



Faculty of Applied and Creative Arts

THE REAL MEANING OF DOCUMENTARY

Florance Yap Anak Ayu

TR
895.4
F632
2006

**Bachelor of Applied Arts with Honours
(Cinematography)
2006**



THE REAL MEANING OF DOCUMENTARY

FLORANCE YAP ANAK AYU

This project is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for degree of
Bachelor of Applied Arts with Honours
(Faculty of Applied and Creative Arts)

UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SARAWAK
BORANG PENGESAHAN STATUS TESIS/ LAPORAN

JUDUL: THE REAL MEANING OF DOCUMENTARY
.....
.....

SESI PENGAJIAN: 3.....

Saya FLORANCE YAP ANAK AYU
(HURUF BESAR)

Mengaku membenarkan tesis/ Laporan * ini disimpan di Pusat Khidmat Maklumat Akademik, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak dengan syarat-syarat kegunaan seperti berikut:

1. Tesis/ Laporan adalah hak milik Universiti Malaysia Sarawak
2. Pusat Khidmat Maklumat Akademik, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak dibenarkan membuat salinan untuk tujuan pengajian sahaja
3. Pusat Khidmat Maklumat Akademik, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak dibenarkan membuat pendigitan untuk membangunkan Pangkalan Data Kandungan Tempatan
4. Pusat Khidmat Maklumat Akademik, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak dibenarkan membuat salinan tesis/ laporan ini sebagai bahan pertukaran antara institusi pengajian tinggi
5. * sila tandakan ☐

☐

SULIT

(Mengandungi maklumat berdarjah keselamatan atau kepentingan seperti termaktub di dalam AKTA RAHSIA RASMI 1972)

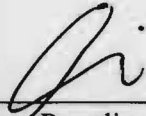
☐

TERHAD

(Mengandungi maklumat Terhad yang telah ditentukan oleh Organisasi/ badan di mana penyelidikan dijalankan)

☒

TIDAK TERHAD


Tandatangan Penulis

Tarikh:

TandatanganPenyelia
Tarikh:

Alamat Tetap:

100-790 TAMAN MINANG
71 000 PORT DICKSON
NEGERI SEMBILAN

Catatan: * Tesis/ Laporan dimaksudkan sebagai tesis bagi Ijazah Doktor Falsafah, Sarjana dan Sarjana Muda

* Jika Tesis? Laporan ini SULIT atau TERHAD, sila lampirkan surat daripada pihak berkuasa/ organisasi berkenaan dengan menyatakan sekali sebab dan tempoh tesis / Laporan ini perlu dikelaskan sebagai SULIT atau TERHAD

The project entitled 'The Real Meaning of Documentary' was prepared by Florance Yap anak Ayu and submitted to the Faculty of Applied and Creative Arts in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Bachelor of Applied Arts with Honours

Received for examination by:

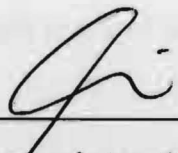
(Gregory Wee Lik Hoo)

Date:

Statement of Originality

The work described in this Final Year Project, entitled **“The Real Meaning of Documentary”** is to the best of the author’s knowledge that of the author except where due reference is made.

09/05/06
Date: 09th May 2006


Florance Yap anak Ayu (10060)
Faculty of Applied and Creative Arts
Universiti Malaysia Sarawak

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisor Mr. Gregory Wee and Cinematography lecturers. Without their support and guidance, I might not be able to complete my thesis and my final year project. I am grateful towards their dedication and willingness to teach and help me in accomplishing my project and thesis.

Here I would also like to thank my family and friends for their encouragement. For my family and relatives, thank you for being supportive throughout my project. To my parents and sisters thank you for participating in my project. As well as my crew members and those who helped me, I am thankful. Hereby, I would like to thank Hope Pal for your supports and endless prayers. As for those closed ones Hee Ninh, Cindy, Li Lian, Gladys, Paul, Natalie, Joyce, Uma, Kelvin, Kok Hing, Florida, Ai Siew, Pei Yee, Chui Lian and Chee Wyai thanks for being there for me in times I needed the most. Not forgetting, the Cinematography students, thank you for your help and guidance toward the whole three years we have been together. As for those who participated in my shooting, thank you for availing yourself in completing my documentary.

Above all else, I want to thank God for His guidance, strength and love which leads and inspires me till the end.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgment	iii
Table of Content	iv- iv
List of Tables	v
List of Chart	v
Abstract	vi
Abstrak	vii

CHAPTER 1: FINDING THE REAL MEANING OF DOCUMENTARY

1.0	Backlground	1-3
1.1	Problem Statement	3-4
1.2	Hypothesis	5
1.3	Objective	5
1.4	Methodology	5-6

CHAPTER 2: DEFINITION OF DOCUMENTARY

2.0	Introduction	7-10
2.1	Types of Documentary	10-19
2.2	Approach	19-20
2.3	Issues of Objective and Subjective Documentary	20-23

CHAPTER 3: FILM ANALYSIS

Film Analysis : The Big Durian	24-30
--------------------------------	-------

CHAPTER 4: FILM ANALYSIS OF FINAL YEAR PROJECT

Film Analysis of Final Year Project: The Seasons of Life	31-36
--	-------

REFERENCES	37-38
-------------------	-------

LIST OF TABLES: *CLASSIFICATION OF MODES*

Table 1	27-28
Table 2	34-35

LIST OF CHART:

Chart 1	
The Categories in Documentary	21
Chart 2	
Summary of Documentary	23

ABSTRACT

THE REAL MEANING OF DOCUMENTARY

By

Florance Yap anak Ayu

My thesis is entitled “The Real Meaning of Documentary”. My final year project resolves in the life of a family who runs a hawker business. This documentary brings us through the journey of the meaning of life as a family as we venture into their personal side of view. This piece also leads us into the perspective of hawker’s daughter and her life.

ABSTRAK

MAKSUD SEBENAR DOKUMENTARI

Oleh

Florance Yap anak Ayu

Tesis Tahun Akhir saya bertajuk “Maksud Sebenar Dokumenatari”, projek tahun akhir saya merangkumi sebuah keluarga yang menjalankan perniagaan makanan. Dokumentari ini menjelajahi maksud kehidupan sebagai sebuah keluarga apabila ia melibatkan pandangan peribadi seseorang individu. Dokumentari ini juga, membawa kita mengetahui perspektif anak dalam keluarga penjaja makanan.

CHAPTER ONE

FINDING THE REAL MEANING OF DOCUMENTARY

1.0 Background

The early age of documentary film were started by the Lumiere Brothers and their earliest recording such as "Factory Workers Leaving Plant", "A Train Entering a Station" and "Baby Having Lunch" records on the reality of living. All these are parts of the objectivity of documentary. Even though Lumiere Brothers started with filming of reality but the term of documentary are not applied. "It was till 1930, John Grierson a film critic and a documentarian comes out with the principles of a documentary. Among his principles were exploitation of art by observing life, real life actors and environments are much more effective in displaying real life dramas rather being acted by professional actors"(Wikipedia, n.d). Robert Flaherty's officially first non-fiction narrative film was "Nanook of the North" but it was till "Moana" in 1926 the term of documentary is applied. John Grierson argued that Flaherty's film "Moana" has the value of a documentary. Supposing documentary films are factual film. Encyclopedia Britannica defines a documentary as a "motion picture that shapes and interprets factual material for purposes of education or

entertainment." It continues, "Documentaries have been made in one form or another in nearly every country and have contributed significantly to the development of realism in films" (Hernandez, n.d). John Grierson definition of documentary is "*creative treatment of actuality*". The documentary as being manifested at the beginning are non-fictional films where reality of one lifestyle are being film without any needs of professional actor, script and much editing effects being applied. Basically as a filmmaker we will try our best to deliver the truth we saw through the camera lens without interferences from outside, so that viewers will be able to focus upon one particular object at a time. It is to bring the reality to the eyes of the viewers. The objective of documentary is documenting down the reality and facts of life by the documentation and through viewing without compromising the truth.

But through out the years of development of film making, the objective meaning of documentary has since branched out to many forms. Here is a quotation from Michael Chanan's article taken from Filmwaves No.4:

"Nothing shows so clearly the growth of skepticisms in the twentieth century as our attitude towards documentary. The emergence of the documentary as a recognized cinematic genre in the 20s inherited a naïve trust in the veracity of the image as an authentic representation of the real. Today we no longer see things this way. Documentary has succumbed to a general disbelief in the possibility of objective truth, and the rise of the very inexact concept of relativism. My purpose here is not to defend this

relativism, but to suggest that the problem is rather that objectivity is not what it was thought to be..." (Chanan, n.d)

Some of the documentaries have different perspective of viewing. Some of the documentaries are more towards narrative, some involved propagandas and some with non-objective. All of this depends much on the documentation whether how and which perspective he look and would like to present them. Here documentaries are in the forms of subjectivity. Robert Flaherty is considered a subjective documentarian. In filmmaking, it is essential for us to identify the people we are working with so that we would be able to their point of side in which will gives us the understanding of subjectivity. One subjectively interview documentary is supposing to be intimate and spontaneous such in searching conversation so that viewers will have their questions answered even though the interviewee might not know the questions an interviewer will be asking. Subjectivity is something that it known by viewers but not the antagonist or protagonist at the set of time while being film. It is mostly revolving the perspective of the filmmaker himself and how it is related to them.

1.1. Problem statement

Wagner (1998) stated, *"We tried for objective documentation but, of course, every time we made a long-shot, medium-shot, and close-up of the same subject we were creating a little story- not full of sound and furry, but certainly a small message told*

by a pair of American filmmakers from their point of view". Through this, the researcher figure out that the objective of documentary is to provide information and true facts to the audience. Documentary involves real life, it is not just the cultural society or mother natures which surround us, but it is the involvement of the gravity of this nature. "*Humanity is the greatest story*" (Radin, 1998, p.227). According to Jarl (1998), "*-documentaries should cover the backyard of society, the home of the guttersnipe*" (p.153).

In filmmaking, it is essential for us to identify the people we are working with so that we would be able to spot to their point of side in which will gives us the understanding of subjectivity. Filmmaker Shola Lynch ("Chisholm '72: Unbought & Unbossed") offered a dictionary definition as well, and said, "*The only problem is that documentaries are films. Good ones are based on facts that are interpreted to tell stories. So then, how are documentaries supposed to be objective?*" Subjectivity is something that it known by viewers but not the antagonist or protagonist at the set of time while being film. It is mostly revolving the perspective of the filmmaker himself and how it is related to them. Jarl (1998) reviewed, "*My movies are subjective; they express my truth. The world and how it is presented is directly nothing to do with it. My perception consists of the things I see and what I consider important, not what other people see or think. Furthermore, I want to influence others using what I have seen.*"

1.2 Hypothesis

From the information above researcher would like to find out the real meaning of documentary and whether the documentary is in a form of objectivity or subjectivity. Besides that, researcher wished to find out whether what type and what kind of terms that a documentary is no longer seen as a documentary. At the same time, researcher wants to relate whether a documentary is based on truth or based upon the facts only. At the same, this research also acts as the guideline to see if there is any film or any video that is categorized as documentary.

1.4 Objective

To find the meaning of documentary and at the same time to find out whether the origin meaning of documentary is still being identified in this present day. Finding the differences between an objective and a subjective documentary through information gathered from books, articles and documentarian.

1.5 Methodology

Among the method researcher will be practicing are finding the definition of documentary from books and collecting other documentary filmmakers point of view. Through this researcher will be able to study the differences of documentary

meanings. At the same time, researcher is able to do comparisons between these two sources regarding documentary and comes out with a final definition or the actual meaning of documentary. One of the documentary films that the researcher will be watching and researching will be "The Big Durian" by Malaysia's local filmmaker Amir Muhammad. In his film researcher will enclose with the objectivity and subjectivity of the documentary by finding out his definition of documentary. Here researcher would not rule out the possibility of interviewing Amir Muhammad to have a clearer understanding of how a documentary film is being recognized as objective or subjective. After all the researched been carried forward, researcher will be able to do a summary based upon the information and findings. Knowing the meaning of documentary is part of preparing the researcher to understand and to apply some of the findings into this final year project, by identifying the application of objective or subjective form. Basically this research revolved around the hawker lifestyle and their family. Through this project, part of the researcher project theme was to find out the hawker's point and understanding on purpose of life.

Chapter 2

Definition of documentary

2.0. Introduction

Documentary films, is regarded as one of the most factual moving motion pictures. It does not contemplate professional actor and actress in a reality environment and situations, therefore documentary is a non-narrative film. Documentarian has a heavy responsible in reporting the truth or in a better terms educating the viewers in no matter how or which approach they prefer. Thus, documentary films were being shot in the most original ways by the documentarian in the earlier stage of filming. The first ever documentary film that was widely recognized was "*Nanook of the North*" by Robert Flaherty. It was completed in 1922; at that time due to the lack of technology edge and knowledge, building roofless igloo is regarded as one of the best way to shoot the interior environment,t. As being quoted in *The Search for Reality*, Jarl mentioned that "*Flaherty is the father of creativity documentary*" (p.151).

In Michael Weinberger articles he has implemented five guidelines for a documentary standard. The documentary should be true and non narrative, not re-creating truth, base upon the objectivity and should not contradict the original form. In his articles, he also agrees with John Grierson definition which is implementing creativeness in reality. According to instructor Peter Flynn from Emerson, he stated that documentary is a factual work depicting actual events and real people by unifying all these genres in attempt to get the truth of a situation by relating to some concept of reality. Stella Bruzi also commented that documentary is the representation of reality instead of truth.

The American Heritage Dictionary describes documentary as *"presenting facts objectively without editorializing"*, and it also acknowledges that the word comes from the Latin word, "documentum" a lesson, example, and warning; from docere, to teach. According to the Yahoo Webpage Dictionary, documentary is being defined as "A work, such as a film or television program, presenting political, social, or historical subject matter in a factual and informative manner and often consisting of actual news films or interviews accompanied by narration". Besides the academic point of view, Australian Film Commission (ABA) definition of documentary is "a program that is a creative treatment of actuality other than news, current affairs, sports coverage, magazines, infotainment or light entertainment program."

As for the documentarians, each of them has different types of opinions and believes. Some of them do not think that the original definition for documentary applies to them personally. "Documentary is an informative and an entertaining tool." (Mohamad Hashem, Daily Star, 2004). According to Meurer (1998), "Documentary as in long films, point of view, time to wait for light, high shooting ratios, personal interpretation, cinema" (p.245).

Nevertheless, there are still documentarians who still uphold the original definitions of documentary. "*The documentary is not a step to fiction film but a step to freedom.*" (Emile De Antonio). Another documentary theorist Bill Nichlos defines it as "*an institutional framework, a community practitioner, corpus of texts and having constituency of viewers.*" As for Bell (1998), mention "*It takes guts, stamina and humility before the subject so as to allow the material to speak through you as a vessel. It also take takes technologies and passionate people as dedicated as you to wrest the truth from the people whom you film and then from the structure the material dictates to you* (p.84). Jarl (19198) stated that "*documentaries should cover the backyard of society, the home of the guttersnipe*" (p.153).

As what have been viewed and mentioned by different documentarian and theorist, all of it has one same comment that is to deliver and to bring forth the truth and reality. No matter where and who the subject or talent is, documentarian are suppose to carry out this very important task even though the documentarian may not agree

with some of the truth. This is clearly seen in propaganda and mockumentary type of documentary.

2.1. Types of documentary

As the researcher goes through all the materials that had been gathered and researched, here are the results, findings and understandings which the researcher had broken down to smaller scope. The type of documentary is best to be represented as “*Documentary Modes*”.

For Bill Nichols as one of the theorists of documentary film, here are the breakdowns of his 6 dominant modes:

1. Poetic Documentary
2. Expository Documentary
3. Observational Documentary
4. Interactive Documentary @ Participatory Documentary
5. Reflexive Documentary
6. Performative Documentary

As for Kilborn and Izod (1997) they only listed 5 documentary modes, which are:

1. Expository Documentary
2. Observational Documentary

3. Reflexive Documentary
4. First person Documentary
5. Drama Documentary

Meanwhile through Ally Farson he comes out 4 documentary modes which are:

1. Expository Documentary
2. Interactive Documentary
3. Reflexive Documentary
4. Mock Documentary

Here, the researcher would like to channel the focus to the definitions made by some of the theorist in regards to their understanding of the characteristic each documentary mode lay out by them. Firstly, the researcher looks at Bill Nichols findings through the information gather from dePaul.edu.

The characteristic of Poetic Documentary are: it does not apply continuity in editing and they do not specific the sense or depth of location and places. It also consists on exploring associations and patterns involve with rhythms and spatial juxtapositions. At the same time, this documentary does not allow the talent or character to fledge or to be developed fully. Basically it is very straight to the point of transferring ones knowledge to viewers or audience or in another words it uses teaching methods. But

the negative outcome from this is that it lacks of specificity and not being detailed enough.

Expository Documentary arose from the dissatisfaction of the fiction film qualities at that time. In this mode it also combines the characteristics of the Poetic Documentary. In this mode, it directs the viewers in titles and voices and advance in arguing the historical world. Here they also comment directly to the viewers through the images illustrated in verbal commentary by building a sense of dramatic involvements. In this area the sound is yet to synchronize with the visuals. Through this documentary approach, there may be establish editing and main artificial expression of continuity with more space and time. The negative approach that comes out through this is being overly didactic or instructive.

In Interactive mode, it is more towards an advance area where mobile equipment are being use and thus helps the desire of the filmmaker to be allow freely to engage with individuals and environment by exposition interviewing styles. This is the era where archival footages are being included into documentary. The reason of this is to avoid the risk of commentary through the voice of god style. But even through the involvement of archival footages, they can still be very intrusive and gives negative excessive faith in history.

As for Reflexive Documentary, it was founded in the 50s'; it is the most self-aware type or approach where it is out of the three earlier modes implemented. This mode has its own implementation by challenging the impressions of reality. Technology had made an impact in this particular time where mobile equipments are much more affordable and by having synchronous sound equipments. Here the documentarian will tend to be more abstract in presenting his/her work. Thus the audience might have difficulties in trying to relate or understand the message being brought.

For the Performative Documentary, question of knowledge as in Reflexive Documentary has been risen. It reflects upon the definition of knowledge being emphasizes through personal experiences. This is also a mix element of modes which links the subjective knowledge or understanding of the world with the general understanding. As according to Nichlos, Performative mode is challenging the boundaries between fact and fiction.

Below is another explanation and characteristics of the differences modes of documentary base on Bill Nichlos but by another theorist which is Peter Flynn taken from Nanking Studies of NZ.

In Poetic Documentary, we can see clearer through the explanation of Peter Flynn, which is basically the objective or reality of a situation or people through the inner truth. It is poetically manipulated through the visual associating to it and with tones

or rhythmic qualities in an orderly manner. It is also being able to describe passages through formal organization flow. This is the earliest mode of documentary found thus it is known as a traditional type of documentary found. It involves dramatic framing of material presents mythic images of man in harmony that presents a glorified view.

Participatory Documentary is the direct engagement between filmmaker and subject where both parties relate with each another directly or indirectly. Filmmaker can be a part the whole event recorded or chooses not to.

Reflexive or Representation Documentary is the reconstruction of a truth or not the truth statements. Here we would be able to find that the artifice of documentary is being exposed and the recording and editing of sound being highly aware of.

Performative Documentary is about the subjective nature of documentaria, where documentarians construct it in a way where he/she understands and wants to deliver. Here, most of the time it emphasizes the emotional side to influence and to leave an impact on the audience. The objective and concept of this is to inspire or to draw back memories and to move audience emotions.

Peter Flynn statement of Expository Documentary is among the characteristic listed down as being linear and chronological flow of images and arguments. This