



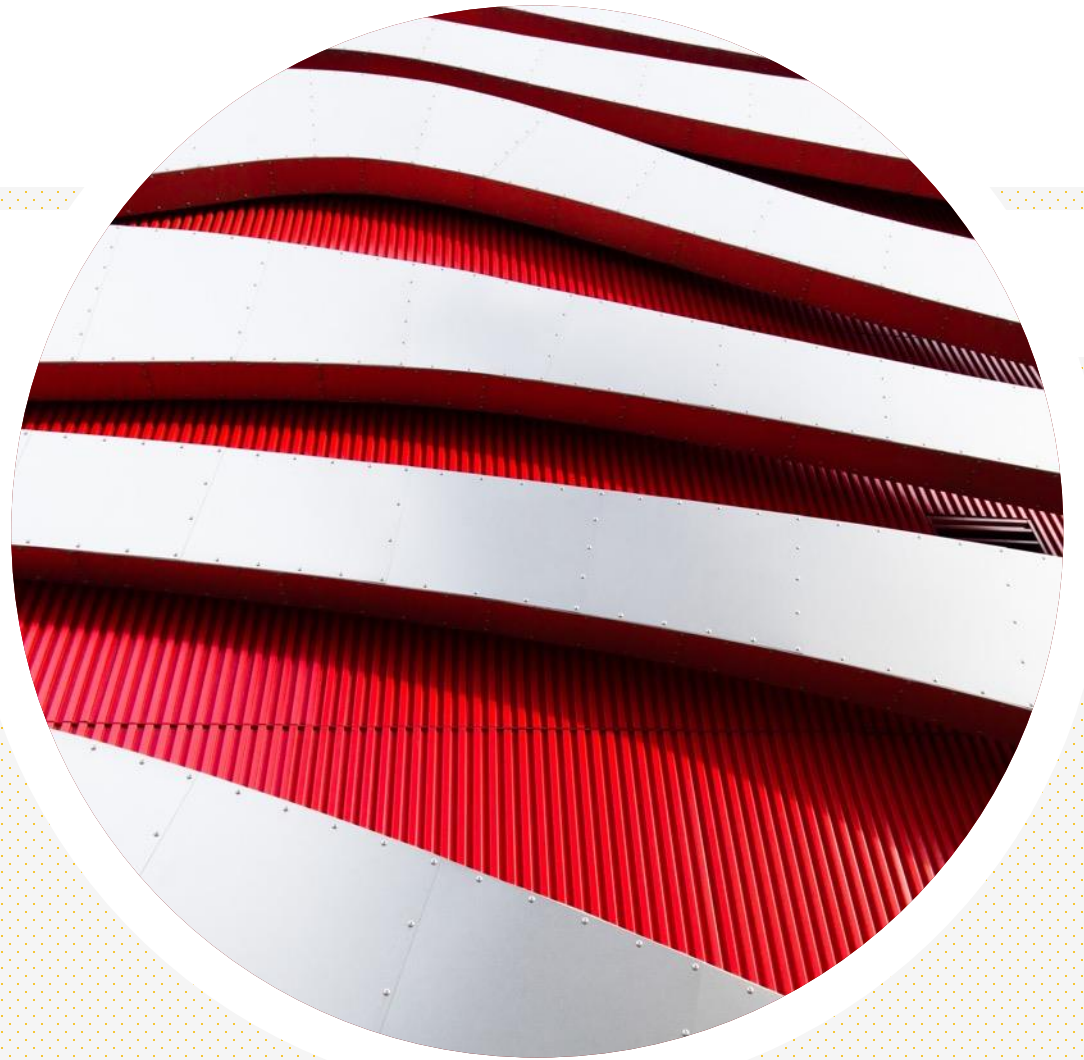
Elements of a Documentary

Friday, Sept 14th

Today's goals & focus questions:

- analyze how visual texts differ from printed texts
- Identify the elements within a documentary
- ▶ -determine a main idea for a documentary clip

- *How do we analyze a story in a film?
- *What strategies can we use to determine the main idea?



What is a Documentary?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uG5j9HJOMrk>



What is a ► Documentary?

Key words???

“A documentary film is a nonfictional motion picture intended to document some aspect of reality, primarily for the purposes of instruction, education, or maintaining a historical record.”

~ Wikipedia

OBJECTIVE

- Objective, or objectivity, is when something is without opinion, only facts
- An objective summary tells what happens, and ONLY what happens
- Example: Liberty is a short story about a girl who sacrifices her dog for a greater freedom.

vs.

BIAS

- Bias is when something contains opinions
- If an article or documentary contains bias, it means that have a preference or opinion that they are displaying in their text.
- Example: Liberty is a great short story about a trouble-making and annoying girl who honorably sacrifices her dog for a greater freedom in the wonderful country of the U.S.



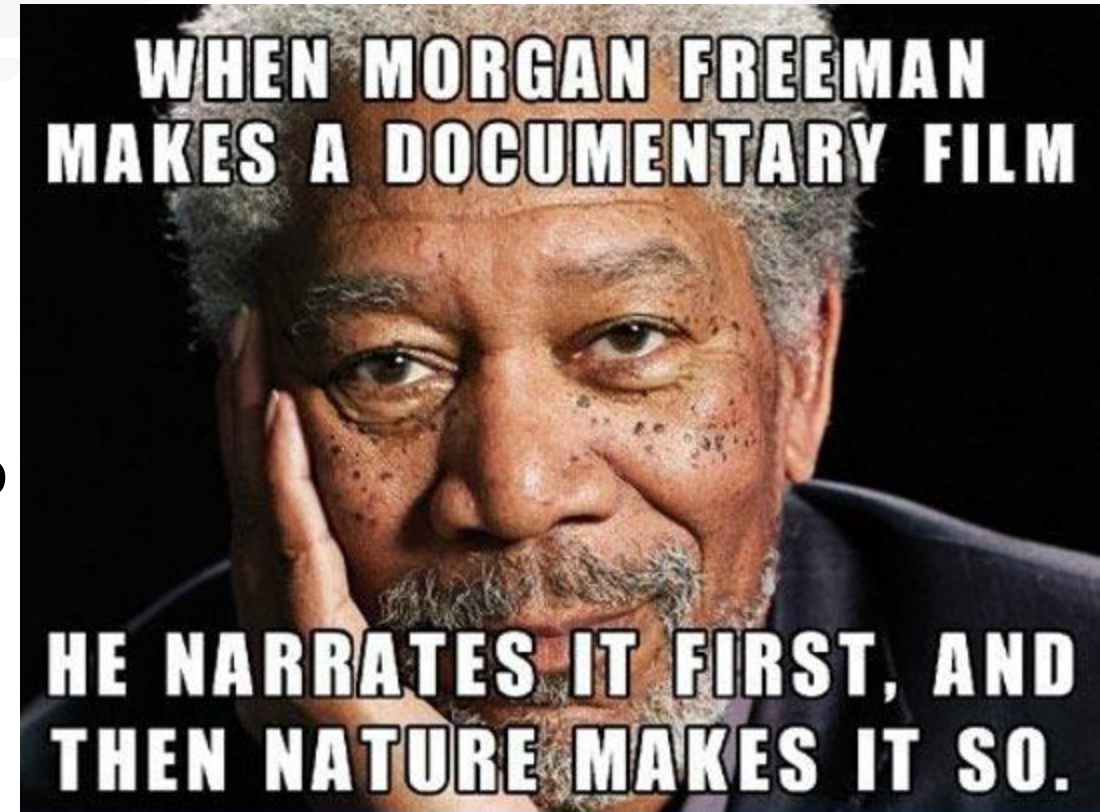
The 6 elements of a documentary

- Narration
- Evidence
 - Interview
 - Expert Witness
- Cutaways
- Footage:
 - Still Shots
 - “Cinema Verite” –Live Action
 - Primary footage
 - Archival footage

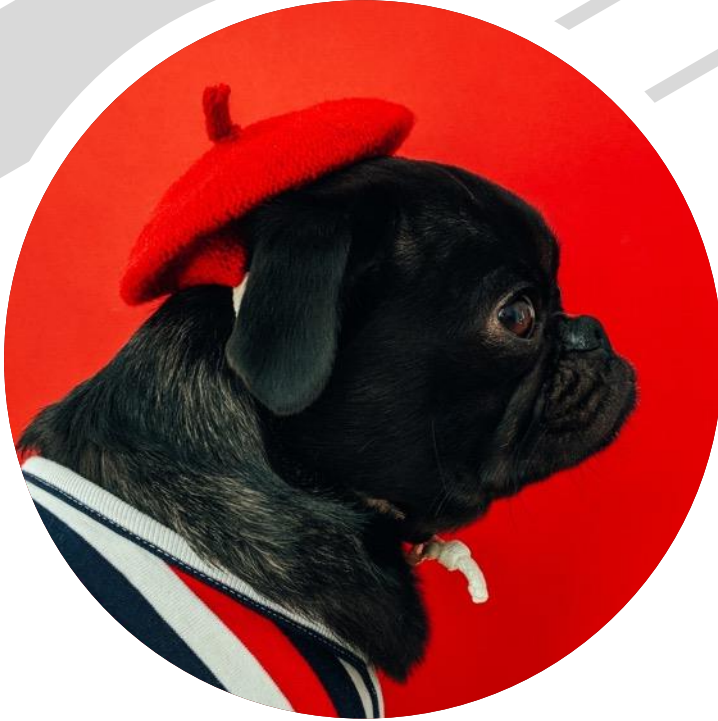


Narration:

- Aka: The Voice of God
- This is the voice-over heard in the movie
- In narrative films (think Disney) voice-over offers exposition and personal comments.
- BUT On documentaries voice-over is used to state unquestionable truths.
- If you hear the sentence “There are only 80 pandas left in the entire world” spoken by a deep voice, you will believe it.
- That’s the reason why most narrators are men and many from Britain – apparently the British accent is more persuasive than American English. Unless you’re Morgan Freeman...



Evidence



- Because Documentaries are presenting real life, they sometimes have to present evidences or documentation to make their point convincingly.
- The sources need to be legitimate
- Newspaper articles, bank statements, government records, surveillance footage are all fair game for the filmmaker because they carry the weight of truth.
- For the most part, at least. Occasionally, directors may intentionally misuse documents and take it out of context to mislead the audience.



Evidence (2 types)

- **Interviews:** Provide evidence when the filmmakers might not have been able to film.
 - Example: Film about a title 1 school and the “history” at the school.
- **Expert Witness:** is anyone that has great knowledge on the subject that they are testifying on.
- Example: film about decline of wild pandas from a film-maker who studied film and journalism in college.

Logo here



Cutaways



- In film and video, a cutaway shot is the interruption of a continuously filmed action by inserting a view of something else.
- It is usually, although not always, followed by a cut back to the first shot, when the cutaway avoids a jump cut.
- The cutaway shot does not necessarily contribute any dramatic content of its own, but is used to help the editor assemble a longer sequence.
- For this reason, editors choose cutaway shots related to the main action, such as another action or object in the same location.
- For example, if the main shot is of a man walking down an alley, possible cutaways may include a shot of a cat on a nearby dumpster or a shot of a person watching from a window overhead.
- These can **tell a story without narration, use shots to evoke emotion, or as fillers between “chapters”**

Footage

- A length of film
- Still Shots
 - Photograph within a film
- Cinema Verite (Live Action)
 - Filming whatever is going on
 - Filmmakers are not interacting
- Primary footage
 - Footage that the filmmakers shoot themselves
- Archival Footage
 - Footage from someone else
 - Usually paid for or in “free-use”
 - Typically older footage, footage from local stations, etc.



Documentary

► Modes

Aka, subgenres of documentaries





Documentary Modes

- *In documentary film and video, we can identify six modes of representation that function something like sub-genres of the documentary genre itself: poetic, expository, participatory, observational, reflexive, performative.*
- *These six modes establish a loose framework of affiliation within which individuals may work; they set up conventions that a given film may adopt; and they provide specific expectations viewers anticipate having fulfilled.*

Poetic

- Instead of using traditional linear continuity to create story structure, the poetic documentary filmmaker arrives at its point by arranging footage in an order to evoke an audience association through **tone, rhythm, or spatial juxtaposition**.
- These films often bear a close resemblance to experimental and avant-garde film.
- Following in the tradition of Godfrey Reggio's [*Qatsi Trilogy*](#), Ron Fricke's breathtaking 70mm [*Samsara*](#) is a fine example.

Expository Documentary

- constructs a specific argument or a point of view for the audience.
- This is the model that is most often associated with documentary in general.
- The structure is grounded in a series of assertions backed up by evidence.
- The assertions are presented through verbal commentary from an invisible voice-over narrator, while images provide the evidence.
- Generally, the formula is a resonating, authoritative voice (like the silky baritone of Morgan Freeman in March of the Penguins) that tells you something with corresponding footage proving that it is, indeed, true.

Observational Documentary

- In reaction to previous forms of documentary and to changing camera technology, both Direct Cinema and Cinema Verite movements started to appear in the 1960s that embraced observational documentary -- that is, the filmmaker observing truth by letting the camera capture its subjects uninterrupted.
- **This mode uses the observations of an unobtrusive camera to create direct engagement with the everyday life of subjects.**
- The seminal film Salesman from the Maysles Brothers and Charlotte Zwerin features all the skinny ties, cigarettes, and oversized bibles you could ever want as seen in this brilliant trailer.

Participatory Documentary

- Around the same time as Direct Cinema style of observing without interfering showed up, so did the opposite sensibility.
- This mode emphasizes the **interaction between filmmaker and subjects**.
- These films usually take the form of a **series of interviews** or other forms of even more direct involvement from conversations to provocations.
- **Archival footage** to examine historical issues is also included.
- The first-person storytelling accounts shared with Errol Morris in his breakout film The Thin Blue Line should be in every filmmaker's must-watch queue

Reflexive Documentary

- Reflexive documentary is not about the relationship with the filmmaker and the subject, but rather the filmmaker and the audience.
- This mode, which includes the mockumentary format, calls attention to **the assumptions and conventions** that govern documentary filmmaking to **increase our awareness** of how films construct representations of **reality**.
- Showing the man (or woman) behind the curtain to the audience should shake the core of the whole damned process of storytelling, as in Sarah Polley's masterful Stories We Tell.

Performative Documentary

- Showing up in the 1980s along with the reflexive sub-genre, the performative documentary emphasizes truth as relative, favoring a personal take over the objective lens.
- This mode highlights the **subjective or expressive** aspect of the **filmmaker's own involvement** with a subject to **heighten the audience's responsiveness** to the subject and to this involvement.
- These films **reject objectivity** and **favor emotion**.
- You can see the subjective poetics of autobiographical experience in the trailer for Marlon Riggs' Tongues Untied.



Watch Film, take notes

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1jvtiVIW5zQ>





You try!

- Watch the following example films, and try to identify the parts.
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kRhJJzylHvw> (10)



THANK YOU

Sources:

<https://nofilmschool.com/2015/09/nichols-6-modes-documentary-can-help-expand-your-storytelling>

<https://www.meridianstories.com/archive/resources/creative-how-to-guides/six-principal-modes-of-documentary-filmmaking/>