

TRANSCRIPT - QE Newsletter 8: When Hollywood Tells The Truth

Tobias: I think the documentary offers a, a version of the truth. But it's also, um, searching for a truth. I think fiction does something else. It creates other spaces that not necessarily is invested in a truth, but it's much more invested in a, to document or witness the human experience, the human journey in this.

I think maybe that's exactly what fiction offers here. That dimension that you can't get in documentary where you try to either do recreation or you need to go out and pick up with interviews afterwards to make sure that everybody gets it. We can write scenes that feels real and translates real and yet they give you the information you needed to understand the story.

Antonio: I think there's something we've lost in documentaries. Like most of the documentaries you see on Netflix, the way that they work is, a filmmaker spends X amount of time with a subject, and they kind of understand what the sort of trajectory of the story is, and then they go back and then they ask the questions on camera to get that story so that when they edit it, they know what it's going to be like.

There's not a lot of spontaneity and surprise, and not a lot of life.

Tobias: Also in fiction, but we seem to be, we have to know our story so well we go and we pitch it. And if you don't, like, entertain, and if you don't hit them with subject matter and reason to make this, and plot, and surprises.

Antonio: And also something familiar. An engine that is familiar.

Tobias: And they need to have seen this work before. And in the documentary cases, like, you have to go there and say, I'm gonna make a documentary about this murder case, and about this, and then that happened, and it turns out it ended up being the mother.

Antonio: My favorite film, one of my favorite filmmakers is Frederic Wiseman because he just goes to a place and he plants himself there for a month or whatever. And then he documents it. And then he makes a movie that's just that. And it's just so full of life and absurd.

Tobias: That is like trusting the process and allowing the journalist or the filmmaker to go out into the world with some time on his hand or her hands. I mean, like, let me just try to figure out what this is about.

I'm just going to spend some time here and, you know, human experience and truth will show itself to me.

Robyn: It's such a privilege what you're talking about. I mean...

Antonio: Is that the same case in journalism?

Robyn: Increasingly, if you're talking about narrative and long form, which, you know, like our favorite work. It does really require like, sometimes just saying, yeah, I can tell you what the end is. Which is a ridiculous thing, like we're reporters, like, what are we talking about, right?

Like, saying I have a theory about the end?

Antonio: I think it's funny because we're talking about, like, this long process of gestating with our fiction, and I feel like we are allotted, as people that write fiction, a lot of time to discover and to go down wrong paths. And then find the thing that it is.

Tina: Like this lack of trust in audience.

Antonio: Well, because executives make decisions, not audiences.

Tina: Right, right. But like it goes back to like the question of specificity. And I don't have the answer to this because it maybe is a business thing. Like, we found collaborators, you know, that allowed you to do your specific vision and then there was audience, right?

And then I, a genuine question to the journalism side, but like. What is that? Like, to me it is a lack of trust of what audience is for, or is it not?

Brian: I think it's a fear. I think it's a business model fear right now.

Tina: Yeah, it's a fear, right? Because people want...

Tom: It's a race to the middle.

Tina: Yeah, a race to the very boring middle.

Antonio: Are podcasts then different? Is there more of a freedom? Because you can go, because they're cheaper to make?

Brian: I mean there certainly was, I think it's emulating your guys world more and more, sadly. But, um. The way S Town could happen, I mean, yeah, I worked for This American Life, um, when I started reporting that story, and the, you know, it was written in the handbook that killing a story is a triumph.

Like, killing a story that's mediocre is a triumph, not a failure. And so, exploring things and having them not work out. There was a both built into the budget of the show, but also the culture of the show that you have to be able to try things. So it was like no big deal like I pitched this thing, I was like, yeah I'll check it out for a while and it doesn't need to work. And killing it would actually be encouraged if it wasn't good enough and you move on to the next better thing. That culture is the only reason that that show happened.

Robyn: Met with the very real pressure of needing to put a show out every few weeks.

Yes. Something special happens maybe when you're like sitting in a room and like everyone's required to pitch stories.