

THE INTERACTIVE MULTIMEDIA DOCUMENTARY
A PROPOSED ANALYSIS MODEL

CHAPTER 3: THE DOCUMENTARY GENRE. APPROACH AND TYPES

3.1 The documentary genre: preliminary issues

The study of the documentary genre is a complex area and it is often difficult to define a middle ground that is free of criticism. As well as attempting to define a historical context and possible definitions, it is very important to review the various positions adopted by documentary filmmakers during the first century of the genre's existence, and to illustrate this using a number of directors and specific works. In *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film (1996:261)* (1996), **Erik Barnouw** says that the positions or different functions adopted by the genre were never mutually exclusive, but instead, directors used to adopt a combination of various functions or positions assumed at different points in time. He also points out that the documentary's position in history has varied depending on the period and the prevailing needs, and has often been subordinate to the regime in power and its social function.

Based on the initial studies by Janssen, Muybridge and Marey, we will consider the evolution of the documentary genre over slightly more than a century. This brief approximation does not use a linear chronology, but is instead essentially based on the description of the modes suggested by **Bill Nichols** in *Representing reality. Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (1991), and cites and lists a series of outstanding authors and periods in the genre's history.

Directors in the genre have worked outside the boundaries of the big fiction system and outside the major studios, as their field is reality and the outside world. Documentary filmmakers are becoming increasingly interested in the history and significance of the medium in which they operate. They pay tribute to and remember the work and words of several pioneers of the genre, such as Louis Lumière and his invention, Flaherty and his passion for other peoples, Esfir Shub and montage, Dziga Vertov and stylistic innovation, Grierson and his passion for immediate reality, and others. The directors of documentaries are excited by images and sounds from reality, and they always place a higher value on them than anything they can invent using a fictional screenplay. Their way of expressing themselves is based on selecting and arranging what they find, and the decisions they take become the discourse that they broadcast to the world, which is always framed within their individual subjectivity. Every choice by the documentary filmmaker becomes the expression of a particular point of view, conscious or unconscious, recognized or unrecognized. Barnouw (1996:312-313) believes that a

documentary cannot be considered “the truth” but rather the evidence or the testimony of a fact or situation, within the complex historical process.

Michael Rabiger (1989:497) warned that the increasing production of documentaries, their independence from news journalism and their growing development as an individual voice in film could have major consequences in the future. Today, documentaries can be produced at no great expense using the latest modern technology, as the documentary does not depend on either studios or production centers. Two decades ago, Rabiger (1989) backed the production of films made on a speculative basis, and predicted a considerable increase in works with the auteur's hallmark, their diversification and their independence from the major centers of power.

As with any other art form, film has been subjected to many classifications based on different criteria and points of view over the years. Rick Altman, in his book *Film/Genre* (2000) says that the film genre can be understood based on various perspectives and meanings. The list he suggests (Altman, 2000:35) is as follows:

- The genre as a blueprint, as a formula that precedes, programs and patterns industry production
- The genre as **structure**, as the formal framework on which individual films are founded
- The genre as **label**, as the name of a category central to the decisions and communications of distributors and exhibitors
- The genre as **contract**, as the viewing position required by each genre film of its audience

Altman's proposal is an initial approach, which does not divide the genre into the two classic categories, fiction and nonfiction.

Roman Gubern (1993) defined the concept of a film genre as “a subject category, a rigid cultural model, based on standardized and repetitive formulas which are used to create the episodic and formal variations that distinguish each specific product and create families of themed subgenres within each major genre” (Romaguera, 1999:46).

3.2 The documentary film genre

3.2.1 Historical background

The documentary genre is still undergoing a long process of assessment in terms of its definition (as is the case with the proposals for classification and categorization). According to Bienvenido León (1999:59) in *El documental de divulgación científica* [The scientific dissemination documentary] (1999), in the history of cinema and television, the term documentary has been used to describe works of various types and characteristics, such as news films, educational films, travel stories and TV shows with various styles and content.

A possible definition of the term documentary is linked to its etymology, the theoretical models it has sustained and analyzed, the evolution of the audiovisual industry and its respective historiography and criticism. As **Alejandro Cock** points out in *Retóricas del cine de no ficción postvérité* [Rhetorics of non-fiction post-*vérité* film] (2009), in 1914, Edward S. Curtis was already using the terms *documentary material* and *documentary work* when referring to moving images in non-fiction (Plantinga, 1997:27). Some years later, during the 1920s, the French frequently used the term *documentaires* to describe the films about travel and news that they were producing at that time. The film used the concept of the document to designate films or extracts linked to reality, and it is this status as a document that is the framework for theoretical discussions about the documentary and its conformation as a discourse of reality (Cock, 2009:40).

The so-called “actualités” played a leading role in commercial cinemas from the early projections by the Lumière brothers until the end of the 1910s. At that time, films about everyday life, news stories, exotic places and cultures, were very popular among audiences and were associated with entertainment. This all led to the later appearance of documentary productions and the coining of the term to describe them. However, the apparent stagnation of the audiovisual language and the aesthetic of films based on real events increased the impetus behind fictional films, which were driven by the industrialization of filmmaking and based on the successful narrative model of the twentieth century novel, and made rapid progress and became a commercial leader all over the world (Cock, 2009:43).

Given the above, various filmmakers began to offer alternative narratives or suggest different conceptions of film, which became known as documentary, experimental or avant-garde film, depending on the commercial needs at any given time. It was a type of filmmaking that had been on the horizon since the beginning of cinema, but which could not have come about without the prevailing fictional model, which it used to postulate itself as an alternative. This laid the foundations for a major evolution in the medium, and major successes at the box office

and among critics, such as the documentary film *Nanook* (Flaherty 1922) and the avant-garde *Un Chien Andalou* (Buñuel, 1929). However, it led to an artificial division into three genres - fiction, non-fiction and experimental - which have today become forms or modes of representation, with increasingly permeable borders.

John Grierson, a key figure in the British documentary school, is thought to have been the first to use the term to describe a film by Robert Flaherty in 1926, which he described as having “documentary value”. The film was **Moana** and what Grierson regarded as “**documentary value**” was its recreation of the daily life of a Polynesian boy (Rabinowitz, 1994:18)¹. In his article called *First principles of documentary*, Grierson discussed Flaherty and the way he made documentaries²:

1) The documentary must master its material on the spot, and come in intimacy to ordering it. Flaherty digs himself in for a year, or two maybe. He lives with his people till the story is told “out of himself.”

2) It must follow him in his distinction between description and drama. I think we shall find that there are other forms of drama or, more accurately, other forms of film, than the one he chooses; but is important to make the primary distinction between a method which describes only the surface values of a subject, and the method which more explosively reveals the reality of it. You photograph the natural life, but you also, by your juxtaposition of detail, create an interpretation of it.

Flaherty himself says of the ethics and the duty of a documentary filmmaker:

“The purpose of the documentary, as I understand it, is to represent life in a way in which it is lived. This by no means implies what some people might think; namely, that the task of the documentary's director is to film, without making any selection [...] The task of selection is performed on the documentary material, with the aim of telling the truth in the most appropriate way” (Romaguera and Alsina, 1989:152).

¹The English term *documentary* was first used to refer to a film by Britain's John Grierson, the founder of the British school. In 1926, in his review of Robert Flaherty's film *Moana*, (published in *The New York Sun*, 1966:11) he wrote: “being a visual account of events in the daily life of a Polynesian youth and his family, has documentary value.” Grierson's later writings suggest that the term *documentary* is an adaptation of the French word *documentaire*, used since the twenties to refer to films about travel (Leon, 1999:59).

²Text published in three articles between 1939 and 1944. Available online at: <http://www.catedras.fsoc.uba.ar/decarli/textos/Grierson.htm> / http://www.everyoneweb.es/orzcinema/Pr_Update_Knooppunt_Inhoud.aspx?WebID=orzcinema&BoomID=B1&KnooppuntID=K481&LG=

John Grierson (1966:40) says that all works using materials from reality are generally categorized as documentaries, but unlike Paul Rotha, he suggests that the category should be set aside for works that include a significant artistic contribution. Grierson considers the documentary to be creative treatment of reality and believes that it is wise to establish formal limits of the different “species” of documentary.

3.2.2 Theoretical approach

More than half a century ago (in 1948), the *World Union of Documentary* established the following definition of a documentary:

“Documentaries are all methods of recording on celluloid any aspect of reality interpreted either 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” (quoted in Leon, 1999:63).

We can maintain all the parameters from the definition above, except for the one referring to the recording medium (celluloid). In any event, the evolution of the documentary and its various meanings has not ceased. As Grierson says in *Grierson on documentary* (1966), the various works within the genre include forms and different intentions of observing reality and organizing the material that has been extracted from it. A more precise definition of the concept is therefore required. Using this approach, Grierson sets out three guiding principles for the documentary. First, he argues that documentary film is a “new and vital art form [...] that can photograph the living scene and the living story.” He also argues that the characters and scenes taken from reality provide better opportunities for interpreting the modern world. Finally, he considers that the material taken from the world can reflect the essence of reality, capture spontaneous gestures and perform movements. In short, “The documentary is nothing more than a creative treatment of actuality. The editing of sequences must therefore include not only description and rhythm, but also comment and dialogue” (Grierson, 1966:36-37). He also says, with regard to art and poetry:

“Realistic documentary, with streets and cities and slums and markets and exchanges and factories, has given itself the job of making poetry when no poet has gone before it, and where no ends, sufficient for the purposes of art, are easily observed. It requires not only taste but also inspiration, which is to say a very notorious, deep-seeing, deep-sympathizing creative effort indeed” (Grierson, 1966:37).

He believes that the documentary is a useful, educational and impersonal genre, able to develop a discourse of sobriety, with connotations of authority, seriousness and honesty (Bruzzi, 2000:79). Grierson also makes a distinction between the documentary and other non-fiction discourses based on the production of sequences ordered in time or space, and the construction

of a discourse is therefore the basis for its differentiation from other audiovisual forms, which he believes are simpler (Cock, 2009:52).

Paul Rotha (1970:65), the British producer and director, says that documentary is synonymous with “the film of specific interest about scientific, cultural and sociological subjects.” Grierson disagrees with Rotha's definition and says that scientific or educational films are not strictly documentaries. For Rotha, the documentary is “the use of the film medium to interpret creatively and in social terms the life of the people as it exists in reality” (Rotha, 1970:5). Rotha was a collaborator with Grierson, but also criticized some of his positions. He popularized the term documentary in the academic world of cinema with his book *The Film Till Now*, published in 1930, in which he refers to the various types of film, and places the *documentary film* in a different category, which he defines based on its purpose and meaning, as follows (Cock, 2009:52-53):

“Documentary defines not subject or style, but approach. It denies neither trained actors nor the advantages of staging. It justifies the use of every known technical artifice to gain its effect on the spectator....To the documentary director the appearance of things and people is only superficial. It is the meaning behind the thing and the significance underlying the person that occupy his attention....Documentary approach to cinema differs from that of story-film not in its disregard for craftsmanship, but in the purpose to which that craftsmanship is put. Documentary is a trade just as carpentry or pot-making. The pot-maker makes pots, and the documentarian documentaries” (quoted in Jack, 1989:61)

Michael Renov reminds us in *Theorizing Documentary* (1993) that the concept of the document and its adjectivization as a documentary have a genealogy that can be linked to historicity, based on the two roots of the term, one from Latin and one from Old French. The original Latin word, *docere*, means the ability to teach, i.e. the conscious transmission of something that can be learned. The Old French root denotes “*evidence or proof*”. Renov (1993:21-22) defines the documentary form as “the more or less artful reshaping of the historical world,” in which four modalities or functions may arise, which he calls rhetorical/aesthetic, which make up the documentary text. These are to record, reveal or preserve; to persuade or promote; to analyze or interrogate; and to express.

The standpoint of **Bill Nichols** in his book *Representing Reality. Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (1991) has received the most attention from international academia. In this theoretical work, Nichols suggests an open and rather unorthodox definition, based on a **multiple perspective**. He believes that the documentary is a protean institution, consisting of a **corpus of texts**, a **set of viewers** and a **community of practitioners and conventional practices** that are **subject to historical changes**. He thereby sees the documentary as a conceptual shift in film theory, as it is not merely defined simply in terms of the argument, the

purpose, the form, style and production methods, but instead he defines it by its changing nature as a social construct. For this reason, the social network of production, filming, distribution and promotion are constructed by the concept itself. Bill Nichols says:

“A good documentary stimulates discussion about its subject, not itself. This serves as many a documentarist's motto, but it neglects to indicate how crucial rhetoric and form are to the realization of this goal. Despite such a motto, documentary films raise a rich array of historiographic, legal, philosophic, ethical, political and aesthetic issues [...] Rather than one, three definitions of documentary suggest themselves since each definition contributes something distinctive and helps identify different sets of concerns. Let us consider documentary from the point of view of the filmmaker, the text and the viewer” (Nichols, 1991:42).

Nichols sets out three criteria for the definition of the documentary, with which he attempts to cover most aspects involved in the complexity of the genre. Each criterion gives rise to a definition that highlights different but complementary meanings.

The first definition, focused on the **director's** point of view, considers fiction in terms of control: “One common but misleading way of defining documentary from the point of view of filmmaker is in terms of control: documentary filmmakers exercise less control over their subject than their fictional counterparts do” (Nichols, 1991: 42). As Bordwell and Thompson (1995) argue, it is often possible to distinguish a documentary film from a fiction film based on the degree of control exercised during the production. While in fiction almost all the factors are controlled down to the smallest detail, the director of a documentary film only controls a few variables in the preparation, filming and editing. However, what is ultimately uncontrollable by the filmmaker is his subject, which is of necessity part of the story. As Nichols says, “by addressing the historical domain, the documentarist is in a similar position to other practitioners who lack control over what they do: social scientists, physicians, politicians, entrepreneurs, engineers and revolutionaries.”

The second area of definition refers to the **text**. We will assume that the documentary genre is a film genre like any other. The films included in this genre have some common characteristics.

As Nichols says:

“Each film establishes internal norms or structures of its own but these frequently share common traits with the textual system or organizing pattern of other documentaries. Documentaries take shape around an informing logic. The economy of the logic requires a representation, case or argument about the historical world. The economy is basically instrumental or pragmatic: it operates in terms of problem-solving. A paradigmatic structure for documentary would involve the establishment of an issue or problem, the presentation of the background to the problem, followed by an examination of its current extent or complexity, often including more than one perspective or point of view. This would lead to a concluding section where a solution or path toward a solution is introduced” (Nichols, 1991:48).

Nichols also mentions that the structure of the documentary text has parallels with other texts.

These parallels occur at various levels: they may belong to a movement, period, style or form. If

the documentary is considered as a genre, the subdivisions within the documentary may have other names.

His third definition concerns the relationship between the documentary and receiver, i.e. the figure of the **viewer**. He says that viewers develop skills based on an understanding and interpretation of the process that enables them to understand the film. These procedures are a type of methodical knowledge, derived from an active process of deduction, based on prior knowledge and the text itself:

“This knowledge would encompass such things as recognizing the picture of Martin Luther King, Jr. as the likeness of a historical figure, understanding that social dislocations can be unified by an argument, assuming that social actors do not conduct themselves solely at the behest of the filmmaker, and hypothesizing the presentation of a solution once a problem begins to be described” (Nichols, 1991:55).

In his work *Blurred Boundaries. Question of meaning in contemporary culture* (1994), Nichols summarizes the current state of the documentary as follows:

“Traditionally, the word documentary has suggested fullness and completion, knowledge and fact, explanations of the social world and its motivating mechanisms. More recently, though, documentary has come to suggest incompleteness and uncertainty, recollection and impression, images of personal worlds and their subjective construction” (Nichols, 1994:1)

3.3 Proposed types of documentary

Despite the difficulties and differences in the proposals for classification of the documentary, the various efforts are in themselves an interesting methodological tool for the study of documentary and its discourse. The aim of this section is to present the most widely accepted and recognized classifications within the academia of the documentary.

Since the 1980s, and especially in recent years, there has been a strong new conceptual movement in non-fiction film, which has replaced or reworked many previous concepts and practices. There are various theoretical trends, such as the semiological and psychoanalytic model, represented by William Guynn; anthropological theory and information, represented by Bill Nichols; deconstructionism and postmodernism, as in the ideas of Michael Reno; feminism and postcolonialism, represented by Trinh T. Minh-Ha, and critical realism and cognitivism (“post-theory”) as considered by Noël Carroll and Carl Plantinga. In this section, we discuss in depth the classifications of Erik Barnouw, Michael Renov and Bill Nichols, in order to classify the periods, movements, authors and works with the various proposals presented by the authors. For reasons of space, we will omit other authors from our study, such as Peter I. Crawford (Crawford 1992) and Elisenda Ardèvol (Ardèvol 1995 and 1996), whose proposals are included in a final synoptic table (Table 3.1).

3.3.1 Barnouw and the historical modes.

In his book published in 1996, *Documentary. A History of the Non-Fiction Film*, Erik Barnouw categorizes movements and series of films with similar stylistic characteristics and which fulfill the same **social function**, and which take place at a specific historical point. The common link in his classification is based on a particular profession or trade.

Barnouw's work begins with a brief description of the background and history that made the invention of cinema possible. He begins by focusing his attention on Louis Lumière, who he describes as a *prophet* (the invention of the Lumière brothers anticipated and prophesied immense future possibilities). One of the first pioneers to take advantage of the Lumières' new invention was Robert Flaherty, in a kind of anthropological and ethnographic documentary, described by Barnouw as an *explorer* (based on the financed expeditions of the period, which enabled the production of the first film in the genre); he then examines the role of the *reporter* (the news genre, following the guidelines laid down by the Soviet propaganda of the time), with one name in particular, Dziga Vertov. This is followed by the avant-garde and its innovative contribution to the genre, described by Barnouw using the figure of the *painter* (documentary filmmakers had very artistic and pictorial, as is apparent in their output) and emphasizing authors such as Walter Ruttmann, Jean Vigo and Joris Ivens. The documentary then adopted the role of an advocate (the documentary within a social context, to defend the cause of the people and society), in which the central figure of Grierson and the British school assumed a prominent role. In preparation for the Second World War, he gives us the chapter discussing the *bugler* (in which the author presents clear examples of the propaganda films of World War II), the exponents of which are Humphrey Jennings and Frank Capra. After the war, we look at the Thorndikes, who feature in the chapter on the *prosecutor* (who judges and condemns the war crimes of the Second World War) and the figure of the *poet* (characterized by a search for metaphorical, everyday or neorealist language), a chapter featuring Arne Sucksdorf and Bert Haanstra. Towards the end of the book, the documentary is considered from the point of view of the *chronicler* (based on the historical account of the late fifties and early sixties), with Jean Rouch, and reaches the figure of the *promoter* (when works are sponsored by private institutions and companies), with Edward Murrow, among others. Fred Wiseman and Richard Leacock illustrate the chapter on the documentary *observer* (focused on the American direct cinema U.S.), followed by Chris Marker and the documentary as a *catalyst* (which breaks down and describes the French *Cinema Verite*), the *guerilla* (the showing of political and militant documentaries of the sixties and seventies) and video production focusing on the figure of John Alpert. By way of a conclusion, it features a lengthy closing chapter, the *movement* (which covers the heterogeneous documentary of the eighties and nineties). The latest trends are not included since it was published in 2001.

3.3.2 Renov and the modes of desire.

Michael Renov and Brian Winston adopt a deconstructive approach to the documentary. Winston (1993:21) reflects on scientific and documentary discourse, and concludes that the former has been invoked to legitimize the latter, and to become its standard. Renov (1993:2-3) believes that the terms of the established hierarchy between fiction and nonfiction must be displaced and transformed. “Nonfiction” is valuable as a category, but based on the assumption that it must necessarily include elements of fiction and vice versa.

Renov says that a perspective that assumes that the documentary is a completely sober discourse fails to understand the deep roots of non-fiction, because it is its distinctive historical status of which distinguishes the documentary from its fictional counterparts, and not its formal relationships. He concludes by saying that “the documentary shares the status of all discursive forms with regard to its tropic or figurative character,” and following other contemporary authors, he says that all forms of discourse, including the documentary, are at least fictitious if they are not fictional (Renov, 1993: 8).

Michael Renov (1993) uses the theory of poetry for his classification, which is an area that is far removed from that Barnouw, the historiographer. Renov proposes a division based on the specific process of composition, function and effect, based on four fundamental trends or aesthetic and rhetorical functions, which he says are **modes of desire**, which have been the mainstay of the discourse on the documentary for decades. They are as follows:

1. **To record, reveal or preserve.** This mimetic function is common to all film, and very closely associated with the documentary genre. This category could include anthropological or ethnographic documentaries (mainly represented by Robert Flaherty) and even personal diaries.
2. **To persuade or promote.** A function considered rhetorical by Renov, i.e. the search for aesthetic and argumentative techniques of persuasion to achieve social and personal goals. Examples include the British school and the Grierson-style documentary, but could also include *Night and Fog*, by Alain Resnais, because for Renov persuasion is a technique that cuts across through all the other functions.
3. **To analyze or interrogate.** A mimetic and rational function that is a more “cerebral” reflex than the first mode, in which the aesthetic attitude seeks the active involvement of the audience. This model includes the documentaries produced by the *Direct Cinema* and *Cinéma Vérité* schools, although this function was also found in pioneering documentaries, such as those by the Russian Dziga Vertov, or contemporary documentarists such as Alain Resnais and Chris Marker.
4. **To express.** This is the aesthetic function, closely related to the documentary form, of reality itself, but it has to date been the least highly valued and rejected because of the

prevailing scientific attitude in society. The aesthetic function is predominant in many schools, such as the avant-garde, when the documentary is similar to pictorial arts or poetry, or Robert Flaherty's anthropological documentaries.

Renov acknowledges that these methods are not specific to the documentary, or exclusive of anything that is not a documentary, but he argues that they bear witness to the historical richness and variety of forms of non-fiction in the visual arts and its rhetorical possibilities.

3.3.3 Nichols and the modes of representation

Nichols' model has been the most extensively studied and criticized in the area of contemporary film theory. His categories are based on the combination of variables of filming styles and material practices. The first classifications were based on the narratological distinction between direct and indirect styles, which evolved until there were four basic documentary modes: the expository, the observational, the reflexive, and the interactive (Burton, 1990)³. In her subsequent work, she changed the interactive mode for the participatory mode and introduced two new modes - the poetic and reflective. Finally, in her third book, she revises and extends her previous work and incorporates the performance mode.

According to Nichols says (1991:65), situations and events, actions and issues, can be represented in different ways. The modes of representation are basic ways of organizing texts in relation to some recurrent characteristics or conventions. The author insists that his analysis and categories have a historical chronology, as new models are developed as a result of dissatisfaction with the predominant model in a given period, although this does not prevent the coexistence of specific movements or documentaries within the same period. Nichols put it as follows:

“New modes convey a fresh, new perspective on reality. Gradually, the conventional nature of this mode of representation becomes increasingly apparent: an awareness of norms and conventions to which a given text adheres begins to frost the window onto reality. The time for a new mode is then at hand” (Nichols, 1991:66).

In his more recent books, Bill Nichols talks about the rhetorical nature of the documentary, although he does so hesitantly and with some inconsistencies. In *Representing Reality* (1991) he separates rhetoric from style: “Rhetoric moves us away from style, to the other end of the axis between author and viewer” (Nichols, 1991:181) and he associates it with argumentation and

³The origin of the four modes began as a distinction between the direct and indirect modes in Nichols' work *Ideology and the image*. Julianne Burton reviewed and put the finishing touches to the initial distinction, and made it into a four-part categorisation, in “Toward a History of Social Documentary in Latin America”, in her anthology *The Social Documentary in Latin America* (1990).

persuasion of a more ideological and almost misleading nature: “rhetoric involves making a persuasive case, not describing and assessing damaging or less appealing facts, though their disclosure would be necessary” (Nichols, 1991:183).

In his book *Introduction to documentary* (2001), Nichols continues to argue, less forcefully but directly, that the documentary is a rhetorical form and cites several classical figures, such as Cicero, Quintilian and Aristotle to justify this claim. Furthermore, he argues that the voice of the documentary is the voice of oratory: the voice of the filmmaker who adopts a position on aspects of the historical world and who is convincing about his own merits. This position contradicts the aspects of the world that are open to debate (i.e. those not based on scientific evidence, which depend on understanding, interpretation, values and judgment). Nichols points out that this mode of representation requires a way of speaking that is fundamentally different to logic and narrative. This is rhetoric, although he once again associates it with argument, and clearly separates it from scientific and literary discourses, which are also always present (Nichols, 2001:49). There are six modes of representation in the documentary described by Nichols:

1. The **expository** mode. This is associated with the classic documentary, and based on illustrating an argument using images. It is a rhetorical rather than an aesthetic mode, aimed directly at the viewer, using text titles or phrases to guide the image and to emphasize the idea of objectivity and logical argument. It emerged from the disappointment generated by the poor entertainment quality of fiction films. Key examples of this mode are the socio-ethnographic expeditions (anthropology in documentary films, especially in the work of Robert Flaherty) and the British documentary movement (social objectives in documentary film, led by John Grierson and the documentarists of the British school) (Nichols, 1991:68-72 and Nichols, 2001:105-109).
2. The **poetic** mode. Its origin is linked to the emergence of artistic avant-gardes in cinema, and that is why it uses many of the devices typical of other arts (fragmentation, subjective impressions, surrealism, etc.). It is a mode that has reappeared at different times and which is experiencing a resurgence in many contemporary documentaries. It aims to create a specific mood and tone rather than to provide the viewer with information, as is the case with the expository and observational modes. This mode includes the avant-garde of the 1920s and 1930s (the aesthetic objective in documentary film led by Walter Ruttmann, Jean Vigo and Joris Ivens) and the films verging on art and neo-realism (the artistic and poetic purpose of the documentary language as embodied

by the contributions of Arne Sucksdorf and Bert Haanstra) (Nichols, 1991:72-78 and Nichols, 2001:102-105).

3. The **reflexive** mode. The purpose of this mode is to raise the audience's awareness of the means of representation itself and the devices that have given it authority. The film is not considered a window on the world, but is instead considered a construct or representation of it, and it aims for the viewer to adopt a position that is critical of any form of representation. Nichols considers this to be the most self-critical and self-conscious mode. It arose from the desire to make the conventions of representation more evident, and to put to the test the impression of reality that the other modes usually transmitted without any problem (in his first study in 1991, Nichols established four basic modes based on the book *The Social Documentary in Latin America* by Julianne Burton). This is the most introspective mode - it uses many of the resources found in other types of documents, but it takes them to the limit, so that the viewer's attention is focused on both the resource and the effect. This mode includes the news documented in Russia in the early years of the twentieth century (the ideological objective in documentary film, led by Dziga Vertov) and some more contemporary authors such as Jill Godmilow and Raul Ruiz, among others (Nichols, 1991:93-114 and Nichols, 2001:125-130).
4. The **observational** mode. This mode is represented by the French *Cinema Verite* and the American *Direct Cinema* film movements, which despite their major differences, both benefited from technological developments (portable, lightweight and synchronous equipment) in the early 1960s. Together with a more open and coherent set of filmic and narrative theories, these enabled a different approach to the subject matter, and the directors prioritized a spontaneous and direct observation of reality. It arose as a result of disagreement with the moralizing aim of the expository documentary. This mode allowed the director to record reality without becoming involved in what people were doing when they were not explicitly looking into the camera. Of particular interest in this category are the *Cinema Verite* movement in France, the *Direct Cinema* movement in the U.S.A. and *Candid Eye* in Canada (the sociological focus of the documentary film, led by Jean Rouch, Edgar Morin and Mario Ruspolli, among others) (Nichols, 1991:66 and Nichols, 2001:109-115).
5. The **participatory** mode (in its interactive origins). This mode was mainly used in ethnographic film and in social theories of participatory investigation, and presents the relationship between the filmmaker and the filmed subject. The director becomes an investigator and enters unknown territory, participates in the lives of others, and gains

direct and in-depth experience and reflection from the film. This mode of representation is present in films such as *Celovek kinoaparatom* (Vertov, 1929) and *Chronique d'un été* (Rouch and Morin, 1960). The observational mode limited the director to the present and required a disciplined detachment from events. The participatory documentary makes the director's perspective clearer, involving him/her in the discourse that is being produced. The directors wanted to make contact with individuals in a more direct way, without returning to the classical exhibitory format, and this led to interview styles and various interventionist tactics, which enabled the producer to participate more actively in the events. He could also become the narrator of the story, or explain what happened by means of witnesses and/or experts. These comments were often added to archive footage to facilitate reconstructions and to prevent endless and omniscient commentary. The outstanding figures were Jean Rouch, Emile de Antonio and Connie Field, among others (Nichols, 1991:78-93 and Nichols, 2001:115-125).

6. The **performance** mode. The final mode introduced by Nichols, which appeared relatively recently, calls into question the foundations of traditional documentary film and raises doubts about the boundaries that have traditionally been established by the genre of fiction. It focuses interest on expressiveness, poetry and rhetoric, rather than on the desire for realistic representation. The emphasis is shifted to the evocative qualities of the text, rather than its representational capacity, and once again focuses on more contemporary artistic avant-gardes. This new mode of representation emerged from the previous modes and the shortcomings or flaws in the classic modes, according to various authors. An obvious example is the American director Michael Moore, among others (Nichols, 1994:92-106 and Nichols, 2001:130-138).

In short, Nichols says that each mode uses the resources of narrative and realism in a different way, and uses common ingredients to produce different kinds of text with ethical issues, textual structures and standard expectations among the viewers. The following overview (Table 3.1) provides a comparison of the main features of the classifications by the three authors studied, plus those by Crawford (1992) and Ardèvol (1995 and 1996).

3.1 EQUIVALENCES BETWEEN THE VARIOUS CLASSIFICATIONS OF THE DOCUMENTARY GENRE

BILL NICHOLS	ERIK BARNOW	MICHAEL RENOV	PETER L. CRAWFORD	ELISENDA ARDÉVOL
<i>Modes of representing reality</i>	<i>Historical modes (social functions and/or tasks)</i>	<i>Modes of desire</i>	<i>Visual anthropology modes</i>	<i>Historical movements and a combination of filming factors, collaboration models and filming</i>
EXPOSITORY	Prophet Explorer Reporter Advocate Bugler Prosecutor Chronicler Promoter	Record Reveal Preserve Persuade Promote	Perspicuous Mode	Explanatory cinema
POETIC	Painter Poet	Express		
REFLECTIVE	Reporter Contemporary	Analyze Interrogate	Evocative Mode	Reflexive cinema
OBSERVATIONAL	Observer Catalyst Guerilla	Analyze Interrogate	Experiential Mode	Observational cinema Cinema Verité Direct cinema
PARTICIPATORY (INTERACTIVE)	Contemporary (The movement)	Express	Experiential Mode Evocative Mode	Participatory cinema Evocative - Deconstructionist
PERFORMANCE	Contemporary (The movement)	Express	Experiential Mode	

3.1 Equivalences between the various classifications of the documentary

3.3.4 Critical definitions

It is quite clear that the categories studied by Barnouw, renew and Nichols are incomplete and present problems, as is the case with any classification that one attempts to establish.

As we have seen, the documentary has been a **vaguely defined genre** since its beginnings. In the documentary genre, reality is apparently transparent, pure, without any manipulation, in contrast to the fiction film. The coexistence of documentary and fiction in modern cinema has

crossed the ethical and aesthetic boundaries of both genres, and has now reached the point where the boundaries between reality and fiction are unknown. An example of this concept (in the present day) is the mockumentary, one of the latest manifestations of the convergence between the documentary and fiction. The case of the mockumentary is interesting: it is based on a series of false events, using the techniques and mechanisms typical of the documentary genre, which sometimes leads to intelligent parodies that question the objectivity and the essential characteristics of the genre itself. The mockumentary is one of the more obvious manifestations of debatable boundaries between genres, and creates some uncertainty at macrogenre level, as regards where the boundaries between reality and narrative structures lie. It is something else that must be added to this period of overall mistrust or *suspicion period*. However, the conventional proposals for classification of the documentary examined above, while useful, and even educational in some cases, have some problems and limitations that should be borne in mind.

The grouping of documentaries by social function proposed by **Barnouw** may have been useful for the pedagogical structuring of his book, and indeed the merit of having compiled, described and exemplified the main stages in the history of the genre should be attributed to him. In addition, the book eschews academicism and a rigid indexing structure, as in the case of the book by Richard M. Barsam, *Nonfiction Film: a Critical History* (1992), and presents the history as if it were a story, with a narrative style that seems to have come from a good novel, in an enjoyable way with anecdotes that give it a tone of originality. However, the chapters (seen in terms of phases or categories that are broken down) present problems in terms of an in-depth analysis, as centering and focusing the genre on the subordination of a series of functions means that other important issues must be left to one side. With this classification system, Barnouw creates a type of sealed compartment which includes various directors and films, and by doing so he rejects the interconnectedness between individuals and movements and the many possibilities deriving from them (Cock, 2006:14). From this standpoint, the classifications created by other authors, such as Nichols and Barsam, are much more illuminating and comprehensible: Nichols presents fewer modes and describes them in depth, and Barsam focuses on historical periods, and makes a distinction between the two World Wars and the interwar and postwar periods (and thereby creates partitions in chronological time, which is a way of clearly defining different periods). However, Barsam offers no clear categorization, but simply sets out the history and the most important movements.

According to Cock (2006) **Renov's** categories are not exclusive or closed and can be extrapolated to other areas, which sets his argument apart from the theoretical approach advocated by Barnouw. However, the shortcomings in Renov's analytical model are quite similar to those of Barnouw. Renov says that his categorization is not chronological or

evolutionary, in an indirect criticism of Nichols, and yet he constantly directly associates part of his categories with historical documentary movements and makes judgments that demonstrate a scale of values between the function deemed the most basic (to record, reveal and preserve) and the most complex (to analyze, interrogate and express). This categorization limits the use of non-fiction films, which can be as varied as the uses of fiction films or of human communication itself. (Cock, 2006:16)

As for **Nichols**, although there is a consistent linear chronology and an implicit trend towards a complexity and multiplicity of modes, in reality many of these modes have potentially been available since the birth of documentary film and the history of independent film. Each mode has experienced a period of dominance in particular regions or countries, but the modes also tend to combine and change within specific films. Today, the oldest and most traditional approaches are not disappearing, but are instead coexisting with new ones that emerge. What works at a particular time and what counts as a realistic representation of the historical world is not simply a matter of progress toward a definite form of expressing the truth, but rather of struggles for power and authority within the historical context itself (Nichols, 1991:67).

