6 HOW CAN WE DIFFERENTIATE AMONG DOCUMENTARY MODELS AND MODES? WHAT ARE THE POETIC, EXPOSITORY, AND REFLEXIVE MODES?

Models and Modes in Documentary Film: The Need to Classify

In chapter 1, we defined documentary as a form of cinema that speaks to us about actual situations and events. It adheres to known facts rather than creating a fictional allegory.

It involves real people (social actors) who present themselves to us in stories that convey a plausible proposal about or perspective on the lives, situations, and events portrayed. The distinct point of view or voice of the filmmaker shapes this story to show us what it feels like to inhabit or experience the world in a given way.

Helpful though this definition is for documentaries in general, it scarcely begins to distinguish among different types of documentary. Many documentaries violate any specific definition, and in any case, mockumentaries deliberately blur the border zone between fiction and documentary. There are no laws and few genuine rules when it comes to creative expression. What actually counts as a documentary remains fluid and is open to debate across institutions, filmmakers, audiences, and the films themselves. Favored styles come and go. Institutional opportunities and constraints, technological innovations and limits, creative inspiration, and evolving audience expectations constantly change the landscape of what counts as a documentary and what constitutes its horizon of possibility.

Rather than regret the failure of documentary films to comply with any single definition, and rather than lament the ability of any single definition to identify all the possible types of documentary, we can accept this fluidity as cause for celebration. It makes for a dynamic, evolving form. Fluid, fuzzy boundaries are testimony to growth and vitality. The amazing vigor and popularity of documentary films over the last thirty-five years is firm evidence that fluid boundaries and a creative spirit yield an exciting, adaptable art form. This said, distinctions can still be made. Documentaries are not documents. They may use documents and facts, but they always interpret them. They usually do so in an expressive,

engaging way. This lends documentaries the strong sense of voice that nondocumentaries lack.

Nondocumentary films such as scientific films, surveillance footage, and informational or how- to films exhibit a minimal sense of voice: they function as documents rather than as documentaries, conveying information in a straightforward, often didactic manner. They speak about aspects of the world with a high degree of transparency or indexicality. This is what lends evidentiary value to what they show: the footage retains a highly indexical relation to preexisting situations and events, such as footage of animal behavior or a spaceship launch. Clarity and simplicity are often at a premium in surveillance footage, whereas expressivity, style, and sometimes ambiguity are prized qualities in documentary films. These qualities distinguish the documentary. We sense a voice addressing us from a particular perspective about some aspect of the historical world.

This perspective is more personal and more impassioned than that of a document. Journalism, which shares a focus on the historical world with documentary, also leans more heavily toward the document, with its stress on factual accuracy and lack of a personal voice. Television news, for example, adopts journalistic standards that have a strongly informational bias, although they are far from completely free of qualities of voice. Bias, framing the context within which to present information, assumptions about who counts as an expert or authority, and choices of words and tone can all push news reporting toward the documentary camp, while journalistic standards of objectivity and accuracy pull in the direction of the informational film.

New documentaries continue to bear a strong resemblance to previous documentaries as well. In fact, it is possible to note a number of models and modes at work in documentary from the beginning of this form of cinema.

This book, therefore, proposes two major ways of dividing up documentaries: preexisting nonfiction models and distinct cinematic modes.

Preexisting Nonfiction Models

Documentaries adopt models such as the diary, biography, or essay. Documentary film belongs to a long, multifaceted tradition of nonfiction discourse that continues to evolve and includes such things as essays, reports, manifestos, ethnographies, and blogs. Erik Barnouw used some of these models to categorize documentaries in his international history, *Documentary: A History of the Nonfiction Film* (1974; 2nd ed., 1993).

Distinct Cinematic Modes

Documentaries select and arrange sounds and images in distinct ways using specifically cinematic techniques and conventions. These forms did not preexist the cinema. Many have since carried over, first to video and

Table 6.1. Major nonfiction models for documentary film[1]

Model	Description	Films
Investigation/report	Assemble evidence, make a case, offer a perspective	· *Bus 174* · *Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room* · *Merchants of Doubt* · *Harvest of Shame* · *Tale of the Grim Sleeper*
Advocacy/promotion of a cause	Stress convincing, compelling evidence, and examples; urge adoption of a specific point of view	· *An Inconvenient Truth* · *Night Mail* · *The Plow that Broke the Plains* · *The Power of Nightmares* · *Sicko* · *Vaxxed* and *2016: Obama's America*[2]
History	Recount what really happened; offer an interpretation or perspective on it	· *The Civil War* · *An Injury to One* · *Night and Fog* · *Seven Days in September* · *Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution*
Testimonial	Assemble oral history or witnesses who recount their personal experience	· *The Fog of War* · *Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* · *The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter* · *Shoah* · *When the Mountains Tremble* · *Word Is Out*
Exploration/travel writing	Convey distinctiveness and often allure of distant places; may stress exotic or unusual qualities	· *Grass* · *The March of the Penguins* · *Nanook of the North* · *Up the Yangtze* · *Wild Safari 3D: A South African Adventure* (an IMAX film)
Sociology	Study of subcultures; normally involves fieldwork, participant observation with subjects, and both description and interpretation	· *High School* · *Jesus Camp* · *Shinjuku Boys* · *Salesman* · *Stranger with a Camera*
Visual anthropology/ ethnography	Study of other cultures; similar to sociological fieldwork with language acquisition usually added; reliance on informants to provide access to the culture studied	· *Dead Birds* · *Les Maîtres Fous* · *N!ai: Story of a !Kung Woman* · *Reassemblage* · *Sweetgrass* · *Wedding Camels*
First-person essay	Personal account of some aspect of author/filmmaker's experience or point of view; similar to autobiography, but stresses individual development	· *Chile, Obstinate Memory* · *The Gleaners and I* · *Nobody's Business* · *Roger and Me* · *Sans Soleil* · *Sherman's March* · *Super Size Me* · *Tongues Untied*
Poetry	Organized around conventions of rhyme, meter, rhythm; calls attention to film's form	· *The Bridge* · *Koyaanisqatsi* · *The Maelstrom* · *NY, NY* · *Rain* · *Window Water Baby Moving*

Model	Description	Films
Diary/journal	Daily impressions that may begin and end somewhat arbitrarily	· *Afrique, je te plumerai* · *David Holzman's Diary*[3] · *The Gleaners and I* · *Sherman's March* · *Unfinished Diary*
Individual or group profile/biography	Recounts story of person or group's maturation and distinctiveness	· *16 in Webster Groves* · *7 Up* (and successors: *7 Plus Seven* to *49 Up)* · *American Teen* · *Citizenfour* · *Food for Love* · *Grizzly Man* · *The Last Waltz* · *Steve Jobs: The Man in the Machine* · *The Roosevelts: An Intimate History*
Autobiography	Personal account of someone's experience, maturation, or outlook on life	· *Complaints of a Dutiful Daughter* · *Finding Christa* · *Loads* · *Tarnation* · *Tongues Untied* · *Waltz with Bashir*

1. A few films appear more than once to indicate how filmmakers can draw from more than one model.

2. These two films present false claims as if they were scientifically valid in the first case and as if they were logically coherent in the second. The first is by Andrew Wakefield, whose 1998 claim in a scientific journal that the MMR vaccine causes autism was later retracted by the journal and thoroughly discredited by other scientists, although he continues to make that claim. The second is by Dinesh D'Souza and John Sullivan, who claim that President Obama's secret plan, were he to be elected in 2012, would be to install a radical Islamic state across the entire Middle East. These films raise important questions about the use of documentary conventions to lie and about the ethical responsibilities of those who chose to show them: should they be left to speak for themselves, or should their falsehoods be identified? These films, and others like them such as *Triumph of the Will* or *Operation Abolition*, appear to be one thing (true) when they are another (false). Unlike mockumentaries, which eventually admit their ironic or deceptive stance, bogus documentaries do not admit their deception; they conceal it.

3. This is a mockumentary that adopts documentary conventions to present the day-to-day life of the film's maker, "David Holzman."

now to digital production and the internet. Like the cinematic techniques developed in the first few decades of the cinema, which defined the look and feel of all cinema, the documentary modes, which developed from the 1920s onward, defined the look and feel of the documentary film. They identify the qualities that distinguish an expository documentary from an observational one, for example, regardless of whether the film uses the diary, report, or biography as its model.

The emphasis here will be on the modes of documentary, but we can ask of any documentary two questions: What model does it adopt from other media? What mode does it contribute to as cinema? These questions are not mutually exclusive. In fact, they are complementary; together, they give us a better sense of the structure of any one documentary film. Table 6.1 provides a description of several models that can provide a useful framework for a documentary film. These models can overlap, and like the modes, more than one can be adopted by a single film. Table 6.1 gives examples of films that adopt each model; it complements table 7.1,

Table 6.2. Specific qualities of documentary modes

Quality	Expository Mode	Poetic Mode	Observational Mode
An alternative to . . .	Fiction/avant-garde	Fiction/exposition	Classic oration and poetic expression
Limited by . . .	Didacticism	Formal abstractions that lose touch with historical reality	What occurs in front of the camera (hard to represent historical events)
Treats knowledge as . . .	Disembodied or abstract ideas, concepts, or perspectives	Affective; new way to see and comprehend the world; see the familiar in a fresh way	Tacit sense of what we learn by watching, listening, observing, and making inferences about the conduct of others
Sound is . . .	Expressive and cognitive, fully under the control of the filmmaker; no indexical link to the image it supports; often in a voice-over form	Expressive, used for pattern and rhythm but with filmmaker holding a high degree of control as in the expository mode	Tied to the image by the indexical link of synchronous recording. Filmmaker gives up full control of sound to record what is said and heard in a given situation; refrains from voice-over
Time and space are . . .	Discontinuous. Uses images from many different times and places to illustrate a perspective or argument	Discontinuous. Uses images that build mood or pattern without full regard for their original proximity	Continuous. Strong sense of continuity that links the words and actions of subjects from shot to shot
Ethical concerns include . . .	Historical accuracy and verifiability; represent others fairly and avoid making people into helpless victims; develop viewer's trust	Use of actual people, places, and things without regard for their individual identity; may distort or exaggerate for aesthetic effect	Passive observation of dangerous, harmful, or illegal activity can lead to serious difficulties for subjects. Questions of responsibility toward subjects can become acute
A voice characterized by . . .	Classic oration in pursuit of the truth and seeking to inform and move an audience	Expressive desire to give new forms and fresh perspectives to the world represented	Patience, modesty, self-effacement. Willing to let audience decide for itself about what it sees and hears

which describes some of the main uses of both frequently used models and the six modes.

These models are familiar to us before we arrive at the cinema, but the cinematic modes are original to film. They represent the different ways in which documentary filmmakers make use of more specifically cinematic qualities to construct documentaries of different kinds. A film may rely on investigative journalism for a framework but then incorporate elements of the expository, participatory, and observational modes, for example.

The placement of films in relation to models and modes reflects individual judgment rather than precise measurement. Most films display characteristics of multiple models and modes. Filmmakers are under no obligation to choose one and only one model or mode. To emphasize

Participatory Mode	Reflexive Mode	Performative Mode
Passive observation and classic oration	Realist representation that ignores the formal process of representing the world or social assumptions about the nature of the world	Empirical, factual, or abstract forms of knowledge
May cede control and point of view to others, lose independence of judgment	Increased sense of formal abstraction, detachment, loss of direct engagement with social issues	Personal point of view or vision may become private or dissociated from more broad social perceptions
What we learn from personal interactions; what people say and do when confronted or engaged by others; what can be conveyed by interviews and other forms of encounter	Contextual. Always framed by institutional constraints and personal assumptions that can be exposed and changed; asks what we learn when we ask how we learn	Embodied. Affective and situated. What we learn from direct, experiential encounter rather than second hand from experts or books
Dialectic. Stresses the speech between filmmaker and subject, especially in interviews. Heavy reliance on sync sound, but may also utilize voice-over; filmmaker retains only partial creative control of sound	May metacommunicate about how communication takes place. Talk about talking about something as well as sync or nonsync sound	Often relies on filmmaker's own voice to organize the film; stresses introspective, testimonial, essayistic forms of speech and dialogue; mixes sync and nonsync sound; uses music and sound expressively
Continuous. May interconnect a present-tense time and space with a past-tense (historical) time and space	Contextualized. Draw attention to how time and space may be manipulated by systems of continuity or discontinuity	Varies according to expressive goals. May stylize time and space to emphasize its affective dimension
Manipulate or goad others into confessions or actions they may regret; strong responsibility to respect rights and dignity of subjects. Questions of manipulation and distortion arise	Use or abuse subjects to pose questions that are those of the filmmaker and not the subjects	Degree of honesty and self-scrutiny versus self-deception; misrepresentation or distortion of larger issues; perhaps lapses into wholly idiosyncratic
Engagement. Strong investment in encounter with others or in presenting historical perspective	Self-questioning, a voice of doubt—even radical doubt—about certainty or fixity of knowledge	Strongly personal, engaged orator pursuing the truth of what it feels like to experience the world in a particular way

this, *Stranger with a Camera* (1999) appears under the expository and the reflexive modes and *Chile, Obstinate Memory* (1997) appears under the expository and the performative modes. Similarly, *Night Mail* (1936) has a strongly poetic quality to its voice-over commentary (written by W. H. Auden) and might be discussed as a film beholden to poetry and the poetic mode rather than to advocacy and the expository mode. *Nanook of the North* (1922) corresponds to anthropology as well as exploration because it has served as a touchstone for many discussions and debates within visual anthropology and ethnographic film. Its emphasis on the character of Nanook also argues for biography as a model. These are all valid choices. They stress specific qualities, just as placing *Nanook* within the observational mode stresses Flaherty's remarkable patience and willingness to let events unfold in their own time, even if it took Flaherty's

active hand to set up events like the seal hunt or igloo building. Different viewers respond more or less strongly to different aspects of the same film and classify it accordingly. The characteristics of the different modes are summarized in table 6.2 and discussed further above.

The expository mode contains the most examples, which suggests the prevalence of this mode. Expository documentaries arose at the start of the documentary tradition and remain prominent today, even if some of the films listed here could be associated with other modes as well. This mode gives priority to the spoken word to convey the film's perspective from a single, unifying source. This in turn facilitates comprehension.

Films like *Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room* (2005) and *Sicko* (2007) demonstrate how one mode can combine with other modes, especially in the use of interviews. We can stress the guiding role of the direct address commentary in *Sicko* (expository mode) or the interviews and what they reveal in *Enron* (participatory mode). In each film, the interviews are central. In *Enron*, they provide crucial information and demonstrate how public interviews and comments by company officers hid rather than revealed the truth, which interviews with others make clear. In *Sicko*, the interviews generate considerable insight—and humor, thanks to Michael Moore's use of mock naïveté and guerilla tactics to catch interviewees off guard in ways other techniques never would. Stressing Moore's own role as commentator argues for a primarily expository emphasis as his voice guides us through the complexities of health care and how to provide it. Such commentary has become a signature of his films. Both expository and participatory modes are clearly present in each film. Which one we emphasize largely depends on what aspects of the film the filmmaker wants to explore further.

This practice of mixing modes holds true for many films. It does not mean that the categories are inadequate so much as that filmmakers frequently adopt a fluid, pragmatic approach to their material, blending different models and modes to achieve a distinct result. This is quite different from an anything-goes approach in which the filmmaker invents structures and patterns on the spot, without recourse to precedent. As is true of other arts, filmmakers who are familiar with previous work and who are aware of the basic characteristics of different models and modes typically exhibit a fluidity and grace in their ability to use a wide range of conventions and techniques to create a style and voice uniquely their own.

The Participatory Mode

The participatory mode also appeared around 1960 as a result of the new ability to record sync sound on location. Here filmmakers do interact with their subjects rather than unobtrusively observe them. Questions grow into interviews or conversations; involvement grows into a pattern

of collaboration or confrontation. What happens in front of the camera becomes an index of the nature of the interaction between filmmaker and subject. This mode inflects the "I speak about them to you" formulation into something that is often closer to "I speak with them for you" as the filmmaker's interactions give us a distinctive window onto a particular portion of our world.

The participatory mode has come to embrace the spectator as participant as well. Interactive websites and installations allow the viewer to chart a path through the spectrum of possibilities made possible by the filmmaker. A vivid example of this shift is the difference between Péter Forgács's film, *Danube Exodus* (1998), about the passage of Jews during World War II from central Europe to the Black Sea aboard a cruise ship and the return passage of Germans from Bessarabia to Germany. Forgács builds his film from the home movie footage of the ship's captain; the result is an extremely powerful, poetic, but also provocative study of the displacement and exodus of two populations. Later, Forgács, in collaboration with the Labyrinth Project, which has created a number of interactive "database documentaries" on DVD, turned the footage into an installation. A computer controls the projection of footage from the film onto a large screen, but now audience members can interact with the computer to make choices about how the footage is displayed, opting to follow different strands or themes in the original footage. In addition, other computers house outtakes, interviews, and other primary source documents that can be accessed in patterns of the viewer's choosing. Individual lives can be examined in greater detail than the original film made possible.

Such innovations suggest that the participatory mode is particularly ripe for exploitation in digitally based, computer-driven forms that grant far more control to the viewer than the standard fixed, unalterable structure of the film-based documentary. Because the filmmaker or database artist retains ultimate control over what gets into the database and how it can be accessed, the overall experience will possess aesthetic and rhetorical qualities that exceed those of a general archival depository, but the participatory emphasis shifts from the interaction between filmmaker and subject to the one between viewer and assembled material. Such work evokes an educational ethos in many cases, where the content is predetermined but users can navigate through it according to their own interests and choices. The sustained engagement with an unfolding narrative or perspective characteristic of all six modes may be more difficult to achieve.

The participatory mode has antecedents in other media and several disciplines. Radio has long featured direct interactions between talk show hosts and guests, a form that migrated readily to television before taking root in cinema as well. In addition, social sciences such as sociology and anthropology have long promoted the study of social groups by means of direct interaction and investigation. Anthropology, for example, remains heavily defined by the practice of fieldwork, where an anthropologist lives

among a people for an extended period of time, learns the language and customs, and then writes up what he or she has learned. Such research usually calls for some form of participant observation. The researcher goes into the field, participates in the lives of others, gains a visceral feel for what life in a given context is like, and then reflects on this experience, using the methods of anthropology or sociology to do so. "Being there" calls for participation. "Being here" allows for observation and reflection. That is to say, field workers do not go native, adopting local customs as their own. Instead, they retain a degree of detachment that differentiates them from those about whom they write. Anthropology has, in fact, consistently depended on this complex act of engagement and separation between two cultures to define itself.

Documentary filmmakers also go into the field; they too live among others and speak about or represent what they experience. The social science practice of participant observation, however, has not become a paradigm. The methods of social science research have remained subordinate to the more prevalent rhetorical practice of moving and persuading an audience and the narrative practice of telling a story. In fact, biography, autobiography, history, essays, confessions, and diaries are among the most popular models for participatory documentaries. Like the performative mode, the filmmaker's presence and perspective often contribute significantly to the film's overall impact.

Observational documentary deemphasizes persuasion to give us a sense of what it is like to be in a given situation, but without a sense of what it is like for the filmmaker to be there too. Participatory documentary gives us a sense of what it is like for the filmmaker to be in a given situation and how that situation alters as a result. We experience the representation of an encounter that can be quite acute in films such as *Nobody's Business* (1996), about the filmmaker's blunt but evasive father, or *Tarnation* (2003), about the filmmaker's efforts to understand what made his mother mentally ill and his own childhood a nightmare, which draw on diary, confession, or essayistic traditions for their model. Equally striking is Nick Broomfield's first-person investigation into the deaths or disappearances of well over a hundred women in south-central Los Angeles, *Tales of the Grim Sleeper* (2014). He does not blend invisibly into this African American community at all, but he succeeds in building trust, finding confidants, and gathering stories that illustrate the deep racial divide between the local police and the community—a divide that may have allowed the man eventually arrested and accused of multiple murders to avoid arrest for twenty-five years.

When we view participatory documentaries, we expect to witness the historical world as represented by someone who actively engages with others rather than unobtrusively observing, poetically reconfiguring, or argumentatively assembling what others say and do. The filmmaker steps out from behind the cloak of voice-over commentary, steps away from poetic meditation, steps down from a fly-on-the-wall perch, and becomes a social actor (almost) like any other (almost like any other because the

Werner Herzog uses footage of grizzly bears shot by Timothy Treadwell to reflect on man's relation to nature and Treadwell's relation to sanity. Treadwell records his own thoughts in footage he shoots of himself without assistance as he camps in the wilderness. Herzog then adds his own voice-over commentary to Treadwell's footage as well as introducing interviews with others. Treadwell's extraordinary footage, shown here, frequently places him in the same frame as wild bears, miles from civilization. The indexical power of deep-focus, long-take shots lends an overwhelming authenticity to his footage. *Grizzly Man* (Werner Herzog, 2005). *Courtesy of Lions Gate Films/Photofest.*

filmmaker retains the camera, and with it a degree of potential power and control over events).

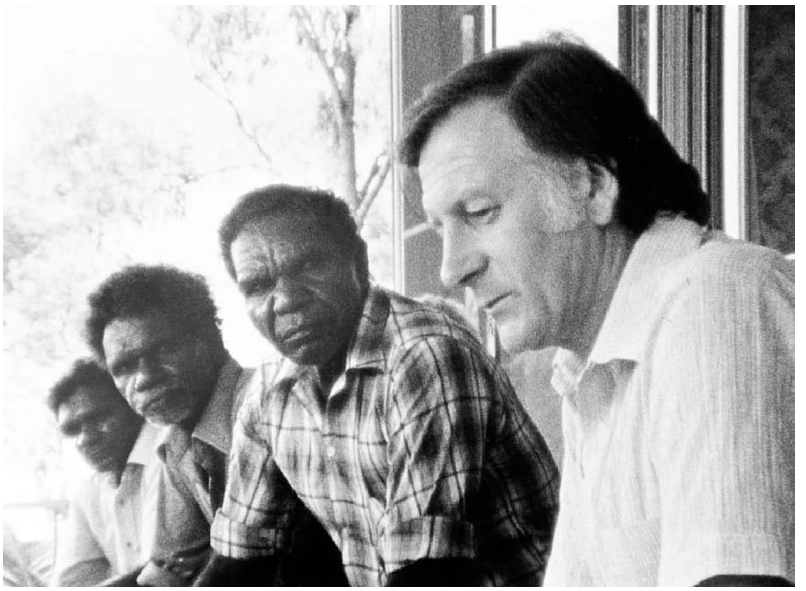
Participatory documentaries like *Chronicle of a Summer*, *Portrait of Jason* (1967), *Tabloid* (2010), or *Citizenfour* (2014) involve the ethics and politics of encounter. This is the encounter between one who wields a movie camera and one who does not. How do filmmaker and social actor respond to each other? Does a sense of respect despite disagreement emerge, or is there a feeling of deception, manipulation, or distortion at work? How do they negotiate control and share responsibility? How much can the filmmaker insist on testimony when it is painful to provide it? What responsibility does the filmmaker have for the emotional aftermath of putting others on camera? What goals join filmmaker and subject, and what needs divide them?

The sense of bodily presence, rather than absence, arises from sync sound exchanges between filmmaker and subject. It locates the filmmaker on the scene. We expect that what we learn will hinge on the nature and quality of the encounter between filmmaker and subject. We may see as well as hear the filmmaker act and respond on the spot, in the same historical arena as the film's subjects. The possibilities of serving as mentor, critic, interrogator, collaborator, or provocateur arise. In *People I Could Have Been and Maybe Am* (2010), Boris Gerrets uses his cell phone as a way to meet strangers on the streets of London and to record his encounters. He develops intimate friendships with two people in particular. He becomes, briefly, the lover of a woman from Brazil and the confidant of a homeless alcoholic who has lost his family. The relationships take on a depth and complexity that attest to his vivid participation in their lives and to their impact on him. Far being above the fray, as it were, Gerrets is affected as much as anyone by the very act of filming.

Citizenfour poses questions of the filmmaker's relation to her subject pointedly because Edward Snowden, seen here, is a fugitive for having revealed classified US documents about surveillance and Laura Poitras is creating a portrait of him not as a criminal but as a morally responsible human being. His action might be understood as civil disobedience, but Poitras is more concerned with his character than his politics, although those are clear. This is a photograph taken for the film and used to design a poster. It captures the modesty of Snowden that Poitras wanted to convey through his downturned head and the straight-ahead camera angle rather than the low angle used to suggest heroes or the high angle used to suggest guilt, failure, or inadequacy. *Courtesy of Praxis Films.*

Many find the ambush interview, practiced on CBS's *60 Minutes* and refined into a major ploy by Michael Moore in most of his films, an example of where an ethical borderline exists. To catch someone who is unprepared and perhaps ill-equipped to engage in an interview can signal disrespect. In many cases, the targets of Moore's ambushes seem to deserve what they get: Dick Clark, who owns the restaurant where a welfare mother barely earns enough to cover the costs of her daily commute and day care for her children, hastily beats a retreat rather than try to explain himself to Moore in *Bowling for Columbine* (2002), but Charlton Heston cannot flee his own home after he lets Moore inside. A rising sense of discomfort comes over many viewers as they realize Heston's faltering responses are at least partly due to Alzheimer disease, making Moore seem insensitive and disrespectful rather than tough-minded. Moore does a similar thing in *Roger and Me* (1989), when he snares Miss Michigan to quiz her about economic conditions in Flint. Moore makes Miss Michigan, who is clearly unfamiliar with the specifics and who is not someone who pretends to have any authoritative knowledge of plant closings and the global economy, look foolish, but for some, the insensitivity to her individuality as a person makes the filmmaker appear callous in his pursuit of irreverence.

Participatory documentary can stress the actual, lived encounter between filmmaker and subject in the spirit of Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin's *Chronicle of a Summer*, Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985), Ross McElwee's *Sherman's March*



The MacDougalls have evolved a collaborative style of filmmaking with the subjects of their ethnographic films. In a series of films made on Aboriginal issues, of which *Takeover* is a prime example, they have often served as witnesses to the testimonial statements of traditions and beliefs that Aboriginal people offer in their disputes with the government over land rights and other matters. The interaction is highly participatory, although the result can seem, at first, unobtrusive or observational because much of the collaboration occurs before the act of filming. *Takeover* (David and Judith MacDougall, 1981). *Courtesy of David MacDougall.*

(1985), Jon Alpert's *Hard Metals Disease* (1987), or Henry Joost and Ariel Schulman's *Catfish* (2010). The filmmaker's presence takes on heightened importance, from the physical act of getting the shot that figures so prominently in *Man with a Movie Camera* to the political act of joining forces with one's subjects, as Jon Silver does at the start of *Watsonville on Strike* (1989), when he asks the farmworkers if he can film in the union hall, in defiance of the union boss. In other cases, the filmmaker's presence takes on a highly personal and sometimes poignant quality, as in *Complaints of a Dutiful Daughter* (1994), in which Deborah Hoffmann, the filmmaker, struggles to cope with her mother's descent into dementia, *Finding Christa* (1991), as filmmaker Camille Billops wrestles with her decision to locate the daughter she gave up for adoption some twenty years earlier, or *Catfish*, where a filmmaker/subject romance blooms even though the very identity and intentions of some of the characters remains a puzzle to the end.

This style of filmmaking is what Rouch and Morin termed *cinéma vérité*, translating into French Dziga Vertov's title for his newsreels of Soviet society, *kinopravda*. As "film truth," the idea emphasizes that this is the truth of a filmed encounter rather than absolute or untampered truth. We see how the filmmaker and subject negotiate a relationship, how they act toward one another, what forms of power and control come into play, and what levels of revelation or rapport stem from this specific form of encounter. Cinema verité reveals the reality of what happens when people interact in the presence of a camera.

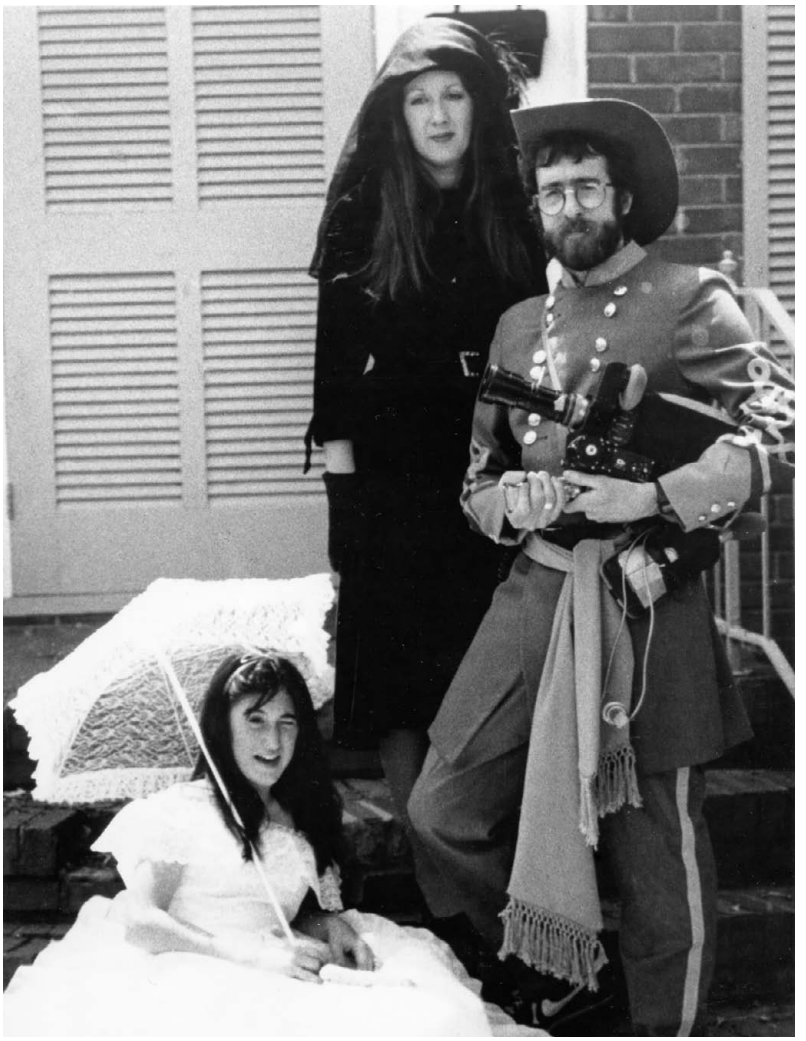
Chronicle of a Summer, for example, involves scenes that result from the collaborative interactions of filmmakers and their subjects, an eclectic group of individuals living in Paris in the summer of 1960. In one instance, Marcelline Loridan, a young woman who later married Dutch

filmmaker Joris Ivens, speaks about her experience as a Jewish deportee who is sent to a German concentration camp from France during World War II. The camera follows her as she walks through the Place de la Concorde and then through the former Parisian market, Les Halles. She offers a quite moving monologue on her experiences, but only because Rouch and Morin planned the scene with her and gave her a tape recorder to carry. If they had waited for the event to occur on its own so they could observe it, it never would have occurred. They pursued this notion of collaboration still further by screening parts of the film to the participants and filming the ensuing discussion. Rouch and Morin also appear on camera, discussing their aim to study "this strange tribe living in Paris" and assessing, at the end of the film, what they have learned.

If there is a truth here, it is the truth of a form of interaction that would not exist were it not for the camera. In this sense, it is the opposite of the observational premise that what we see is what we would have seen had we been there. In participatory documentary, what we see is what we can see only when a camera, or filmmaker, is there instead of ourselves. Jean-Luc Godard once claimed that cinema is truth twenty-four times a second; participatory documentary makes good on Godard's claim.

This is nowhere more true than in the films of Errol Morris, who structures each film around an extended interview with his primary subject, be it the pioneering theoretical physicist Stephen Hawking in *A Brief History of Time* (1991); an expert on how to execute prisoners more humanely who becomes a Holocaust denier, Fred Leuchter, in *Mr. Death: The Rise and Fall of Fred A. Leuchter, Jr.* (1999); a former secretary of defense who offers a complex mix of apologies and wisdom in *The Fog of War: Eleven Lessons from the Life of Robert S. McNamara* (2003), or Joyce McKinney, a beauty queen accused of kidnapping a Mormon man and "saving" him by turning him into her sex slave, in *Tabloid* (2010). In every case, face-to-face interaction is limited to a formal interview setting, but these straightforward scenes are intercut with a dizzying array of diverse images and arresting music that creates extraordinary impact. Morris seeks less to isolate the truth in any given case than to explore truths internalized and articulated by his subjects and amplified in myriad ways by the sounds and images he chooses as accompaniment to what they say.

Filmmakers who seek to represent their own direct encounter with their surrounding world and those who seek to represent broad social issues and historical perspectives through interviews and compilation footage constitute two large components of the participatory mode. They differentiate, loosely speaking, into essayists and historians. As viewers, we have the sense that we are witness to a form of dialogue between filmmaker and subject—be it an issue like a labor strike or a person like the filmmaker's mother—that stresses situated engagement, negotiated interaction, and emotion-laden encounter. These qualities give the participatory mode of documentary filmmaking considerable appeal as it roams among a wide variety of subjects, from the most personal to the



In this still, director Ross McElwee adopts the pose of a Confederate officer, but for the bulk of the film, he simply records his journey through the American South, looking, ostensibly, for love. The film is a classic example of an essay film in which the filmmaker's personal perspective shapes not only what we see but how we see it. The most memorable scenes involve interactions between McElwee and various women as they discuss his search for love. *Sherman's March* (Ross McElwee, 1985). *Courtesy of First Run Features/www.firstrunfeatures.com.*

most historical. This mode often demonstrates how the personal and political intertwine to yield representations of the historical world from specific perspectives that are both contingent and committed.

In *Not a Love Story* (1981), for example, Bonnie Klein, the filmmaker, and Linda Lee Tracy, an ex-stripper, discuss their reactions to various forms of pornography as they interview participants in the sex industry. In one scene, Linda Lee poses for a nude photograph and then discusses how the experience made her feel. The two women embark on an exploratory journey in a spirit similar to Rouch and Morin's, a journey that is partly confessional/redemptive in an entirely different sense. The act of making the film plays a cathartic, redemptive role in their lives; it is less the world of their subjects that changes than their own.

In some cases, such as Marcel Ophuls's *The Sorrow and the Pity* (1970), on French collaboration with Germany during World War II, the filmmaker serves as a researcher or investigative reporter. In such cases, the filmmaker's voice emerges from direct, personal involvement in the

Terry Zwigoff adopts a highly participatory relationship to cartoon strip artist R. Crumb. Many of the conversations and interactions clearly would not have occurred as they do had Zwigoff not been there with his camera. Crumb takes a more reflective attitude toward himself and a more probing attitude toward his brothers as he collaborates with Zwigoff's desire to examine the complexities and contradictions of his life. *Crumb* (Terry Zwigoff, 1994). *Courtesy of Superior Pictures.*

events that unfold. The investigative reporter commonly makes his or her own personal involvement in the story central to its unfolding. Another example is the work of Canadian filmmaker Michael Rubbo, such as *Sad Song of Yellow Skin* (1970), where he explores the ramifications of the Vietnam war among the civilian population of Vietnam. Another is the work of Nick Broomfield, who adopts a brasher style in films like *Kurt and Courtney* (1998). Exasperation with Courtney Love's evasiveness about her possible complicity in Kurt Cobain's death compels Broomfield to film his own apparently spontaneous denunciation of her at a ceremonial dinner sponsored by the American Civil Liberties Union.

In other cases, we move away from the investigative stance to take up a more responsive and reflective relationship to unfolding events that involve the filmmaker. This latter choice moves us toward the diary and personal testimonial. The first-person voice becomes prominent in the overall structure of the film. It is the filmmaker's participatory engagement with unfolding events that holds our attention. It is Emiko Omori's effort to retrace the suppressed history of her own family's experience in the Japanese American relocation camps of World War II, for example, that gives form to *Rabbit in the Moon* (1999). Marilu Mallet offers an even more explicitly diary-like structure to her portrait of life as a Chilean exile living in Montreal married to Canadian filmmaker Michael Rubbo in *Unfinished Diary* (1983), as does Kazuo Hara to his chronicle of the complex, emotionally volatile relationship he revives with his former wife as he and his current partner follow her over a period of time in *Extremely Personal Eros: Love Song 1974* (1974). The film includes a mind-boggling scene in which Hara films his former wife giving birth on the floor of her apartment. These films make the filmmaker as vivid a persona as any other in his or her films. As testimonial and confession, they often exude a self-revelatory power.

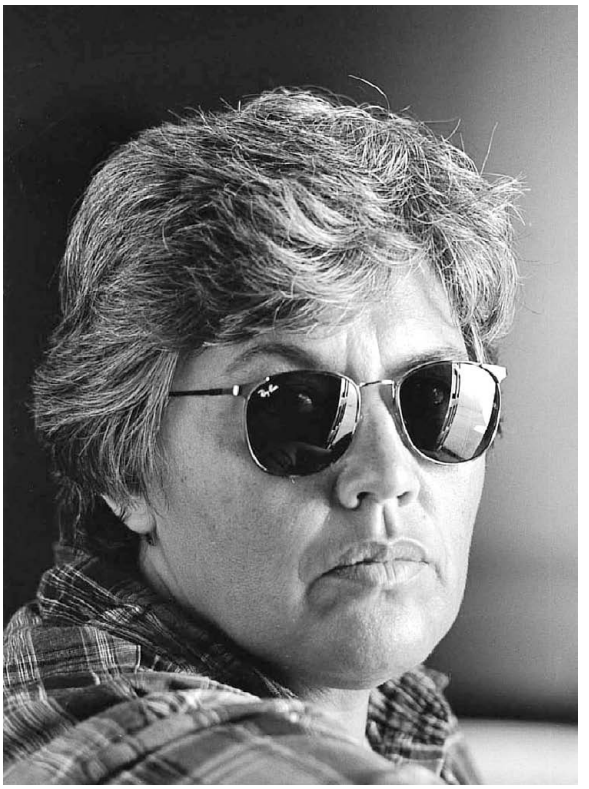
Not all participatory documentaries stress the ongoing, open-ended experience of the filmmaker or the interaction between filmmaker and

These two women filmmakers (Susana Muñoz and Lourdes Portillo) adopt a highly participatory relationship with the mothers who risked their lives to stage public demonstrations during Argentina's dirty war. The sons and daughters of these women were among the "disappeared" whom the government abducted, and often killed, without any notice or legal proceedings. Muñoz and Portillo could not shape the public events, but they could draw out the personal stories of the mothers whose courage led them to defy a brutally repressive regime. *Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* (Susana Muñoz and Lourdes Portillo, 1985). *Courtesy of Lourdes Portillo.*

subjects. The filmmaker may wish to introduce a broader perspective, often one that is historical in nature. How? The most common answer involves the interview and the archive. The result often takes the form of a compilation film and recounts history from above (about major figures and events) or from below (about the experience of ordinary people in relation to a historical event). The vast archive of previously shot footage that now exists provides historical footage to accompany the voices of those who were there or who know about what happened. This archive plus interview form has become a staple of the television documentary, especially on PBS.

The interview stands as one of the most common forms of engagement between filmmaker and subject in participatory documentary. Interviews are a distinct form of social encounter. They differ from ordinary conversation and the more coercive process of interrogation by dint of the institutional framework in which they occur and the specific protocols or guidelines that structure them. Interviews occur in anthropological or sociological fieldwork. They go by the name of the "case history" in medicine and social welfare; in psychoanalysis, they take the form of the therapeutic session; in law, the interview becomes the pretrial deposition and, during trials, testimony; on television, it forms the backbone of talk shows; in journalism, it takes the form of both the interview and the press conference; and in education, it appears as Socratic dialogue. Michel Foucault argues that all these forms involve regulated forms of exchange, with an uneven distribution of power between client and institutional practitioner, and that they have a root in the religious tradition of the confessional.

Filmmakers make use of the interview to bring different accounts together in a single story. The filmmaker's voice emerges as it weaves together contributing voices and supporting material. This compilation of new interviews and archival footage has given us numerous film histories: *In the Year of the Pig* (1969), on the war in Vietnam; *Eyes on the Prize*

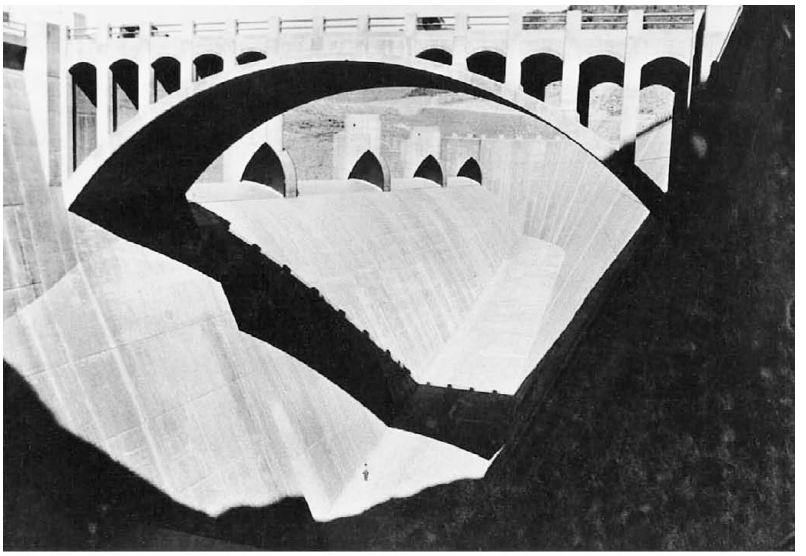


(*top*) Director Lourdes Portillo presents herself here as a hard-boiled private eye. The film recounts her journey to Mexico to investigate the suspicious death of her uncle. Reflexive and ironic at times, Portillo leaves the question of whether her uncle met with foul play, possibly at the hands of a relative, open. *The Devil Never Sleeps* (*El Diablo Nunca Duerme*) (Lourdes Portillo, 1994). *Courtesy of Lourdes Portillo.*

(*bottom*) The filmmaker, in the course of an interview, goes in search of clues, and, ideally, the confession that will solve the mystery. Although she never obtains a confession, the sense that she might do so lends an air of narrative, film noir–like suspense to the film. *The Devil Never Sleeps* (*El Diablo Nunca Duerme*) (Lourdes Portillo, 1994). *Courtesy of Lourdes Portillo.*

(1987, 1990), on the history of the civil rights movement; *The Celluloid Closet* (1995), on the history of gay images in Hollywood films; and *Jazz* (2000), on the history of jazz in America.

Compilation films such as Esther Shub's *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* (1927), which relies entirely on archival footage found by Shub and reedited to tell a social history, date back to the beginnings of documentary film. Shub draws out insights and themes by how she edits shots



Cadillac Desert is another excellent example of a film that couples archival footage with contemporary interviews that add a fresh perspective to historical events without resorting to a voice-over commentary. *Cadillac Desert* retraces the history of water use in California and its devastating impact on the inland valleys of the state. *Cadillac Desert* (Jon Else, 1997). *Courtesy of Jon Else.*

from different sources together, just as later directors like Emile de Antonio draw out a broad historical perspective by how they edit interviews together. Some, such as Barbara Kopple's *Harlan County, USA* (1977), about a coal miner's strike in Kentucky, or Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004) dwell on events in the present moment as the film is made and in which the filmmaker participates. Others, such as Errol Morris's *The Thin Blue Line* (1988), Leon Gast's *When We Were Kings* (1996), on the epic 1974 fight between Muhammad Ali and George Foreman, or Ray Müller's *The Wonderful, Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl* (1993), on Riefenstahl's controversial career, center on the past and how those with knowledge of it now recount it.

The experience of gays and lesbians in the days before Stonewall could be recounted as a general social history, with voice-over commentary and images that illustrate the spoken points. (In 1969, gay patrons of the Stonewall bar in New York city battled police who tried to raid

the bar; it sparked the rise of the gay rights movement.) It could also be recounted in the words of those who lived through those times by means of interviews. The Mariposa Collective's *Word Is Out* (1977) opts for the second choice. The filmmakers, like Connie Field for *The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter* (1980), screened scores of possible subjects before settling on the dozen or so who appear in the film. Unlike Field or Emile de Antonio, the Mariposa Collective opts to keep supporting material to a bare minimum; they compile the history primarily from the "talking heads" of those who can put this chapter of American social history into their own words. The articulateness and emotional directness of those who speak gives films of testimony such as this a highly compelling quality. The form is similar to but different from the oral history, an extended recounting of past events by participants. Oral histories serve as primary source material and generally lack the careful selection and arrangement of the interview material into a greater whole or a broader perspective.