

A study on triumph of will



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The ultimate aim of documentary is to find the perfect way of representing the real is what Stella Bruzzi believes is the function of a documentary. As she states it herself, the 'aim is to' find the perfect way of 'representing reality'. The three underlined words are themselves hypothetical terms that are not certain, hence this is the first indication that documentary might not necessarily achieve its aim. Documentary style of films are still under debate as to how 'real can they be, this probably why Stella Bruzzi uses the word 'find' instead of a more commanding and certain word. Therefore, what is really a documentary according to different theorists?

John Grierson, the first writer to use documentary as a term in his review of Robert Flaherty's *Moana*, came up with his famous dictum that documentary is 'the creative interpretation of actuality'. Grierson's essay *First Principles of Documentary* argued that documentary was cinema's potential for observing life could be exploited in a new art form; that the "original" actor and "original" scene are better guides than their fiction counterparts to interpreting the modern world; and that materials "thus taken from the raw" can be more real than the acted article. Contrary to Bruzzi's idea of 'representing' reality, Grierson believes in 'interpreting' it. Interpretation can be in form of re-enactment. So the question that arises is – how realistic is a documentary that has actors and scenes "guiding" the flow of the film? Any re-enactment or borrowed situations can be manipulated to reflect the director's idea, which leaves hardly any space for 100% reality.

The term 'documentary' stems from the verb 'to document' – to convey information on the basis of proof and evidence to support it, according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary. In the realm of films and cinema, a

documentary is a film that is an attempt, in one fashion or another, to show reality as it really is.

Another way of defining documentary is the necessity to capture life as it is – as it naturally appears. It needs to be filmed surreptitiously, while the goal is to capture life's unawareness and natural beauty. The term has expanded to encompass many additional aspects than its original definition. ‘

Documentaries’ was a term used to describe movies shot on film stock, which is a term used to describe the discovery of celluloid – a product much less fragile than the paper film previously used. It has now come to involve video and digital productions, whether for private use, made-for-TV or for the big screen. The continuing goal of documentaries is to constantly work to identify a film making practice that captures life as it truly is, create a cinematic tradition that remains interesting and lively, and finally, to gain and maintain a connection with the audience.

There are several types of documentary, but for this essay, I will pit two completely different ‘documentaries’ and analyze which of these two, make it closest to the above different definitions. *Triumph of the Will* a propaganda film made by Leni Riefenstahl and *Super Size Me* is a documentary by Morgan Spurlock are the two documentaries I will take into account because their genres are completely different from each other, and this could lead to an interesting analysis of the documentaries’ purpose and what they attain in the end.

Triumph of the Will/ Triumph des Willens

In 1934 Hitler suggested that Leni Riefenstahl film the party rally of that year. Hitler wanted a first-rate filmmaker to direct the film of the party rally, having insisted several years earlier that he wanted to “ exploit the film as an instrument of propaganda in such a way that the audience will be clearly aware that... they are going to see a political film. It nauseates me when I find political propaganda under the cloak of art. Let it either be art or politics.” Riefenstahl demanded that the film be made by her own company rather than by the Ministry for People’s Enlightenment and Propaganda. Hitler agreed to this demand and promised not to interfere with the filming; he granted her complete freedom to make the film she desired. Although ostensibly her company financed and distributed Triumph of the Will, there is little doubt that the Nazi party actually provided the funds as well as the setting and every facility possible for unimpeded film recording of the event. This reflects greatly on the biasness that is present in the film. Hitler’s SA and SS were known for generating fear, and even if promised to have interference in her documentary, if Riefenstahl did show something negative about the Nazi Party, it could only mean either her disappearance or concentration camp. Moreover, the title of the film was suggested by Hitler himself, implying that after all it was not independent of any political pressure. The camera crew used thirty cameras and were dressed as SA men so that they would not be noticeable in the crowd. Although there are at least twelve sequences in the film where the wary spectator can detect cameras at work, in general the crew working the film is very well disguised.

Triumph of The Will (1935) “ is not only a masterpiece entirely on its own, divorced from political or propagandist considerations, but in its emotional manipulation of the audience represents the very heart of what propaganda is all about”. (Barsam, 1992, 130) Riefenstahl is able to create a glorified representation of the NSDAP, or Nazi party, with the use of a music score that invents Hitler as heroic. Her ability to represent a political party so triumphantly is noted in the moving and chilling pieces of cinematography when Hitler gives his final speech and compares his party to a holy order. She captures an essence far purer than the NSDAP, and in a way does more than justice to the party’s attempts of propaganda. On the other hand, her achievements in portraying the NSDAP as glamorous can be seen as misrepresenting and a line can be drawn between fact and fiction as to, whether her glorifications are unjust and morally wrong.

For the Nazis, the euphoria of a perfect Germany according to them can be portrayed with proper film aesthetics but without directly referring to the contemporary society of the 1930s. The ‘ what it would be like if Nazis ruled’ agenda can be portrayed with the use of abstract visuals and other techniques as long as the ‘ real’ is not referred to, as societies in Germany were not of pure race. The idea of creating a pure race and portraying this in a film is almost mythical, yet alone absurd. In order to portray an Aryan world blatant lies and imaginative discourse would be called for. The ethical implications behind this, is that the people themselves must change in order to create this ideal society.

The overly repeated Flag Bearer image depicts symbolism connected to Nazism; the inclusion of a flag bearing the Nazi Swastika symbol represents

the militarized power of the party. As a trend in Nazi propaganda, there is enormous emphasis on military symbols in *Triumph of the Will*, triggered deeply felt emotions associated with Germany's former military might.

Leni Riefenstahl's editing provides an insight into the status of *Triumph of the Will* as Nazi propaganda. For example, one sequence during Hitler's arrival in Nuremberg is composed of four shots; the first two shots show the old buildings of the city and then a German flag therefore representing the old, traditional Germany. The following two shots depict Hitler and then a Swastika. This sequence typifies how Riefenstahl has represented the Nazi ideology of a return to a mythical epoch by linking the ideals of the traditional dogma with a visionary future. Similarly, before the scene of the city awakening Riefenstahl links a shot of an old church to represent Volakis thought, with the rally camp site to signify the new Germany. Incidentally Hinton suggests that as result of these sequences, *Triumph of the Will* is more than a document of the 1934 Nazi Party Rally; it is a document of the city of Nuremberg' where the viewer gains a sense of the beauty and history of the medieval centre. Furthermore, the use of German and Nazi flags ties in with the use of military symbols inherent in the propaganda of the Third Reich. She also states that; ' In my cutting room, it was the most difficult work of my life' describing the task that took at least five months to fulfil. She explained that she did not care much about chronological accuracy on the screen and that she intuitively tried to find a unifying way to edit the film in a way which would progressively take the viewer from act to act and from impression to impression.

With political pressure, adoration for Adolf Hitler, and clearly a propaganda film, *Triumph of the will* does portray reality in terms of the images used, they are all live and not re-enacted by Riefenstahl. However, it is a biased documentation of the reality. I believe it would have been a real documentary if only there was not so much of glamour shown about the Nazi rallies, and the darker side such as the Holocaust and ghettos were also covered. The latter would have made it a more objective piece of work, making it more of a documentary instead of a propaganda tool.

Super Size Me

Morgan Spurlock decided to make this documentary to investigate the fast food companies, and the effects of certain fast food chains products, particularly McDonalds, on the health of society. This Documentary explores the United States growing epidemic of obesity and diabetes as well. Morgan decides to eat nothing but McDonald's food for thirty days. He must eat one of everything on the menu at least once, and when asked to super size his meal he must do so. Another stipulation of Morgan's experiment is that he can only take 5, 000 steps a day to replicate the exercise that most average Americans get on a daily basis. He must also eat three meals a day, no exceptions and if McDonalds doesn't serve it Morgan can't eat it. Morgan enlists three doctors to assist him through his thirty day documentary. A cardiologist, gastroenterologist, and a general practitioner all check him out at the beginning of the experiment which makes it credible because there is science supporting and bringing logic to the results of the experiment.

Critics of the film, including McDonald's, argue that the author intentionally consumed an average of 5, 000 calories per day and did not exercise, and

that the results would have been the same regardless of the source of overeating. He was eating solely McDonald's food in keeping with the terms of a potential judgment against McDonald's in court documents highlighted at the beginning of the film.

The film addresses such objections by highlighting that a part of the reason for Spurlock's deteriorating health was not just the high calorie intake but also the high quantity of fat relative to vitamins and minerals in the McDonald's menu, which is similar in that regard to the nutritional content of the menus of most other U. S. fast-food chains.

About 1/3 of Spurlock's calories came from sugar. His nutritionist, Bridget Bennett RD, cited him about his excess intake of sugar from "milkshakes and cokes". It is revealed toward the end of the movie that over the course of the diet, he consumed "over 30 pounds of sugar, and over 12 lbs. of fat from their food". The nutritional side of the diet was not fully explored in the film because of the closure of the clinic which monitored this aspect during the filming of the movie.

Spurlock claimed he was trying to imitate what an average diet for a regular eater at McDonald's—a person who would get little to no exercise—would do to them. Spurlock's intake of 5,000 calories per day was well over twice the recommended daily intake for a sedentary adult male, which would amount to only about 2,300 calories. A typical man consuming as many calories as Spurlock did would gain nearly a pound a day (which is roughly how much Spurlock gained), a rate of weight gain that could not be sustained for long periods. Additionally, Spurlock did not demonstrate or claim that anyone, let

alone a substantial number of people, eats at McDonald's three times per day. In fact McDonald's is mentioned during the movie to have two classes of users of their restaurants: There are the " Heavy Users," (about 72% of the customers, who eat at their restaurants once or twice a week), and the " SUPERHeavy Users" (about 22% of the customers, who eat McDonald's 3 or more times a week). But no one was found who ate at McDonald's three times a day. Spurlock said that he was eating in thirty days the amount of fast food most nutritionists suggest someone should eat in eight years.

Though Spurlock provokes fear of fast food, he fails to acknowledge that poor diet is not the only cause of obesity, and that the " toxic environment" he describes is reason enough to consider that the responsibility should in fact be in the corporation's hands. What Spurlock does exactly is that he reflects his own ideology. Before going for the experiment and documenting it he was clear as to what he wanted to show by the end of it and worked towards it, hence it can be debated that he made the documentary with his biasness to his idea, and giving more coverage to the latter instead of bringing about more balance reflection such as the influence and pressure on Americans by the constant advertisements about fast food.

Comparison of both documentaries

From the information given above about the documentaries in question the first thing that is important to note is the fact that Triumph of the Will was an idea suggested by Adolf Hitler whereas, Super size Me was the idea of an ordinary American filmmaker Morgan Spurlock. This is an important fact to be taken into consideration because eventually the ideology and aim intended by Adolf Hitler and Morgan Spurlock is what will ' direct' the ideas

reflected in the documentary, hence, objectivity can be compromised. For reality to be completely present in order to have a real documentary there should be ideally, no draw backs on objectivity in the portrayal of ideas.

Adolf Hitler was a Nazi dictator ruling over a powerful country like Germany, his influence and power to pressurise Leni Riefenstahl was unquestionable. On the contrary, Morgan Spurlock was just an independent director. What kind of objectivity and impartiality (two very important subjects to reflect reality) can one expect from a director working under a dictator who controlled the population through fear?

The purposes of both documentaries are extreme opposites. Triumph of the Will was intended to be a propaganda political film. Propaganda is after all; a form of communication aimed at influencing the attitude of a community toward some cause or position. As opposed to impartially providing information, propaganda in its most basic sense, presents information primarily to influence an audience. Propaganda often presents facts selectively (thus possibly lying by omission) to encourage a particular synthesis, or uses loaded messages to produce an emotional rather than rational response to the information presented. The desired result is a change of the attitude toward the subject in the target audience to further a political agenda. In comparison to this, Super size Me was more to do with creating awareness amongst people. Creating awareness is the state or ability to perceive, to feel, or to be conscious of events. In this level of consciousness, sense data can be confirmed by an observer without necessarily implying understanding. This suggests that Spurlock was not aiming at influencing people to completely revolt against fast food but at <https://assignbuster.com/a-study-on-triumph-of-will/>

least beware and conscious of the harmful effects of it. He leaves it upon the audience to make their choice without brainwashing them.

The presentation of Triumph of the Will is what documentary forefather, John Grierson would categorise under Poetic mode. Such documentary thrive on a filmmaker's aesthetic and subjective visual interpretation of a subject, in addition to it different music is selected for different scenes, just like in the Triumph of Will. By contrast, Super Size me is what Grierson would categorize under participatory mode, in which filmmakers move from behind the camera and appear as subjects in their own work like Spurlock carries out his experiment himself and becomes the main subject of the documentary.

The time period in which both documentaries are set in are also crucial points to be noted. Triumph of the Will was set in 1935 in Germany, where people were in the middle of Nazi revolution and political chaos. In contrary to 2004 America where Super Size Me is shot, the taste of the audience has changed dramatically. Audiences of Super Size Me are not only in America but world around, which wasn't the target audience of Triumph of the Will, the latter was meant for only the Germans. To add to this, Germans in 1934 were comparably less educated than the audience of 2004, because one of Germany's major issues at that time was low education. Hence, propaganda movies worked to its full potential as people would not question or form their own opinions; however, the same cannot be expected from liberal thinking people in 2004. The taste of what audience around the world want now is completely different from what was expected in 1930's. Nowadays, reality and truth in the form of controversy is what really gets people's attention.

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One may wonder if 1930's audience would have liked to watch real documentary, what if Triumph of the Will was to include scenes from the concentration camps, how would have the audience responded to the documentary?

Lastly, editing plays a big role in representing reality. The camera can capture all the truth there is to be captured, but the audience eventually see what is presented to them after much chopping done in the editing room. Director's choice of scenes, images and music is what is eventually reflected in the documentary. In other words, only one or a few people's choice or ideology is selected and presented to the audience. The director's selection does not necessarily have to reflect the reality. Therefore, how is reality ever represented in documentaries?

Conclusion

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