



The Development of Documentary Film Language from the Silent Era to the Present

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ABSTRACT:

Documentary films are aesthetical representations of actual material or the direct sound recorded with video and presented aesthetically with the help of editing. The language of fiction film is very close to that of documentaries, as these two are the audio-visuals. Prior to the film made by Robert Flaherty, *The Nanook of the North* people used to call documentary films by different names, like academic film, Exotica etc. Documentary film has been around for 100 years. From the silent era to the sound era, it covers a long way, and the means of communication to the audience have changed with the time. Silent documentaries or sound documentaries, God voice documentaries to synk sound only diegetic sound documentaries, auteur documentaries have taken place. This paper will examine the evolution of documentary film and the changes in its form and language of representation through an examination of the works of some notable documentary filmmakers from various eras.

Key words: *Documentary film, film language, Robert Flaherty, Michal Moor, Jan Luc Godard, Errol Morris, Bill Nichols.*

Introduction:

In this paper, we analyse the works of master documentary makers from various different eras and discuss their perspectives of documentary. We will start from Robert Flaherty and his silent documentary with title card and the way he establishes the documentary film itself that is one of the impotent historic events in the part of documentary studies. Bill Nichols is another film maker and documentary theoretician has given some idea about different modes of documentary we are going to discuss this also. Errol Morris and his films like *Thin blue line* and his idea about documentary and application of new concepts will be discussed in the paper then Michal Moor one of the auteur documentary film maker would be discussed in the paper and Jan Luc Godard and his last master piece image book will be discussed.

In the teen years and early 1920s, modern art and journalism had a significant impact on the documentary style, from Realism, which produced the appearance or impression of reality, to newsreels, which offered both archival material and recreations of real-life events. During the Second World War in the 1930s and 1940s, propoganda techniques were developed, while later in the 1950s and 1960s, Cinema Verite expanded the subject, technique, and approach of documentaries. Cinema vérité was thought of as an antidote for filmmakers who were constrained by the big studios, allowing them to shoot on location, utilise handheld cameras, include light and synchronised sound, and work with smaller crews. Later, documentaries continued to question the established quo, frequently reflecting the political climate and counterculture movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Documentarians are seeing an increase in their visibility and prospects due to the audience's always expanding demand for new and unique information, according to Slate.

In 2016, 73% of Netflix customers watched a documentary. 68 million people, to be exact. 34 million individuals streamed *Tiger King* in within the first 10 days of its release, when the world seemed to end in 2020 due to the COVID-19 epidemic. Documentaries can generate global dialogues and trends in ways that weren't previously conceivable with an audience that size.

Robert Flaherty:

He was referred to as "The Father of Documentary Film" for his work on this movie, despite all the controversy his films generated upon and shortly after his debut. Flaherty's narrative of *Nanook and his family* is the product of a second effort at an exploration of Canada's Hudson Bay. Even though it was produced under difficult conditions—the film was developed in the tundra—it turned out to be one of the period's most technologically advanced movies. By stating that the movie "combined realistic, stark, and wonderfully created imagery with a loose story line and a compelling focal character," The Museum of Modern Art emphasises this description of the movie. The more contentious elements of his filmmaking are also discussed, and it is acknowledged that "the film continues to raise problems regarding the objectivity of the documentary genre with its fictionalisation of real-life events and Flaherty's romanticization of his subject."

Michael Moore

Michael Moore's films are known for their highly subjective viewpoints. Since the beginning, he has narrated tales that are somehow related to him. He even opened *Roger and Me* with tales of his youth spent playing in the shadow of the GM factory, which would later be shut down, as shown in home movies and photographs. The movie was filmed in Flint, Michigan, his hometown.

Additionally, he has a reputation for manipulating the facts in movies to support his point of view. He has even gone as far as to combine quotes from disparate speeches, edit them together, and intercut them with still images to hide discrepancies in locale and attire. Another example of this type of editorial splicing can be seen in the movie when he displays a newspaper story that purports to demonstrate that Charlton Heston had plans to visit Flint 48 hours after a shooting. In order to give the impression that Heston was going to visit Michigan but would disregard the shooting of Kayla Rolland, the story has been purposefully highlighted or buried. Truth be told, the phrase in question was from President Clinton expressing his desire for increased gun control in the wake of the shooting (Hardy, 2002). Once more, criticism of his level of editorialising has increased with each new film he produces.

9/11 is discussed in the film's first scene, which follows the opening credits. The sole kind of description for the event, though, is audio. In order to avoid reliving the upsetting visuals, the video is omitted in order to encourage viewers to conjure up the images in their minds. A woman is seen screaming and pleading when the film eventually resumes "Lord, keep them from perishing. Lord, save them from perishing." New Yorkers who have experienced tragedy can be seen looking up in terror, melancholy, and fear in the photographs that follow. Moore doesn't, however, depict the towers burning. The sorrow of the onlookers is sufficient to evoke recollections of our own sorrow at first learning of the catastrophe.

Errol Morris:

Errol Morris is a documentary filmmaker who concentrates on the language of his subjects, whether they are heads of state or worm farmers. The expert's verbal construction of his own competence matches Morris' effort to depict the subjective malleability of reality. Morris's subjects provide varying examples of the expert both inside and outside of the dominant power system because they are lost in the imaginary worlds they have constructed in their heads. Morris explores how the power of words enables his subjects to become authorities in any field they choose, whether it be real or made up. Morris incorporates narrative components into his movies. These include, but are not limited to, re-enactment, musical soundtrack, and stylized lighting. Many documentary filmmakers who adopted the previous generations' cinema vérité technique reject the usage of these components.

Jan Luc Godard:

The *Image Book* is made up of a number of movies, paintings, and musical compositions that are connected by narration and extra original footage by Godard and Anne-Marie Miéville, in keeping with the rest of Godard's late-period oeuvre. The film explores the history of cinema and its failure to acknowledge the atrocities of the 20th and 21st centuries (specifically the Holocaust, ISIS, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict), the responsibilities of the filmmaker, and the advancements in political discourse with the introduction of consumer-grade digital cameras and iPhones, much like his earlier series *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (and sometimes using some of the exact same film quotes).

The *Image Book* is the recognisable Godard irony-mosaic of clips and fragments, complete with sloganized, gnomic text, puns in brackets, abrupt fades-to-black, unpredictable, unsynchronized sound cues that seem to have been edited quite without the usual concern for aural seamlessness, and vast, declamatory orchestral chords.

A significant portion of Godard's cinematic lexicon may now have been appropriated by cultural theorists or conceptual artists. The grandeur that only cinema, only the phenomena of people gathered in the dark in front of a giant screen, can express, however, is something that Godard consistently insists upon.

Conclusion:

We have discussed the work of Robert Flaherty, Michal Moor, Jan Luc Godard, and Errol Morris. They are all important contributors to documentary film making, or we can say documentary film language matured with the help of these people's work. Robert Flaherty the man who made the film *Nanook of the north* was staged a bit instead of that the film has become one of the important film of all time. The term "documentary" was first used by John Grierson in relation to Flaherty's 1926 film *Moana*. Then comes Michal Moor and Errol Morris, these two people used staged things as well to explain the reality or to make the reality more real Infront of viewers. Moor was the person who said that the term Documentary is dead now, we all are film makers, All of the documentary filmmaking approaches have been used by him. Morris criticised several times by film schoolers for his staged shooting. Instead, his movies did well at the box office. He is the first filmmaker whose documentaries were commercially successful. Based on a real-life occurrence from 1953, Errol Morris' 2017 Netflix original series *Wormwood* has become very popular among Netflix viewers. The documentary "Image book" by Jan Luc Godard upends all preconceived notions about the subject. It can be viewed as an audio-visual portrayal of reality using vérité, magic reality, poetic representation, and traditional modes of representation. *Image Book* is among the clearest illustrations of how the language of documentary filmmaking is evolving through time. In the upcoming years, we can anticipate greater innovation in the field of documentary filmmaking.

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