

Documentary film making

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A documentary refers to the factual representation of information particularly in form of a film or a television program that basically airs issues related to politics, historical or social matters. Generally, a documentary consists of actual filming of interviews or news that is apparently accompanied by a certain narration concerning the filmed news. In a documentary, information is kept as factual as possible with the elimination of fictional matters as experienced in books and most films. It ensures the presentation of facts without the concern of a certain individual or event with little or no fiction. This paper attempts to analyze the meaning of the term documentary, particularly film documentary. It states the theoretical concepts and readings used in analyzing documentaries.

In addition, this paper clearly illustrates these documentaries giving sufficient interpretation and provision of a critical reading. Aspects of reality or historical records are documented in nonfictional motion pictures and hence constituted in a documentary film. Originally, documentary films were only shot on film stock while nowadays they are inclusive of both digital and video productions. These productions can be produced to go direct to the video, set as a television program or for screening in cinemas (Stott).

Documentary has been described as the avenue for accomplishing the practice of film making, with an unlimited and evolving audience receptionist. Any documentary that attempts to analyze reality and authenticity in the process of describing individuals, events or places is known as a documentary text.

There is a very different view from the process of mediation, figuring out of the difficulty that arises with the representation of a true happening without

fixing in a fictional narrative. Apparently, edited images are not viewed as wholly factual but rather the final results of the photographer's choices. Media texts are classified as non-fiction since they aim at revealing reality which happens to be less filtered when compared to a fiction text. Such stories cannot be viewed to be objective since they are generally constructed from a particular moral or political perspective. A thesis must be established by the documentary maker before the commencement of text construction whereby the process of making the documentary can be seen as the confirmation of their own ideas. This can be used as the basis for misquoting, where the destination rather than the origin is considered to carry the objectivity of the text.

There are various purposes which fall under the documentary genre due to the selection as well as recording of events and polemic text which in their own way persuades the audience into a specific set of opinions (Hales, 271). It is thus the duty of the audience to identify that purpose and thus decode documentary texts differently to fictional narratives. There exist six modes of documentary as illustrated in Nichol's book. The very first mode of documentary is the Poetic Mode which is responsible for the reassembling of the world's fragments. It is also responsible for the revolution of historical material into a rather lyrical, abstract form that is generally related to the modernist ideas. The second method involves the Expository Mode, which basically discusses issues related to the assembling of an argumentative frame that is interceded by the narration of the voice of God.

This is related to the period around the years 1920s-1930s which was characterized by polemic and rhetoric immediate to World War Two. The <https://assignbuster.com/documentary-film-making/>

third mode is the Observational Mode which was associated with the advancement of technology which apparently influenced the ease in documenting life as the size of cameras had reduced. Since only little control is required over lighting, person responsible for the coverage of documentaries were able to record such documentaries without interacting with each other. The fourth among the modes of documentaries is the Participatory Mode that occurs in the interaction that is experienced between the film-maker and the subjects particularly when recording takes place. The film-maker is basically engaged with the situation being documented and as a way of effectively interacting with the subjects, asks questions of their subjects.

They are expected to ensure honesty of the witness and as if to encourage them more, they also share their own life experiences. The consciousness of the process of reading the documentary is looked at under the Reflexive Mode. This mode is associated with the process of engaging actively with realism issues and representations (Nichols). It acknowledges the presence of the viewers in relation to their judgment according to the 1980s critical theory. The subjective and emotional aspect of the documentary is acknowledged by the Performative Mode.

Under this mode, ideas are considered being part of the context while there are distinct meanings for different people generally autobiographical. In relation to photography, documentary is essentially related to its mode, antedates or its genre. Photographs were very useful since they described hidden, unknown, forbidden or rather places that are difficult to access.

Documentary photography was well boosted by the new reproduction

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methods for photography. Low cost mass reproduction of books, magazines as well as newspapers due to the introduction of halftone reproduction and the apparent refining of photogravure methods. It is around this time that there was the birth of this new form of documentary.

The practitioners of photography referred to themselves, or were termed by others as artist particularly during the period that documentary photography turned inwards (Synder). Documentary photography was essentially democratized and consequently there was adaptation that influenced the potential the documenting of local communities. Such documentation was empowered through the means of creating and capturing their own identity through themselves or otherwise through the means of the photographs of a professional. Documentary Film Styles Filmmaking requires proper planning, creativity and critical thinking. The same is done when it come to making documentary films.

Every step encompassed in filming ordinal films is done when making documentaries and the main difference are found in the length of the films, most documentaries are short compared to feature films. Proper planning aids in streamlining the entire process, forming the base on which to make the documentary film. A documentary does not have to be necessarily a film, it can be a photograph. Generally, documentaries attempts to illustrate facts or an accurate and truthful representation of an issue or agenda at hand. The main aim of any documentary film is to give the reality of a particular issue. They are often used to educate and help people better understand the subject matter being investigated from another larger perspective.

Documentary films are presented to the viewers in various forms. The style used to present the documentary differs depending on the subject matter to be illustrated and the film maker's preferences (Klotman). Documentaries are filmed in various film styles ranging from compilation of films using original archival footage to spectacular reenactments which demonstrate events and occurrences that do not have archival footage in existence. The different elements of styles of documentary filming greatly determine the influence, the impact and credibility of the documentary film. Documentary film makers apply varied techniques, aesthetics and resources to illustrate the subject stories of their documentaries. Having an understanding of the choices makes whoever is watching the documentary savvy and a highly sophisticated moviegoer.

Some of renowned documentary filming styles are explained below (Nichols).

Cinema verite/ Direct Cinema This is one of the major and most common styles used in documentary film making. This style records real happening true events, without censoring them using a hand held camera. The intention of this method is to make the documentary viewers feel like they are eye witnesses of the occurrences and events displayed in the film. The filming is characterized by lack of extensive voice use over narration and demand less evidence of the documentary film maker's presence (Nichols, 20).

Kino-Pravda This style was developed in Russia by Dziga Vertov together with several other colleagues. Basically it was a series of fourteen (14) real - news like documentaries. They depicted the 1920s daily life happenings, and current events, using a hyper realistic detailed manner. Newsreel documentaries used to exist before television news came into existence.

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They were movie goers that gave the society information on current happenings ranging from wars to elections, announcements, declarations, coronations fashion, and finance to sports. These compilation documentaries had short segments that covered a particular topic.

They were characterized by a voice over narration that boosted frequently the editor's point of view and in a great way resembled propaganda (Karl, 56). Political Cinema During periods of wars and social upheavals

documentary and narration was often used to spread propaganda. These documentaries were not objective rather they were the direct opposite of direct cinema/ Cinema verite (Karl). Documentary film making A

documentary film constitutes large categories of fictional and nonfictional motion pictures intended to illustrate some aspect of reality, for the purposes of maintaining or instruction a historical record. Originally, a documentary film was originally shot on stock-the only medium accessible, but in the resent days they include digital and video productions that can be either released for screening in cinema, made as a television program or direct-top-video.

In the resent years, documentary has been described as a “ cinematic tradition, filmmaking practice, and a mode of audience reception” that is frequently developing and evolving without clear boundaries. Filmmaking also constitutes the processes of making films from initial stories, commission or idea, casting, through scriptwriting, directing, shooting, editing and screening the finished product before a presentation to an audience is made (Karl). The Earliest Documentaries: The earliest documentaries were developed in the form of instructional picture, <https://assignbuster.com/documentary-film-making/>

travelogue, recorded current events or mostly short newsreels. They did not employ creative Story narration. The first recorded official documentary film was filmed by Robert Flaherty's a non fictional film named “ Nanook of the North in 1952”.

This documentary film looked ethnographically on the harsh life observed by Inuit Eskimoo found in Canada (at the Arctic). Despite parts of the scenes involving obsolete scenes being staged, Flaherty is regarded as the father or founder of documentary films. Documentaries and City Symphony A documentary film presents facts, mainly about events and people of historical significant and social issues. The City Symphony, whose origin is traced back in the images recorded by Louis Lumiere and Augustine in the 1890's, is an example of documentary. It began with Manhatta back in 1921.

The movie raised the popularity of documentary film to higher heights by putting it as a real form of art. The director of a documentary films aims at presenting facts in an entertaining angle and being keen not to distort the targeted information. This type of entertainment film uses actual footage of events and people to communicate viewpoints or information. The actors are used only to create the historical event. City Symphonies are good examples of real documentaries.

In most cases, they use candid shot of common people undertaking their daily duties. By juxtapositioning of scenes, they create montage which tends to illustrate work of art. There is no distortion of the city that takes place as the images always take on a surrealistic aspect (Nichols, 25). City Symphony City Symphonies are motion photos that aim at capturing the uniqueness as

well as the spirit of a city by gathering the images daily activities in that city. The most memorable City Symphony genre appeared in 1920's; it was silent, black and white documentary.

The movements in a symphony vary in intensity and pace; they win our interest with images of the city. These film styles are made by experimental filmmakers such as Walter Ruttmann and Dziga Vertov, where they directed a movie that clearly married with the subject matter of the city. Both were quality products that hit the market in the 19th century and they dominated in the 1920's (Ellis). In conclusion, documentary film making has become very popular in the recent years. This has in turn boosted the creativity and quality of the new documentaries released in the film market. Like any other feature film or motion picture documentary making involves all the approaches used when making a normal film and differs with normal films only due to the length or the narration parts.

Documentaries are also based on true life happening and their main target is to entertain the society and make them become aware of the subject matter detailed in the documentary film.