, and reconstructing the essence of life. After a film conference in March 1963 at Lyons, France, many debates were raised about *cinéma vérité*, which sometimes was also known as observational cinema. The Dutch activist filmmaker Joris Ivens questioned in the conference, “which truth and for whom? Seen by whom, and for whom?” Another filmmaker Wolf Koenig also argued, “Every cut is a lie but you’re telling a lie to tell the truth”[7].

As Joris Ivens said, at that time, many filmmakers thought that the camera would be able to represent the real life by filming without interfering with the position of the camera, but these observations also related to subjective framing, moreover, the same potentially subjective post-editing. The *cinéma vérité* style was questioned by interpreting life through the perspective of the filmmaker rather than objectively.

Besides, because of endless filming of a single scene, each shot was too long to leave the audience bored. Later, many filmmakers gradually jumped out of the bandwagon of the so-called observers and started innovating in the methods of constituting documentary. This was also inseparable from the simultaneous development of the film technology, which saw the emergence of the 16mm cameras.

As the 16mm camera disseminated into the lives of the normal people, the individuals became the protagonist of the documentary. Since camera was much lighter than the 35mm ones, the filmmakers could take it into more public and personal places.

Benefiting from the synchronized sound, which could record the sound of an actor at the same moment when actors were acting, the camera became what French sociologist Edgar Morin called ‘the real talking camera’, shooting the ‘dialogue, dispute, and discussion’ between the objects, the subject, and the film director[8]. As an advantage of these technological developments, it became possible for the documentary to observe and explore more about the inner spiritual world.

Moreover, since the 1970s, the style documentary films had started developing compared with the *cinéma vérité* period as they depended on interviews to put forth their arguments and reinforce their perspective with historical evidences. Especially some minority groups had begun to express their political demands in documentary, including the feminist groups, gays, etc. They hoped to use the documentary to amplify their resistance to the mainstream social views and fight against dogmatic thinking prevailing at that time. These films completely abandoned the principles of direct filming or the *cinéma vérité* style, which had to be objective. The filmmakers had an obvious existence only in the texts. Subjectivity was no longer seen as something shameful. On the contrary, it could enter into the texts by the filtering facts.

As the time progressed, there was another documentary with a strong sense of subjectivity that was developing rapidly. The first-person documentary is a kind of film often socially engaged, and rarely critical film. It is marked not only by the first person’s voice as a testimonial, but also lead the viewer into the world of the narrator[9].

As early as the 1920s, Russian Director Dziga Vertov’s movie *Man with movie camera* was the first self-reflective film, which made the cameras self-aware. It gradually developed into a style that the filmmaker himself raised self-awareness, making use of the first-person narrative, which emphasized the subjective creativity. In the 1980s, the development of the first-person documentary completely reflected on the subjective and the filmmakers’ interference. They led the audience to enter into their perspective, treading on their traces. Following the appearance of the autobiographical documentary the later even allowed the director to become the protagonist of the film, where the filmmaker was both the ‘seer and the seen’, ‘the observer and the observed’. With regard to the relationship between the filmmaker, the subject, and the audience, it was not the traditional third person filmmaking, which liked ‘telling their stories to the people’, and it was not the first person filmmaking, which liked ‘I told their stories’, but instead changed to “I shall tell you my story”[10]. The filmmaker’s own psychological world become the theme of the film. More and more documentary film directors began to use the images to carry out inner reflections and confessions. The American film scholar Michael Renov noticed this phenomenon and began to summarize it theoretically. He pointed out that in the past 20 years, a novel and unique ritualized self- reflection, in the form of the first-person video confession had appeared. Because of the potential of personal production and consumption of the video, it was considered the best choice for this purpose. Similar to the revolution that contradicted *cinéma vérité*, technical improvements likewise contributed a lot to the development of the documentary style during this period. Due to the appearance of DV camera which was technically easier to handle compared with the analog one, it is possible to explore the inner world of the subject. In the late 1990s, the DV camera which was more convenient and flexible to operate was a giant step forward in this direction.

Compared to professional cinematic camera, the DV camcorders were smaller and could be operated with one hand. LCD screens could be turned on, which allowed the photographer to not just stare at the viewfinder, and the eyes could be pulled out at a certain distance. This allowed the photographer to have more opportunities to observe the environment and to communicate with the subject.

Moreover, since the DV and digital non-linear editing systems were relatively affordable for people, more and more untrained amateurs had started trying their hands on their own documentary creations.

However, this transition from the third person to the first person also raised many disputes and arguments. Michael Renov said filmic autobiography was entitled as fictions of the self in the non-fiction film[11]. Especially, the director builds a fictional story using real stories that he has personally experienced and yet creates the illusion through filming techniques claiming as non-fiction. This controversy seemed similar to the skeptics of *cinéma vérité* which doubted the subjectivity of the observational filming style. However, there was another voice from the filmmaker Edgar Morin who said, "Because the camera stimulates social personality which is obscured and suppressed under normal circumstances, the 'real' in the *cinéma vérité* is similar to the 'Psychoanalytic Truth'. In this circumstance, objective truth is no longer the essence of the whole film. 'Truths' that autobiography offers are often those of the interior rather than of the exterior"[12].

This point also leads to the connection between the first-person documentary and psychology. The founder of *cinéma vérité*, Jean Rouch expressed a similar view, saying, 'the camera has become a stimulant for psychoanalysis functionally, stimulating people to behave in other situations that are unlikely to act.'[1] This ideology shall be examined further through next few chapters.

3. Results and discussion

3.1 *The development of self-therapy film*

As Freud's theory was widely accepted in the European countries in 1926, film director and theorist Jean Epstein discovered that the camera could disclose the hidden truths of anything. He said, "The person is 20 times bigger than himself in front of the camera, which is listening to his secrets, regrets, shame, and possibly true. Like the patient, he is stripped by a psychiatrist and presents a naked, fearful self." Favorably comparing film with psychoanalysis, he wondered: "Will psychotherapy or the forensic processes someday make use of this film confession in which the subject sees himself becoming the object?"[13] A similar topic was also mentioned in the typical self-healing documentary *Waltz with Bashir* in 2008.

In the Israeli animated documentary *Waltz with Bashir*, there was a conversation at the beginning. In that scene, the director Ari Folman has been talking to one of his friends in a pub, Boaz Rein-Buskila, both of whom were veterans of the 1982 war between Israel and Lebanon. Boaz confides in Ali about a nightmare that has been plaguing him for more than 20 years. In an arrest of that year, Boaz continued to shoot 26 dogs in order to cover his comrades. For more than 20 years since then, these dogs have always been appearing repeatedly in his dreams, chasing him. Boaz said, "I clearly remember the 26 dogs, remembering them each, their expressions, their wounds, and the kind of eyes they had before they died...". Ali asks Boaz why he didn't go in for psychotherapy or to a psychiatrist. Boaz says: "No, I don't want to find them. I am looking for you." Ali is very surprised. He blurts out: "But, I am just a film director!" At this time, Boaz raises a very intriguing question: "Can't the film be a treatment?" As an audience, we have no way of knowing whether these conversations were taken by the documentary, or whether the director deliberately designed and rehearsed. Does a film as a narrative art be embedded with psychological meaning or can film be an antidote to self-saving? As far as the film itself is concerned, an obvious fact was that it was the director's own questioning of the trauma in his heart that motivates the film and constitutes the structure of the entire film narrative. The original and ultimate purpose of making a film is often to heal his own wounds psychologically. From this point of view, this film can be regarded as a positive answer to the question put forward by both Boaz in the film *Waltz with Bashir* and cinema scholar Jean Epstein, which can be classified as a so-called 'self-healing documentary'.

Sometimes a self-healing documentary is similar to the first-person documentary or an autobiographical film since what the content they are based on is always the director's own stories, which are especially embedded with his traumatic experience. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, when a camera is set up, the director might act in some way that even they themselves would be surprised. Film scholar Agnieszka Piotrowska mentioned, it is in some ways a 'recording' of the

moment of the encounter between the subjects of the film and her filmmaker[14]. From this perspective, it may be a truism to liken what Lacan's psychoanalysis theory, from the process of encountering unbearable 'me' or to say the Real in filming at the first stage, to the healing course later that is the course of making a new sense of the past experience through the editing of the film. Besides, it also includes what Freud mentioned questioning themselves and repetitively reproduce those traumatic scenes and then finding out the so-called 'reason' in order to get redemption and accept themselves through filming. This perspective shall be examined further in next few paragraphs through Taiwanese self-therapy film the *Small Talk*.

Though there is a similarity between the first-person documentary, the filmic autobiography and the self-healing documentary in content, there were still obvious distinctions in the way they styled themselves. Technically, unlike *cinéma vérité*, which used a completely bystander's perspective without any filmmaker's interventions, and also was different from the techniques of the first-person documentary frequently being applied which made the camera imitate the director's eyes guiding people subjectively. Self-healing documentaries retain and mix both the approaches of filming and in some ways the camera is like a spectator watching the development of the story, and sometimes shows an immersive first-person angle which leads the audience into the director's subjective perspective in another. Nevertheless, the self-healing documentary interludes with interviews, stills, and other archives from the family members or others to build and augment the storyline which seems like an expository documentary with voice-over and archival evidence. Why do the self-therapy film directors merge different styles and how they organize those techniques under the same context? In the next chapter, I shall examine the Taiwan documentary *Small Talk* with an intent to answer these questions, while analyzing the content, the film techniques, and the other features of the self-healing documentaries as well as find out how to achieve a psychological process similar to psychoanalysis.

3.2 Self-healing documentary case analysis

In 2017, director Huang Huiyi won the best documentary award at the 67th Berlin International Film Festival for her first documentary film *Small Talk*. The film tells the story of a gay mother and daughter, who is the director, Huang Huiyi, in the documentary. Even after living under the same roof for many years, the mother and she never had a real communication. The meal left at table made by the mother was the only connection between them. When the mother returned home at midnight, the daughter had already slept. Over the years, the director had too many questions about her mother: why the mother never talks about her own experiences, why mother likes the girl but still marries her father to give birth to her, why does the mother never try to communicate with her like a normal mother and daughter? Does the mother hate her or regret having her? Those questions had been wrenching at the director's heart for a long time. Taking advantage of this documentary filming, she hoped that she could actually sit at the table and have a formal conversation with her mother to open up those secrets.

These questions brought up by the director are similar to the process of psychotherapy in a way what psychological therapist would start, yet in this situation, the film director acts herself as a psychology counselor to open up the past traumatic experiences.

To answer her own questions, the director tries to know more about her mother by going back to her mother's hometown. Many years ago, the mother lived in Chiayi, Taiwan, marries her father under the arrangement of her family, though they did not know each other before. After just a year, she gets pregnant, her sister was born, and 2 years later the director was born, though at that time the father did not earn much money to support the family. The family had a very hard life at that time, hence, the mother had to earn a living together with the two sisters by acting in the 'Soul Guiding Play', which was a traditional funeral ceremony in Taiwan. But the father was habituated to drinking alcohol excessively and gambling. Even if her mother came home exhausted after working for the whole day, the father would yell at her mother and even beat her up. The mother is unable to bear with this life anymore. One day, while her dad was not at home, the mother escapes from their home with the director and her sister.

The director feels they survived the difficulties by bonding together, they should have become the most intimate persons for each other rather than keeping silent and refusing to open her own affairs, like a stranger in their lives. However, there was a growing chasm between her and her mother because of their silence, and also no one wanted to set up a bridge to go and see each other's deepest thoughts. Though Huang Huiyi tried not to touch the scars that she pretended to ignore for many years, it became more and more obvious until she has become a mother herself. Thereafter, she decided to build a channel to explore the mother's inner world, carrying her doubts, her questions, her distresses, and her

love by filming in order to cure herself and reconcile with her mother.

Regarding the style of this film, it not only had the observational film style to present the mother's daily life, but also the director's first-person voice-over narration. That is because the director herself in the film has been both, the observer and the observed. When it comes to the mother's life, it starts in an observational mode, since they had not even talked to each other for ten years, there is an invisible distance between her and her mother. On the other hand, after the observation, when the director gets the footage back, it is in the first-person narration when she questions and answers to heal herself.

In the climax scene, they finally sit down at the dinner table and face each other directly, open their heart, speak out the hidden questions in the director's heart: 'Do you love me?' The family issues that had been gathering dust for many years are finally unveiled at the dinner table. In the end, the director takes the courage to talk about the sexual harassment when she was a child by her father was always a scar. She mistakenly thought that her mother did not love her for this reason, so she always felt insecure to talk to her mom. In the end, they have a heart to heart conversation, untying the knots, and smoothening each other's scars.

In these scenes, director herself becomes a subject present in the film. She becomes the observer to watch her autobiography. Besides, she also wants herself to be observed by the whole society, becoming a small unit and using her own story to express deeper social meaning.

Because of the theme, '*Small Talk*' was often regarded as a 'gay documentary'. Nevertheless, what Huang Huizhen really wanted to convey is – 'How do we get along with another person, especially those who are so close, but hard to approach?' She opened her deepest wounds in her heart through the film, attempting to heal her inner scar and also allows her mother to get redeemed. When people doubted her about utilizing the privacy issues to get attraction, they always referred a saying in China that "the familial scandal cannot be made widely known" which was considered as a virtue. Huang Huizhen responded in her autobiography book that if everyone thinks that privacy should not be revealed, then such things would still be there, these structures will not change but happen all the time. However, if someone speaks it out today, other people would also follow to speak, and it may lead to some changes. If a victim of a school sexual assault is willing to speak up, there might be some others who would dare to come out and identify that this perpetrator has done something that hurts her (he).

She said, "I have no intention to say a tragic story full of misery and misfortune, and I don't want anyone to regard this as a so-called inspirational story of how people strive for the upper place, and even reverse life." She said repeatedly that she did these things just for 'conversation' - talking to herself, talking to her mother, and talking to the people outside the 'door.' [15]

That may be an explanation of why this film combined a multi-style and mixed- technique. In the process of self-healing, the director hoped that her personal experience would be associated with the individual identity of the audience, rather with even greater social reality and historical evolution. Hence, the perspective constantly switches between subjective and objective. On the first stage, the director is like an observer, exploring the mother's life, which is unfamiliar to her. Next, she gets all the footage and examines herself and gets self-healed during the filming process through the first-person perspective. Towards the end, the director desires to express himself through interviews, embedding herself into the observational perspective of the whole society, and becoming a small part of it to express the deeper social significance through her own story. Hence, the personal narratives could also construct a profound parallel with the broader social realities, bearing deeper social content, and becoming a window unto the truth of the society.

Leading the audience through the personal space of the gay mother by the camera, seems to be only a record of her personal life, in fact, at the same time recorded the face of her life – the Taiwan of the 80s. The stereotype that man is superior to woman and the only thing woman can do after they become adult is to marry to a man although they had not even seen each other before marriage, subverts the director Huang Huizhen family's whole life. The personal experience has been closely linked to greater social reality or historical evolution. Hence, the individual identity directly points to the self- therapy documentary that has a close internal relationship with the society. Its publicity was not only to increase the audience's awareness of the objective world, but more importantly, to challenge and subvert the mainstream social values. Paul Arthur said, Instead of an omniscient 'we' hovering over the 1930s social documentaries, or a neutral 'you' instated by Direct Cinema, films associated with identitarian political causes gravitated toward a fallible, unstable, and embodied 'I'[1]. Different from politically engaged documentary which pursues to subvert the world in a way of preaching, self-therapy documentary tries to change the person behind the camera inherently, with audience potentially sympathetic witnesses. But they are not ordinary witnesses, and they are potentially being reminded

and influenced while witnessing these directors' stories, which invades people's life chronically.

It is also confirmed what the scholar Michael Renov said 'film autobiography was entitled as fictions of the self in the non-fiction film'[16], as mentioned in previous chapter. The director consciously organizes the story by switching different perspective skillfully, which were not shameful or hidden under. Exposing self to be close to real, privacy and taboos remain at the deepest levels of the individual's heart, and the self-therapy documentary's strategy of exposing privacy and challenging the taboos to some extent makes the image 'close to the hidden and true self'. At this moment, the lens, the audience are like a pastor in the church, or a psychologist in the hospital, quietly listening to the inner confession and remorse of the filmmaker. With repentance, the filmmaker will eventually get the result of 'redemption' and 'purification'. Self-therapy documentary is an effective 'scalpel', whose purpose of surgery is to make people free from anxiety and self-identity through redemption and purification, which is matched with the perspective of the Lacanian or Freudian theory of psychoanalysis.

3.3 Therapeutic filmmaking

Nevertheless, in recent years, after combining the efforts of film scholar and psychology theorists, there has been a new form of therapy called therapeutic filmmaking. In clinical practice, therapist makes clients explore themselves through ingenious, demonstrative, self-reflexive process of filmmaking exercise, which subtly bridges the connection between film and psychology.

In the 1970s, there are two studies published which used filmmaking as a therapeutic technique, scholar Jeffrey Arnott and Bill Gushin designed a 7-week workshop for prepubertal boys with improper mannerisms[17]. They concluded that the filmmaking process grants the boys to externalize their feelings and self-examine on the meaning their stories had for them and are able to check on emotional conducts voluntary. After this treatment, the clients learned how to confront their past traumatic experiences and also envisage the future positively, which was in fact similar to what the self-therapy film artists made for themselves.

From this angle, the film as art-therapy technique has the same functions as others like painting, music, and dance which are artistic approaches generally to make the clients pour out their feelings. As art therapy scholar Cathy Malchiodi concluded, "art therapy is based on the idea that the creative process of art making facilitates reparation and recovery and is a form of nonverbal communication of thoughts and feelings"[18]. It gives people an approach to express or even acts as a catharsis for their emotions, helping individuals create meaning and gain insight meanwhile getting recovered from the trauma or the overwhelming emotional feelings. As a result, people build self-perception, obtain personal growth, and enlighten their daily lives.

4. Conclusion

Though self-therapy film has an innovative and intriguing style of documentary, it is still mired in controversy. Some film scholars doubt, whether the private image of the privacy content of the self and relatives and friends become an uncomfortable offense once the 'invasion' is in the public domain? Why should viewers take the time to watch the privacy of a person who has nothing to do with him, his friends, and his relatives? These voices have been in the air since the appearance of the autobiographical documentaries and the self-therapy documentaries. In essence, this kind of questioning, the controversy, and even the opposition is whether the private documentary with the private image as content has any sociological and political significance.

To be fair, we cannot deny that individuals are the smallest part of the family and society. That is to say, individuals and society cannot be separated. The individual certainly does not represent the whole society, rather only through the smallest unity could understand the whole society. The personal documentary gives up the horizontal exploration of the breadth and turns to the individual digging deeper in the vertical dimension.

Psychologically, people also doubt the therapy function of a self-therapy film. Although there have been some researches and pilot studies implementing filming to help clients place themselves as an innovative method. According to Paul Arthur's article, movies are not truly therapy sessions and directors are not trained psychologists. Expounding on areas of similarity with family or systemic or cognitive schools of therapy seems similarly fruitless, but it will be interesting to see whether the documentaries discussed here prove a diverting trickle or something else[1].

This thesis, intending to respond to the questions of how the director get healed through the period of making a self-therapy documentary, explored it from two perspectives of psychology and film studies.

Psychologically Lacan and Freud contributed heavily to trauma and healing, especially Lacan who elaborated further on Freud's definition of trauma. He divided individual development period into 3 parts which were: the Real, the Symbolic, and the Imaginary respectively. Through this perspective, in order to help clients get healed and liberate themselves from their past, the therapists should aim at helping clients make new meanings in the future to weed out the past memories of sufferings, with the self-therapy film having the similarity to match with.

In terms of filmmaking, by analyzing the development of a documentary, especially cinéma vérité style, first-person documentary and the filmic autobiography, it leads to the direction of fictional style invading in the documentary in recent years. For self-therapy documentary, it not only aims at telling a personal story but also inadvertently enlarges the reflection of the social issues, which is the reason why it combines both the subjective and the objective perspectives in self-healing documentary. This was aptly examined by the case study of the Taiwanese documentary *Small Talk*.

Nevertheless, though the discomfort of the personal issues stepping into public screening is debatable, it still remains an innovative and engrossing approach to experiment with.

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