

DOCTORAL THESIS

NAME:

JANET TEMPE MEREWETHER

DATE:

2007

COURSE:

DOCTOR OF CREATIVE ARTS CO2020

UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY SYDNEY

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

SUBJECT:

INNOVATION IN STYLE AND PERFORMANCE

IN HYBRID DOCUMENTARY

JABE BABE – A HEIGHTENED LIFE

(52 minute hybrid documentary film)

CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP / ORIGINALITY

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Production Note:
Signature removed prior to publication.

Signature of Student

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge several people who have contributed their knowledge and experience during this period of research, writing and production of the documentary *Jabe Babe – A Heightened Life*. These include Sarah Gibson for her steady and consistent contribution, Dr Jane Roscoe for lively debate and recommendations, Lisa French, editor of *Womenvision*, for her dedication to Australian screen culture and the work of women directors, and Belinda Chayko, whose intelligent perspective in relation to the writing process has been inspiring. Thanks must also be extended to Tim Haydon for his valuable reader comments during the preparation of this thesis. I would also like to acknowledge the friends, family and childcare workers who provided support and childminding after the birth of my son, Arlo, and during the writing stages.

I'd also like to thank Jabe Babe, Jackie Farkas, Deborah Szapiro, Glenys Rowe, Debbie Lee, Amanda Duthie, Julia Overton, Karin Altmann and Sally Browning for their participation and belief in *Jabe Babe - A Heightened Life* during its long period of development and production.

Acknowledgement must be made to the writers and filmmakers involved in the revival of Australian cinema and screen arts, who provided the role models, and made my choice of vocation possible. These filmmakers include Jeni Thornley, Corinne Cantrill, Martha Ansara, Sarah Gibson as well as the late Clem Browne.

I would also like to acknowledge the influence of other Australian filmmakers on my work, including Tony Ayres, Dennis O'Rourke, David Caesar, Tracey Moffatt and Merilee Bennett. These film-makers have been inspirational, and are responsible for extending the boundaries of documentary form, by the production of creative and profound films.

I would like to extend my gratitude to all the inspirational filmmakers and mavericks who have shared a vision to expand the language of cinema.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Certificate of Authorship / Originality	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Table of Contents	iv
Abstract	v
Introduction	1
Chapter 1	4
Hybrid Documentary	
Chapter 2	48
The Development of a Personal Directorial Style : Hybridity in Short Film and Video	
Chapter 3	74
Performance in Hybrid Documentary : <i>Jabe Babe – A Heightened Life</i>	
Chapter 4	107
Innovation in Visual Style	
Conclusion	134
Appendix i International Profile: The Short Films and Videos of Janet Merewether	
Appendix ii Script – <i>Jabe Babe – A Heightened Life</i>	
Bibliography	
Filmography Documentary	
Filmography Janet Merewether	
DVD <i>Jabe Babe – A Heightened Life</i>	

ABSTRACT

This thesis proposes a definition of the ‘hybrid’ documentary, which is the contemporary term used to describe non-fiction films which employ a stylised form of representation of the subjective voice, and may incorporate experimental and self-reflexive modes of production. This exegesis argues that hybrid documentaries integrate fictional characteristics through the use of formal innovation in performance, design and *mise-en-scène*. Hybrid documentary frequently presents voices from the margins of society, and has been particularly embraced by feminist, queer and avant-garde filmmakers seeking to invert the position of the subject as victim and establish new aesthetic possibilities for the documentary. The hybrid form is characterised by highly original directorial approaches, which may incorporate documentary, structuralist, media art and performance art practice.

Hybrid documentary is frequently self-reflexive and eclectic, foregrounding its mode of construction, and revelling in the ironic celebration of quotation, artifice and fantasy. It is reflective of the definition of hybridity in post-colonial studies and the biological sciences in that it seeks to artificially fuse disparate and incongruous cultures and sources into a unified whole. Hybridity questions the existence of ‘objectivity’ and fixed definitions of history, culture and identity, instead representing the ‘in-between’ spaces. In this way it can be differentiated from the definition of conventional documentary as a conveyor of ‘truth,’ or, as Nichols proposes, a ‘discourse of sobriety’. Hybrid documentaries eschew didactic and ‘objective’ stylistic features such as the ‘voice of God’, unless used ironically, preferring instead to foreground the voice and perspective of the subject, who may also act as a performer. These documentaries are frequently informed by the personal experience of the director. Through their self-conscious use of stylisation, they exemplify Sontag’s definition of ‘life as theatre,’ or, in Dovey’s words ‘documentary...as performance.’

This DCA research project outlines a definition of the hybrid documentary, through the production of the 52 minute documentary *Jabe Babe – A Heightened Life*, written, produced and directed by the author and a written thesis, examining hybridity in documentary. The exegesis is structured around an analysis of past experiments in documentary form, an examination of my own short film and video work and the performance and visual design innovations employed in *Jabe Babe – A Heightened Life*.

Jabe Babe – A Heightened Life has achieved a high level of recognition in critical, broadcast industry and festival contexts, as well as contributing to international academic debate around hybrid documentary forms. The film has also been well received by a wide range of audiences. I conclude that hybrid documentary, an eclectic, subjective and formally inventive genre, is well positioned to adapt to new interactive and web-based delivery platforms in the future, whilst retaining an influential position in the broadcast, cable, festival and theatrical media landscape.