Spectatorship and Alternative Portrayals of Blindness

Catalin Brylla

This chapter discusses my practice-led research, which revolved around the production of two feature-length documentaries, each focusing on a blind individual. These films were eponymously titled *Terry* (2016) and *June* (2016), and were conceived with the aim of providing alternative portrayals of blindness, deviating from common media stereotypes. As such, they required the adoption of a critical documentary practice, one that recognises that the filmmaker's actions are informed by their 'cultural knowledge', resulting in a cultural artefact with particular implications (Wayne 1997, pp. 9–10) for the spectator's 'interpretations, knowledges, experiences and modes of comparison' (Fuery 2011, p. 85), including the formation and confirmation of stereotypes based on formulas inscribed in the film texts. This accords with the proposition that mainstream film- makers and audiences share the same interpretation, experience and knowledge of minority groups such as the disabled. This so-called 'filmmaker-audience loop' comprises a set of shared assumptions that, on the one hand, enables the viewer to understand the narrative formulas deployed in the film and, on the other, allows the filmmaker to successfully predict the audience response (Plantinga 2011, p. 30).

An understanding of the inextricable connection between filmmaking and viewing practices proved essential when, prior to filming, I examined con- temporary documentary representations of blindness. It allowed me to identify the common narrative and aesthetic denominators that elicit a perception of 'otherness' in the spectator when encountering blind characters onscreen. I used this knowledge to devise alternative strategies for my own film practice, in an attempt to counteract this sense of otherness and reconfigure the spectator's stereotypical preconceptions. One such strategy – which is the focus of this chapter – was to map the characters' quotidian, subjective experiences of (and within) their domestic space, highlighting the embodiment of their experiences in their corporeal relationship to physical objects.

Documentaries about blind people, such as *Blindsight* (2006), *Going Blind* (2010), *High Ground* (2012) and *Notes on Blindness* (2016), repeatedly deploy two character-led and obstacle-laden narrative formulas: the 'supercrip' narrative that assigns almost magical, superhuman abilities to disabled people, in a bid to inspire respect in an able-bodied audience (Barnes 1992, p. 12), and the 'tragic hero' narrative that depicts the tragic progression of blindness (Pointon 1997, p. 88). Marta Badia Corbella and Fernando Sánchez-Guijo Acevedo (2010) and Michael Schillmeier (2006) argue that, as a result, the majority of films fail to portray the individual personality traits of blind characters in all their diversity, complexity and ambiguity, and instead use the condition of blindness as a convenient focus for the story because it induces clear-cut, unambiguous emotions – either positive or negative – in the spectator. As Tom Shakespeare (1999, p. 164) explains, disabled film characters are overwhelmingly one-dimensional and function only through their impairment; the use of disability as character traits, plot device or atmosphere is a lazy shortcut used by writers and filmmakers to draw the audience into the story. This narrative focus on blindness turns it into a 'surface manifestation of internal symptomology' that stands for the equally abnormal subjectivity of the individual (Mitchell and Snyder 2000, p. 59).

On an aesthetic level, documentaries, most notably *Window of Soul* (2001), *Black Sun* (2005), *Antoine* (2008), *Planet of Snail* (2012) and *Notes on Blindness* (2016), tend to centre on the presumed phenomenal qualities of 'visual' perception in people who are blind, and attempt to suggest this by employing evocative imagery, such as image distortion, colourisation, soft focus and chiaroscuro interplays of light and dark.

Alternatively, the aesthetics emphasise non-visual sensory perception through the use of extreme close-ups of body parts, in particular the fingers, ears, noses and skin, and the aural emphasis of individual sounds. This practice fragments and abstracts the viewer's notion of pro-filmic material space and creates an audiovisual hyper-reality that constitutes a 'different mode of perception that is simply marked deviant' (Stock and Ochsner 2013). These aesthetic strategies disembody the character and erase his or her identity, fetishising screen actions as purely aesthetic pleasures rather than the subjective experience of a human agent. The characters become showcased metonymies (Rodas 2009, p. 117) of audio- visual poetry, revolving around the condition of being blind.

These narrative and aesthetic representations of blind people reflect an ableist ideology, which others blind people by emphasising a sense of 'loss' or 'lack' and establishing binaries of blindness/vision, deviancy/normality and them/us (Markotić 2008, p. 7). Interestingly, filmmakers often genuinely believe they are raising awareness and giving a voice to the blind. Unfortunately, when it comes to the formation and maintenance of stereotypes, good intentions (or even the fact that the filmmaker himself or herself is blind, as is the case in *Going Blind*) bear little relevance for spectatorship. However, these stereotypes *can* be counteracted by shifting the narrative impetus away from concentrating on blindness and onto the character's multi-layered range of specific character traits, which includes, but is not restricted to, their disability (Schillmeier 2006). This strategy operates in tandem with the spectator's experience of the blind character as an 'ordinary' person, rather than representative of the 'need to over- come, to inspire and stand as shining examples of the extraordinary power of the human spirit'. (Chemel n.d.). As Stella Young (2014) succinctly puts it, when commenting on what she sardonically terms as 'inspirational porn', 'disabled people don't do anything out of the ordinary, they just use their bodies to the best of their capacities'.

Young's statement calls for the able-bodied to look beyond what they deem as extraordinary and instead consider the ordinariness of disabled people from their own perspective. Thus, the notion of ordinariness in my research is dictated by the perceptions of the screen characters themselves; the films' task is to mediate their sense of the ordinary to the sighted audience. For instance, the fact that someone who is blind writes with obvious dexterity on a Braille typewriter or works as an internationally known disability-access auditor (scenes that occur in Terry's and June's films, respectively) may appear extraordinary to the viewer, but they are ordinary attributes of these characters' lives and are represented as such by using methods that evoke an equivalent ordinary experience in the spectator. The mediation of the ordinary/everyday[1] practices of blind people has the potential to counter the social and cultural stigmatisation of blindness in general (Schillmeier 2006, p. 481). This does not mean that blindness is normalised, ignored or obscured. On the contrary, it is neither foregrounded nor relegated to the background, but is an implicit part of the character's physical activities during onscreen actions. As Nicole Markotić (2012) puts it when discussing the everyday bathing scenes of the main

quadriplegic character in *Citizen Sam* (2006), the audience sees the actions of an ordinary person performing ordinary activities, albeit with an extraordinary body.

By filming characters in domestic spaces and situations, the filmmaker is able to access a multitude of embodied, day-to-day practices and multiple character traits. A variety of scenes in my films focus on everyday activities and everyday objects in June's and Terry's homes, using distinct filmic methods – for example, the characters are asked to talk about a certain object directly to the camera, or the camera observes their everyday activities or films their ordinary domestic objects undisturbed by human inter- action. The following analysis of these films demonstrates the spectatorship-focused paradigm of my film practice, where filming and editing decisions are taken with the narrative and aesthetic reception of the viewer – the ultimate agent of stereotype formation, perpetuation or correction – in mind.

THE HOME

Fig. 5.1   Back figure of Terry chatting to Pam. (Source: Catalin Brylla 2016)

The concept of 'home' is not straightforward. For instance, David Morley (2000) highlights its semantic heterogeneity by describing the home as a construct based on individual and collective identity, media and mobility, which includes not only dwelling spaces, but also communities, localities and territorialities, among other things. Meanwhile, Mary Douglas (1991, p. 289) defines home as a controlled space, where 'control' means the ability to establish and temporally maintain a certain structure or appearance. Morley's and Douglas'

definitions are useful for the documentary filmmaker, especially since the idea of home links everyday experience to particular character traits. For instance, Terry rarely leaves his crowded domestic space (Fig. 5.1), even to explore the small park behind his house, despite his love of nature and especially trees. During my encounters with him (inside and outside his domestic space), I noticed that his reclusive lifestyle was rooted in his desire to avoid interaction with people in general and his perception of the 'outside world' as beyond his control. Inside his home, by contrast, he is familiar with the material topography and can navigate around the different rooms with ease.

In comparison with Terry's small apartment, June's domestic space is a spacious (Fig. 5.2), two-storey house, and consequently her spatial aware- ness has become more honed, and also more flexible when it comes to novel situations. June's spatial acuity, combined with her more extrovert nature, is evident when she walks around the streets of her small seaside town. Unlike Terry's noisy suburban environment, her area has relatively little traffic and the different sounds of the sea and the gulls, people and boats are clearly discernible, providing her with pleasurable aural stimuli that help her orient herself. Hence, June's concept of home extends well beyond her house, and she has acquired a profound historical knowledge of her home town, which has increased with the purchase of additional properties in the area: a second house for tenants or guests and two beach huts. June's expanded sense of home is shown in her film through her everyday activities and interviews with her in local public spaces, whereas all the scenes with Terry and his partner, Pam, take place in their tiny flat, mediating his different subjective experience of home.

One example of this is a scene in which June meticulously describes the history of her house while standing on the other side of the street. This represents the liminality of her domestic life: she describes the experience of the home where she dwells from the locus of her extended, public home. The encounter between the body and different material agents naturally elicits an expressive and embodied experience of June's immediate home, leading her to point to different parts of the house, constantly turning and 'looking' at it, as if she perceived the space with her entire body. A high degree of subjective experience can be revealed by capturing bodily dispositions in relation to space. June's actions and perceptions are intertwined or, as Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962, p. 293, p. 295) puts it, the body is 'anchored' in space – it has a 'grip' on the physical environment and is 'geared' towards the objects it perceives. June's embodied account of the history of her house

anchors her to that space, but it also anchors the house itself to the town's geography and history.

The decision about which domestic everyday activities to film was not only dictated by daily life, but also by issues of representation in relation to the ever-present potential for stereotyping. If all post-filmic encounters showed Terry or June performing domestic activities that highlight the ways in which they are inhibited by their disability, the audience would experience them as 'other'. Conversely, if all encounters intentionally obscured the characters' disability, then it would deny an essential factor in their corporeality. I chose instead to film activities that offer a balance between these two poles, one that relates to the characters' consciousness of their own bodies. According to Rob Imrie (2004, p. 751), the body disappears from consciousness when immersed in daily life at home; it only reappears explicitly with the experience of pain, disease or bodily dysfunction. Then, the impaired body becomes conscious and is 'experienced "as- alien-being-in-the-world"'; this is especially so during embodied encounters with spatial norms that cater primarily for non-disabled people. One example of this *conscious*, alienated body is the scene where Pam describes an illustration of a painting to Terry, leading his finger over the page to give him a haptic sense of the composition. As he is a skilled painter (and non- congenitally blind), this everyday activity allows him to retain his visual memory of composition and colour. Likewise, June is shown being guided around town by her partner, David, despite the fact that she is able to walk on her own with the help of a stick (albeit with more difficulty). Examples of the *unconscious*, tacit body, on the other hand, include Terry using his Braille typewriter and June knitting. Numerous other scenes, such as June making tea (Fig. 5.2), show an oscillation between Imrie's two bodily states, reinforcing the notion that the disabled body is an ordinary part of these characters' everyday lives.

Fig. 5.2   Back figure of June making tea. (Source: Catalin Brylla 2016)

OBJECTIFICATION

A major conceptual strategy I have used to link Terry's and June's bodies to the ordinariness of their domestic spaces is that of 'objectification'. This theory, influenced by Hegelian and Marxist dialectics, as well as Merleau- Ponty's theory of 'chiasm' (1968), describes the dialectical relationship between things and people. Ben Highmore (2011, p. 58), for example, explains that things 'affect us, entice us, accompany us, extend us, [and] assist us', while we 'make them, break them, adjust them, accredit them with meaning, join them together, [and] discard them'. According to Christopher Tilley (2006, p. 61), subjects and objects ambivalently 'form part of each other while not collapsing into or being subsumed into the other … same and different, constituted and constituting'.

As with Merleau-Ponty's concept of spatial anchoring, objectification relates not only to objects but also to spaces. In this sense, the home displays best what Jean Baudrillard (2005, p. 91) refers to as a 'private totality', a collection of ordinary things or possessions, with which we construct our specific worlds. This subjective collection, which can be seen, touched, heard and smelt by the collector, transforms the home from a 'space' into a 'place' of intimacy; the locus of intimacy does not lie inside us, but is evoked by directly experiencing the collection (Tuan 1977, p. 144).

A key filmic method of mediating the characters as objectified parts of their domestic totality is the visual motif of the back figure, a trope that is found, in particular, in Caspar David Friedrich's paintings, such as *Woman at a Window* (1822). Will Wolfradts (cited in

Sugiyama 2007, p. 6) identifies this motif as a reciprocity of two elements: landscape (or place) and the human being. The human back figure within a particular place manifests the consonance between the *Weltseele* (the world soul or *anima mundi*) and the *Einzelseele* (the individual soul). For Herbert Von Einem (cited in Sugiyama 2007, p. 6), the human being and the space exist in reference to one another and are parts of a whole. The *anima mundi* concept to which both writers allude has a parallel in the anthropological concept of objectification, where the boundaries between the animate and inanimate are transcended, and objects are seen as embodiments of their human possessors/perceivers/producers/users and vice versa.

Figures 5.1 and 5.2 show two examples of long, observational takes featuring back shots of Terry and June, in which the characters' bodies are objectified alongside the surrounding space, placing them as a part of the 'private totalities' they possess. These scenes are carefully framed so that the audience not only sees the main character's back, but also the surrounding clutter. According to James Cutting and Kacie Armstrong (2016, p. 896), 'clutter' can be defined as 'structured ground against which a figure appears', and it can be measured by, among other things, the salience of image features and the relative number of edges in the image. Hence, in order to increase the clutter around the bodies, my back shots augment the density of the features and edges in the surrounding space – a result of *mise-en-scène* (busy spaces), shot size (wider shots that increase clutter), focal length (a deep focus that increases clutter) and framing (congested foregrounds that frame the characters and place them in mid-ground).

Cluttering the back shots in my films helps impede object identification (Cutting and Armstrong 2016) – bodies and body movements appear to merge with the material environment. This is emphasised by the choice of shots where the colour and luminosity of the characters bear a strong affinity with the colour and light of the space around them. The omission of the face means that the spectator's gaze is not distracted from the overall space. Usually, film scenes provide the audience with 'frontality' in order to guide the viewer's attention to facial expressions (Bordwell and Thompson 2008, p. 152); in the back shot, however, the body is robbed of its subjective identity and becomes simply a part of the characters' private totality of material possessions, mediating objectification and the situatedness of the moment. Nevertheless, facial recognition is essential for mediating subjective experience. According to Carl Plantinga (1999,

p. 240), seeing the face not only establishes identity, but also elicits an affective response in the spectator, especially an empathic response. As too many back shots in the films would inevitably 'other' the characters, they only appear in the film's narrative once the audience has already been familiarised with Terry's and June's different facial expressions.

To sustain the experience of objectification, most back shots are static wide shots and long takes. An example of this tableau-shot technique can be seen in the scene where Terry makes tea and then sits down to chat with Pam. The advantage of using the long take in this instance was that neither character was distracted by my movements, as they would have been if I was constantly trying to find the best perspective. As a result, they engaged in a conversation that naturally progressed from one topic to another, sometimes with clear associations, sometimes with random leaps between subjects, but always circling around the theme of the size of their flat and their need to move to a bigger home. The topic of their conversation is efficiently mediated through the long take of the cluttered space, which affords little room for moving around or sitting down. Terry's and Pam's claustrophobic experience of their home is mediated by using the visual cluttering techniques described above throughout the film, not only in the back shots. The tableau shot anchors the characters in their environment, revealing their bodily grip on the space, and this prevents the stereotypical fragmentation and abstraction of space engineered by close-ups, which are often used to achieve a visual poetry that purports to simulate the sensory perceptions of blind characters.

The tableau shot also emphasises the everyday oscillation between body-consciousness and body-unconsciousness in relation to disability. Terry moves fairly easily through his flat, but from time to time he subtly touches pieces of furniture and other objects to navigate his way. In terms of objectification, the space itself could be said to have an autonomy and agency, in that it determines Terry's spatial anchoring to the objects around him; this is most palpable in the confined positions of Terry and Pam, who sit in the same places (on the floor and in the chair, respectively) in almost every scene. After all, the home is not only the product of human agency, but itself possesses an agency (Miller 2001, p. 4). The tableau shot, which encourages the spectator to scan the entire screen and not just focus on the body, thus gaining a holistic view of the material environment, helps mediate this material agency. Tim Smith (2013, p. 183) has used eye-tracking experiments to demonstrate that the wider, the longer and the more static a shot, the more dispersed

and less clustered the gaze that scans the screen; this is especially the case if there is an absence of human faces and if visual composition or plot do not lead the gaze to focus on specific areas. The viewer's gaze in this case is likely to idiosyncratically roam around the entire image.

The agency of the space also appears to prompt Terry and Pam to discuss the space itself and the objects around them, without being asked to do so. In the scene described above, they complain about their tiny, cluttered flat, discussing the amount of rooms they ideally need to accommodate Terry's paintings and Pam's books. In a different yet aesthetically similar scene, they discuss conceptual art, which Terry despises. He sarcastically proposes his own idea for a piece of conceptual art: a film camera fixed to the bottom of a toilet. Terry's imaginary art object carries several innuendos: apart from the scatological reference to the quality and value of conceptual art, there is a clear reference to the camera that is filming him at that moment and to the audience itself. His frequent, sarcastic remarks exhibit his love-hate relationship with the camera. It is also interesting to note that he juxtaposes the camera, which is the most ordinary object in the filming process, with the toilet, one of the most ordinary objects in the home. In this way, he juxtaposes two of the most tacit objects of two different private totalities: the actuality of his world and my filming process, which is capturing that actuality. Both scenes have a plethora of other verbal references to objects and materialities. It is as if the overwhelming materiality around the characters has the agency to determine not only their movements and positions, but also their conversations, once again mediating the phenomenon of objectification to the spectator.

The tableau shot, with its lack of insert shots and vantage points such as frontality, is also an embodiment of David MacDougall's (1998, p. 89) 'deep reflexivity', which positions the author within, rather than outside, the film text. Deep reflexivity refers to a type of overt authorship that is not imposing, self-indulgent or self-conscious, as is often the case in documentaries about blindness that use aesthetic experimentation. The tableau shot, for example, exposes the act of filmic bracketing without calling explicit attention to itself. Contradicting André Bazin's theory that diegetic realism is experienced by means of the long take, Peter Wollen (cited in Hill and Church Gibson 1998, pp. 28–29) identifies it as a mannerist, Brechtian tableau dramaturgy, where duration becomes an overt stylistic feature, which is reinforced if the camera is static. In addition, the departure from

continuity editing (or at least elliptical cuts to compress time) that the spectator expects is in itself reflexive (Nichols 2001, p. 128). This temporary departure also subverts the ocular-centric paradigm of visual vantage points of actions and characters, especially as frontality is denied. Consequently, the deviation from expected modes of filmic representation is not just an aesthetic experiment but also an embodied political statement that interrogates, among other things, the stereotypical attempt to visualise blind people's perception by fragmenting body and space. In the context of my films, this statement is deeply reflexive, embodying the filmmaker organically within the moment of the scene. The natural inter-twining of my (the filmmaker's) and the screen characters' experience is also due to the intertwining of two ordinary practices – the aesthetically ordinary filmmaking practice of static observation and the everyday activities of the characters, making tea or chatting unselfconsciously, without addressing the camera.

STILL LIFE

Another filmic strategy, inspired by still-life paintings, is to depict a montage of shots of objects and spaces without the bodily presence of the characters. This occurs in one scene in each film, giving an overview of Terry's and June's very distinct spaces. The main purpose of these scenes is to allow the spectator to directly experience, in Baudrillard's terms, their collections of possessions. It would at first appear that this strategy, due to the lack of human interaction, goes against the concept of objectification; however, the spaces and objects depicted in these scenes are not completely divorced from their human counterparts, as they occur in the middle of the films, after Terry and June have already been shown interacting with them. The spectator perceives these objects as comprising the characters' private totality, and this is reinforced when the rooms and several of the objects appear in other scenes.

Although the still-life scenes do not mediate the notion of objectification to the spectator, they do mediate materiality. Since all shots show ordinary domestic objects at rest, the spectator can connect to their 'thingly actuality' (Highmore 2011, p. 59). This connection is also embodied, although here the embodied agent is not a screen character, but the spectator himself or herself who experiences the 'affordances' of domestic objects from a similar topological perspective to Terry and June. James Gibson's (1986, pp. 127–

128) theory of affordance illuminates the relationship between an organism and its surrounding physical objects which affords that organism the opportunity to perform an action. The experience of affordance therefore simultaneously involves the action-readiness of the subject and the physical qualities of the objects in question. In this way, many of the objects and spaces in my films mediate to the viewer their material qualities in relation to haptic interaction and spatial motility which force the disabled body into consciousness.

For instance, in Terry's small flat, the material clutter results in low affordances in terms of body movement, which is exemplified in other scenes when Terry has to touch objects in order to navigate his way around. Overall, this focuses Terry's consciousness on his disabled body (more frequently than is the case with June) and leads him to make occasional onscreen references about how alienating he feels his blindness to be. In June's house, the larger spaces result in higher body-movement affordance, which can be experienced, for example, in the tea-making scene. This aligns with the fact that she makes almost no onscreen references to her blindness and represents her disabled body as a tacit, rather than alienating, part of her everyday life.

Like the tableau shots, the still-life aesthetic conjures up the private totality of everyday things, mediating the two elements identified earlier as vital to the reconfiguration of stereotypes of blindness: ordinariness and the diversity of particular character traits, as depicted by a plethora of particular objects and spaces. These are captured in wide shots, as well as close-ups, in order to prevent the fragmentation of space. As a result, the featured objects are obviously anchored in a larger space. In addition, this aesthetic is another form of filmic bracketing that is deeply reflexive and reveals the presence of the embodied filmmaker. Daniel Miller (2010, p. 51) explains that ordinary objects are both peripheral and 'blindingly' obvious – that is, we are 'blind' to their presence. However, the still-life sequences foreground these objects, bringing them out from the periphery, through bracketing, and this places the audience in an anamorphic position that ambiguously highlights the objects' ordinariness by making them *extra*ordinary.

On a narrative level, this bracketing occurs by presenting an entire scene dedicated to static, inanimate objects and spaces – the omission of the characters who previously inhabited these spaces is especially noticeable. On an aesthetic level, the myriad of different static shots of particular objects and spaces mediate their 'thingly actuality' – they are temporarily experienced simply as what they are, without the inscription of any intellectual meaning. This

filmic bracketing of objects is a form of *epoché*, a term originating in Edmund Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, which focuses on the study of the first-hand experience of particular phenomena. Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi (2008, p. 23) summarise it as 'the aim to suspend or neutralize a certain dogmatic attitude towards reality... focusing directly on reality as it is given – how it makes its appearance to us in experience'.

Thus, a filmic *epoché* is closely related to Viktor Shklovsky's *ostranenie* and Louis Delluc's *photogénie*. According to Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell (2003, p. 91), *photogénie* distinguishes a film shot from the actual object – that is, the process of filming 'lends an object a new expressiveness by giving the viewer a fresh perception of it'. They stress that the camera framing already isolates (brackets) objects from their environment and, in the tradition of *photogénie*, mediates a realm beyond everyday experience. However, although these objects are lifted out of their ordinariness through filmic bracketing, they are filmed in the spaces and positions in which they ordinarily rest and are not self-consciously addressed by the characters, unlike other scenes, such as the one in which June describes the history and architecture of her house. The still-life technique can therefore be seen as bracketing and unbracketing at the same time. The objects are ordinary, yet *extra*ordinary – an ambivalence that also relates to the way in which they are both perceived in their own right and also in relation to their human possessors.

CONCLUSION: AMBIGUITY

Mediating a degree of narrative ambiguity is an efficient way of portraying both ordinariness and multi-layered character traits, helping overcome stereotypes that usually operate by way of binary oppositions (Hartley 2003; Moskowitz 2005; Schillmeier 2006). This chapter has shown that the different techniques of filming material interactions between the body and everyday objects within domestic spaces generate a range of ambivalences, such as ordinariness/extraordinariness, object/subject, objectification/subjectivisation, reflexivity/observation, tacit/alienated body, identity/defacement and private/public home. Both films are imbued with such ambivalence – a deliberate departure from the three interrelated tropes identified earlier as leading to the othering of blind people. It is used, first, to prevent blindness from becoming a major narrative element; second, to counteract the formation of a categorical view of blindness as a deficiency or blind people as deviant

and/or exotic; and, third, to challenge such ableist binary oppositions as sighted/blind or normal/ abnormal.

Eliciting a sense of ambiguity in the spectator is essential to the task of challenging and overturning the perceived otherness of social groups that are consistently stereotyped, and the focus on ordinary objects and spaces is an efficient way of overcoming binaries, schematic categories and totalising knowledge. Ambiguity is not only inherent in the concept of objectification, but, as Miller (2010, p. 62) argues, objects themselves are ambiguous as they are neither intrinsically good nor bad, but contradictory. There are also many contradictions between individual experience and the domestic space itself that make the home a source of constant renegotiation, change and mobility rather than the locus of fixed symbolic meanings in relation to the self (Miller 2001, p. 4). Questioning the fixed symbolic meanings embedded in narrative formulas and social stereotypes is arguably a prerequisite for representing human characters in general. The human subject is an amalgamation of multi-layered and complex identities, subjectivities and experiences, all of which constitute his/her particularity. As Kate Nash (2011, 238) explains, in documentary film this human particularity can only persist if 'the images speak of doubt, uncertainty, and plurality of meaning'.

NOTE

1. Highmore (2011, p. 2) holds that the terms 'everyday' and 'ordinary/ ordinariness' are synonymous, and this chapter follows suit by using the terms interchangeably.

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