

DOCUMENTARY Brian Winston January

2009 The term 'documentary' to describe a particular class of non-fiction film comes into general use in English by the early 1930s, but films having the characteristics of what would come to be regarded as documentaries pre-existed the application of the word. The concept of the photograph as a document in the sense of the image being accurate and faithful evidence of what is before the camera's lens dates from the outset of the introduction of the technology in the 1840s. With the coming of cinematography, the camera's capacity to capture the 'real' was its initial selling point and, although, the cinema was soon captured for fiction, coverage of news events, actualities (as the French termed them), continued. Films of travel 'travelogues' (from 1908) or 'documentaires romancés' and the first ethnographic film appeared (1911), as did scientific movies both popular (Cheese Mites, 1903, Charles Urban) and scholarly (Mechanics of the Brain, 1926, Vesvolod Pudovkin's footage shot in Pavlov's lab). Governments were quick to see film's value as propaganda (Urban's

Battle of the Somme, 1916); so were charities (Save the Children's Russian Famine, 1921). European artists, such as the painter Fernand Léger, experimented with the manipulation of images of the everyday often in a non-narrative form (Ballet mécanique, 1924). Overall, though, non-fiction film was resistant to the growing sophistication of the fictional cinema's narrative techniques.

'Documentary' came to describe a specific non-fiction cinema that melded the camera's ability to document the world with fiction's compelling narratives, but without so manipulating the original material that its claim on the real would become attenuate. Edward Curtis' In the Land of the Headhunters (1914), for instance, combined non-actors (aka 'real' people), authentic settings and costumes (albeit in Curtis' established still-photographic style of recreations of the immediate past) with a fictional story that had no relationship with the Kwakiutl culture he was supposedly recording. He saw the work, nevertheless, as 'documenting', in some sense or another, Native American reality (Holm and Quimby, 1980). Robert Flaherty, a prospector filming in the Canadian Arctic, failed in his earliest attempts to move beyond what he described as 'a scene of this and a scene of that'. no story (Christopher, 2005:322); but Headhunters showed him how. In 1920/21, with specialised technology (hand-cranked Akeley cameras specifically designed for use in the wild), Flaherty filmed a dramatic 20 year-old true Inuit story of survival. He cast a trapper, Allakarialuk, renamed for the film 'Nanook', as the hero of his reconstruction of this tale. Leaving Curtis' fictional story-telling behind, Flaherty's breakthrough was to

realise that footage of real people in real (even reconstructed) situations could be edited into an exciting narrative, essentially by the use of intertitles. The film, which Flaherty not only shot but also, with the help of the Inuit, developed in the Arctic, was *Nanook of the North*. It is, conventionally, considered as the first documentary and it was an amazing commercial success. A brief vogue for dramatised features of the travelogue type followed (e.g. *Grass: A Nation's Battle for Life* (1926) shot in Persia by Ernest Schoedsack and Merian Cooper). In post-revolutionary Russia, *Kinoglaz: Zhizn vrasplokh* / *Kino Eye: Life Caught Unaware* (Dziga Vertov aka Boris Kaufman 1924), was, he claimed, the world's first attempt to create a film-object without the participation of actors, artists, directors; without using a studio, sets, costumes. All members of the cast continue to do what they usually do in life (Vertov, 1984:34). But not straightforwardly so: for example, to illustrate as vividly as possible how much effort is required to make a loaf of bread, Vertov edited film of the process running backwards, starting with the load and finishing with the wheat being harvested. His *rhythm of the city* film, *Chelovek s kino-apparatom* / *The Man with the Movie Camera* (1929), added to a montage of city scenes (as in, for example, [HYPERLINK "http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berlin:_Symphony_of_a_Great_City"](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berlin:_Symphony_of_a_Great_City) Berlin: *Die Sinfonie der Großstadt* / *Berlin: symphony of a city*, 1929, made by avant-garde abstract film pioneers Walter Ruttmann and Hans Richter) footage of his own production process shots of the cameraman and the editor at work. Less challenging in form but also of lasting importance was [HYPERLINK "http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0018246/"](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0018246/) *Padenie dinastii Romanovykh* / *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* (1927), Esfir Shub's brilliantly re-edited pioneering compilation of the fallen Tzar's home movies and newsreel footage. As the initial attraction of full-length features faded, so did these possibilities. Already by 1926, Famous Players Lasky, having commissioned Flaherty's second film *Moana: A Tale of the South Seas*, had hesitated to release it; but, after all, *Nanook* itself had been sponsored by a fur-company. Documentarists could look for funding outside of the box-office. The term *documentary* was now coming into general use. John Grierson, in a New York newspaper review of *Moana*, had written of that film's documentary value. Grierson, who was Scottish, upon his return to the UK, established a publicly-funded production unit dedicated to moulding film of witnessed -- or of reconstructed (i.e. pre-witnessed) -- everyday events into satisfying, and instructive, narratives. Grierson's activities established in the UK a documentary movement making short films for a variety of organisations from the post-office (e.g. *Nightmail* 1936, Harry Watt and Basil Wright) to the energy utility companies (e.g. *Housing Problems*, 1935, Edgar Anstey and Arthur Elton) to the shipping industry (*Shipyard*, 1935, Paul

Rotha) and beyond. The vocabulary of the documentary was being firmly established -- observed footage, voice-over commentary, explanatory graphics, added sound effects and music. Synchronous ◆ direct - sound, though, challenged the filmmakers ◆ capacity to avoid reconstruction. Nevertheless, it was essayed, first in the Soviet Union where Shub used interviews in KShE/ Komsomal: Pioneer of Electrification (1932) as did Vertov in Tri Prisni ni Lenin/Three Songs of Lenin two years later. The first interviews in English were in Housing Problems. On the whole, documentarists were uncomfortable with sync dialogue scenes. Even if based on prior witness, sync shooting produced often embarrassed performances by the non-actors involved. The British work was well received by cin ◆ philes world-wide, but it failed to find a mass audience. Although it was perceived as being radical in its politics, it was attacked at the time for running away from ◆ social meaning ◆ (Rotha, 1973:30). To its left (in a decade noted for its political polarisation), a small group of independent oppositional filmmakers, organised primarily into the Workers Film and Photo League, produced a political engaged, if often technically inept, body of newsreel and documentary work. This pattern was to be repeated in the later 1930s in the United States where Pare Lorenz, funded by Rooseveltian New Deal agencies, made five films, most notably The Plow That Broke the Plains (1936) and The River (1938). Critical opinion sees the final sequences of these films outlining New Deal solutions to the Great Depression as embarrassing add-ons to otherwise poetically exceptional works; but they are the logical outcome of Lorentz ◆ s editorial position.

Lorentz ◆ s crew on Plow, Ralph Steiner, Leo Hurwitz and Paul Strand, were not happy at what they saw as, indeed, an avoidance of ◆ social meaning ◆. They turned to the left, to the American Film and Photo-League and its successor organisations. Sponsors, however supposedly ◆ enlightened ◆ (i.e. non-interfering), always nevertheless obtained the film they paid for. The Nazis got Triumph des Willens/Triumph of the Will (1935, Leni Riefenstahl) a lengthy paean of praise to dehumanising fascism while the radical government in Mexico, for example, hired Paul Strand to make Redes/The Wave (1936) on the plight on poor exploited fishermen. (Reifenstahl is also responsible for the feature length sports documentary, the equally triumphalist two-part Olympia (1938) being the first of these.) Emblematic of the close connection of sponsorship and movie was the career of Joris Ivens. His early poetic films (e.g. Regen/Rain 1926), funded by film-club enthusiasts, rapidly gave way to commercial sponsorship (e.g. Symphonie industriell/Industrial Symphony - aka Philips-Radio - 1931) from which he just as quick to turn away. Mis ◆ re au Borinage/Misery in the Borinage (1933), the recreation of a bitter strike in the Belgian coalfield was again a film club production (Ivens, 1969:88 n. 216). 55 years of nomadic filmmaking all over the world followed but, like almost all documentarists before the coming of television, he never found substantial, steady and unencumbered funding. Given the sponsorship tradition, though, it was easy for the documentary to fit into World War II propaganda efforts. In Britain, government-funded feature length documentaries reappeared in the cinemas, often dealing with the same subjects as fictional films and doing so more effectively.

Fires Were Started (1943), for example, used real firemen to create a picture of their life during the first London Blitz and was more successful than a fictional feature film on the same topic (*The Bells Go Down*, 1943, Basil Dearden). *Fires* was made by Humphrey Jennings, whose small oeuvre contains the most complex documentaries, in terms of their elaborate associative montage and layered sound tracks, of the era (e.g. *Diary for Timothy*, 1944). In the United States, major Hollywood directors turned their hand to documentary (e.g. Frank Capra's *Why We Fight* series, 1942-5; or John Huston's *Battle of San Pietro*, 1945). Overall, the documentary emerged from the conflict with its value well-established. In the post-war years, Griersonians were, for example, to establish government film units all over the British Commonwealth along the lines of the National Film Board of Canada which Grierson himself had created in 1938. Despite this, in general, official production, never welcomed by the film industries of the democracies, was cut back. For smaller nations, which could otherwise not support a feature film industry, documentary allowed for a measure of local activity; in the Netherlands, for example. Such shorts became a staple of art-house programming (e.g. Bert Haanstra's commentary-less study of glass-blowers, *Glas/Glass* 1958). Nowhere, though, was documentary production secure. In France, a group of documentarists moved to prevent the introduction of the double-feature which would have excluded their work from the cinemas. They preserved the continental European poetic tradition of impressionistic studies, e.g. George Franju's picture of a slaughter-house (*Le Sang des bêtes/The Blood of Beasts*) or Alan Resnais' haunting evocation of the Holocaust (*Nuit et brillard/ Night and Fog*) both 1955. Otherwise, apart from Disney's anthropomorphic nature films, the occasional bizarre collection of exotic human excesses (*Mondo Carnei*, 1962, [HYPERLINK "http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0415059/"](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0415059/) Gualtiero Jacopetti) or endurance (*Conquest of Everest*, 1952, George Lowe), and the quadrennial Olympics movie (joined by the world soccer cup feature from 1974 on), documentary more or less disappeared from the cinema. The naive assumption of enlightened commercial sponsorship proved illusory. *Free Cinema* was created in Britain by the next generation to combat the seriousness of the Griersonian oeuvre, with topics such as a teenage dance (*Momma Don't Allow* 1955 Karel Reisz and Tony Richardson); but the sponsorship trap could not be avoided. All the trucks in *Every Day Except Christmas*, Lindsay Anderson's 1957 study of Covent Garden (then London's fruit and vegetable market), were Fords -- except for one old jalopy: Ford Motor Company paid for the film. By the 1960s, this generation, British and French, was abandoning the documentary for fiction. Television, though, was already mounting a rescue. Although a mass audience still proved elusive, documentaries became a touchstone of medium's commitment to quality public service. Only a little of this directly reflected Jennings' stylistic complexity: Denis Mitchell's *Morning in the Streets*, 1959, for example, is a perfect throwback. On

the whole, television was to develop other aspects of the tradition more thoroughly. Following Schubert's lead, really for the first time, the historical compilation documentary, beginning with NBC's *Victory at Sea* (1956, Henry Salomon and others) became a staple. The nature documentary, too, found a welcome on the small screen. Television has also been engaged for decades in producing supposedly definitive authored series on a variety of topics such as Kenneth Clark's *Civilisation* (1969) or Jacob Bronowski's *The Ascent of Man* (1973) both for the BBC; or Carl Sagan's *Cosmos* (1980) for US public television. The main strand of documentary on the small screen, however, has been long-form news-features in branded slots. CBS Reports was to run for more than three decades after 1959 and in its archive are some of American television's finest moments: *Hunger in America* (1968), for example, or *The Selling of the Pentagon* (1971). As public service requirements were removed by broadcasting deregulation in 1980s such series disappeared from all the US terrestrial networks; but elsewhere, even with declining audience numbers, the news documentary remains established as a mark of public service. If sponsorship was removed as a problem by television, reconstruction was not. Indeed, the emerging emphasis on documentary as a species of, essentially, television journalism exacerbated the problem. Reconstruction and journalism do not mix; but it was the next generation of North American documentarists themselves who, frustrated at being unable, because of inappropriate technology, to fulfil Vertov's instruction to 'show us life', led the charge against reconstruction. Using hand-held 16mm equipment they developed Direct Cinema, an observational approach that minimised the interventions of the filmmaker. The Direct Cinema group (primarily Richard Leacock, D.A. Pennebaker, Al and David Maysels, Robert Drew) began by revisiting Grierson's agenda of social concerns from politics (*Primary*, 1960); to race relations (*The Children Are Watching* 1960); to foreign affairs (*Yankee No!* 1960); and capital punishment (*The Chair*, 1962). Direct Cinema also extended the range of documentary subjects with the 'rockumentary' (*Lonely Boy* 1962, Wolf Koenig and Roman Kroitor; *Don't Look Back*, 1963, D.A. Pennebaker) and facilitated, for the first time in documentary's history, invasions of private intimacies (e.g. *A Married Couple*, 1969, Alan King; *An American Family*, 1973, Sue and Alan Raymond). Rules, a dogma, emerged: no interviews, commentary, artificial lights, added sound. That these injunctions were not always obeyed did not prevent exaggerated claims of evidential purity being made. Fred Wiseman said of Direct Cinema: 'you have to make up your own mind about what is going on. You are not being spoon-fed or told what to think about this or that' (Halberstadt, 1976:301). Nevertheless, whatever the lengths gone to during shooting to avoid mediation, manipulation in the editing room was essential to create absorbing narratives – the essence of documentary since Flaherty. Direct Cinema practitioners dismissed all previous reconstructed work but were soon themselves attacked. Most telling was the ease with which their supposed

authenticity could be faked in mockumentaries (e.g. David Holzman's Diary, 1967, Jim McBride). The French approach to the new equipment (which they, with the New York group and the National Film Board of Canada, had developed) was to combat such cynicism by integrating images of as much of the production process as possible into the documentary itself. In the year of *Primary*, Jean Rouch, an anthropologist frustrated by the limitations of ethnographic film, released *Chronique d'un été*/Chronicle of a Summer (with Edgar Morin). It too used the new lightweight 16mm equipment to explore, in a series of encounters arranged by the filmmakers, the mentality -- the mind-set of the French. Unlike the North Americans, Rouch was not seeking to avoid intervention. On the contrary, his Cinema Vérité approach depended on it. He was searching for a way to use film to document the inner-lives of ordinary people, whether in Paris or in Africa. The climax of *Chronique* finds all the participants of the film sitting in a viewing room, after watching a rough-cut of the picture, discussing the truthfulness of their portraits. However, Morin's final on-camera comment -- "we are in hot water" indicated that Cinema Vérité was no more able to avoid the authenticity, or any other, problem than was Direct Cinema. Documentary remained in hot water. For the public, whenever it failed to meet expectations, it was not because these were actually incapable of performance (which they were) but rather because of the filmmakers' failings. Public opinion completely bought Direct Cinema's authenticity rhetoric and, indeed, extended its dogme. Eventually, even departures in the final assembly of a film from the order in which the sequences were actually shot, not part of the original set of rules, were deemed to compromise documentary value. Older standard procedures, such as cross-cutting reverse angles taken at different times, were all deemed to be unacceptable. Unannounced reconstruction was definitely forbidden. This was despite the fact that Direct Cinema's dogme had been diluted by television into *vérité*, a style that promiscuously mixed all the older interventionist techniques with Direct Cinema's non-interventionist observationalism. The public, in effect, were holding documentarists to their own claim of authenticity, turning that into something of a millstone. Paradoxically, this public insistence on truth began to emerge as French film theory was declaring that, in the words of Christian Metz: "every film is a fiction film" (1982:47). Post-modernist thinking was ever more quizzical about the authenticity of the image. In the face of this, some (Noel Carroll, for example 1996:283ff) strenuously reasserted documentary's claim on the real while others proposed more sophisticated explanations of the documentary's difference that made a difference (Bill Nichols, 1991:7). These arguments were largely unsatisfactory

since all depended, in the final analysis, on the image's referential integrity (Hill, 2007:139) which can never be guaranteed especially in the emerging age of digital image manipulation. More than that, Morin's hot water also had an ethical dimension. The exploitation of the documentary subject had not figured in professional discourse and had barely surfaced in academic debate, but it became a central concern for documentary studies as the new millennium began. Anglophone documentarists, though, remained largely unconcerned with issues of theory or ethics. Instead, by the mid-1980s, they were chaffing at the restrictions Direct Cinema imposed upon them. Films recovering techniques eschewed during the quarter century of Direct Cinema's dominance began to appear: Errol Morris deliberately used 35mm and film noir production values in a miscarriage of justice documentary (*Thin Blue Line*, 1988). Space was found for previously excluded feminist or ethnic voices, often seeking new aesthetic forms to express their concerns as in Michelle Citron's *Daughter Rite* (1980) or Marlon Rigg's *Tongues Untied* (1990). Others autobiographically explored their own personal histories (e.g. *Sherman's March: A Mediation to the Possibility of Romantic Love in the South During an Era of Nuclear Weapons Proliferation*, 1986, Ross McElwee). Radical ethnographic film gave voice to First Peoples with anti-colonialist ethnographers acting as their advocates. In Canada, the Film Board handed the new video cameras to the public in the *Challenge for Change/Pour une société nouvelle* program (1969).

By

1991, the BBC were enabling the public make their own videos for Video Diaries. As the millennium drew to a close, with the arrival of new media platforms, the documentarist as artist, journalist or advocate was on occasion excluded altogether. Instead there was viewer content produced by the audience itself. Meanwhile, the politically engaged retrieved a 1930s tradition of committed works (e.g. *Night Cleaners*, 1975, Berwick Street Collective or *Seeing Red*, 1983, Julia Reichert and James Klein). Michael Moore adopted a satiric tone, seen for example in the anti-war *The Atomic Cafe* (1982 Jayne Loader and Kevin and Pierce Rafferty), for *Roger and Me* (1987), an attack on deindustrialisation in the USA. This had an unexpected popular theatrical success which, re-enforced by the attention paid to documentary at the Sundance Film Festival, caused a small but persistent revival of cinema distribution for a few feature documentaries.

Humour had never been part of Grierson's repertoire but others, notably Mark Lewis, also made it central; his *Cane Toads* (1987) not only documented an ecological disaster, it did so hilariously and unforgettably. Outside documentary's Anglophone heartlands, the impressionistic European tradition was continued by, for example, *Christ Marker* (e.g. his meditation on memory, *Sans Soleil/Sunless* 1983) or Werner Herzog in his unexpectedly poetic study of the first Gulf War (*Lektionen in Fensternis/Lessons of Darkness*, 1991). The collapse of Soviet communism led to a flowering of documentary in Eastern Europe often more in pre- than post-Direct Cinema modes (e.g. *Belovi/The Belovs*, 1993, Victor Kossakovsky). Elsewhere, in other parts of Europe previously not given to documentary production (e.g. Austria or Finland) or in Latin America or, more

recently, in the Middle East, documentary production traditions were being established. Even television was affected. Journalistic *vérité* series were threatened but developments. For example *docusoap*, which usually cross-cut short scenes of institutional life across several episodes in soap opera fashion, enjoyed a popularity never before achieved by the small screen documentary. With colourful and often socially effective *real* characters, they also avoided the victimhood which had become a mark of the mainstream documentary subject. Docudrama (drama documentary), where prior witness in the form of detailed memoir or actual transcript was used to recreate, with professional actors, an account of an event, also became a persistent presence in the schedules. Even animated illustrations of prior witnessed events were offered as documentary: Paul Ferlinger's astonishing cartoon of his privileged childhood as the son of a senior Czech communist *Drawn from Memory* (1995) was a most substantial pioneering effort. In the UK, a revived interest in the 1930s and 40s led to the use of poetic commentaries including the development of personalised songs for the subjects of documentaries to sing on camera a species of *docu-musical* (e.g. *Feltham Sings*, 2002, Brian Hill with lyrics by Simon Armitage involved young offenders in prison). Such vibrant proliferation suggests that the original vision of the documentary has become too limiting. It heralds a post-Griersonian era. The camera's ability to show us life remains whatever the theoretical difficulties of defining documentary, or the ethical dilemmas raised or, even, the threat to authenticity implicit in digital image manipulation. Grierson's implicit assumption that the image contains its own guarantee of authenticity must, though, now be abandoned. Instead, it must be up to the audience to find documentary value by determining whether documentary's structuring (or narrativising) of recorded aspects of observation is consonant with its everyday experience of the (non-intertextual) real. Carroll, No. 1 (1996), *Nonfiction Film and Postmodernist Skepticism* in *Post-Theory* (David Bordwell and No. 1 Carroll, eds.) (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press). Halberstadt, Ira (1976), *An Interview with Fred Wiseman*, in *Nonfiction Film: Theory and Criticism* (Richard Barsam, ed.) (New York, E. P. Dutton). Hill, Annette (2007), *Restyling Factual TV* (London, Routledge). Holm, Bill, and Quimby, George Irving (1980), *Edward S. Curtis in the Land of the War Canoes* (Seattle: University of Washington Press). Christian Metz (1977), *Le Signifiant imaginaire: Psychanalyse et Cinema* (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions) trans. Ben Brewster (1982) (Bloomington: Indiana University Press). Bill Nichols (1991), *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press). Rotha, Paul (1973), *Documentary Diary: An Informal History of the British Documentary Film, 1928-1939* (New York: Hill & Wang). Vertov, Dziga

(Denis Kaufman) (1984), *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov* (selected by Sergie Drobashenko, trans. K. O'Brien) (Berkeley: University of California Press). CINEMA VERITÉ was introduced by ethnographer Jean Rouch in a conscious

echo of the Soviet 1920s term *kinopravda*. Cinema Verité utilises hand-held, sync sound equipment (initially 16mm film) and available light, to penetrate beneath the surface (as did Vertov's *kino-eye*). In the later 1950s, Rouch had become increasingly frustrated by the limitations of ethnographic film and was experimenting in trying to document his subjects' inner lives (e.g. *Moi, un noir/Im black*, 1958). This project called for direct sound but, as he found in *La Pyramide hymaine/The Human Pyramid* (1959), where he brought black and white pupils in an African high school together, 35mm sync equipment killed spontaneity. In Paris in 1960 he was able to take advantage of the first silent-running (self-blimped) 16mm *clair* camera and a portable audio tape recorder to film the encounters he and co-director Edgar Morin arranged for *Chronique d'un été*. To ensure audiences understood their role, Rouch and Morin also filmed their own involvement exactly as Vertov had done in *Man with a Movie Camera*. This reflexivity became the mark of Cinema Verité in contrast to Direct Cinema's directly contrary intention of self-effacement. Especially in the English-speaking world, it was not much emulated; but Rouch's interventionism is one source of reality television. DIRECT CINEMA

(popularly: *fly-on-the-wall* documentary): Documentaries shot hand-held (initially on portable 16mm film equipment) using (ideally) only available light and sound. Commentary and interviews were also to be avoided. Throughout the 1950s frustration with the necessity of reconstruction caused by direct (sync) sound shooting increased until the search for more mobile equipment that would allow for available-light hand-held sync sound shooting became central. (Because of war-time combat footage, the hand-held camera, lacking the preternatural steadiness of studio mounts, had become a mark of authenticity.) By 1960 the technology was to hand and Direct Cinema was to dominate Anglophone documentary

production for the next three decades, its *rules* (or *dogme*) becoming, in the public mind, the essential marks of documentary authenticity. This dominance, however, moved the documentary more firmly than its pioneers had intended towards the journalistic. It curtailed both older documentary methods and inhibited the introduction of new ones. DOCUMENTARY FILM: DEFINITION.

Documentary refers to a specific approach to the utilisation of non-fiction image capture which balances the camera's capacity to record reality against the structuring of such material into narratives or logical arguments. It has been variously defined: *the creative treatment of actuality* (John Grierson, 1933): *all methods of recording on celluloid any aspect of reality interpreted either*

by factual shooting or by sincere and justifiable reconstruction, so as to appeal either to reason or emotion, for the purpose of stimulating the desire for, and the widening of human knowledge and understanding, and of truthfully posing problems and their solutions in the spheres of economics, culture and human relations (World Union of Documentary Filmmakers, 1948): aspects of the

observer's perception of what happened in the presence of the camera Richard Leacock (1974) which can be glossed as: the structuring (or narrativizing) of recorded aspects of observation. DOCUMENTARY FILM: TECHNOLOGY. Documentary

film has always been of marginal economic importance to the film industry and has therefore tended to adopt and adapt mainstream film technology. A rare exception to this was the introduction in 1915 of the Akeley, a rugged hand-cranked camera special designed for location shooting. Despite the coming of sound, silent footage could still be shot on comparatively small, non-blimped (i.e. noisy) 35mm tripod-mounted cameras and audio added later. Sync, on the other hand, required full-sized studio cameras, even larger optical sound recorders and, on location, massive generators and was therefore limited until the professional utilisation of 16mm post-World War II. Primarily driven by the needs of television newsfilm, 16mm's development in the 1950s finally caused documentarists to adopt what had been previously seen as an amateur gauge. (Although introduced in 1923, it had been largely ignored even after Kodak marketed a 16mm sound system in 1938.) TV news had adopted single system 16mm cameras (with sound recorded on a narrow magnetic strip on the celluloid replacing one set of sprockets). Attendant technologies portable battery-powered lights and editing machines with separate paths for celluloid and sprocketed audio-tape, fast film stocks (capable of working in low light levels) were also developed in response to broadcast news requirements throughout the later 1950s. Documentary's contribution was to push for ergonomically designed self-blimped (i.e. silent running) cameras, which could be easily hand-held (e.g. the French *clair* and the German Arriflex *BL*), to be operated with separate battery-driven inch audio tape recorders (e.g. the Swiss *Nagra*) the so-called separate-magnetic or sep-mag system.

The Steinbeck editing table for this was developed by German television and sophisticated, i.e. wireless, methods of keeping the cameras running synchronously with the tape recorders were introduced in the early 1960s in the USA. Lightweight video-cameras were initially developed for surveillance purposes and only slowly replaced film equipment. The first experimental video documentaries were shot on Sony *Portapak*, introduced in 1969. The comparatively slow pace of uptake was not only a consequence of video's initial poor quality but also because it lacked a full range of editing and post-production capabilities. For example, prior to the widespread introduction

of computer-based editing systems, what was gained in the flexibility of effects on the visual-track was lost on the audio-side. Digital image capture and computer-based editing are now documentary production norms although 16mm film and even 35mm is still not unknown. DOCU-DRAMA (Drama Documentary) uses prior

witnessed events, at its purest in the form of actual transcripts, as the basis of a script, cast with professional actors playing the original participants. The documentary value of the result turns on the detail of the source. Given the dramatic traditions of the West (where past events, as in Shakespeare's histories, have long furnished plots) something more accurate than generalised references to actual events is needed. In 1970, Leslie Woodhead used the prison diaries of a dissident Soviet general to document life in the Gulag, *The Man Who Wouldn't Keep Quiet*. Robert Kennedy's memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis was the

basis of a made-for-TV feature, *The Missiles of October* (1974, Anthony Page with [HYPERLINK "http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0001137/"](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0001137/) William Devane as

[HYPERLINK "http://www.imdb.com/character/ch0027408/"](http://www.imdb.com/character/ch0027408/) President John F. Kennedy). Drama documentaries have maintained an intermittent but constant presence in the television schedules. Retrospectively, the term has been applied to documentaries from Flaherty to Jennings because of their reconstructional elements but the crucial difference is that drama documentary uses professional actors which the older documentaries never did. Currently, using the best available scientific evidence, conditional documentaries on events which have yet to happen have been produced: *Smallpox* (2002, Daniel Percival) documented the consequences of a biological weapon terrorist attack with the tag-line, *It's all true. It just hasn't happened yet*. ETHNOGRAPHIC

FILM: no

academic discipline has been more assiduous in its use of film as a research tool than has cultural anthropology. The first film of fieldwork (*Torres Straight Expedition*, Alfred Haddon) dates from 1911. Nevertheless, far from demonstrating the scientific viability of cinematography, ethnographic filmmaking has actually illustrated its limitations as evidence; it has always been a controversial enterprise. Apart from the conservatism of the anthropological establishment, the popularity of documentaries (from the earliest documentaries romances though *Nanook* to *Mondo Carne* and its like) were seen as debasing serious visual anthropology. Even ethnographic film made by anthropologists themselves was problematic for one thing they often used professional filmmakers insensitivity to ethnographic concerns; for another they needed the films to help raise funds with public which required the distortions inherent in narrativizing. Frank Boaz, on the other hand, in 1930 filmed fragments of native American dances with the participants wearing their usual European clothes. This field-note style of record footage was to come more to the fore with the utilisation of 16mm (e.g. Margaret Mead and Gegerory Bateson's

series on Character Formation in Different Cultures 1936-1938). Record footage has persisted: e.g. Richard Sorenson's Papuan series with titles such as South Fore:Children IV: Waisa Village. Eastern Highlands, East New Guinea, December 16, 1963. Despite this, visual anthropologist generally tended towards more complete narrativized films (e.g. The Hunters, 1958, John Marshall; Dead Birds, 1963, Robert Gardner). Film, moreover, remained surprisingly ambiguous as scientific evidence. Jean Rouch's study of a Western African cult's ritual practice (Les Maîtres fous/The Mad Masters, 1957) was seen, when screened publicly, as racist to his extreme distress. Sync sound did not help. For example, Timothy Asch's The Ax Fight (1975) replays uncut record-footage of an incident in a Yanomam village (plus four different edits and a voice-over diagram) to describe what was going on but this thorough procedure still leaves many possible alternative explanations open. Film's inherent flaws as evidence coupled with a rising sensitivity to anthropology's insoluble connections to European colonialism led to Jean Rouch's attempts to penetrate surface realities more deeply, eventually creating Cinema Vérité. Not only that: by the 1970s the cultural imitations of the technology itself as a product of the West were becoming apparent. David McDougal, for instance, noted how inappropriate the camera was to filming low intensity activity because it privileged close-ups of the individual; colour film, moreover, was designed to photograph Caucasian skin tones. Led by Australian First Peoples a turn was made to allow the ethnographic subject to make their own films, initially with the aid of Western anthropologists (Two Laws, 1972, the Borroloola People and Caroline Strachan and Alessandro Cavadini). REALITY TELEVISION consists of unscripted artificial situations, created by producers, which are filmed according to observational documentary norms. Because the subjects are not professional actors pretending to fictional persona, in some circumstances documentary value can be claimed. At one end of the Reality TV spectrum, though, are game shows whose winner is determined by displays of skill or aptitude (e.g. talent contests) and the only limited documentary value can be said to be involved. More clearly akin to documentary is programming at the other end of the spectrum, i.e. formatted or constructed documentaries whose content is the result of arrangements made by the production team somewhat like Cinema Vérité's practice. Only the intention of the producers (titillation, as in Wife Swap, 2003) distinguishes it from Rouch's experimental exploration of inner lives. Between these two poles stands the Reality TV game show where the encounters match those of the formatted documentary but the audience votes a winner as in the game shows (e.g. Big Brother first seen in the Netherlands in 1999). Documentary to describe a particular genre of non-fiction film comes into general use in English by the early 1930s computing services computing

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