

Narrative vs. Documentary - Same Story told in different film Genres -  
A comparative analysis of MAN ON WIRE and THE WALK

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## Abstract

This paper is a comparative analysis of the two films, *Man On Wire*, a documentary film directed by James Marsh and, *The Walk*, a biographical drama directed by Robert Zemeckis. Both films are based on the true story of the French high-wire artist, Philippe Petit, who on August 7, 1974, daringly walked on a high-wire suspended between the two World Trade Center Twin Towers in New York City for 45-minutes. The thesis of this paper deals with the dramatic constructions of these films. My aim is to compare how the two filmmakers tell the same story in different film genres using different narration techniques. I will focus on narrative and dramatic composition comparisons, scene comparisons, and cinematic effect comparisons, as well as, discuss the similarities between the two films. My thesis also deals with the pros and cons of truth-telling in documentary film, the relationship between fiction and news in the medium, and how we see it as a film genre, which reveals reality and claims to be true.

*I look on cinema as a pulpit, and use it as a propagandist.*  
- John Grierson

## Zusammenfassung

Diese Bachelorarbeit ist eine vergleichende Analyse der beiden Filme, Man On Wire, ein Dokumentarfilm von James Marsh und The Walk, ein biografisches Drama von Robert Zemeckis. Beide Filme basieren auf der wahren Geschichte, des französischen Hochseilkünstlers Philippe Petit, der am, 7. August, 1974, mutig auf einem Hochseil balancierte, das zwischen den beiden World Trade Center Twin Towers in New York City 45 Minuten lang gespannt wurde. Der Inhalt dieser Arbeit beschäftigt sich mit dem dramatischen Aufbau dieser Filme. Mein Ziel ist es, zu vergleichen, wie die beiden Filmemacher die gleiche Geschichte in verschiedenen Filmgenres mit unterschiedlichen Erzähltechniken wiedergeben. Ich konzentriere mich auf erzählerische und dramatische Kompositionsvergleiche, Szenenvergleiche und filmische Effektvergleiche, sowie die Gemeinsamkeiten der beiden Filme. In meiner Bachelorarbeit geht es auch um die Vor- und Nachteile der Wahrheitsfindung im Dokumentarfilm, um das Verhältnis zwischen Fiktion und Nachrichten in diesem Medium und wie wir den Dokumentarfilm als Filmgenre sehen, das die Realität offenbaren soll und diese für sich beansprucht.

*I look on cinema as a pulpit, and use it as a propagandist.  
- John Grierson*

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Motivation and Destination

Film is an art that people create; documentary filmmaking balances the categories of fact and fiction, art and document, entertainment and knowledge. As a student studying *Medientechnik*, observing the ways filmmakers put all kinds of stories on the big screen has always been my passion. Everyone has their own perspective and taste when it comes to films. Each genre of film has its own storytelling ways and unique techniques. Also each has its own particular audience. There are so many different kinds of films that exist ever since the first film came to life. Hollywood, known as the mainstream filmmaking industry in the United States, often tells and retells the same stories, sometimes with the same storyline and settings, sometimes with different ones. From Hollywood's earliest days, it adapted the classics of literature and folklore. As time goes on, different kinds of art has been influenced people's lives. Filmmaking is becoming more and more accessible through stories based on true event or books written by all kinds of authors. In the biggest Award show in the United States of America – The Academy Award, also known as the Oscars, documentaries have always had their important roles to play. Because film reaches out to all hearts in the world, no matter where we grew up or what our experiences are, it would be only right to absorb all kinds of stories that are happening among us and tell them in an authentic ways. Stories based on true events with real mutual emotions are the ones that have been doing really well with the critics as well as at the box office. Through the years, the range of documentary films has widened its sources to include TV Series, video games, comic books, magazine or newspaper articles, lesser known films, as well as older yet popular films.

By researching, gathering all the information that I needed and repeatedly watching the films, I was able to really dive into the subject and complete an analysis with depth. I hope my thesis can create a perspective which comes from a *Medientechnik* student, using all possible angles from dramatic construction to the latest cinematic techniques in order to get a result of how filmmakers tell the same story using

different narration techniques. Questions like what people may ask, what is the difference between them? Why do I need to see both films? Which film is actually better? Which one should I see first? I hope I can offer a lot of clear and comprehensive perspectives to people who are interested in watching films in different genres which are telling exactly the same story.

## 1.2 Art of Storytelling – Introduction into the film world

“Once upon a time ...” used to be the start of a story, a fairy tale specially. People have been telling stories through all kinds of Art; either as a book, a song, a poem, a painting or how we do it in the modern world – films. We have been able to tell all kinds of amazing inspirational stories through the world of filmmaker’s imagination. Everyone tells a different versions of stories. How do we categorize them since there are so many of them? How do we sell them to the audience in order to make them go to the cinema and watch the films they want? The idea of film genre came to life, borrowed from the world of literature. The word “genre” is firstly used for the classification of literature. Webster’s Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English language defines genre as “a category of artistic, musical, or literary composition characterized by a particular style, form, or content.”<sup>1</sup> Genres are the different film groups, categories based on similarities either in the narrative elements. Genres are like labels, providing convenient and clear ways for the filmmakers to choose the subject, cast actors, finish their screenplay and structure their narratives and dramatic constructions. A film genre provides the audience basic and necessary information of how the film is presented, which makes it easier for them to make a satisfying choice before they watch it. Terms such as “form” and “content” are those we hear most often in any scholarly discussion of art. Content can be defined as the subject of an art work and form is how the subject is expressed. In other words, content is what the artwork is about and form is how the meaning is presented to the viewers. The two terms are often paired because works of art need them. Form and content are a team and they depend on one another. Content provides something to

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<sup>1</sup> Webster’s Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary, p.591.

express and form supplies the methods and techniques necessary for us to experience it. Form allows us not only to see the contents but also to see content in a very particular way. Popular genres in modern days include comedy, science-fiction, horror, romance, action, thriller, drama, mystery, crime, animation, adventure, fantasy, superhero, film noir, biography etc. <sup>2</sup>

The filmmaker gets to shape the viewer's particular experience and interpretation of that content with different film genres. Genre consists of four elements: character, story(action), plot and setting. In the world of cinema, form is cinematic language also called tools and techniques that filmmakers use to convey meaning and mood to the viewer, such as, lighting, camera angles, focal length, editing, moving camera, proxemics and sound.

### 1.3 Selecting the Film – Motivation of choosing this story and these two films

On Wednesday, August 7, 1974, people in Lower Manhattan stopped in their tracks to watch a strange event in the sky – not a bird, not a plane, and certainly not Superman. What that was, was the bold reckless action of the French high-wire artist named Philippe Petit, who was walking at that moment on a high wire more than almost 400 meters in the air<sup>3</sup>, suspended between the tops of the Twin Towers of the old World Trade Centre. This is one of the most amazing and inspirational stories that I have seen in the movie industry where the story was based on a real life event. To be able to witness this true life story in two totally different film genres, with both films using great and amazing cinematic techniques from two of the greatest, most talented, award winning filmmakers of our time, was such a huge inspiration and motivation for me.

By watching interviews with Philippe Petit, I found him to be a very energized, unique, optimistic and motivational. No matter the film genre, the energy and

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.imdb.com/feature/genre/>

<sup>3</sup> DVD *Man On Wire* 2009 Arenal Filmverleih GmbH

character of Philippe Petit can only make a film better. I feel like it is not a hard job for the filmmakers to make the audience fall in love with the main character in Petit's case. His charisma is a very powerful tool.

In 2015, filmmaker Robert Zemeckis honored the World Trade Center high-wire feat in a film called *The Walk*, starring Joseph Gordon-Levitt as Philippe Petit. First things first: *The Walk* isn't the first film about Philippe Petit's high-wire performance. The 2008 documentary movie *Man on Wire*, directed by James Marsh, won the Academy Award<sup>4</sup>, also known as the Oscars, for Best Documentary Feature. Funny fact, the title *Man on Wire* was originally coined from a police report which documents this event. These films were also named as a love letter to the Twin Towers, featuring interviews with Petit and his accomplices, and aerial footage of pre-9/11 New York City.

*Man on Wire* and *The Walk* both showed passion and admiration towards the Twin Towers, which were destroyed in the September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 terrorist attacks. These two films have awakened my deep interest also on this matter. How romantic is this contribution towards the Twin Towers. New York went through the darkest day in history, where people lost their loved ones. It is a tragedy no one wants to look back on. The idea of "love letters to the Twin Towers"<sup>5</sup> gives it a different meaning completely, lightly changing the way people want to look at this landmark after the tragedy. Of course, people will not or do not want to forget about what happened on September 11<sup>th</sup>, but it is also very important for us to be reminded and to celebrate the many beautiful moments of the Twin Towers. Both films have done a wonderful job of both remembering and celebrating. I also think it is good and thoughtful of the directors to not even mention September 11 in the films.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://oscar.go.com>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.thenational.ae/arts-culture/the-walk-a-thrilling-love-letter-to-the-twin-towers-1.126796>

## 1.4 Goal and Method

I will begin my paper by listing some obvious similarities between the two films from the basic facts of the storylines, which allows me to dig in a deeper level of insight and inference to complete this thesis. By listing some key elements of what I want to analyze, some internal similarities can be seen which allows me to dig deeper into the filmmaker's mindset of making them. From the character to the plot, from the cinematography to the pacing, from the editing to the special effects, from the real life characters to the performances, I have tried to look first at the similarities and then at the differences. I will compare the two films in every cinematic element and some factual information like Video Sequence that represents the same story moments in the films, in order to have a better look at both films. With the help of broad inference that includes titles and directors, factual reminders, specific inferences that assert a deep insight, I hope I will be able to give an in-depth comparative analysis. I will analyze the two films in regard of film genres in chapter 4 and 5 respectively.

The rest of thesis is organized as follows. Chapter 2 explains what narrative film and documentary film are and makes a general comparison between them. In chapter 3, I ask, "who is Philippe Petit and what is his story?" by introducing the protagonist of the two films and also giving explanations as to why I choose his story. Chapter 4 takes the documentary *Man On Wire* as an example in order to discuss the essential characteristics of the documentary film as particular film genre. Chapter 5 is a film analysis of the motion picture *The Walk* following chapter 4; this chapter looks at the biographical drama *The Walk* and takes a look into the modern filmmaking industry. Chapter 6 provides a clear answer to the question "How do these two films differ in narration and dramatic composition." Chapter 7 addresses the visual reality of what they are presenting to the viewers. I hope to give a better look on how both films present the story using different cinematography techniques by presenting the frame of references of the two films with screenshots in this chapter. In chapter 8, I compare the different cinematic effects presented in both films from the perspective of cinematography, pacing, editing, douns effect and CGI techniques respectively. In chapter 9, I will address the repercussions of Petit's actions, as well as, pay tribute to the World Trade Center. Finally, I draw my conclusion and express my personal

opinion in chapter 10. Behind this thesis lies the assumption that awareness of the central concepts in documentary film narration, along with a sense of concepts in fictional narrative film, provides extremely valuable tools to the filmmakers as well as the critic and audience.

## 2 Definitions

### 2.1 Definition: Narrative Film

Since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, films have played a significant role in the lives of human beings around the world. The moving picture debuted at the 1893 World's Fair with the introduction of Thomas Edison's kinetoscope.<sup>6</sup> It is a stationary viewing machine which showed short films on a variety of subjects. The first narrative film is *The Great Train Robbery*, it was released in 1903,<sup>7</sup> and found almost instant success.

Narrative film is one of the most popular and common types of film genres. Refers to the development of a 'story', the roles and relationships of the characters within it, the situations and dilemmas they confront. Because movies have such a large amount of viewers, they usually have the power to share new ideas, teach lessons about the past or the future, or even motivate people and society to review the laws and situations that have been talked about in the films. Sometimes films aren't just there to entertain us. Just like the diverted film genre, through the many styles of storytelling, filmmakers are trying to get their diverted message out.

In simple terms, narrative films are the kind of films that tell a story. It normally is driven by a story that has a certain and particular structure. Movies like *Rocky*, *the god father*, *Titanic* and *the Wizard of Oz* are some of the many examples that have enriched our lives. It seems to be a huge category; which is probably because many films fit into it.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.openculture.com/2014/03/thomas-edison-and-kinetoscope-create-the-first-movie-filmed-in-the-us-c-1889.html>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0000439/>

There are some important elements of the narrative format. Basically, narrative is the story; narration is the act of telling the story and the narrator is who or what tells the story. In other words, the narrator delivers the narration that conveys the narrative. The camera is the primary narrator that comes in mind because the camera tells us the story. The narration contains what kind of story, the range, the composition, how the story is captured, and what sound effects to use. All those fall into the category of camera narration. So, in every film the filmmakers and their creative techniques are the primary narrator.

## 2.2 Definition: Documentary film

The definition of a documentary film defined by Carl Plantinga is as follows: “a nonfiction film, or a documentary, is a text that more or less publicly claims that the presented objects, states of affairs or events truly exist or existed in reality as they are presented, whereas the things presented in a fiction film do not necessarily need to exist, and thus, there is no truth claim in fiction.”

Documentary film, in the words of Bill Nichols is, “one of the discourses of sobriety that include science, economics, politics, and history discourses that claim to describe the real, to tell the truth”. In the book *Introduction to Documentary*, the author Bill Nichols divides film into two categories which are, 1. Documentaries of wish-fulfillment as known as fictions and 2. Documentaries of social representation.<sup>8</sup> They give a variety of emotions, wishes and dreams also nightmares and dreads. They have a large viewer amount because our emotions are mutual, we feel connected when we get to see people, who are involved in this event, tell their real story. Unlike news which is usually reported by a journalist as a third person, documentaries represent real events, visually and audibly, in a way which allows the audience to immerse themselves in it.

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<sup>8</sup> B. Nichols, 2001, p.1

A documentary film is often seen or considered as something different from fiction or news. It is something which tells us about what really happened. The film claims reality or truth. But some define documentary film merely as “art” with no big difference to fiction. There are, of course, only points of view of how people define documentary film. Is it a form of truth telling or is it a fictional art? They represent two extremes of opinion and therefore both problematic. Which brings me to the question, “How real is a documentary film?” Which is a question I will talk about in this thesis.

All documentary films are nonfictional, but not all nonfictional films are documentaries. Documentary film is a record of the truth; it reviews what really happens; it is a film genre that people give credibility to and when people want to know what really happened regarding a particular event, they usually choose documentary films.

### 2.3 Difference between Narrative Film and Documentary Film

The famous filmmaker Ken Burns, whose widely known documentary series include *The Civil War*, *Baseball*, *Jazz*, *The War* once said that filmmakers think themselves as “tribal storytellers”. One similarity between narrative film and documentary film is the impulse. It is the same all the time, to tell the story, to share emotions with the audience. They are ways and methods storytellers and filmmakers recording the event, grab the audience with their own interpretation, share their version of the stories with the audience. To record it, is a documentary, and to interpret it, is a dramatic fiction. However, all films come with filmmaker’s interpretation. On this matter I do not really see a difference emotionally or psychologically on the viewers. It is just the category and genre that come to discussion, but under the surface I think the line is blurred for me between the two. However, a good way to tell the difference is through the scripts. Though narrative film usually presents with an original or adopted screenplay in pre-shooting phase, where documentary filmmaking captures the reality with following the subject of the story without a script written before shooting, but after the shooting has begun, and story often unfolds as it happens. I

will use the example of *Man on Wire* and *The Walk* to discuss this question further in the following chapter.

## 3 Background Story

### 3.1 The Story of Philippe Petit and “his towers”

Philippe Petit is a French high-wire artist and a street juggler. He writes, draws, performs close-up magic, practices lock-picking, 18<sup>th</sup>-century timber framing, plays chess, studies French wine, gives lectures and workshops on creativity and motivation, and was recently sighted bullfighting in Peru. Also, he has been arrested over 500 times for street juggling. Petit is recently working on his seventh book, *Why Knot?*<sup>9</sup>

WTC-The Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre in Lower Manhattan, New York City, United States was opened on April 4, 1973 and were tragically destroyed in the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.<sup>10</sup> These two identical 110-story buildings were one of the New York City icons and key elements of Manhattan’s famous skyline. They were once a New York City Landmark.

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<sup>9</sup> [https://www.ted.com/speakers/philippe\\_petit](https://www.ted.com/speakers/philippe_petit)

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.history.com/topics/landmarks/world-trade-center>



img.1: WTC Twin Towers under construction Getty Images Bettmann

Philippe Petit talked about the Twin Towers like his lover. He called the Twin Towers “my towers” in the documentary *Man on Wire*. It is a romantic relationship between Petit and the Twin Towers. This man, his relationship, and the amazing but crazy story of “his towers” has been told countless times in newspaper articles, interviews and later recounted in multiple books and films, each of which attempted to capture something of this singular fabulous event. Two of the most recent and well-known of these retellings are the films *Man on Wire* (UK 2008) and *The Walk* (2015).

After a throughout watching of the documentary, we know that this is not Petit’s first “criminal attempt”. It might be the most famous one, but it also confirms that Petit had already attempted and completed an illegal high-wire walk at Paris’s Notre Dame Cathedral in 1971. The real footage of this feat was shown in the documentary *Man on Wire* and also recreate in the film *The Walk*. Another illegal walk was at Sydney’s Barbour Bridge in 1973, which was also well documented and beautifully done from Petit’s camera man, but wasn’t mentioned in the film *The Walk*. The documentary *Man on Wire* also reviewed that he made three trips to New York City in order to study the Twin Towers. In this period of preparation for his work, he rented a

helicopter to observe the Twin Towers from a high angle and take pictures for the planning of the “coup”, the nickname he gives in the film for the high-wire walk.

This photo, taken the morning of August 7, 1974, is captured by Petit’s friend and co-conspirator, Jean-Louis Blondeau. This beautiful image shows us the beautiful event on that day. It reveals Petit balanced on his wire, between ground and the sky, between the south and north Towers of the World Trade Centre and between life and death hanging on the wire.



img.2: Philippe Petit on cable suspended between the two towers of the newly completed World Trade Centre in New York City, August 7, 1974. *Man on Wire 2008*, directed by James Marsh. Photo: Jean-Louis Blondeau

### 3.2 The Book - *To Reach the Clouds*

The Academy Award-winning documentary film *Man on Wire* is based on Petit’s book *To Reach the Clouds*<sup>11</sup>. This book is about the dramatic story of his high-wire walk between the Twin Towers. His narrative is lyrical, swaggering, urgent, passionate and optimistic. On the morning of August 7, 1974 he illegally rigged and walked steel

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<sup>11</sup> P. Petit, 2002

cables between the Twin Towers. A hundred thousand people gathered on the ground in Lower Manhattan to watch the 24-year-old French high-wire artist walking back and forth on a steel cable at an altitude of 400 meters above the ground. Petit journals this event from conception, planning to the performance and its aftermath. This is a story told by Petit himself. No one could have imagined that the book he would one day write about it would serve as a memorial not only to the extremes of human daring, but also to the buildings themselves.

### 3.3 Literature and Film - What is Reality?

*I don't know what truth is. Truth is something unattainable. We can't think we're creating truth with a camera. But what we can do, is reveal something to viewers that allows them to discover their own truth.*

- Michel Brault

There are many ways in which literature and film are similar in promulgating their realities, to promote or make widely known an idea, a story or a message, especially when these ideas and stories are coming from real life. They both do very good job on deliver those messages; both have the same themes and motives, but they actually express themselves in very different ways. Literature often projects a very vivid literary detail of the scene and the characters in the story. This gives a lot of space for our imagination to do the job; it allows our mind to project into that situation as if we are experiencing the same event that is happening around us and, in which, we get to interact with it. This projection of the characters and stories is done mostly through narration; either by the character or by the author, who is the observer of the whole situation.

Since we believe in things we see with our own eyes, visual reality is indeed the most important part of the complete reality of the story. However, one must still have the power and choice to identify with the characters through feelings and emotions. In literature the narration is done mostly through a first or third person perspective. The

story we are getting from books are told either by a character in the story or a third party observer of the situation.

Though visual reality is a quite large part of storytelling, people get to the ability to experience the magical moment of pure imagination on their own. This is why stories like *Pride and Prejudice* and *The Great Gatsby* are brought to film in so many different versions with different settings, different storylines, different actors and different filmmakers. This is because everyone has their own imagination of the characters, and the remake always brings something that the audience can relate to in that scenario.

One of the main differences between James Marsh's documentary and Philippe Petit's book *To Reach the Clouds* is that we get to see other perspectives other than Petit's own in Marsh's film. Marsh gathered other important parties in his documentary to give a different voice on this event and to create a vibe of truth. We know that Petit is a man with passion and pride; this made his work especially interesting.

## 4 Film Analysis - Documentary *Man on Wire* (2008)

### 4.1 Film Facts, Genre, Plot summary and Technical Specs

The film's producer Simon Chinn first encountered Philippe Petit in April 2005 after which Chinn decided to try to acquire the film rights to Petit's book, *To Reach the Clouds*.<sup>12</sup> Director James Marsh met Petit in 2006, and Petit agreed to be part of the film with a request that the film has to be mischievous. The title of the film is taken from the police report of that day that led to the arrest of Petit. Director James Marsh utilized actual footage along with reenactments and interviews to successfully recreate the story which crafts the documentary like a heist film because of the fact that what Petit did was illegal. Marsh says the music in the film plays a very important

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.screendaily.com/case-study-man-on-wires-soaring-success/4043705.article>

role and it helps create the mood of the film. The filmmaker's purpose of *Man on Wire* is to capture Philippe's ambition to cross the Twin Towers on a high-wire. It also reveals his perseverance and brazen determination in reaching and achieving his goals and dreams. It is a movie about a crime, as well as dream come true. It is a truly inspiring story.

On August 7, 1974, Philippe Petit, a French wire walker illegally walked on a high-wire for 45 minutes between the rooftops of New York's World Trade Centre's twin Towers. The documentary uses interviews of Petit and his friends, archival footage and re-enactments to show his previous stunts, Petit's preparations and what they did the night before the walk. What makes this documentary so incredible is, that Marsh manages to include interviews and testimonies from loyal companions and co-conspirators at the time. This includes Petit's girlfriend at the time, Annie Allix, and several other American and French friends, who supported him with the high-wire walk. In the interviews, they talk about all the logistics and legal issues involved in his high-wire walk. He crossed the Twin Towers of New York's World Trade Centre on 7 August 1974 at 7 a.m. back-and-forth from the north Tower to the south Tower for 45 minutes. Suspended on his high-wire. Petit balanced in the gap between the two buildings for a whole forty-five minutes before returning to the south tower, which was then full of police officers waiting to arrest him. His story has been told and re-told many times in different forms. *Man on Wire*, by British director James Marsh, has earned a unique place of retelling Petit's story alone with the Academy Award for the best documentary.

#### 4.2 Characterization

*"To me it's so simple, that life should be lived on the edge of life. You have to exercise rebellion; to refuse to taper yourself to rules, to refuse your own success, to refuse to repeat yourself, to see every day, every year, every idea as a true challenge, and then you are going to live your life on a tightrope."*

- Philippe Petit, *Man on Wire*.

The character shaping is a process that involves a variety of factors such as script, performance, convention, relationship with the audience etc. Philippe Petit himself was already a very interesting, charismatic, fascinating person. James Marsh didn't have to make the character interesting for the audience; Petit just has to be himself, and it's enough. His obsession for the Twin Towers sets tone of the film. His dream of walking across them started even before the completion of their construction, and again and again in the documentary, he reminds the audience of the love and respect he has for the Towers and the stunt. He repeatedly expresses how it has and always will be a life-long ambition of his.

We see different characters in his life that contribute to Philippe's plan. Petit wasn't quite on board with some of the people interviewed for the film. Barry Greenhouse, for example, represents the 'donor' character as someone who gives knowledge and resources to Petit. Other characters represent his sidekicks or mentors who somehow contribute to continuing to push the narrative forward. Alan Welner was the skeptic type, who didn't believe in Petit. The confliction between the team members also made this documentary authentic and dramatic. One very important emotion that the audience keeps experience the fear of death. The audience gets to witness this emotional moment through the interviews with Petit's that time girlfriend, Annie Alix, and also other team members. David Foreman has done a very realistic interviews in the film. He is a musician who has smoked pot every day for the past 30 years as he opens up in the film and shamelessly shares and owns up being stoned the day of the walk.

#### 4.2.1 Relationships between the Characters

In this documentary, everyone describes the process as a team, rarely saying "I" in the interviews, but Petit certainly doesn't shy from using the term. This lack of consideration puts an idea of domination but also death to relationships. His love interest back then, Annie Allix, discusses her relationship in the beginning with Petit. She shows immense admiration for him, which gives Petit a lot of power over her. She was present when he walked between the Notre Dame, Sydney Harbor Bridge,

and the Twin Towers. Once Petit completed his walk between the Twin Towers, they had a brief but passionate embrace. Due to Petit's taste of fame, he had no interest in continuing their relationship. As he discusses in the interviews, he betrayed his girlfriend after become famous by having a passionate affair with another woman.

Petit's dream could not have been realized without a band of friends who were with him every step of the way. They are, so to speak, standing in the shadow of greatness, and it is not absolutely natural. With the movement of the storyline, the problems and conflicts between Petit and his accomplices become stronger. Marsh stresses a lot of the problems through the interviews with Petit, Annie, and some of Petit's so called former friends, which he would say "betrayed" him. But as explained by Marsh in an interview in *Filmmaker Magazine*, this is exactly why he wanted the people to join this project – because they are part of the drama. Petit wasn't that comfortable with those former friends who "betrayed" him, but Marsh desperately wanted to interview the Americans, Alan and David, whom Petit called Albert and Donald. They abandoned the project during preparation. Marsh finally convinced Petit to get them in the film after a moment of back-and-forth.<sup>13</sup> This film dispels the myth of the solitary artist and reminds us that achieving something of this magnitude requires partnership and loyalty. Petit's accomplices put their egos aside to make way for Petit. After the project was realized, many of these friendships faded away, perhaps because Philippe no longer found them useful. The film examines the collateral damage of great art and amazing feats. It asks the viewer to consider where an artist's true loyalties lie – are artists beholden only to their art, or also to the people who help them achieve their vision?

#### 4.3 Dramatic Construction *Man on Wire* (2008)

After watching the documentary film *Man on Wire* several times, I was convinced that each time I find something new, something exciting and special about this film. It was no wonder that *Man on Wire* took home the Oscar for best documentary. James

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<sup>13</sup> <https://filmmakermagazine.com/archives/issues/summer2008/manonwire.php>

Marsh did a great job of creating a unique cinematic experience for the audience using his special dramatic construction for a film about crime and dream.

For a filmmaker to make a great documentary film, great subjects aren't enough. One must also have rich supporting evidence. Marsh is dealing with an event almost 30 years old. It includes a young version of Philippe Petit and an old version of him. The walk that Philippe Petit puts on actually happened on Aug 7, 1974, and the film *Man on Wire* was released in 2008. For a documentary movie, it is very important to record what actually happened that day. This makes it hard for James Marsh to create a documentary, a hybrid of actual and restaged footage. Marsh manages to give us a whole experience of the event which is constructed like a first rate thriller. Petit and his camera man recorded a lot of footage within the preparation phase. Such as Intercut with sequences of Philippe assisted by his friends as he practices for the twin towers wire walk. Using the footage that Petit and his friends recorded back in 1974 and creating reenactment sequences, Marsh puts pieces of a puzzle together to recreate the event. Marsh has presented a beautiful journey for the audience along with Petit on his amazing criminal journey. The footage of the World Trade Center under construction were also very powerful in creating the emotion.

It is not hard to make the audience love Philippe Petit. He is such a fascinating, optimistic and awesome person, an artist who brought a sense of humanity to a monolithic landscape. But what is also interesting and important is for a filmmaker to stay true to the film he is making. In a stroke of inspiration, James Marsh has realized that Petit's story isn't an ordinary or average one. It isn't a so-called run-of-the-mill<sup>14</sup> kind of documentary. It is a heist film. The heist film or caper film is a subgenre of crime film. It focuses on the planning, execution, and aftermath of a theft, which fits perfectly into Petit's story. Marsh used a mixture of dramatic reconstructions, original material shot by the protagonists, as well as, talking head interviews (with *Reservoir Dogs*-style nicknames<sup>15</sup>)<sup>16</sup> to bring *Man on Wire* to life.

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<sup>14</sup> run-of-mill is a common, everyday, ordinary item that does not stand out from the rest.

<sup>15</sup> 1992 American heist film written and directed by Quentin Tarantino

<sup>16</sup> Note: Somehow nobody knows why Petit give them nicknames instead of calling their real names

Of course thanks to Petit's ineffable and unspeakable charm. But the dramatic construction of *Man on Wire* has built a fantastic vibe for the story. The film begins with the rush which make us feel nervous and intense. It opened with the scene of Petit and one of the accomplices hiding for the security guard of the Twin Towers and then went backwards in time after that scene. The film reviews for the most screen time how this act has come to life, it is about the high-level scheming behind Petit's Twin Towers tightrope walk.

This narration of the crossing, what of course Philippe Petit refers to as the "coup", enlists nearly every technique that is available to documentary film. It seems to confront the question "How does everything come together?" Marsh has successfully combined archival footage recorded in the seventies, contemporary talking-head interviews<sup>17</sup> with Petit and his accomplices made for the film, and staged reenactments designed to reproduce the tension of the hours preceding the walk. Along with a complex array of flash-backs, flash-forwards, and dueling narrative arcs that produce two separate accounts of the coup, these techniques present an ambitious documentary project. But what distinguishes Marsh's film and makes it of interest in his discussion of untimely cinema is not simply the aftermath. It must both tell the story of criminal infiltration of the World Trade Centre towers, along with the years of planning and espionage necessary to pull it off, and communicate the sublime feat of an artistic endeavor that in truth teems with ambivalence.

*Man on Wire* is organized in a structure that is appealing both visually and logistically. Marsh didn't choose to tell the story using a normal timeline. At the beginning, prior to delving into the story, is a brief summary period that lays out the narrative conflict for the viewer, drawing one in with an all-black-and-white opening that shows the audience symbols that will become important later in the story. This symbolic code can be seen at the beginning when the camera cuts to Petit's identification card to enter one of the towers. While there is not really any specific emphasis on that portion of the story, symbolically it is extremely important because

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<sup>17</sup> A talking-head video is one where the main action involves someone just talking to the camera, Man On Wire

it represents the group's gateway into the buildings. The documentary then enters into a period of equilibrium. There really isn't much conflict, but more of a flashback period where the viewer is giving background knowledge of the protagonist Philippe Petit and his life. Marsh gets the audience on the edge of their seats with a couple of scenes which have huge tension of dramatic construction. All those scenes were incredibly compelling. The story then reaches a disequilibrium, as the protagonist and his accomplice find themselves caught beneath a tarp in the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center as guards are walking around them. With the help of reenactments and sound effects, the film creates a special dramatic tension for the viewer, with anxious verbal code in the way Petit describes the guard's actions.

At the beginning of the movie, Marsh shows the beautiful Twin Towers of New York's World Trade Centre. It jumps back-and-forth in time with Petit's interview. He was only 17 years old when he had the idea of walking on a high-wire between the Twin Towers while he was reading a magazine at a dentist's waiting room in 1968. But the film didn't start with it, it starts with an image of the "coffin" which represents death. Marsh managed to create fear in the first minute of screentime. And this brilliant move perfectly set tone for the whole documentary.



img.3: screenshot DVD Film *Man On Wire* (2008)

#### 4.4 How realistic is Documentary Film?

Documentary film has been called “public truth claim”. It is the relationship between truth and truth-telling. It is a battle that all documentary filmmakers have to fight. There is a price to pay in all kinds of truth-telling filmmaking, because we are seeing it with an angle, an angle of the filmmaker. We can't be sure how much weight one particular individual or in our case filmmaker puts on a documentary film, or what degree this individual shows the truth with one's own coloring technique. So in some cases, it can also be seen purely as entertainment or even a fiction film.

Documentary film seems to be going back-and-forth in an ambiguous position somewhere between fiction and news. Documentary film is something that tells us about reality or makes truth claims, as well as, addresses our emotions. We have seen many good documentaries for the past decades. Documentaries have already become a very important member of the cinematic family. It might have begun with a small audience who were interested in this kind of film genre, but with time, the filmmakers have offered a different experience to the cinema - introducing art into news, so that more people could appreciate this film genre, which used to be viewed as boring and specific. One of the peculiarities of documentary film lies also in its name, the label and the genre. If one is too concentrate on categorize the films, it maybe be a chain for the filmmaker which limits their ideas and blue print.

So my conclusion to this question is really dependent on which perspective one choose to see the event. I talked about the reality in literature and film. With the example of Philippe Petit's book and James Marsh's documentary, which perfectly review the point I am going to make. Everyone has their own vison and opinion about that same event, so it makes a huge different who the audience hears the stories from. So with documentary film, the huge plus point is, filmmaker have a good amount of perspective in form of interviews to present to the audience. Documentary film can perhaps neither be a representation or a mirror to reality, nor an act of art,

but in its existence, along on the way with many great filmmakers of our time, it becomes a discourse that contributes to socially constructed knowledge and reality.

## 5 Film Analysis - *The Walk* (2015)

### 5.1 Film Facts, Genre, Plot Summary and Technical Specs

*The Walk* was released on October 22, 2015 in Germany, with a 123 minutes runtime. Like *Man on Wire*, it was labeled as heist and caper in the genre.<sup>18</sup> The Narrator of *The Walk* is Philippe Petit. Having the main character within the story acknowledge and address the audience from a position outside the events on-screen gives the viewer a richness to enjoy the film. The director, Robert Zemeckis has even pushed this idea farther, by having the first person narrator, Philippe Petit, interrupt some of the scene to address narration to the audience. This technique is also used in telling great stories in films such as *Amélie*, *Fight Club* and *Annie Hall*. These films do not limit the first-person narrative to voice-over narration; instead the first person narrator character interrupts the narrative to address narration directly to the audience.

It is so dramatic to see those two towers. I think they are more like a character in the movie. We all think about the tragedy that happened on 9/11, but with any tragedy it is also important to remember the positive things and beautiful memories, and that is what this movie is. One elements that makes this film interesting is the caper. It is a caper but not the kind of caper where people get hurt, nobody is stealing diamonds or microfilm. However, everything has to be done surreptitiously and under the radar. The story is told or, so to speak, hosted by Joseph Gordon-Levitt who plays Philippe Petit. It goes back and forth in time and reviews how the caper unfolded.

The most unique point that differs this film from other films based on Petit's story is *The Walk* present the actual walk itself, which is the very emotional climax of the film.

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<sup>18</sup> <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt3488710/>

It does become this spiritual or sacred thing that happens to this artist when he actually has this years and years of planning. Finally, he is out there and doing this thing that he has dreamed about for so long. It was the most beautiful, exciting and life-changing moment Robert Zemeckis offered to the Audience in this film.

## 5.2 Characterization

Joseph Gordon-Levitt stars as Philippe Petit, the daredevil who strong a tight rope between the Twin Towers back in 1974, 110 stories over Manhattan and then walked across it without any safety wire. Philippe Petit insisted to train the young actor himself and together they accomplished a major progress in 8 days, reviewed Petit and Gordon-Levitt in an interview with ABC news.

The main cast of *The Walk* to recreate the characters of Philippe Petit and his accomplices is:

Joseph Gordon-Levitt as “Philippe Petit”

The Muse Charlotte Le Bon as “Annie”

The Photographer Clément Sibony as “Jean-Louis”

The Soul César Domboy as “Jeff/Jean-François”

The Inside Man Steve Valentine as “Barry Greenhouse”

The Mouth James Badge Dale as “Jean-Pierre/J.P.”

The Misfits Ben Schwartz as “Albert” & Benedict Samuel “David”

The Mentor Sir Ben Kingsley as “Papa Rudy”



img.4: Philippe Petit and Jorseeh Gordon-Levitt on pre-production set of the movie *The Walk* (2015)

One unique thing that *The Walk* has been able to offer to the audience is that we get to see Papa Rudy in this film, played by the great Sir Ben Kingsley. Like Papa Rudy Sir Ben Kingsley is a force of nature when it comes to performing and acting. He has a real sense of the character and relished in giving this guy the eccentricity that he would have had to be this patriarch of wire-walking troupes. Sir Ben Kingsley was able to bring all of that to life.

### 5.3 Screenplay

Zemeckis's screenplay<sup>19</sup> has a different look from Petit's book, screen play is actually a very essential art. Film is the visual elements to rich those written words. The climax scene of Petit's "coup" took from 1:28:29 to timeline 1:46:45 is the Scene of Petit walking on the high-wire between the north and south towers of the World Trade Center. The longest scene is also the most important scene. It is an 18-minutes video sequence in total to show the 45 minutes that Petit was on the wire. If we were just reading the screenplay of it, which is from 114 to line 134, there are some description

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<sup>19</sup>[https://wikileaks.org/sony/docs/03\\_03/Mktrsch/Market%20Research/Scripts/THE%20WALK%20-%20CHERRY%206-3-14%20DRAFT%20%28Ladestro%29.pdf](https://wikileaks.org/sony/docs/03_03/Mktrsch/Market%20Research/Scripts/THE%20WALK%20-%20CHERRY%206-3-14%20DRAFT%20%28Ladestro%29.pdf)

states cinematography like line 124 in the screenplay “*The camera floats above Petit, who now sits on the wire.*” There are not many shots explained in the screenplay in which there are other topics to create the films unique look outside the screenplay, which certainly set the tones of the cinematography. But help us know a film has a lot to offer just by shots and cuts.

#### 5.4 Structure of storytelling

The story, the narrative was told by the First Person Narrator – Philippe Petit, played by the actor Joseph Gordon-Levitt and the camera also as the primary narrator. We followed Petit and the camera though this beautiful Journey. The movie opens up with a monologue of Petit standing on the statue of liberty showing his love to the Twin Towers. By looking into the camera and talking directly with the audience, this creates techniques of Robert Zemeckis that bring the audience personally into the picture, since Petit was telling his story by looking directly into our eyes. Having a character within the story that acknowledges and addresses the audience from a position inside the events on screen is very personal, as it creates the richness of the narrative. Not only does Robert Zemeckis use first person narrative to voice over narration, but the first person narrator character also interrupts the narrative to address the narration directly to the audience. The scene of Petit pulls us back with him on the Norte Dame high-wire walk.



img 5: screenshot *The Walk*



img 6: screenshot *The Walk*

## 6. Comparison of Narrative and Dramatic Composition

### 6.1 Visual Analytics

The visual aspect plays a very important role in the world of filmmaking. The visual languages with which it operates have quite varying effects on the audience. Visual elements review how we arrange the subject matter in which we want to show the audience in the frame. We use all the various shots as the language to communicate with the audience. How lenses are going to affect the image and how light and contrast, those elements play important roles in filmmaking. Composition or framing is one of the biggest elements on filmmaking. The filmmaker has been using framing to guide the eye of the audience to what they want them to see or not see, helping to tell their stories. There are so many roles in filming and when it comes to composition the main rule is the rule of thirds.<sup>20</sup> With the rule of thirds, if we divide the frame into three segments horizontally and vertically by placing objects of interesting in the intersecting points, we create an image that is pleasing to the eye.

### 6.2 Narratives

I talked about the three elements in the definition of narratives. Both *Man on Wire* and *The Walk* have the same narrator – Philippe Petit – who is telling his story. The common ground between the two stories is they are told by Petit. However, behind the camera, the narrators are after all different. In this level the narrators are the filmmakers James Marsh and Robert Zemeckis and their unique camera techniques. In other words, we can say the narration can be in the form the character of Philippe Petit’s particular perspective on his own event high-wire walk. *The Walk* used the “First Person Narrator” known as “Voice-Over Narration” which means hearing the characters – in this case, Philippe Petit’s voice-over without actually seeing Petit speaking. But Robert Zemeckis has spiced things up for the audience through showing Petit’s face where he passionately tells the story in the beginning and during

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<sup>20</sup> <https://www.photographymad.com/pages/view/rule-of-thirds>

the narration. This allows us to see Petit's face first, keep him in mind and then hearing his voice-over narration from the first person narration while watching the narratives through the other narrator – the camera. This combination allows us to have an even richer experience of the narrative.

There is also one thing quite worth mentioning when it comes to the narratives of the two films. In the Linear and Non-Linear narrative expression, Linear is a story that follows one singular line of narrative, *The Walk*, follows a clear line of time, as time progresses in the film, the first person narrator with voice over narrative from the main character Philippe Petit lead us through the narrative. But with *Man on Wire*, it also follows a time line narrative, but I will describe it more in a Non-Linear narrative way. It tends to break up the simple line, and put some pieces back together in a different order. This is why we get to see the New York scene first, where the audience eye has been dragged to the van where they move the equipment and drive them to the Twin Towers, and on the rooftop where they hide under the construction fabric for the security guard. After the short review of that part, the film breaks the narrative line and takes us back to Paris, where the dream started.

### 6.3 Pacing

Pacing is the timing of the story; it is always there in the background keeping the film in rhythm. To put pacing into categories, there is fast, slow and somewhere in between. Pacing is mostly created in the script and edit, but it is also developed in other elements like acting, score, sound effects (SFX) and visual effects (VFX). A good pacing is to balance the progress of all those elements to create emotions for the audience. Like the sequence where Petit, played by Joseph Gordon-Levitt in *The Walk*, was on the wire between the north and south towers of the World Trade Centre. Petit walked back-and-forth for 45 minutes, and we get to experience the beauty of being that high with Petit through the visual effects that *The Walk* has given us. The Pacing techniques were quite to be noticed in the movie. The “coup” sequence started from timeline 1:28:29 where his left foot steps on the wire. With the score we felt a moment of magic where Jeff disappears, Petit's doubts disappears,

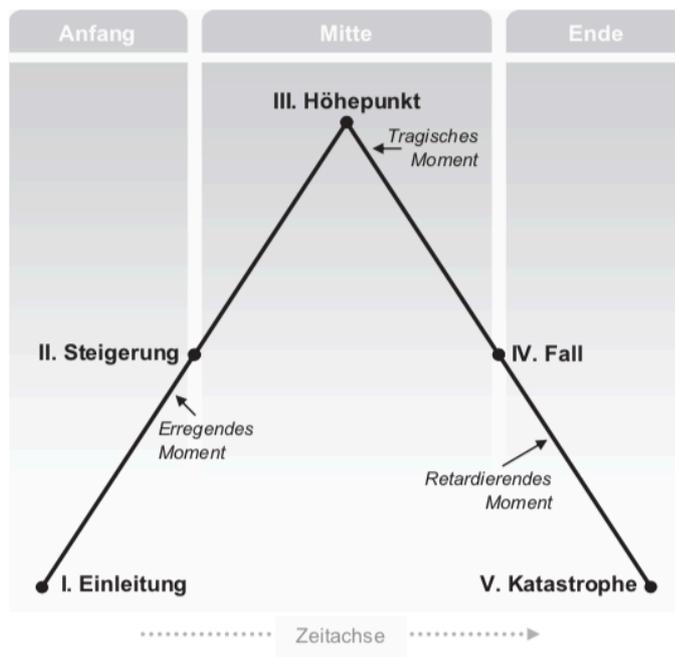
the New York's street vanished, and we only see clouds. As he steps his right foot on the wire and started walking towards the other tower, the score gives us a peaceful vibe with excitement, coming in with the view of Lower Manhattan from above. This creates also a bit anxiety for the Audience through wide gliding shots over CGI New York City, making the character seem isolated in a dangerous situation but in a beautiful and peaceful way. This all comes together to the most important sequence of tension building. Pacing is key in all formats of storytelling from fast paced action to calm dramatic moments. All the preparations are done, night comes to the moment of morning glory, it all comes to the moment of dream come true, it is a payoff. At that moment, the audience feels and experiences all the thoughts that went through Petit's mind. This moment was create naturally, not rushed, beautifully done. The pacing of the moment leads us to enjoy the walk itself, not too fast, also not to slow. The emotions that come with this editing and pacing are powerful yet peaceful.

#### 6.4 Dramatic Construction

Arc of tension dramatically stages theme. Marsh uses a mixture of dramatic reconstructions, original material shot by the protagonists, as well as, talking head interviews. The reenactments give the audience a visual aid and a much deeper understanding on what really happened. The talking head interviews bring the audience in the story with Philippe Petit, making a real mutual connection between the character and audience. *Man on Wire* begins with a diegetic sound and followed with Petit's voice "In the middle of the night, I have almost like a nightmare." The camera pulls slowly in through a glass window, focused slowly in the "coffin". This is how James Marsh want us to start the journey with Petit. The "coffin" which Petit called with a bit of humor is actually a wood box with all the wire and equipment he required for the high-wire walk. Introducing first and the base stone emotion of the film – scarcity.

Both of the films did great jobs on reaching the climax of the story. *The Walk* was able to recreate the Twin Towers and the wire that was between them on that day above 400 meter of the ground. It is such an empowerment for the audience to see

everything coming together after years and years of preparation. With the help of the modern production techniques – CGI, the viewers get to experience the magic and fear as if they were there that day. There is no actual footage of that moment or any of the walk on the Twin Towers in *Man On Wire*. The documentary does a great job of making the audience feel like they are experiencing it because the interviews are so compelling, Petit tells the story so well, but all they have is a few photos, that's the only recorded evidence of the walk. Through combining the photos with people telling the story, James Marsh has reached a very dramatic and emotional climax<sup>21</sup>.



img.7 Gustav Freytag

Every drama needs a good climax. For both films, the climax is the glorious moment of Petit finally get on the wire after all the preparation work. With a hybrid of actual and restaged footage, *Man on Wire* is constructed like a first-rate thriller. Although it feels like heist thriller movie, we still are getting the hint of the truth revealing vibe of this film. Philippe Petit has brought a lot of archival footage on his own, how he was performing in Paris Norte-Dame and how he got arrested in Sydney Harbour Bridge.

<sup>21</sup> Filmanalyse p.198 Narrative analyse

With the real-life footage, photos and Marsh's interviews and reenactments, the film has reached a whole new level of documentary filmmaking.

### 6.5 How they start?

How both film started? "...A TRUE STORY" with these three words, and a sequence of Philippe Petit played by actor Joseph Gordon-Levitt deeply looking into the camera with his blue eyes. This is how Robert Zemeckis start the film followed by the beautiful image of the Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre in New York where he explains how he was falling in love with the towers standing on the top of Statue of Liberty. What a beautiful way to start a movie at the time contribute to the Old Twin Towers.

*Man on Wire*, in the other hand, starts in a much more mysterious way. Opening with the coffin scene and the daunting challenge right away by reenactment sequence of shortly before the walk. This allows us to jump directly into how they break into the towers with their equipment, make their way to 110 floors up, get the cable from one tower to the next, rig it and finally, walk it.

### 6.6 How they end?

"The End" ending is also one of the many special things I want to mention in *The Walk*. This is also what makes *The Walk* outstanding out of Petit's story. It recreated the moment after he was arrested. The New York Police Department and Petit walked down from the rooftop; construction workers were gathered to see him. Everyone was amazed and clapping their hands for Petit. Downstairs, on the ground, there are hundreds of press, journalist and television reporters waiting to get a peek of this crazy French high-wire walker. *The Walk* highlights one man's audacious feat of art and glory, but also reveals how so many people were instrumental in Petit's success. Through them, the film becomes a meditation on friendship, loyalty, the egoism of art as well as its achievement. In my opinion, *The Walk* manage to end this story in quite a good time point. Differing from the documentary *Man on Wire*, the

*Walk* showed us the gloriously moment and finishes film there, where *Man on Wire* continues with how fame changed Petit's relationship with his girlfriend and his friends.

## 7. Comparison of Scenes

### 7.1 Frame of Reference

Scene: Where Petit saw an advert for two Towers that would soon be built in New York which lead him beginning scheming with his friends to stage a unique wire walking performance.



img.8: screenshot *Man On Wire*



img.9: screenshot *The Walk*

Scene: hiding the security guard under



img.10: screenshot *Man On Wire*



img.11: screenshot *The Walk*

Scene: sleeping guard



img.12: screenshot *Man On Wire*



img.13: screenshot *The Walk*

Scene: Annie (Petit's ex-girlfriend) walked on the wire with Petit



img.14: screenshot *Man On Wire*



img.15: screenshot *The Walk*

Scene: The crowd watching his performance



img.16: screenshot *Man On Wire*

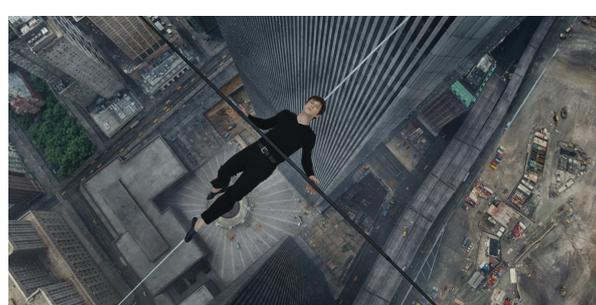


img.17: screenshot *The Walk*

Scene: on the wire between Twin Towers



img.18: screenshot *Man On Wire*



img.19: screenshot *The Walk*

Scene: arrested by the police



img.20: screenshot *Man On Wire*



img.21: screenshot *The Walk*



img.22: screenshot *The Walk* – the glorious moment

## 7.2 Arc of tension – how they staged the theme dramatically

The 2008 Academy Award winner for best documentary feature was the British film directed by James Marsh, *Man on wire*, a movie documenting a death-defying stunt in 1974. It is the amazing real-life story about the twenty-four-year old Phillippe Petit – a charming, French high-wire artist who dared to do the impossible: walk between the Twin Towers of the New York's World Trade Centre in lower Manhattan. The film tells the story of Petit's high-wire walk on 7<sup>th</sup> August 1974 and the journey that led up to it. Retold through first-hand narration using over original film footage and convincing dramatizations, the story of how this amazing event unfolded is a remarkably fascinating one. In 1974, shortly after the World Trade Center (WTC) Towers were complete, Petit and his team of foolhardy companions traveled to America, snuck into the WTC buildings using falsified documents, hauled thousands

of pounds of wire and equipment to the roof of both 110-story buildings, rigged a wire in between the two buildings in the middle of a cold morning, before Petit danced above the streets of New York, over nearly 400 meters in the air. His stunt caused quite a commotion, and although he was promptly arrested, it is this timeless act that actually helped the public fall in love with the new skyline of New York City. No mention is made of the towers' eventual fate on 9/11, but perhaps it is for the best. This is a story about brazen determination and hope and one man's ridiculous dream to walk between the world's two tallest buildings. Between Jinx Godfrey's editing and James Marsh's crime-caper sensibility, the narrative unfolds with the suspense of detective fiction. The execution of this stunt and especially the way it has told here, plays out like an expert heist picture. Very rarely is a documentary movie described as "tense" and "thrilling", but the interviews, photos and reenactments are really just that. Well-paced, with some catchy music and brisk editing. It is difficult to believe anyone would be bored by watching this documentary, but inherently, documentaries sometimes carry that stigma. The participants all speaking in various degrees of English and are brutally honest as they recount the defining moment of Petit's life. None of them were afraid to insult one another or share their pessimism of what they were attempting. Ultimately though, this is a fascinating and extremely interesting 90 minute story focused on a single, 38-year-old event - nothing more, nothing less. It is a fun adventure that takes us deep into the mind of a daring dreamer and performer. The critics have called it an, "exhilarating account of incredible events". The audience only need to sit in the cinema or in front of the TV, listen to the people who were there, hear them tell you a story. This is *Man On Wire*.

## 8. Comparison of Cinematic Effects

### 8.1 Principles in Cinematic Style

In this chapter, I would like to talk about the film look<sup>22</sup> and how the two films differ in achieving the film look. Film look also known as the cinematic look, is broadly defined

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<sup>22</sup> <https://www.filmmachen.de/film-grundlagen/bildgestaltung/der-filmlook>

as the look and feel of the footage that we see in a feature film. There are many techniques involved in creating video, but there are a few which are especially important to achieve this look. This look is best achieved through techniques involving both the settings of the camera capturing the video, as well as editing in the post-production stage. There are many factors to take in consideration, like color grading, lighting, audio, lenses, props and story. Both films present the story with mostly smooth camera movement. The “coup” sequence in the movie *The Walk* are presented with a lot of smooth camera movement and slow-motion shots, slowing down footage is a great way to make shots look smoother.

Point of view is implied by the framing of shot. Framing control what we see and how we see it, ways in which framing effect how we see something include camera angle, composition and camera movement. Framing is really a way of pointing, like we point at something and tell other to look at something in this way. One of the most significant things that framing does is that implies a point of view in other words the viewpoint through which we view the action. They are three kinds of point of view: omniscient point of view, single character point of view and group point of view.

## 8.2 Cinematic Techniques

Many cinematic techniques were applied to the making of both films. The different types of music appeals to the audience’s emotions. The reenactments of Petit’s preparation before showed us how dangerous the situation was, it makes audience’s heartbeat go faster. Furthermore, all the techniques that James Marsh used in the documentary not only tells the story of Philippe Petit but it stressed the realism of the significant event.

Robert Zemeckis used a lot of Dolly Tracking camera movement in *The Walk*, especially where Gordon-Levitt’s character is visiting the Twin Towers for preparation before the high-wire stunt. This technique of the camera movement takes us from point A to Point B, revealing scenery. We get a sense of time, that time is flying, it is not much days left to the August 7, where Petit’s plans for the “coup”. By letting the

camera simply roll and roam and follow, we get a unique snapshot of Petit planning for the “coup”.

### 8.3 Cinematography

Cinematography – a very important element in filmmaking, capture the specificity of the art form and our ability to manipulate it. This is about the art of visual storytelling, then the heart of cinema is cinematography. It is though not only about how filmmaker capture the action of the scene, it is how we show that action to the audience. In other words, cinematography is about communicating with the viewer. Both Marsh and Zemeckis create a lot of beautiful moments of Petit’s high-wire stunt, they are emotional. It is not only about what they put on the big screen but also how they communicate them, and this is cinematography, it is a language using as tool to communicate with the audience.

*The Walk* – dentist waiting room scene - We see an unpleasant receptionist, so we viewers entered the scene in question of what is going to happen next. Featured slow dolly in which gradually enlarges Petit and frame increasing his visual significance as he fills out the form. This shot reestablishes how Petit first saw his towers and wasn’t completely happy about the waiting room setting. Suddenly we shift from a pretty loose wide framing to a very up close view of Petit’s face. This sudden spatial shift does a couple of things, it gives the moment and the focus, we know that he is going to see something life-changing in this very moment. And in this moment we are not just seeing what is going on in the waiting room, but we are inside Petit’s head. But the pattern which drives our attention from Petit’s unpleasant visit to the climax where he sees the towers will have maximum impact. This is the first shifting moment for Petit in *the Walk*. Another element entry the mix. Implied proximity builds instant connection between the Twin Towers and 17-year-old Petit in the small dentist waiting room in Paris.

*Man on Wire* – talking head interviews - the content is memory. In the end, James Marsh uses a variety of formal techniques to craft our experience and interpretation

of each character's conflicting versions of the same event and this makes the documentary dramatic, emotional and authentic.

Bouncing back and forth is also what I will use to describe the time structure used to present the story in *Man On Wire*. We started with shortly before the event and then going back with the characters to the very beginning of the story. It builds a special dramatic tension that allows us to feel the rush and excitement.

By noticing the camera language such as how does the camera moves, is there a certain composition for certain characters, is the camera movement doing anything abnormal compared to the rest of the shots, the audience has a huge diversity of perspective and rich powerful experiences of the different shots presented by James Marsh and Robert Zemeckis. And this is has nothing to do with the script or acting, it is purely what the audience get through the camera work.

#### 8.4 Editing

Editing is a very important content of the post-production process. Filmmakers need to set goals on what they want to achieve. A goal reverts to telling a great story. Marsh sets out to tell a story about a French high-wire artist, but more importantly about an attitude towards life. Philippe Petit is one of the kind of people who refuses to acknowledge limits and boundaries. He commits to his dream regardless of any kind of consequences. The most basic editing what we can do is the cut, which is basically going from one cut into another, changing perspective. The hide-and-seek scene is very well-paced and well-edited.

#### 8.5 Special Effects

There is sadly no actual moving footage of that day where Petit walked on the wire. The Police came just right after Petit's companions took a picture of Petit on that wire, they had hide for the New York Police department which is unfortunately the reason why they do not have any real footage that day. Fiction movies are famous of its Computer-Generated imagery as known as CGI, with the advanced CGI technic

today, we get to experience the joy and beauty of the event as if we were there with Petit, and witness everything he saw above with our own eyes. CGI is what makes us witness the real event or even somebody's Imagination.

The Walk opens with a spectacular Shot of the New York City Skyline, described lovingly and passionately in the Voiceover by the French high-wire Artist Philippe Petit played by the talented actor Joseph Gordon-Levitt.

The young American Actor Joseph Gordon-Levitt trained with the real life legend Philippe Petit for the Movie to play this one man walk show on a wire between the world trade center - Twin Towers. Until now the view from the wire has only been experienced by one man. Petit walked back and forth for 45 minutes even lay down for a break. He insists on training Joseph Gordon-Levitt himself and ending up trained him for 8 days. Joseph Gordon-Levitt, who we know from many great movies like *Inception*, *500 Days of Summer*, *50/50* trained wit Petit before shooting. But those short time training wasn't enough for performing the wire walking part. So it is the job of the Visual supervisor to make the stunts look like it is coming from Joseph Gordon-Levitt, so they CGI his face into the professional wire walker<sup>23</sup>.



img.24: Original Plate *The Walk* Post-Production creating CGI

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<sup>23</sup> <https://www.fxguide.com/featured/step-by-step-a-walkthrough-of-the-walk/>

In this movie we actually get to see the performance of it. There is no motion picture footage of the historic performance of Petit. There are only some pictures of Petit walking on the high wire but no actual video footage. For us to see what happened on the high-wire, it is recreated by one of the greatest visual filmmakers of the time.



img.24: Original Plate *The Walk*



img.25: Final Shot *The Walk*

It is also a gripping story. In 1968, Philippe Petit was an 18-year-old street artist living in Paris. *The Walk* was able to create a colorful scenes taking us back to 1968, Paris, where boy meets girl. The scene was set up in the studio and it was very beautifully done, we get to see what Paris and Petit's street life was like.

The Walk visual authenticity is very important for the story telling. From small to big, from the actors face to the New York landmark, this film was created using a lot visual effects. Obviously the biggest challenge for the filmmakers was recreating the World Trade Centre Towers in 1974, reviewed the VFX supervisor of *The Walk*, Kevin Baillie in an interview with *Variety*.<sup>24</sup> Now New York looks totally different in comparison to 1974, not only because the World Trade Centre doesn't exist anymore, but also the fact that the visual effect crew has to recreate every detail in lower Manhattan, from the newspaper stand to the big landscape. Sometimes they have to recreate a building from scratch. The artist spend month on the Twin towers to make them feel hand build. The void between the towers was the big deal. We get to spend day time, early morning mist and glory to blustery overcast and night time where all the different lights have to be recreated with CGI in order to make 1974

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<sup>24</sup> <https://www.fxguide.com/featured/step-by-step-a-walkthrough-of-the-walk/>

New York authentic. This means that it is amount of work to accommodate every conceivable camera angle from up high and also a vast number of lighting scenarios. There is no doubt that the VFX team has done a great job. This photo of before and after reviewed that the actor was actually walking on a wire in the studio, the made a mode of the rooftop from the Twin Towers and stretched a wire on that. The actor only get to see other green set ups. Under him is not the crowd New York City, those were added by the VFX crew in the Post Production. Actor Joseph Gordon-Levitt walk on the wire in the studio where they recreate the rooftop of the Twin Towers.



img.26: Original Plate *The Walk*



img.27: Final Shot *The Walk*



img.28: Original Plate *The Walk*



img.29: Final Shot *The Walk*



img.30: Original Plate *The Walk*



img.31: Final Shot *The Walk*

## 9 The Follow-up Effects

### 9.1 Movie influence – “Love letter to the Twin Towers”

The motion picture *The Walk* has been called a love letter to the Twin Towers. Certainly any of us think of the World Trade Centre, we go to the tragedy of 11<sup>th</sup> Sep. first. Sadly, this is how we remember it now. However, it is important that we remember those tragic lost and grief properly so that we do not forget what happened and be stronger through all that everyone has been through. But it is also important that we remember the good and beautiful moments of it and this is what this movie is about. It is a celebration of one of the beautiful moments that happened with those two buildings right when they were born. Petit calls the Twin Towers until this day “his towers”. It is really like seeing a love story between those two. Especially the way how Robert Zemeckis introduced the Twin Towers into the movie, beautiful and magical. Film creates emotion, and emotion triggering attributes of cinema. This fictional film featuring the real life story of Phillippe Petit gives us an insider look on what happened on the Wire that day. These make us go back in time way before the September 11 tragedy, allows us to purely enjoy the moment with Petit and celebrate one of the most beautiful moments of the twin towers. It is very important how people remember the Twin Towers.

Construction scene of the World Trade Centre are actually the real footage of early stage in the construction of the towers. The film shows the towers growing, construction workers, huge trucks and cranes, huge steel beams being lifted, the pieces being out together. This is beautifully done, it not only building a relationship between Petit but also the audience whom is watching the film. As it happens, 9/11 was not even mentioned in the film, and this is how Marsh and Petit want us to remember, the twin towers associate with joy, wonder, bravery, excitement and joy, not with terrorism and fear.

## 9.2 Impacts on Society

What do you say if someone tells you something that you do not believe? Maybe you will look into this person's eyes and tell him that you will believe it when you see it with your own eyes. In our case, to witness the event that happened back in 1974 with our own eyes would be impossible. In which we need photos, footage and films to help us visualize the moment that Philippe Petit was on that Wire, walking between the Twin Towers of New York's World Trade Centre. This two films make it possible to do so. The expression of saying "I will believe it when I see it." is possibly stating that a human's most valuable sense is that of vision. Movie create vision. If one can't see something then they are more likely to question the reality and validity of the object, whether it be an occurrence earlier that day on the news or in the newspaper, or a movie or novel that they may have encountered.

Petit said in this film: "I cannot just calmly recall the adventure, I have to relive it truly." By drawing a line between the two buildings, Petit began working toward a goal that many people would not have even dreamed possible. The Twin Towers themselves were also in a dream stage, proposed but not yet built. But exactly this image inspired Petit and set the course of his life. It gives him a fabulous stage to introduce himself to way he is into the world. Through meticulous planning, focused training, and sheer determination, Petit and his friends were able to pull off an act that completely defied expectation and redefined what is possible. For six years, Petit prepared for his great feat, scheming and practicing while the Twin Towers were being constructed. In order to pull off his tightrope walk, Petit had to convince many people that it was possible. Surely his talent helped persuade them, but Petit's passion was so enchanting, it motivated others to believe in his vision. His obsessive drive helped him achieve his goal, but perhaps also explains why he cast off his friends after his goal was achieved.

It is a crime after all. Philippe Petit was of course arrested after he walked on the wire he brought on the two towers of the World Trade Centre. This photo give us a look of Petit answers reporter's questions on Aug. 7, 1974, as he is escorted from Beekman Hospital by Port Authority police officer in New York City. The way James Marsh

presented the story of Philippe Petit in *Man on Wire* were pretty neutral but also in a very positive way. But this doesn't mean that Marsh didn't leave us the question of consequences of Petit's behavior, consequences he left to crime and norm, consequences of his relationships with his friends. With no doubt, Petit's act was a challenge for the New York state police department. And Petit obviously doesn't share the conventional norms and boundaries that society has set. He wouldn't even consider to pull this off without thinking of the consequences, and since he put his own safety aside, other conventional norms just become lesser. His act was breaking the law and society's constructs, it definitely seems to be a very brave and fearless act, but who pays it if something went wrong. Will people still be speaking highly about Petit's act or does it change the blue print forever? It is interesting to see how New York state charges him with "disturbing the peace." We just couldn't imagine what if he failed and fallen?



img.25: Philippe Petit arrested after the high-wire walk New York Daily News Archive/Getty Images

The story is so emotional. It serves as an inspiration for people to never give up and to follow your dreams no matter how impossible they may seem. All dreams are

achievable as long as we are passionate and committed to them. The story made its way to the audience's heart for many reasons. Philippe Petit has the bravery, the skill, and most importantly, the focused mindset to perform the high-wire stunt. That is what makes Petit Petit. His attitude sets the tone for the movie right before it starts. It is the tone of passion and optimism. The viewpoint of the movie is personally viewpoint of Petit, which makes the documentary credible. But also because of Petit's personality, the tone also makes the movie incredible.

## 10 Conclusions and Personal Opinion as a Viewer

In conclusion, I find the most important difference of these two films is the narration perspective. The genre categorizes the film but also indirectly shapes the characters and story, establishes the setting, and determines the plot. Documentary film is a great genre with a special quality of telling real-life stories. In *Man On Wire*, the main narrator is Petit himself, but he is not the only one who is telling the story. The director, James Marsh, successfully incorporates broader perspectives beyond that of just Petit. We also see the event through the eyes of, Annie, who is passionate and feminine and who shows Petit her love and companionship; there is "David", who is a talented musician, has smoked pot for the last 30 years, and gives up on the project at the last minute; there is Jean-Louis and "Jeff", loyal companions, who see through the whole project, sticking with Petit to the very end and help him succeed. These are the voices we don't get to hear in the Petit's book *To Reach the Clouds* or Zemeckis's Movie *The Walk*, however, it is these varying perspectives that brings a heightened level of dramatic tension to *Man on Wire*. For example, one of the most dramatic and emotional moments in *Man on Wire* is when we get to see how Petit's "ex-girlfriend" and "former-friends" talk about their relationship after the high-wire walk. The conflict of the characters is an added dramatic tension that follows the climax of Petit's walk, which is not addressed at all in Robert Zemeckis's version of *The Walk*. Very rarely is a documentary movie described as "tense" and "thrilling", but the interviews, photos and reenactments are really just that. It is well-paced, with some catchy music and brisk editing. Additionally, the varying narrative perspectives are what makes the documentary film realistic. It creates a certain level of trust of the event; it makes the film authentic and dramatic.

Petit is not the only narrator in *The Walk*; the other narrators are Robert Zemeckis and his camera. Zemeckis has Petit looking directly into the camera, doing a first person narrative. This act immediately connects Petit and the audience, offering more emotional understanding and sets tone for the rest of the story. Also with Zemeckis's visual stunts, he himself is the narrator through the camera lens. The character of Petit expands in a very special and personal way in order to act within the narrative structure of the story and plot.

As an audience member, my favorite film of the two is *Man on Wire*. I absolutely enjoyed the screentime with the real Philippe Petit. Throughout the film, Petit's compelling interviews reveal his passion, guts, daring and voluble eloquence. He talks passionately about his dream to high-wire walk between the World Trade Center Towers while scheming his criminal act. With unique camera angles and spectacular filming techniques, using contemporary interviews, archival footage, and clever re-enactments, James Marsh made this a heist movie. It is a movie that is so inspiring on so many levels. It has widened and refreshed my view of documentary films. I think this is the most dramatic and entertaining art work in addressing Petit's stunt. The aspect that drew me to *The Walk*, however, is that we get to see the high-wire walk itself. The beautiful 15 minutes high-wire walk scene puts us into an experiential mindset, while we only can imagine how it looks and feels when Petit tells his story in *Man On Wire*. In *The Walk*, we get to see the act with our own eyes.

In actuality, by viewing both films together, I have been able to fully experience Petit's journey and get a deeper sense of cinematic filmmaking. I think the biggest challenge, though, is knowing the bliss point of successful filmmaking. This is something that does not have a written formula and will always be a challenge to determine. The writing journey of this paper taught me how to be a detective and be analytical when watching a film. This process has helped me dive deeper into the intentions of the filmmakers, allowing me see and understand valuable information I would have otherwise missed. I will take the learned knowledge and analysis that I have acquired in writing this paper as I continue to enjoy the medium of cinema in the future.

## Attachment

CD

Contents

- Bachelor Thesis as PDF
- Script *The Walk*

Eigenständigkeitserklärung

Declaration of Originality

## Bibliography

### DVDs

Man On Wire Format Specifications for DVD-ROM

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Eigenständigkeitserklärung:

Ich versichere, die vorliegende Arbeit mit dem Titel

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A comparative analysis of MAN ON WIRE and THE WALK

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Rui Zhao