

+O'REILLY FILM+  
+VISUAL LITERACY+

READING DOCUMENTARIES  
EARCOS MANILA 2016

**Research referenced in my presentation**



## Five Types of Documentaries

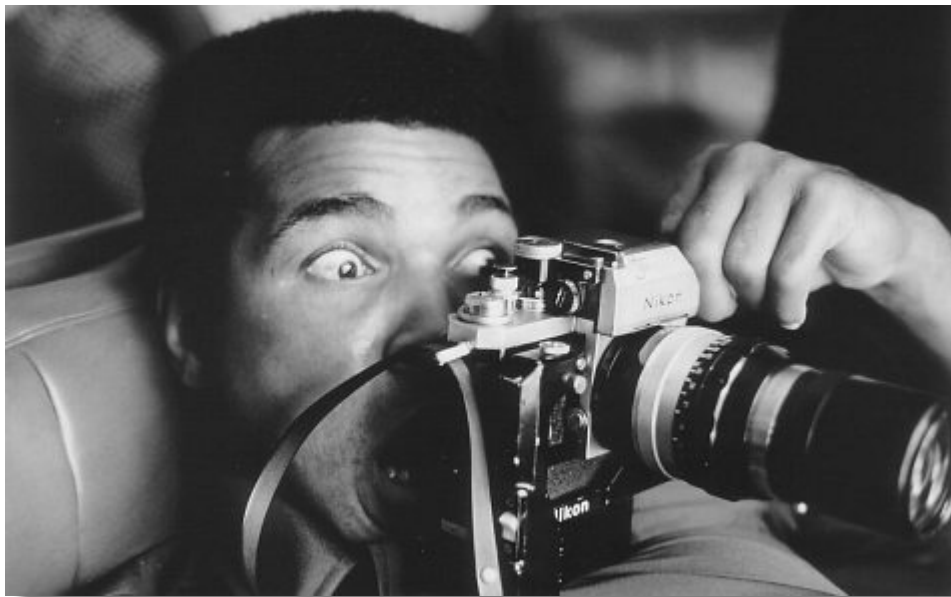
In *Representing Reality: A Critical Introduction to Documentary* (1989), Bill Nichols identifies five categories of documentary film: the expository, observational, interactive, reflexive and the performative documentary.

- **The expository documentary** employs the following techniques: a disembodied and authoritative voiceover commentary, plus a series of images that aim to be descriptive and informative. The commentary in this type of film is often called the “voice of God” – an all-knowing narrator imparting knowledge.

*Night and Fog*. (Alain Resnais, 1955)



- **The observational documentary** is sometimes called the “fly on the wall” documentary. It tries to present a “slice of life” or a direct representation of the filmed events. The filmmaker attempts to be completely invisible, that is, an uninvolved bystander. There is no “voice of God” and no interviews.



*When We Were Kings* (1996) Leon Gast's observational documentary on the 1974 heavyweight championship bout in Zaire between champion George Foreman and underdog challenger Muhammad Ali.

- **The interactive documentary** makes the film maker's presence prominent, as he or she interacts with the people or events being filmed. These interactions primarily take the form of interviews, which draw out specific comments and responses from those who are filmed.

Parodies of this style include:

*Take The Money and Run* (Woody Allen, 1969)

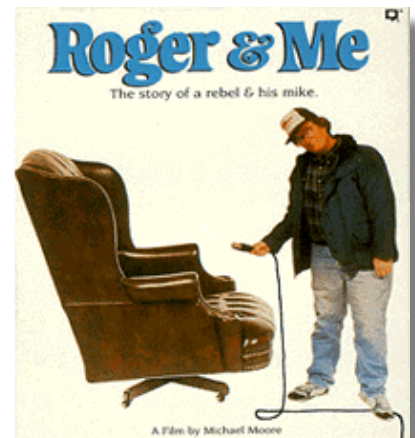
*Strictly Ballroom* (Baz Luhrmann, 1992)

- **The reflexive documentary** attempts to expose to the spectator the conventions of documentary representation. Rather than focus on the events and people filmed, the reflexive documentary focuses on how they are filmed.

The effect is that the reflexive documentary challenges the documentary's apparent ability to reveal the truth.

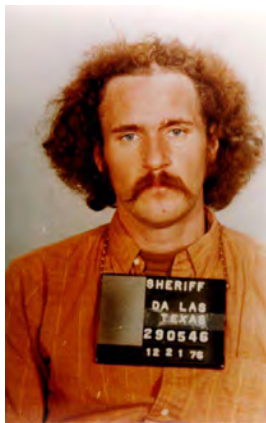
*Roger and Me* (Michael Moore, 1989)

*9/11* (Gideon & Jules Naudet, James Hanlon, 2002)



- **Performative documentary** deflects attention away from the world and towards the expressive dimension of film. It is obviously subjective and often includes re-enactments of events. The subject matter is presented in a vivid and striking manner but, at the same time, the viewers must question whether events are distorted as a result of the way they are presented.

*The Thin Blue Line* (Errol Morris, 1988).



- Billed as “the first movie mystery to actually solve a murder,” *The Thin Blue Line* is credited with overturning the conviction of Randall Dale Adams for the murder of Dallas police officer Robert Wood, a crime for which Adams was sentenced to death.

## **Recommended Documentaries**

### **Breen O'Reilly EARCOS 2016**

The following are discussed or referenced in my presentation:

Nanook of the North  
Ilha de Flores  
John Baldessari  
Central Park Five  
Thin Blue Line  
Samsara  
Baraka  
Benda Bilili  
The Act of Killing  
Punk Syndrome  
Wasteland  
War Dance  
Spellbound  
The Game of Our Lives  
Young and Restless in China  
The Imposter  
20 Feet from Stardom  
Ai Wei Wei - Never Sorry  
Let The Fire Burn  
Red Obsession  
The Wolfpack  
Cartel Land  
One Day in September  
Manufactured Landscapes  
Hoop Dreams  
Going Clear  
Autism the Musical  
Young at Heart  
911  
China Heavyweight  
The Possibilities are Endless  
Ryan