

HYBRIDITY IN DOCUFICTION

(appendage to the Wikipedia's article on docufiction)

CONCEPT

Docufiction is a hybrid film genre in which documentary and fiction weigh more or less on the plate, being rare that both have equal weight. The balance needle may tilt more to one side than to the other. The issue may also be seen other way: how far a filmmaker may go without traversing certain limits, often uncertain, beyond which documentary turns into fiction and so



Jean Rouch in the film **PAROLES**

[https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paroles_\(film\)](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paroles_(film))

crossing a border, getting into a territory that doesn't belong to him and where he will be seen as an intruder. He'll step, in an extreme situation, on a real territory that turned into an entirely fictional place. There are certain places where one doesn't know where he has got, where his certitudes turn into nothingness. There, one may feel just a little confuse (and that may be amusing) or, in the worst case, desperate (and that may be tragic) **(01)**, there or anywhere else **(02) (03)**.

Documentary films rarely arouse empathy feelings among audiences as they aren't made for that but just to impress them in a different way: showing facts that deal with consciousness, helping one to be more aware of what reality is. They are crude, they are pure by nature and so they must be. Besides, "If audiences hesitate to watch documentaries on "heavy" social issues then these issues must be presented in more subtle or palatable ways" **(04)**. Thomas Larson refers to it in these terms (in literature, but fitting to cinema as well): "Hybrid writers mix fact and fiction; poetry and prose; memoir and history; biography and memoir. The hybrid goes by a number of names: nonlinear narrative, composite, pastiche, montage, collage, mosaic, and bricolage; it is a form that blurs one genre with another; and it describes any narrative whose structure is fragmented, braided, threaded, broken, or segmented. That's to say being tempered by aesthetic or ethical ingredients, turning into fiction with more or less serious effects on both their value and their consequences" **(05)**. In other words: in extreme situations, documentary may degenerate into fantasy and fiction into corrupted cinéma vérité https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cin%C3%A9ma_v%C3%A9rit%C3%A9 **(06)**.

Modernity is, by definition, the motor that made docufiction cross a new frontier and find land to grow, a wide territory governed by ambiguous characters, in real or fictional narratives, who exceed themselves in extreme situations.

Things went really wrong for the first time in History (and in the history of docufiction as well) with a sad story: "Children of Hiroshima" (1952) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Children_of_Hiroshima, survivals of a colossal tragedy caused by crazed agents (see Ward Wilson

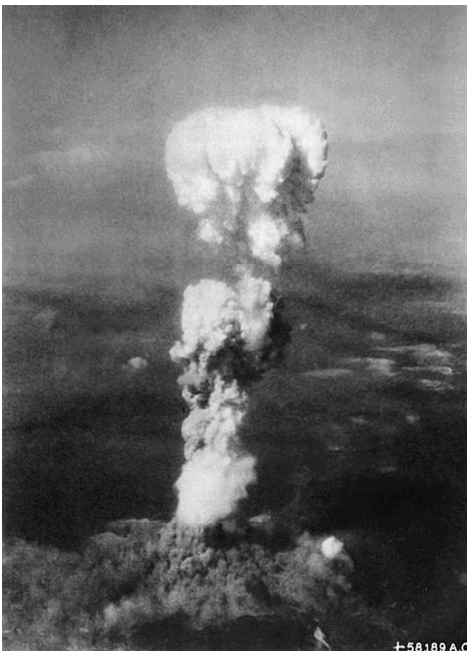
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ward_Wilson), a story of revenge starred by actants like "The Great Artiste" https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Great_Artiste and "The Necessary Evil" [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Necessary_Evil_\(aircraft\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Necessary_Evil_(aircraft)). Children of Hiroshima tells the story of the effects of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atomic_bombings_of_Hiroshima_and_Nagasaki,



thrown on innocent people, of tremendous explosions which imploded in cathartic effects of devastation and suffering, in pictures of great beauty. Face to stories like these (like those of a Greek tragedy), one must submit to an extreme requirement: **such things must not be done**. Aesthetics, more than ethics, has the power to impose similar prescripts.

In same style, but unavoidably in much lower scale, new attempts have been made to cause such effects. Subsequent films would arise less pathos, among which certain would reveal a more acute understanding of modern realities (07) (08). How far can they go? How far author vanities injure spectators? Will this perverse fashion have a future? Films like these have been few. Will be many those which follow? Will they fit to modern definitions? (09).

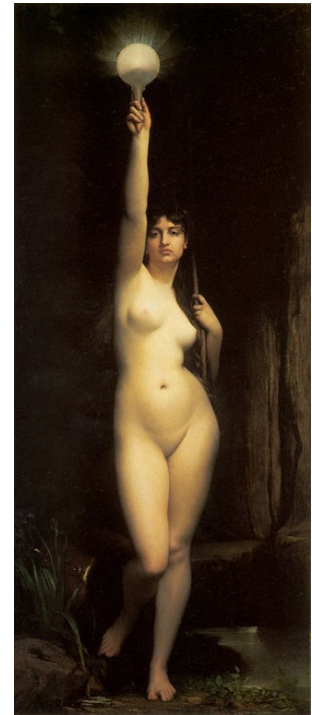
Illustration and allusion (recording and interpretation (10) (11)) are the poles of two different forms of mirroring reality, either in film or any other art. Illustration techniques are objective and implicate a concern of fidelity to what they represent, to the representant, (12) (13). Allusion represents subjective matter.



Robert Flaherty used to illustrate the realities he pictured with appealing aesthetics, realities that touched naïve audiences thirsty of alluring landscapes: exotic natives, beautiful and noble savages from dream countries faraway. He showed them with strong images, conceived to please large audiences and greedy producers (14) (15) (16) (17) (18). As well seduced by such charms, Jean Rouch, a scientist before everything else, ventured to go further in extreme attempts. Using "neutral lenses" (a neutral perspective) and a quite different sense of poetry, he went shooting blacks in mysterious countries of Africa

with the noble intent of discovering who they are and what they mean. He submitted to confrontation in both fronts: reducing aesthetics to images with no pretention and ethics to strict principles, indispensable to bring up truth (19).

The stories these adventurers tell about such encounters are cryptic and highlight an uncomfortable paradox that haunts them all in different ways (20). It affects audiences somewhat (21). From different countries, others try the same. For strong reasons, a few dare to go beyond the limits they should keep, turning documentary into irreducible fiction, into fantasy with no return: "Arabian Nights [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arabian_Nights_\(2015_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arabian_Nights_(2015_film))" (22), "Horse Money https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horse_Money" (23) e.g., in radical approaches but different moods (reveries, dramas, local realities: country paradigms). Others, in matching moods and similar attempts, afraid to veer, set foot on redlines without scalding, using subtle tricks, ingredients with less burning effects: "Taxi [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taxi_\(2015_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taxi_(2015_film))", "Drifts [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drifts_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drifts_(film))" (24) e.g. (autobiographies, city portraits, no budget films https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/No-budget_film, metafilms <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metacinema>, docu-comedies <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mockumentary> in extreme). Both tendencies will survive. Mutant realities will make them vary (25) (26) (27).



La Vérité by [Jules Lefebvre](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jules_Lefebvre)

https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jules_Lefebvre

NOTES

(01) 'Based on a true story': the fine line between fact and fiction

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/dec/06/based-on-a-true-story-geoff-dyer-fine-line-between-fact-and-fiction-nonfiction>

article by Geoff Dyer https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geoff_Dyer

(02) Documentary and Fiction Breed to Create a Better Truth

<https://www.documentary.org/feature/hybrid-reality-when-documentary-and-fiction-breed-create-better-truth>

article by Chuleenan Svetvilas at IDA <https://www.documentary.org/>

(03) In and out of this world: digital video and the aesthetics of realism in the new hybrid documentary

http://blogs.iac.gatech.edu/filmtech/files/2014/08/Landesman_Hybrid-Doc.pdf

– article by Ohad Landesman

(04) Scripting the Docufiction: Combining the Narrative and Documentary Modes in a Social Issue Film –

Thesis by Joseph V. Brown, University of Denver

<https://digitalcommons.du.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1091&context=etd>

(05) The Hybrid Narratives

<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/b4e3/42f06636fb5bd654dc045451fcee615c7eb8.pdf>

academic dissertation by Salla-Maaria

Laaksonen, Department of Social Research University of Helsinki, Finland, 2017

(06) Home Feature Articles – Jean Rouch: Cinéma-vérité, Chronicle of a Summer and The Human

Pyramid

<http://sensesofcinema.com/2002/feature-articles/rouch/>, article by Barbara Bruni

<http://sensesofcinema.com/author/barbara-bruni/>

at Senses of Cinema <http://sensesofcinema.com>, March 2002

(07) Postmodernism and Film: Rethinking Hollywood's Aesthetics

<https://cup.columbia.edu/book/postmodernism-and-film/9780231174558>

by Catherine Constable, Columbia University Press, 2015. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/10.7312/const17455?ref

(08) Postmodernism definition

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/postmodernism-philosophy>

at Britannica encyclopedia

(09) Postmodern Cinema

<http://ideasfilm.org/postmodern-cinema/>

– article by Dana Night

<http://pt.gravatar.com/danakinightideas>

(See: Postmodernist film https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Postmodernist_film)

- (10) Docufictions: an interview with Martin Scorsese on documentary film** https://muse.jhu.edu/journals/film_history/summary/v019/19_2donato.html
by Raffaele Donato
- (11)** <https://www.nytimes.com/movies/person/189594/Raffaele-Donato>
Raffaele Donato] (Film History: An International Journal Volume 19, Number 2, 2007 pp. 199-207)
- (12) Representant versus represented** <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/Representant> or referring versus referred, or signifier versus signified https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Signified_and_signifier
- (13) Signifier and Signified** http://changingminds.org/explanations/critical_theory/concepts/signifier_signified.htm
- (14) Robert Flaherty** <http://sensesofcinema.com/2002/great-directors/flaherty/> – article by Deane Williams <https://arts.monash.edu/media-film-journalism/news-and-events/articles/associate-professor-deane-williams-celebrates-release-of-ten-years-of-studies-in-documentary-film> at Senses of Cinema <http://sensesofcinema.com/>
- (15) Realism, Romanticism and the Documentary Form: Robert Flaherty's Man of Aran**
https://www.academia.edu/9302735/Realism_Romanticism_and_the_Documentary_Form_Robert_Flaherty's_Man_of_Aran
– Chapter 4 of Brian McFarlane, Ed, 24 Frames: The Cinema of Britain and Ireland, Wallflower, 2005
- (16) Flaherty / Vertov : two founding masters, two traditions** <https://klerichar.wordpress.com/tag/robert-flaherty/> – article at Klerichar
- (17) Knowing Images: Jean Rouch's Ethnography** <http://www.maitres-fous.net/Cooper.html> – chapter on Jean Rouch at MAITRESFOUS.net <http://www.maitres-fous.net/>
- (18) A Tribute to Jean Rouch** http://www.rouge.com.au/3/rouch_tribute.html – article by Paul Stoller https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Stoller at Rouge <http://www.rouge.com>
- (19) Jean Rouch's Ciné-Ethnography: at the conjunction of research, poetry and politics**
http://tweb.latrobe.edu.au/humanities/screeningthepast/firstrelease/fr_17/LMfr17a.html
article by Lorraine Mortimer at Latrobe.edu <http://tweb.latrobe.edu.au/> / **The other side of the mirror** <http://rcfilms.dotster.com/the-other-side-of-the-mirror.pdf> article by Ricardo Costa [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ricardo_Costa_\(filmmaker\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ricardo_Costa_(filmmaker))
- (20) The Paradox of Aesthetic Meaning** https://www.istor.org/stable/2102918?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents
– article by Lucius Garvin at Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, Vol. 8, No. 1 (Sep., 1947), pp. 99-106
- (21) What is the difference between documentary and feature film?** <https://www.video-university.com/video-how-to/whats-the-difference-between-documentary-and-feature-film/> – article at Video University <https://www.video-university.com>
- (22) Arabian Nights** [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arabian_Nights_\(2015_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arabian_Nights_(2015_film))
- (23) Horse Money** https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horse_Money
- (24) Drifts (illustrated page)** <https://ma0967.wixsite.com/drifts>
- (25) Cinematography: The Creative Use of Reality, The Avant-Garde Film: A Reader of Theory and Criticism** <https://makeithink.files.wordpress.com/2010/05/cinematography-the-creative-use-of-reality.pdf>, ed. P. Adams Sitney (New York: Anthology Film Archives, 1978), pp. 60-73
- (26) Avant-Garde Realism** <http://www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=442> – article by Nicholas Rombes <http://redlemona.de/author/nicholas-rombes-0> at Ctheory.net <http://www.ctheory.net/>, January 19, 2005
- (27) Reality Ink: When Nonfiction Film Meets Experimental Cinema** <http://www.documentary.org/column/reality-ink-when-nonfiction-film-meets-experimental-cinema> – article by Cynthia Close <http://www.shewrites.com/profile/CynthiaClose>, April 15, 2015