
Documentary Review

Lighting The Path of Documentary Meaning

11 October 2019 Thomas Titus Blake 502405 HPMF7004



Introduction

Bill Nichols in his book *Introduction to Documentary* helps us define what documentary is . In chapter one he says “ The current golden age of documentaries began in the 1980s . It continues unabated . An abundance of films has breathed new life into an old form and promoted serious thought about how to define this type of film-making . These films challenge assumptions and alter perceptions . They see the world anew and do so inventively. Often structured as stories, they are stories with a difference : the stories stem from the world we all share. “

This gives us a clear prospective that documentary is a study and demonstration of actuality , how one person sees the world and reveals that through different modes of documentary film making, revealing different styles of actuality truthfully. These modes are :

- Observational Mode
- Participatory Mode
- Reflective Mode
- Performative Mode
- Poetic Mode
- Expository Mode

The modes in documentary represent the various ways a documentary film maker tells their story to the viewers. I would call myself an expository film maker or an investigative documentarian. However within my film , I use different modes at different scenes . Nichols says “ A film may rely on investigative journalism for a framework but then incorporate elements of expository , participatory, and observational modes”.

Examples of these amalgamation of modes are seen in John Huston’s film “*Let there be light*” here is a film about the effect of post dramatic stress on war veterans after the war. The film in my opinion is an expository mode revealing the effects of war on the soldiers , however it has excellent cinematography elements much like a film with a performative element to it or a perceived performative element , but in actual fact *Let there be light* is actuality .

John Grierson a Scottish film maker, is said to have coined the word “Documentary” he like many other men of his time had a style, a mission that they would reveal through this type of film making . He saw his mission in life as a problem solver to the current issues in the world . He was the documentary film maker “dramatising issues and their implications in a meaningful way”. If I could compare him to a religious leader in the Bible it would be Moses, who lead the children of Israel out of confusion in Egypt to prosperity and real life . Grierson mission was no different, it is said in Eric Barnouw book Documentary “he could lead the citizen through the wilderness “. This became the Grierson way .



The Way of The Documentarian and Their Views

Barnouw states of Grierson “he observed the American melting pot in action” he began to feel with Walter Lippmann his associate, that expectations once held for democracy in the USA were proving illusory . Grierson’s determination was to bring the citizens eye in from the ends of the earth, to the story his own story of what was happening under his nose”.

Dziga Vertov’s view on documentary was “life as it is” in other words life filmed surreptitiously which means in the oxford dictionary, in a way that attempts to avoid notice or attention. Vertov saw fiction films like a religion, the opium for the people .

John Grierson’s view on documentary is “ cinema as a pulpit” dramatising issues and their implications in a meaningful way, leading citizens through the wilderness .

Robert J. Flaherty’s view on documentary is revealed in *Nanook of the North* “ it would centre on one eskimo and his family and reveal characteristics events of their lives” . He felt the documentary he filmed originally before it got burnt was just a “ scene of this and

that, no relation no thread “. This lead him to create a kind of fake documentary that in my opinion did not stick to actuality , as some scenes where staged to invoke a sense of wonder and primitiveness of Nanook . So as my research continues my goal is to find out can documentary really be like its name describes , a living article, a document come to life , the actually factual truth .

References from :

Introduction to Documentary Third Edition - Bill Nichols

Documentary - Erik Barnouw

Wikipedia -https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Documentary_film#Definition