

Interactive Documentary

161MC

Today's lecture aims to:

- explore the relationship between traditional and interactive documentary
- develop your understanding of interactive documentary through the use of specific examples
- discuss interactive documentary ethics

What is a documentary film?

The term documentary was first used in 1879 in the Littré dictionary, as an adjective meaning “that which has the character of a document”. The term acquired cinematic meaning in 1906 and became a noun after 1914.

Georges Sadoul

“The creative treatment of actuality.”

John Grierson

Actuality refers to the state of existing in reality, but how can we define reality?

Is there a reason for recording it on camera?

A reality recorded on camera is mediated, so to what extent can it be objective?

Fictionality VS Truth

How could we combine the notion of interactivity with that of traditional documentary?

Documentary has been associated with objectively conveying factual information/ representing reality, but any sense of objectivity is undermined by the interactive user's ability to change content.

Blurred boundaries between
fiction and truth

Lumière brothers- *Workers Exiting the Factory* (1895)

The first silent films were known as “actualities”,
however for *Exiting the Factory*,
the Lumières had to instruct the workers
not to look at the camera,
thus manipulating “reality”.

Flaherty- *Nanook of the North* (1922)

Robert Flaherty is known as the “father of documentary”.

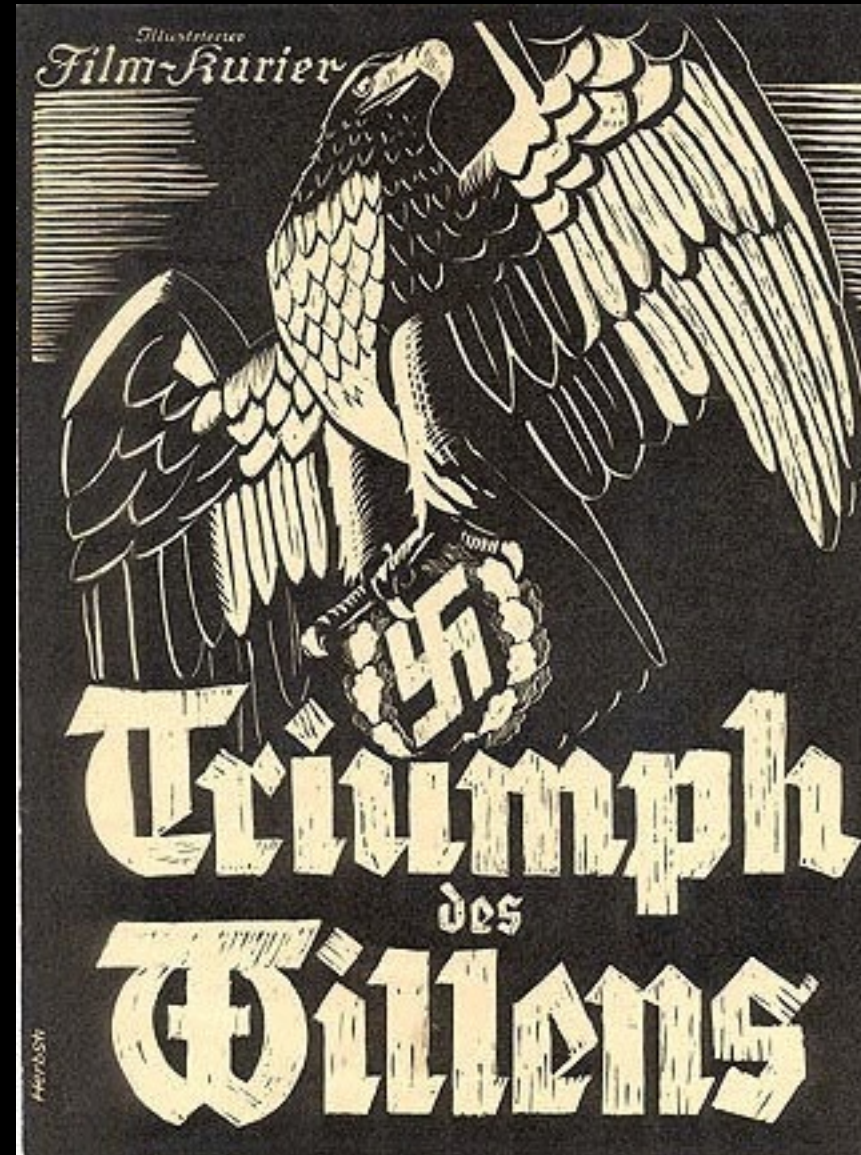
For *Nanook of the North* he used fiction film techniques and created a story with a dramatic character (protagonist) and a narrative structure, with a beginning, a middle and an end, even though the film is based on “reality”.



Riefenstahl- *Triumph of the Will* (1935)

Matters of ethics and authorial intent: Can we interpret a documentary film on the basis of authorial intent?

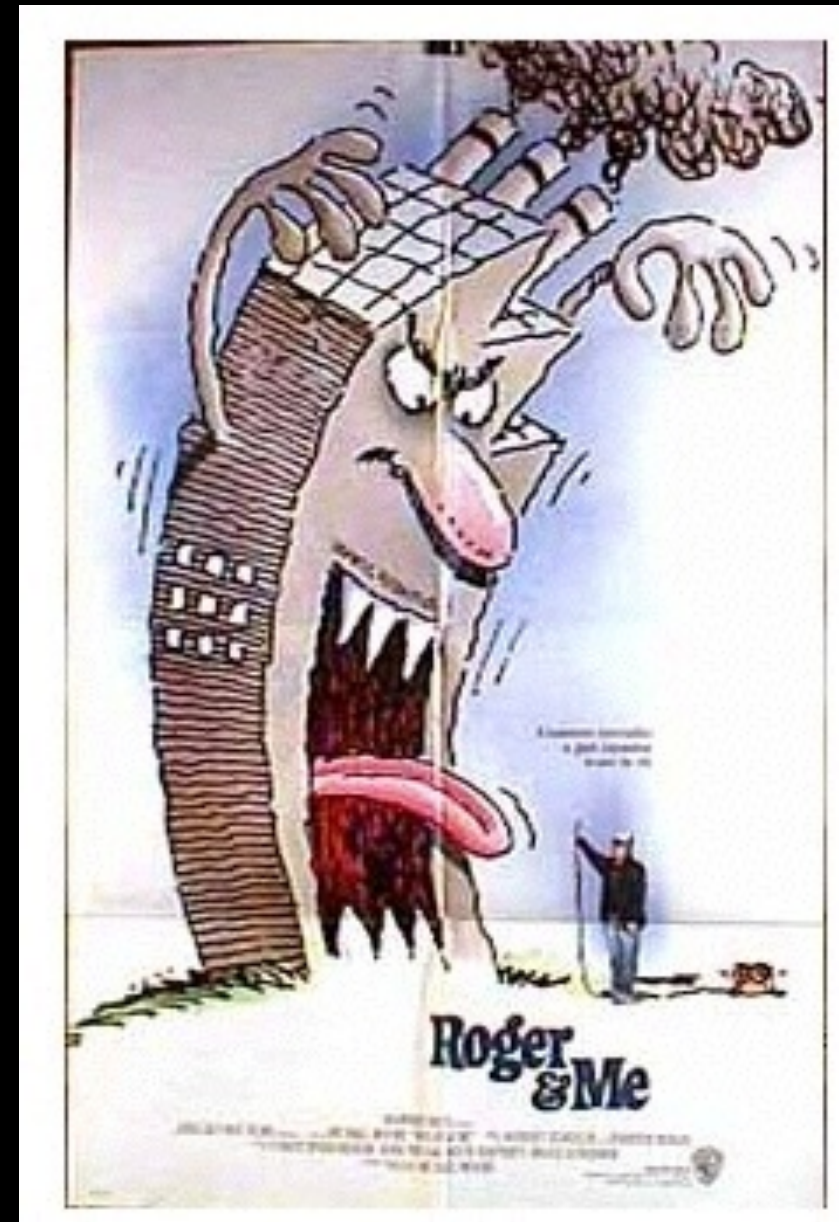
Riefenstahl would firmly declare that her intentions were purely artistic; however *Triumph of the Will* is considered by many people as a tribute to the Nazi party.



Moore- *Roger and Me* (1989)

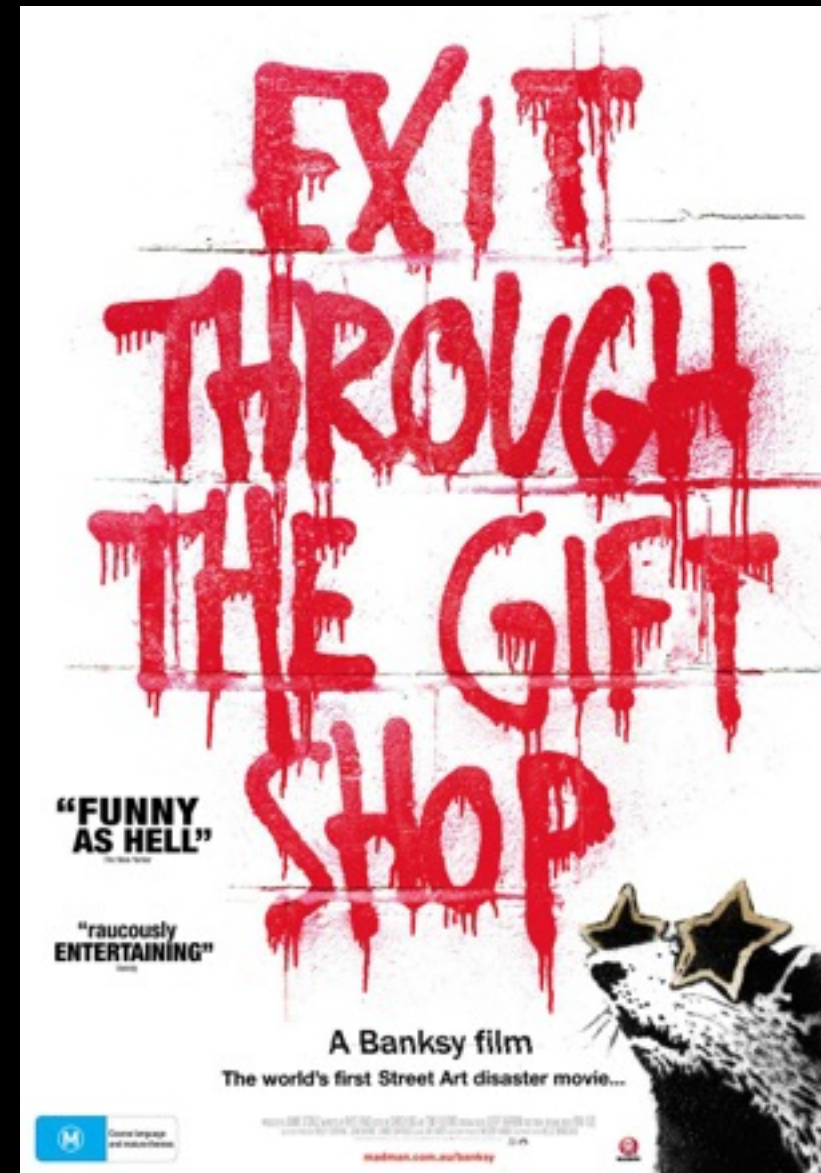
Moore's credibility as a filmmaker has been questioned, for the way he treats his material.

In *Roger and Me*, he presents certain events out of chronological order.



Banksy- *Exit Through the Gift Shop* (2010)

Is this a hoax?



What is an interactive
documentary?

In 2002 artist and academic Mitchell Whitelaw
was noticing the rise of the terminology
'interactive documentary'

Sandra Gaudenzi

Any documentary that uses interactivity
as a core part of its delivery mechanism.

Galloway, McAlpine and Harris

Interactive online or offline applications,
carried out with the intention of representing reality with
their own mechanisms,
including navigation and
interaction modalities,
depending on the degree of participation
under consideration.

Arnau Gifreu

Out My Window (2010)

Documentary project about life in residential highrises, directed by Katerina Cizek and produced for the National Film Board of Canada (NFB).

<http://interactive.nfb.ca/#/outmywindow>

Framework of documentary interactivity - Nash (2014)

1. Technological dimension:

Interactivity is understood in terms of the features of a medium.

2. Relational dimension:

Establishing specific forms of participation and communicative dynamics position the audience in relation to the documentary content.

3. Experiential dimension:

Calls attention to the interactive documentary audience and their response to the invitation to participate.

18 Days in Egypt (2011)

Collaborative crowd sourced documentary project, created by Jigar Mehta and Yasmin Elayat, aiming to capture the events of the revolution in Egypt throughout the 18 days of the 2011 uprising and in the years since.

<http://beta.18daysinegypt.com/#/>

The growing belief in the act of sharing and cooperation that characterizes contemporary digital culture seems to run in parallel with (...) the many experiments in creating new, less centralized forms of community life, characteristics of many of the protest movements we have recently witnessed.

Paolo Favero

Geld.gr (2013)

Korsakow film, investigating the origins of the financial crisis in Greece, directed by Florian Thalhofer.

<http://geld.gr/fr/>

All art is interactive,
but new media placed new cognitive and physical
demands on the viewer.

Users are asked to follow
pre-programmed associations
and follow “the mental trajectory of the new media
designer”,
instead of their own thought processes.

Lev Manovich

Ethics and i-Docs

- Who owns the rights to material contributed?
- Under what kind of licensing arrangements are they available?
- How do participants get credited?
- Is there a set of arrangements whereby participants can share in the rewards received by producers?

Dovey (2014)

Documentary filmmaking has no field-wide tradition of articulating ethical practice. Interactivity multiplies ethical problems.

- Good faith with users as subjects
- Good faith with users as receivers
- Good faith with sponsors
- Transparency as ethical value

Aufderheide (2014)

Conclusion

- “a degree of fictionalisation and manipulation has been at the core of documentary film since its very inception” (Favero, 2013)
- “the notion of interactive documentary is one that is the logical extension of documentary” (Galloway, McAlpine, Harris, 2007)

Questions?

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