

NON-FICTION FILM

DOCUMENTARY



“Film is truth 24 times a second”

Jean-Luc Goddard

# REALISM-FORMALISM SPECTRUM



Realism as "reality" or close to it

Realist film: idealized as having the least amount of mediation between subject and audience

# WHAT'S A DOC?

(traditional definition)

## Content & Subject Matter

- “Documenting” something--a film record of a person, place, idea or event
- Unbiased, neutral, objective (audience expectations)
- Relates to the historical world (reality not fantasy)
- Ethnographies--documentaries about a group of people

# WHAT'S A DOC?

(traditional definition)

Style (aesthetic conventions)

- Hand-held camera
- grainy film, often out of focus
- long takes
- interviews, narrator, voice-over

# WHAT'S A DOC?

(contemporary definition)

- acknowledges the subjectivity of filmmaking
- may argue a point of view (expository writing)
- does not pretend to be journalism
- may be as concerned with the filmmaker as the subject matter
- may incorporate reenactments, stylized aesthetics, and fiction film elements like conflict and story structure

# 5 TYPES OF DOCUMENTARY

## 1. Expository ("voice of God")



*March of the Penguins* (USA , 2005). Dir: Luc Jacquet

# 5 TYPES OF DOCUMENTARY

## 1. Expository ("voice of God")

- Narrator directly addresses the audience
- Common sense knowledge--logical, linear argument (cause and effect)
- Continuity editing (linear structure)
- Examples: wildlife docs, Victory at Sea series, industrial/educational videos



# 5 TYPES OF DOCUMENTARY

## 2. Observational (direct cinema)



*Hoop Dreams* (USA , 1994). Dir: Steve James

# 5 TYPES OF DOCUMENTARY

## 2. Observational (direct cinema)

- stresses the non-intervention of the filmmaker
- slice of life--depicts the everyday
- editing only to enhance the impression of real time
- sounds and images used are only those recorded at the moment of observation (no voice-overs, graphics, reenactments)
- Examples: Hoop Dreams, The Farmer's Wife

# 5 TYPES OF DOCUMENTARY

## 3. Interactive



Fast, Cheap and Out of Control (USA , 1997). Dir: Errol Morris

# 5 TYPES OF DOCUMENTARY

## 3. Interactive

- Emphasis on testimony or verbal exchange (interviews)
- Images demonstrate the validity or doubtfulness of what a witness says
- ethical problems: how a filmmaker represents his or her witnesses
- Examples: Buena Vista Social Club; Fast, Cheap and Out of Control



# 5 TYPES OF DOCUMENTARY

## 4. Reflexive



*Roger and Me* (USA , 1989). Dir: Michael Moore

# 5 TYPES OF DOCUMENTARY

## 4. Reflexive

- Questions how we talk about the historical world
- Aware of itself being a documentary (self-conscious)
- Plays with structure, conventions and audience expectations
- examines the difficulty of being objective in film
- emphasizes the interaction between filmmaker and subject
- Examples: Roger and Me, Sherman's March, Spinal Tap

# 5 TYPES OF DOCUMENTARY

## 5. Essayistic



*Sans Soleil* (France , 1983). Dir: Chris Marker

# 5 TYPES OF DOCUMENTARY

## 5. Essayistic

- Emphasizes filmmaker's comment on or reaction to a topic
- Often autobiographical or meditative
- Lyrical cinematic techniques that reflect themes/emotion of film
- Examples: Night and Fog, Sans Soleil, Regret to Inform, Tarnation



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