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MONTAGE OF A GENRE: INTERSECTIONS OF BIOGRAPHY, DOCUMENTARY AND FICTION IN CELEBRITY DOCUMENTARIES

Abstract

The latest fully authorized documentary, *Montage of Heck* (2015) by Brett Morgan, delves into the life of Kurt Cobain, presenting a unique form of storytelling that blends documentary and fiction. This film is notable for its emotional truth, which caters to the audience's yearning for the romanticized image of the deceased idol. *Montage of Heck* stands out for its innovative integration of multiple genres, creating a distinctly intimate viewing experience by merging biographic, documentary, and fictional elements.,

This innovative approach, which I term "biographic docufiction," represents a recent trend in celebrity documentaries. Despite its novelty, this subgenre has yet to be extensively examined in scholarly discussions. My analysis will contribute to this field by exploring the characteristics of biographic docufiction, focusing on its unique integration of biographic, documentary, and fictional practices within a single film. Additionally, I will examine how this cross-genre methodology impacts the audience, highlighting the film's distinctive manner of storytelling and its effects on viewers. My approach focuses on analyzing film elements through the lens of cultural studies, emphasizing its structural and conceptual characteristics as well as the functional roles the film plays within its cultural context

Keywords: *Celebrity documentary, biography, celebrity confessional, parasocial relationship*

1. Introduction

Marking the twenty-fifth anniversary of Kurt Cobain's death, *Montage of Heck* (MoH) presented a 132-minute-long reflection on Kurt's life, constructed from a rich array of materials, including interviews, never-before-seen recordings, drawings, personal diaries, audio memoirs, and sound mixtapes. The film offers an unprecedented glimpse into Cobain's private world, creating a constellation of artefacts that reveal the circumstances shaping his identity.

Due to its innovative approach, *Montage* was widely regarded as an unconventional documentary. Traditionally, documentaries are understood as nonfiction, but *Montage of Heck* breaks this mould by seamlessly integrating fictional techniques, making this hybrid approach a compelling strategy worthy of further examination.

Firstly, Montage expands beyond the artistic side of Cobain's personality and emphasizes his interaction with other individuals. Secondly, the movie does not focus on one perspective; on the contrary, it seeks controversy and creates a spectacle by portraying contradicting content without giving away which one is more convincing. Thirdly, Montage is an intimate movie narrative which touches viewers emotionally and creates a personal viewing experience while pushing the borders of the viewer's comfort zone. Montage is a half-biographic documentary and half-fiction; it struggles to be whole in any genre. I argue that Montage should be classified in a separate trend, biographic docufiction, since its structural, conceptual, and functional individuality creates an independent film continuum, which cannot be fully explored by applying the knowledge of only one of the relevant genres. Under the term biographical docufiction, I understand those biographic celebrity documentaries that succeed in creating a relatable illusion of reality, extend to the ultimate private aspects of an individual's personality, employ multiple medial and narrative strategies, as well as maintain the entertaining pace and dramatic effects to establish a personal experience between the on-screen product and the viewer.

Acknowledging and giving this trend sufficient attention would greatly benefit critical scholarship, assessing developments within documentary films and exploring the representational strategies and their effects in biographic docufiction. This awareness is also advantageous for viewers, enhancing the ability to select similarly themed films more efficiently.

I chose Montage to illustrate the biographical docufiction trend since the film's name properly represents this new development of genre intersection. While analyzing the film and its effects as a cultural artefact, I focused on its construction, elements, narrative strategy, and impact on the audience.

2. Question Of Reality In Documentary Film And Concept Of Emotional Truth

As the World Union of Documentary Filmmakers suggests, non-fiction films genuinely reconstruct truth (qt. in Painlevé 434, 2016). The emphasis here is on reconstruction, which is strictly distinguished from fabrication. However, any reconstruction involves a certain degree of media mediation and is subjective.

Documentaries are representations that have effects of authenticity mainly because of the absence of performance (Thomas Waugh 817, 2016). Modern documentary film intersects at the point of "presentation" and "representation" discourse „when subjects perform “not looking at the camera” while offering their lives for public consumption. (cf. 818, 2016) A certain amount of performance and visual enhancement is needed for a documentary film to attract viewers; therefore, even though the core of a documentary film is not fabricated, it is hardly performance-free, primarily when it features a celebrity persona.

The commodification of celebrities' private lives significantly heightens competition, intensifying the pressure to disclose more. A "privileged access to the private" space of a famous person has become a highly sought-after commodity in celebrity documentaries (cf. Goode n.p., 2011). Such access is often exploited as proof of authenticity, creating a spectacle around truth-telling. However, as Sean Redmond explains, exposing one's personal life through voluntary confessions is less about revealing an absolute truth and more about offering an alternative interpretation of it:

[S]tars and celebrities make their revelations through embodied performance. This sense-driven performance is often a deliberate attempt by the celebrity to authenticate themselves through reference to, or via symbiotic connection with, streams of emotional truth. (4)

Redmond (2011) suggests celebrity documentaries offer an emotional truth, a staged version of "real life." Onscreen meltdowns—such as crying or heartfelt confessions—are designed to intensify the parasocial bond between the performer and the audience. Since the information presented is carefully mediated, viewers struggle to objectively evaluate the truth and accuracy of what they are shown.

It is accuracy rather than truth itself that is valuable. Emotional truth is dubious and attractive, but emotional accuracy is much easier to understand. [...] Stories can be accurate but not true, and emotions can be correct whether or not they are true. (Sousa and Morton 265, 2002)

Truth can exist in many forms, but combining truth and precision creates accuracy (266, 2002). For celebrities who choose to participate in documentaries about themselves, the flexibility of emotional truth becomes a tool for shaping their desired self-portrayal. The coexistence of performance, spectacle, and truth (even if occasionally inaccurate) within a single film suggests that genre traditions have the potential to blend into one cinematic space. From my perspective, cross-genre analysis reveals that there are no definitive guidelines for categorizing a film into a specific genre.

3. Biographic Docufiction

Biographic docufiction combines authentic biographical information with elements of fictional storytelling, such as dramatization and creating new content inspired by authentic archival material. This approach results in a structurally, conceptually, and functionally unique product.

The distinctive structure emerges from the unconventional arrangement of diverse audio-visual media. For example, animations fluidly transform into captions, drawings gradually evolve into slow-motion sequences, artefacts seamlessly blend into motion picture scenes, and audio memoirs are woven into musical recordings. This integration of mediums enriches the narrative, creating a layered and immersive experience.

Conceptually, biographic docufiction strongly emphasises the personality of its subject and its impact on others. The narrative voice often expands from the midpoint of the story, deviating from the use of objective or impartial observers. Instead, every participant in the film engages emotionally, sharing personal reflections on the deceased subject with deep sentimentality. This approach makes the emotional resonance of the interviews just as crucial as the content itself. As a result, the film captures factual details and the emotional significance of those memories. The visual design, sound, and other cinematic techniques amplify the film's dramatic potential, enhancing the fictionalized aspects of the production. These artistic choices blur the line between fact and fiction, emphasizing the story's emotional depth while making the audience feel intimately connected to the subject.

Functionally, biographic docufiction creates a sense of "unearned intimacy" with the deceased figure, delivering an emotional truth about them. This intimacy feels "unearned" because the film's protagonist is no longer alive to consent to, approve, or refute the portrayal of their life. Consequently, the film generates a closeness between the audience and the subject that might not have been possible if they were still living to offer their perspective (qtd. in Reilly n. pag., 2015).

4. Structure of *Montage* – Authentic and Fictional “Mish-mash” of Artefacts

Cooperation with the family and exclusive access to private archives are critical elements in biographical docufiction. They enable filmmakers to present rare, previously unseen materials that resonate with the audience's desire for a deeper, more personal connection to the film's subject (cf. Litter 12, 2003).

For example, in *Montage*, a mixtape made by Kurt Cobain, serves as a narrative device, featuring an eclectic mix of sounds, including a rocket launch, the fertilization of an ovum, and the digestive process—subjects that fascinated Cobain throughout his life. The relationship between these sounds and the film's scenes is often abstract, as director Brett Morgan explains that they represent a "mish-mash" of ideas, with some elements drawn directly from Cobain's original material (Miller n. pag., 2015). In other instances, Morgan created new content inspired by Cobain's archives.

They are often regarded as deeply personal, private journals and audio diaries that further immerse viewers in Cobain's inner world, where one would not perform but one's true self. The film provides a rare opportunity to witness Cobain's most private thoughts—elements that would typically remain concealed—thereby enhancing the sense of authenticity. The privileged access invites audiences to explore the subject's psyche in intimate and undeserved ways. The fictional aspect of biographical docufiction delves into "Kurt's psyche" through single-cell animation sequences created by Cobain. The film crew's involvement was minimal in these scenes, focusing primarily on crafting meaningful transitions between Cobain's artworks. In “Mr. Moustache” (*Montage* 00:41:57-00:43:00), a short graphic novel created from the drawings of Cobain, Mr. Moustache has his ear placed on a pregnant woman's abdomen. The caption reads: “My son! Boy, he's Gonna be Quite a Man, listen to the power of those little strong legs! He's gonna be A football player. This kid Better NOT Be A Lousy little Girl. I want my very own Faggot hatin(?) 100% pure beef AMERICAN MALE!” (*Montage* 00:42:07). The next panel depicts Mr. Moustache idyllically listening to the baby kicks, followed by the scene where the baby kicks so hard that the abdominal wall breaks and blood and intestines of the mother are splashed in the face of Mr Moustache. This scene is accompanied by heavy sounds of chaotic music, which can be interpreted as supporting the protest against male supremacy and gender prejudice. The *Montage* crew transformed these drawings into a stop-motion animation and added a musical background, which is an exemplary work of fiction, even though Cobain created the separate elements of this animation.

In the 24-frame animations, the film crew's creative involvement becomes more evident. The audience listens to Cobain's authentic audio memoir while viewing motion picture sequences created more than twenty years after his death. These visuals, crafted by Stefan Nadelman, bring to life what is heard in the recordings. This is particularly palpable in one thematically and emotionally charged scene, where a “stoner's voice” narrates his first sexual encounter with a mentally disabled girl.

I decided [...] I wasn't going out of this world without actually knowing what it was like to get laid. So, one day after school, I went to the girl's house alone and invited myself in. [...] I sat on her lap and I said, "Let's fuck." [...] So, I tried to fuck her, but didn't know how, and asked her if she had ever done this before. And she said a lot of times, mainly with her cousin. I got grossed out very heavily with how her vagina smelled when her sweat reeked, so I left (*Montage* 00:21:36-00:22:10).

Accompanied by Smells Like Teen Spirit, animations show a teenage boy with a significant physical resemblance to Cobain and an overweight girl with hypotonic facial expressions,

undressing obediently. At one point, Cobain's character leaves the house, and the screen reveals a dark, uninviting suburban area with the sound of raindrops in the background. Although the voice-over is authentic and Cobain's diaries confirm that a related event occurred, this does not necessarily mean the scene happened exactly as depicted by Cobain and later visualized by Nadelman. The animator reconstructed elements such as the weather, characters, and surroundings, which Cobain did not explicitly describe.

These sequences highlight how biographical docufiction can blend nonfiction with fictional elements. Despite incorporating fictional aspects, *Montage of Heck* remains a documentary film, as it "seizes the opportunity to rework [the author's lived] experience at the level of sound and image" (Renov 747-748, 2016).

4.1 Concept of Montage – A Story About Kurt And Other Human Beings

Montage follows the chronological timeline of Cobain's life, focusing on the selected episodes. At the beginning of the film, there is a homemade video describing the film's fundamental idea. "Who are you?" a female voice asks Cobain, who answers in a high-pitch slow, childish manner: "I am Kurt Cobain", and the other attendants of family celebration clap and cheer for him (Montage 00:08:55-00:09:10). This short dialogue manifests the ambition of the film: Montage is about "who he [Kurt] was as a human,"¹ (Brown n. pag., 2015).

In *Montage of Heck*, each individual who speaks, offers their personal interpretation of how events in Kurt Cobain's life impacted them, rather than simply recounting specific occurrences. This narrative structure allows for a more subjective and multifaceted portrayal of Cobain's life. The film devotes significant time to exploring the marital issues within Cobain's family, and throughout this, various interviewees provide conflicting statements, reflecting their differing perspectives on these events. For example, Wendy O'Connor, Cobain's mother, openly criticizes her ex-husband, Don Cobain, for his shortcomings as a father. This portrayal emphasizes the fractured nature of the family dynamic and the subjective recollections contribute to the documentary's layered narrative.

Wendy O'Conner: Kurt, he was hyper, full of energy, always busy. [...] and Don, he didn't know how to handle that. He was one of those kinds of people that just thought that children should be seen and not heard. (*Montage* 00:11:07-00:11:41)

She also speaks about how her lack of personal fulfilment in the marriage and the divorce negatively affected Kurt Cobain's personality: "[I]n those days people did not get divorced. [...] [I]t just embarrassed him [Kurt] to death that we've gotten divorced." (*Montage* 00:12:00-00:13:18) These scenes establish a biographic fact that divorce of his parents provoked Cobain's teenage rebellion. Within this thematic framework, cross-accusations of parents unfold, turning the story into a spectacle. Cobain's father, who has repeatedly been blamed for Cobain's fragile mental state during adolescence, explains that it was his ex-wife who failed their defiant and traumatised son:

Donald Cobain: She [Wendy] could not handle him. [...] There is one thing I said that one time, that I was never going to get married again. And I think, he took that for a word. (*Montage* 00:13:23- 00:13:43)²

¹Stated by Francis Cobain (daughter of Kurt Cobain), who is an executive producer of the film.

² This episode is also described by Cross in *Heavier than Heaven*, although in a slightly different version: "Afraid he might lose his dad, Kurt asked Don to promise not to remarry. Don gave his assurance and said the two of them would

Interviews of Cobain's parents are arranged after each other, thus the tension between the ex-partners is well communicated with the audience. Depiction of family drama culminates during the interview of Jennifer Cobain, stepmother of Kurt Cobain:

He [Kurt] wanted to be in a family. Period. [...] He wanted to be most loved and it just was not the ideal world he thought a family should be. (*Montage* 00:13:57-00:14:47). It was like nobody wanted [him]...after a couple of weeks...they [the relatives] wanted him out. I think that sad part of the whole thing is that Kurt really wanted to be with his mom" (*Montage* 00:15:12-00:15:42).

Through these interviews, *Montage* suggests that even after twenty-five years family issues are still linger within the Cobain household. This notion is solidified through a sequence where, after various interviews highlighting these tensions, Kurt Cobain's own voice surfaces in an audio memoir. Cobain provides his perspective on dealing with these unresolved issues, stating: "[T]hen one day I discovered the most ultimate form of expression ever...Marijuana." (*Montage* 00:19:16-00:19:53). This statement is delivered right after the interview sequences, suggesting that for Cobain, marijuana became an escape or form of expression amid family turmoil.

Montage is not limited to juxtaposing contradictory perspectives from emotionally involved individuals. In an interview with bandmate Krist Novoselic, Cobain's heroin addiction is contextualized in a non-judgmental manner. Novoselic suggests that Cobain's addiction was an attempt to cope with childhood trauma: "I did things like withdraw or drink. [...] [I] had beer and wine [...]. Kurt had heroin." (*Montage* 01:11:18-01:11:46). In contrast, Cobain's mother, Wendy O'Connor, presents a compassionate perspective, portraying her son as a victim of addiction rather than someone who chose for it. She explains the emotional toll it took on her: "[H]e knew it was breaking my heart. [...] I asked him if he was at the stage of where he was addicted to also to the needle prick. And he burst into tears." (*Montage* 01:55:15-01:55:42). A diametrically different approach is evident in the interview with Courtney Love, who has been blamed for introducing Cobain to heroin. Her interview features strong language and indirect accusations, adding another layer of complexity to the film's portrayal of Cobain's addiction.³

Courtney Love: I had already done heroin, beat the thing, had a rule, I loved it still, but I didn't have a fantasy that he [Kurt] had. [...] His fantasy was I'm going to get to \$3 million, and then I'm going to be a junkie. (*Montage* 01:14:56- 01:15:10)

Courtney Love, who adopts a less compassionate tone, views Cobain's addiction as a conscious choice made by an adult man. She openly discusses her own addiction, which led to a notorious legal battle with child welfare services in 1992. At the same time, her remarks seem to address and refute the accusations made against her regarding her influence on Cobain's drug use. Notably, *Montage* is the first media publication in which Love openly admits to using drugs during her pregnancy:

always be together. [...] [W]ith his ten-year -old's narcissism, Kurt did not understand his father's desire for adult companionship or why Do wasn't happy with just the two of them (Cross 23-24).

³ There are widely circulated mass media accounts about Love's consumption of drugs while pregnant, being unfaithful to Cobain and having orchestrated his murder.

I did do heroin when I was pregnant, and then I stopped. [...] I assured him [Kurt] that I was built like an oxen and could carry this pregnancy to term and not have any problems. [...] The pregnancy isn't the problem. It's the being around a junkie while I'm pregnant when I'm a junkie, too, and I know the minute that baby's out, I'm going to go shoot up in celebratory fashion. (*Montage* 01:30:32-01:31:07)

The audience detects an overtone in Love's confession: while she admits to using heroin during her pregnancy, she simultaneously places some of the responsibility for her behavior on Cobain. This confession is received with the context of the aftermath, which is known to the viewers, creating a poignant and somewhat tragic portrayal of the lives of privileged individuals.

4.2 Aesthetics of *Montage*

While the documentary film is constrained by the premise of “justified reconstruction” (Painlevé, 434, 2016) elements such as archival content, interviews, lighting, music, camera work, and scene montage collectively shape the voice of a biographical docufiction.

In one scene, Cobain's family members blame each other for failing Kurt. When the stepmother remarks, “I think that the sad part of the whole thing is that Kurt wanted to be with his mom,” the camera zooms in on Don Cobain's expressionless face and then shifts to a close-up of his hand gripping the armrest of the sofa. This close-up and the timing of the shot suggest that Don Cobain's gesture is significant for understanding the scene. His body language, marked by this tense grip, indicates distress in response to his wife's words. Although we cannot definitively know if Jennifer Cobain's remarks triggered this reaction, the implication is clear: Don Cobain appears struggling to maintain composure and conceal his discomfort from the camera while the other interviewee speaks. This moment illustrates how camera work can subtly guide the narrative without explicitly articulating the story.

The lighting strategy significantly affects the ambience of the interviews with Wendy O'Conner. Her visuals are bright and colourful when she speaks about Kurt's childhood. She wears make-up and perfectly groomed hair and looks and smiles at the camera. Once the storyline reaches Cobain's critical struggle with addiction, O'Conner is interviewed in a dimly lit room. The shallow focus⁴ draws attention to the missing colours that were so dominant in her earlier appearances. She does not look at the camera but speaks to the invisible interviewer. The topic's weight and the plane's darkness add an emotional charge to the scene.

Lighting, visual, cinematographic design and sound design play a substantial role in representing Kurt Cobain's partners, Tracy Mirander and Courtney Love. In Cobain's biography, Mirander is described as a “homespun beauty with down-to-earth attitude,” (Cross 79, 2001). The close shots highlight Mirander's unpretentious look: she wears no make-up, has grey hair, facial pores and dandruff are vivid; her garments are mainly comfortable, and her upper torso hints at possibly being overweight. Mirander's visual is attuned to her film image of a self-dedicated partner who puts Cobain's well-being before her needs. (*Montage* 00:34:01-00:35:27) Her appearance in the film illustrates Cobain's life before he was transformed into a rock idol. Animations depicting Cobain playing his guitar between a pile of unwashed dishes also support Mirander's story about Cobain's reluctance to participate in household chores. Once Cobain reached success as a musician, his relationship with Mirander ended, so confirms Mirander herself: “he just felt like maybe he was moving ahead, and I was not” (*Montage* 01:53:10). Mirander's camera time is distinctive by

⁴ *Montage* 01:54:51-01:55:40

shallow focus and balanced lighting with the very sharp, clear images of her face. As mentioned, the visual design of the scenes suggests no enhancements in the form of make-up or hairdo have taken place, which is a visual strategy of portraying her as a confirmation of the non-glamorous part of Cobain's life. Mirander's selfless love for Cobain is channelled in the playful reference to her as "Kurt's slave."⁵

After one of Mirander's interviews lyrics of "Been A Son" zoomed in on the screen:

She should have stood out in the crowd
She should have made her mother proud. (*Montage* 00:40:19-00:40:38)

It is difficult to interpret this lyric solely in connection with her role in the relationship, especially given the line, "she should have been a son." These lyrics can also be understood as a feminist manifesto, highlighting the submissive roles women often accept in certain relationships. In *Montage*, this song is used to transition from the image of a selfless, domesticated goddess to the sub-narrative of a rock widow. The film portrays the marriage of Kurt Cobain and Courtney Love as an equal-to-equal union, which starkly contrasts Cobain's earlier relationship with Tracy Marander. In *Montage*, Love and Marander represent how biographical docufiction can craft a duality in depicting themes such as love, relationships, and marriage.

Visually, *Montage* contrasts Miranda's simplicity with Courtney Love's expressive, evocative presence. Love's loose blonde hair, minimal yet striking makeup, and lighting a cigarette in front of the camera create a vivid portrayal. She sits in a relatively dark room, shrouded in smoke, drinking plain water, her melancholic widow persona emphasized by a long-sleeved black blouse. This initial image suggests to viewers that they are about to witness a mournful reminiscence of Cobain.

However, Love presents herself as a more self-assured woman with a self-aware approach to grief. She rejects the stereotypical roles of the domesticated, nurturing female or the heartbroken widow idealizing her deceased partner. Instead, she paints an unromanticized portrait of their marriage and resolutely refuses to express regret for her choices—if there were any to regret.

Interviewer: You never cheated on Kurt?

Love: No, but I almost did one time, and he knew it [...] Nothing happened, but I was tired and I... I'm not... I wasn't as monogamous as he is... [...]. But I never cheated on him, but I certainly thought about it one time in London. [...] And the response to it was... he took 67 Rohypnols and ended up in a coma because I thought about cheating on him. (*Montage* 02:03:15-02:04:15)

Courtney Love, who had previously been accused of infidelity, makes a provocative and scandalous statement in *Montage*. Her speech is often repetitive and, at times, incoherent, which can be interpreted as defensiveness, mainly when she explains, "I am not as monogamous as he is..." Love frames her view of marital polygamy as a legitimate personal choice, one that a free, adult woman can make. However, she understands the audience may not be as accepting of a polygamous marriage. The film reinforces this sentiment through the song lyrics accompanying Love's theme, emphasizing the complexity of her relationship with Cobain and the societal judgment she faces.

⁵ *Montage* 01:28:37-01:28:40

My girl, my girl, do not lie to me

Tell me where did you sleep last night. (*Montage* 02:04:30-02:05:02)

This song is significant because it can be interpreted as a reference to an unfaithful relationship and as a nostalgic memento of Kurt Cobain's iconic image as a suffering artist. "Where Did You Sleep Last Night" holds deep emotional weight, as it was performed during Nirvana's final MTV Unplugged concert. It was the closing song of the show. As Cobain sang the final lines, he took his now-infamous deep breath (Nirvana Unplugged in New York 02:13:26-02:13:42). Paired with the funeral-like decorations of the MTV Unplugged set, this iconic image of Cobain, along with the song's lyrics and Love's reflections on their marriage, creates a profoundly melodramatic atmosphere in this scene.

4.3 Function of *Montage* – Posthumous Intimacy With The Idol

The death of a star at a young age amplifies the emotional impact on fans who share a parasocial bond with them. As Redford and Bloch note, "Death may produce a need to cling to items that have been in contact with the deceased person, elevating the status of these items" (141, 2012). Biographical docufiction caters to this need by offering an intimate viewing experience, allowing fans to "cling" to the memory of the star in a more personal way.

Getting to know 'the real' or 'inner' person behind or inside the celebrity has for a long time been an integral means of generating interest in them. [...] (Litter 12)

In biographical docufiction, revealing the person behind the celebrity is often achieved through the use of archival footage. The reception of these never-before-seen images requires an analytical approach from the viewer, who can reconstruct the celebrity portrait rather than passively consume it. *Montage* incorporates archival videos that, due to their lack of enhanced quality, feel "raw" and authentic. The film includes footage depicting intimate moments, their experience as parents, and episodes of intoxication. Scenes involving nudity and sexual engagement in front of the camera suggest that Cobain felt unguarded in these moments. For example, viewers witness Cobain lying in bed after apparently vomiting into a plastic bucket (*Montage* 01:23:00-01:22:44). In the following scene, he is in the bathroom with Love, shaving while she applies talcum powder to her armpits and genitals (*Montage* 01:22:44-01:27:08).

On the one hand, seeing Cobain vomiting, shaving, or having intercourse with his wife — offers an exclusive glimpse into what Alexander calls the "heavenly world" of icons. Fans often forgive a star's antisocial behavior, expecting the "sacrality of the celebrity-icon must be sequestered, protected from pollution" (Alexander 329, 2010). This "celebrity sacrality" concept becomes even more poignant after the star's death. *Montage* addresses Cobain's idolized image in two ways: it allows viewers to see deeply personal moments, such as the rock legend attending to bodily hygiene. Nevertheless, the filmmakers assert that they sought to challenge, rather than perpetuate, the cult of Kurt Cobain:

I feel that everyone knows Kurt did heroin. And yet they never had access to what that really was like for those who were close to him. So, in a way, [fans] have been glamorizing it all of these years. (Miller n. pag.)

Thus, *Montage* presents Cobain in an unflattering light, directly confronting the mythologized version of his life. The imagination of a celebrity's existence as being in an "extra-mundane and extra-territorial world," as Alexander (2010) suggests, is juxtaposed with the chaos of the Cobain household. Despite the raw portrayal, the audience tends to be more lenient in their judgment, as addiction and antisocial behavior are often tolerated in celebrities. However, *Montage* pushes the boundaries of viewers' tolerance, forcing them to confront the stark reality behind Cobain's glorified image.

In the footage (01:52:11-01:54:10), Cobain holds his daughter while he cannot stay awake and dozes off. Courtney Love tries to awaken him with the words: "Kurt, you do not want your daughter to see you like this, on drugs!" (*Montage* 01:53:32-01:54:00). Since Cobain is wearing no t-shirt and track marks are visible on his arms, there is a reasonable doubt that he is under drug influence, even though he says in the footage: "I am not on drugs, I'm tired" (*Montage* 01:53:36). Cobain had indeed abused heroine - it is well-established public knowledge; However the emphasis of this scene is on what effect his drug abuse had on the people surrounding him, especially on an infant.

This scene emotionally appeals to viewers, who are invited to commiserate and condemn Cobain. A variety of social and emotional aspects of this addiction merge: Cobain's childhood trauma, feelings of rejection, and his fiasco of being a functioning parent. The presence of a baby, who represents the collateral damage of an addiction, makes this scene extremely unsettling. In this scene, Cobain is not presented as an innocent or a "divine creature" (Alexander 328, 2010) but will not be judged as any other human being. His life, his art, and his tragic death invite the audience to be more tolerant of his behaviour (even though the film creators' intentions were different). Exposure to the star's private space impacts the audience, who has sought an opportunity to re-experience the idol once more.

4.4 Effects Of *Montage* - Emotional Truth

Since biographical docufiction taps into viewers' nostalgic sentiments towards a deceased idol, its primary function is to provide "an illusion of intimacy" (Redford & Bloch 39). For instance, seeing a rock star with his wife and baby daughter in the bath creates a voyeuristic and intimate viewing experience. In this scene, Courtney Love says, "I am kinda happy right now," to which Cobain responds, "Yeah." The audience is compelled to respond emotionally to this melancholic moment: Cobain, who is dead, remains forever young and charismatic, yet his family happiness, despite fame and wealth, was still "kinda," not fully confirmed or stable.

Biographical docufiction conveys an emotional truth distinct from objective truth in the sense of being true or false. As Sousa and Morton suggest, emotions can offer "correct or incorrect representations of something in the world outside us" (247, 2002). Thus, an individual's emotional response to their surroundings is an internal process. Emotional truth describes how a person felt about or reacted to a particular stimulus. Emotions are complex, as "each emotion is linked to its specific evaluative continuum" (Sousa & Morton 251, 2002).

In *Montage of Heck*, interviewees present various emotional truths. Courtney Love mentions that her drug abuse was not a problem because she was "built like an oxen." At the same time, Kurt Cobain himself explained that he used heroin to manage lifelong stomach problems (*Montage* 00:51:20-00:51:50). Wendy O'Connor claims her husband was not suited to be a father. These personal accounts reflect valid emotional truths from the perspectives of the individuals involved based on their "evaluative continuum" (Sousa & Morton 251, 2002).

Emotional truth also functions as a communicative mechanism, eliciting viewers' emotional responses reflecting their personal emotional truths. These responses may not always be positive or sympathetic. For instance, Buzz Osbourne, a member of the band Melvins and a friend of Cobain, was critical of the film. He remarked, "People need to understand that 90 percent of *Montage of Heck* is bullshit." Osbourne questioned the authenticity of Cobain's reported stomach ailment, suggesting instead that Cobain might have used it as an excuse to remain intoxicated: "He [Kurt] could use it as an excuse to stay loaded. [...] Of course, he was vomiting—that's what people on heroin do, they vomit. It's called "vomiting with a smile on your face" (Coleman n. pag., 2015).

5. Conclusion

Biographical docufiction is a relatively new development but has the potential to evolve into a distinct sub-genre with a unique narrative structure and conceptually and functionally distinctive posthumous biographical narratives. Biographical docufiction establishes its unique nature by integrating documentary filmmaking practices with fictional storytelling.

Montage of Heck exemplifies this genre through its blend of documentary and fictional elements. While the film's core narrative is supported by other publications and common knowledge, it relies on authorized access to Cobain's archives. Fictional elements are evident in the film's animation sequences, memoir recordings, graphic motion pictures, and scene transitions based on Cobain's drawings.

Conceptually, biographical docufiction offers multiple perspectives on the same events, often presenting conflicting views. The focus is not on what happened but on how the events affected those involved. This approach leaves questions open to interpretation rather than providing definitive answers.

Biographical docufiction aims to create an intimate viewing experience, bridging the nostalgic gap between the idolized image of the deceased star and the audience's longing for them. These films communicate emotional truths about their subjects, acknowledging that emotional accuracy and rational agency are independent aspects (Sousa & Morton 267, 2002). As such, they do not claim to present objective truths but rather to convey personal and emotional experiences.

Montage of Heck is a prime example of biographical docufiction, transcending traditional genre boundaries and setting a new trend by merging established practices. The film combines diverse media and a sentimental narrative into a cohesive story that feels "unorthodox" today. This sub-genre holds the potential to rediscover and reframe the stories of young artists who lived fast, died young, and left behind a captivating legacy.⁶

⁶ „Live fast, die young and leave a good-looking corpse" was originally quote in Moser's article "Live Fast, Die Young, leave a Good-Looking Corpse": Coined by a Chicago Writer."

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