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ABSTRACT

Three components seem central to the definition of a documentary film: (1) the filmmaker should seek to provide as valid a record as possible of the facts, (2) the filmmaker must not neglect artistry in the portrayal of reality, and (3) a persuasive purpose is inherent to the form. Thus, documentary film provides for the artistic portrayal of reality for purposes of influencing public thought. Given the rhetorical bent of this definition, one is surprised to find that very few film critics have examined the documentary from a rhetorical standpoint. To remedy this lack of attention, Humboldt State University, California, has developed a course in rhetorical theory to study the documentary as a rhetorical phenomenon. Throughout the course, the instructor lectures on a particular theorist, shows a documentary film to illustrate the ideas brought out in the lecture, then leads a discussion exploring the links between the theorist and the film. Some of the films used are, "Sixteen in Webster Groves," "Webster Groves Revisited," "The Strange Case of the English Language," and "The KKK: The Invisible Empire." The classical rhetorical canons as used in a particular film are also discussed. (A syllabus and text suggestions are included.) (HTH)

CELLULOID RHETORIC: THE USE OF DOCUMENTARY FILM TO TEACH RHETORICAL THEORY

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Special thanks to Dick Pincsak, with whom I taught this course. To use documentary film to teach rhetorical theory was his idea, which he followed up by writing the grant for the rental of the films. He also offered valuable suggestions on early drafts of this paper. Most important, I enjoyed working with him in the classroom and learned much from him.

CELLULOID RHETORIC: THE USE OF DOCUMENTARY FILM TO TEACH RHETORICAL THEORY

The human desire to document and thus preserve the events and circumstances of the world perhaps first found expression with a few sketches in charcoal on a cave wall. Since then, an increasingly technological society has produced a number of highly accurate ways to reproduce our surroundings. Recorded information can now be transmitted to the public at incredible speeds and in enormous amounts. Millions of people throughout the world, for example, witnessed the shooting of Lee Harvey Oswald on television, and just as many became acquainted with the horrors of war through nightly news reports about Vietnam. Television is but one of the forms of documentation which now permeate our culture; others include radio, photography, the telephone, voice prints, and duplication processes of all kinds--and these only begin to suggest the range and capabilities of the documentation process.

A documentary format which has gained increasing prominence is the documentary film. Its origins can be traced to the Lumiere brothers in France who, in the late nineteenth century, recorded such events as workers leaving a factory and the arrival of a train at a station.[1] In the United States, documentary film is said to have begun in 1922 with Robert Flaherty's Nanook of the North, which presented the everyday activities of an Eskimo family in its natural environment.[2]

Despite spirited controversy about the definition of a documentary and the types of films that should carry this label, three components seem central to its definition. First, technical accuracy is important; the film maker should seek to provide as valid a record as possible of the facts so that they carry almost the same authority as did the original event. Accurate preservation of the environment and of events is only the foundation, however. The documentary film also must appeal to an audience; thus the film maker must not neglect artistry in his/her portrayal of reality. In this sense, the documentary film draws on the "objectivity" of journalism as well as on the dramatism of art. Bluem makes this blend of functions the essence of his conception of the documentary film:

> Those kinds of communication which are informed by the documentary idea are founded upon the conviction that the events and circumstances which shape man's life must not only be recorded and reported, but that such reporting must be made in as compelling a fashion as possible. The function of documentary communication is to make drama from life.[3] [italics his]

Bluem's description also suggests the final component of the documentary: inherent in its form is a persuasive purpose. The documentary film is designed to further and advance individual and social causes, values, attitudes, and conditions. Bluem again explains this notion:

> It [the documentary] is an undeniable form of public communication, . . . Valid documentary must involve more than presentation of the records of life. There must be a social purpose in its conception and the use of a technology which permits a significant impact on

> its dissemination. . . . Documentary communication seeks to initiate a process which culminates in public action by presenting information, and to complete the process by making this presentation persuasive. Documentary seeks to inform but, above all, it seeks to influence.[4]

The documentary film, then, provides for the artistic portrayal of reality for purposes of influencing public thought.

Given the rhetorical bent of this definition, we would expect that critics of the documentary film would have utilized at least some techniques of rhetorical criticism, but this does not appear to be the case. Very few film critics have examined the documentary from a rhetorical standpoint.[5] The few criticisms of this type available are found predominantly in communication journals and are, for the most part, historical surveys, generic categorizations, and methodological suggestions rather than critiques of specific documentaries.[6]

The course described here attempts to remedy this lack of attention to documentary film as a rhetorical phenomena. The outline which follows is essentially that used in a course in Rhetorical Theory, which I taught with Richard Pincsak at Humboldt State University, Fall 1979. I have modified the course slightly to incorporate the ideas for improvement which emerged in the process of teaching the course. The purpose was to teach rhetorical principles via the analysis of documentaries. It was hoped that students would arrive not only at an understanding of rhetorical theory as a result, but that they would see the validity, practicality, and contemporary relevance of these principles as they applied them to the current events and everyday situations portrayed in the films.

The course, designed for upper-division and graduate students, met weekly for a three-hour class period, although it is easily adapted to other formats. The course could meet twice weekly, with the ideas of a particular theorist presented at the first meeting, to be followed by the showing of the documentary and the analysis of it at the following meeting. The class also could be adapted to the semester system; in fact, this would be desirable in several respects. The course could be expanded to include, for instance, the history and evolution of rhetoric, with three or four class meetings spent on classical theorists. Another possibility would be to include additional contemporary theorists, or to spend more time on those covered here.

Groundwork for the Course

The course was made possible by a grant from the Humboldt State University Foundation, which provided money for the rental of the films. We used documentaries produced by all three networks--ABC, CBS, and NBC--and films were rented from the following distributors: Carousel Films Rental Library, University of California, Berkeley; and Carousel Films Rental Library, University of Washington, Seattle. A complete list of the titles available through Carousel Films can be obtained by writing to: CBS, 1501 Broadway, New York, New York 10036, (212) 354-0315. This office was extremely helpful to us in the process of locating various documentaries and in directing us to distribution centers nearby.

Textbook

I suggest using Contemporary Theories of Rhetoric: Selected Readings by Richard Johannesen (Harper & Row, 1971). Other possible texts, depending on the level and focus of the course, include Douglas Ehninger's Contemporary Rhetoric: A Reader's Coursebook (Scott, Foresman & Company, 1972), or The Rhetoric of Western Thought, 2nd ed., by James L. Golden, Goodwin F. Berquest, and William E. Coleman (Kendall/Hunt, 1976). A class composed only of graduate students would be advised to read the complete texts of the theorists' works whenever possible.

Assignments

(1) A think-piece applying the ideas of a theorist or group of theorists to a particular documentary. These think pieces are presented orally at the class meeting following the showing of each documentary; they are intended to serve as a review of that film, to facilitate comparison of the various theories, and to encourage the application of each theory to more than one documentary.

(2) An in-class midterm examination over material covered in the first half of the quarter.

(3) A take-home final examination consisting of one question: "You have been asked to produce a 60-minute documentary for CBS on the role and importance of rhetoric in the United States in the year 2000. Describe, in a 6-10 page paper, the content, format, and purpose of your film. Provide a rationale for your choices." Students are given this question at the beginning of the quarter so they can draw upon class discussion and in-class analyses of documentaries in formulating their answers.

(4) Research paper (10-15 pages in length) in which students select one of the following options: (1) explore in-depth some dimension of a rhetorical theory or principle discussed in class; (2) analyze a documentary not seen in class or some other rhetorical event according to a selected rhetorical framework; or (3) compare two theories or two rhetorical phenomena according to a particular theory or aspect of a theory discussed in class.

Course Outline

For each class meeting discussed in this syllabus, I have included the following information: the rhetorical theorist to be studied that week; the documentary film chosen to illustrate the rhetorical principles of that theorist; a brief explanation of how the theorist's ideas can be used to analyze that particular film; reading assignments; and, where appropriate, additional resources for the instructor. In some cases, I will describe particularly valuable resources or indicate useful ideas for consideration.

Throughout, a lecture-discussion format is followed. The instructor lectures on the particular theorist, shows the documentary film to illustrate the ideas brought out in lecture, and then leads a discussion in which students explore the links between the theorist and the film.

First Meeting

Lecture-Discussion Topic: The Documentary Film: Definitions and History

Documentary Film: Sixteen in Webster Groves

Sixteen in Webster Groves is based on a survey by film maker Arthur Barron of all of the 16-year-olds in Webster Groves, Missouri, in which he attempted to discover their attitudes toward marriage, education, their parents, the future, and the like. Barron set out to objectively record and portray the values of the teen-age community, although the results were not what he had expected: his survey revealed a group of materialistic, narrow, and prejudiced youth who were essentially carbon copies of their parents.[8]

This film was selected to open the course because of the unusually large amounts of material available about it. The students read an interview in which Barron provides extensive insights into the purpose and production of the film. In addition, Barron made a sequel to the film called Webster Groves Revisited, with the express purpose of recording community reactions to Sixteen in Webster Groves. This students can compare the motives, values, and views of the various creators and audiences, which include CBS, Arthur Barron, the members of the Webster Groves community, and themselves as viewers. They also can compare scenes filmed in cinema verite, where nothing is staged, with those created or designed by the director to convey a specific message. During this process, then, students are constantly exposed to how "reality" is interpreted by all involved in the film. The possibilities for discussion are endless, but all questions can be linked to the primary components of a documentary--technical accuracy, dramatic interpretation of life, and social usefulness. The result is a revealing and representative example of how a documentary is made and the choices that are inevitably part of the process.

Reading Assignments

Gronbeck, Bruce E. "Celluloid Rhetoric: On Genres of Documentary." In Form and Genre: Shaping Rhetorical Action, ed. Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson. Falls Church, Virginia: Speech Communication Association, [1977], pp. 139-61.

Edmonds, Robert. Chapter I of About Documentary: Anthropology on Film. Dayton: Pflaum, 1974, pp. 7-15.

"Sixteen in Webster Groves and The Berkeley Rebels." Interview with producer-director Arthur Barron. In The New Documentary in Action: A Casebook in Film Making by Alan Rosenthal. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971, pp. 131-48.

To introduce the idea of documentary, students read two of the more systematic attempts to define documentary film. Gronbeck's essay on "Celluloid Rhetoric" is useful because it categorizes types of documentaries by means of a rhetorical model. The opening chapter of Edmonds' book begins with a general treatment of symbolic meaning and definition and then applies these concepts to documentary film. In the process, he discusses a variety

of definitions of documentaries, including those which have become classic to film history, to finally arrive at his own definition of documentary as "anthropology on film."[9]

Resources for the Instructor

Definitions of Documentary

Bluem, A. William. Documentary in American Television: Form-Function-Method. New York: Hastings House, 1965, pp. 13-16.

Hardy, Forsyth, ed. Grierson on Documentary. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966. "First Principles of Documentary," pp. 145-56; and "Propaganda and Education," pp. 280-94.

Rotha, Paul. Documentary Film. London: Faber and Faber, 1935, pp. 45-71; 105-118.

Schlesinger, Jr., Arthur. "The Fiction of Fact--and the Fact of Fiction." In The Documentary Tradition: From Nanook to Woodstock. Selected, arranged, and introduced by Lewis Jacobs. New York: Hopkinson and Blake, 1971, pp. 383-85.

Winters, Barry Anson. "Rhetorical Criticism as a Tool for the Analysis of the Documentary Film: A Burkeian Criticism of The River." Thesis University of Oregon 1966, pp. 15-23.

History of Documentary Film

Barnouw, Erik. Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film. New York: Oxford University Press, 1974.

Bluem, A. William. Documentary in American Television: Form-Function-Method. New York: Hastings House, 1965, pp. 17-59.

Hardy, Forsyth. Grierson on Documentary. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966. Discussion of the historical development of documentary film runs throughout this collection of essays.

Hoffer, Thomas W., and Nelson, Richard Alan. "Evolution of Docu-drama on American Television Networks: A Content Analysis, 1966-1978." Southern Speech Communication Journal, 45 (Winter, 1980), 149-63.

Jacobs, Lewis. The Documentary Tradition: From Nanook to Woodstock. New York: Hopkinson and Blake, 1971.

Rotha, Paul. Documentary Film. London: Faber and Faber, 1935, pp. 75-101; 213-343.

The above citations provide the instructor with a full range of definitions for the documentary film and with comprehensive material about its historical development. In particular, I suggest that instructors look at how Winters conceptualizes the documentary; he describes a hierarchy of documentary films based on purpose and use. Level 1 is the documentary as record, the purpose of which is to simply preserve segments of our existence. Filmings of scientific experiments and footage for news broadcasts exemplify this category. Level 2 goes one step beyond in attempting to give meaning

to what is recorded, with travelogues a good example here. Level 3 is the use of the documentary film for instruction, where the purpose is not only to record and reveal but to teach. Films made for classroom use comprise the bulk of films in this category. At Level 4, the documentary functions as a social commentator, promoting sympathetic understanding on the part of the audience. Many of the television documentaries aired today on subjects such as child abuse, teenage prostitution, and the like are examples of this type of documentary. Finally, at Level 5, the documentary moves from commentator to advocate, with the persuasive dimension becoming primary. Propaganda war films are classic examples of this ultimate category.[10]

Barnouw, too, offers an unusual--and essentially rhetorical--approach to documentaries, which would be useful as an organizing format for a rhetorical theory class. He categorizes documentarists by purpose: as prophet, explorer, reporter, painter, advocate, bugler, prosecutor, poet, chronicler, promoter, observer, catalyst, or guerilla.

Second Meeting

Lecture-Discussion Topic: Review of Classical Rhetorical Principles: Foundation for the Rhetorical Analysis of Documentary Film

To review the origins of rhetoric, the classical canons are presented and discussed, but in the context of documentary film. In order to be useful as a form of analysis for examining and understanding documentaries, the canons must be viewed flexibly; both instructor and students need to realize that the canons were developed and codified when the basic communication message of concern to rhetoricians was the speech, and documentary films were centuries away from existence. Thus there is considerable overlap among the canons, and memory especially seems inappropriate. Therefore, I have omitted discussion of it here. A brief description of the remaining four canons--invention, arrangement, style, and delivery--will show how they can be broadened to fit this contemporary context.

Invention traditionally involves the discovery of arguments to support the point of view espoused. The three modes of appeals available, according to Aristotle, consist of logical appeals addressed to the understanding, ethical appeals stemming from the speaker's character, and emotional appeals or attempts to move by passion. The speaker searched through common and special topics to find material for these appeals. In relating invention to documentary film, the first consideration is the amount of information available to the film maker, whether previous films by the same film maker provide additional support for or constraints on the film, and any limitations which prevented full access to all relevant material. The discussion then could move to the specific lines of appeal--i.e., what techniques are used to establish credibility, to secure emotional reactions, and to gain acceptance for the claims of the logical arguments?

Arrangement, or the choice and organization of materials within a message, can be related to the making of a documentary by considering the process by which material was selected for inclusion in the film. The film maker obviously makes choices during both the filming and editing stages of production about which information to include, how long to spend on a particular piece of information, what length each scene should be, and so on.

At a more subtle level, however, other factors such as a film maker's cultural background, personal history, and motives will affect his/her choices about which material to use and how to arrange it. The availability of tools and equipment, the degree to which the film's subjects are willing to cooperate, the biases of producers and financial backers are among the other considerations which can dictate arrangement.[12] The notion of choice--central to this canon--leads to broader questions about "truth" and "objectivity" in a documentary: are such qualities attainable or even desirable?[13] Obviously, many of these questions overlap with those considered under invention. It is virtually impossible to keep the two processes distinct when examining documentary film.

Style, defined traditionally as the use of language in the construction of a message, has broader implications for film than were present in classical Greece and Rome. Students explore first the vocabulary and syntax of the film medium as well as any traditional stylistic devices used in the film--e.g., metaphor, climax, oxymoron, or antithesis. These considerations can lead to a discussion of how camera angle and distance, length of scenes, use of flashbacks, repetitions, and rhythms established in the film can result in different overall styles. One film, for example, might be designed and/or perceived as nervous or jumpy, another as graceful and elegant, and another as overwhelming and passionate--and these impressions rise in large part from stylistic considerations. Again, however, many of these issues overlap with those discussed as part of arrangement; the canons must be viewed flexibly and in an integrated fashion.

The last canon is delivery, defined in classical times as the actual presentation of a message. This canon translates first to concerns about good print, projection equipment, and viewing conditions for the audience. Other questions about delivery concern differences between the use of a narrator in a film and a documentary in which the people speak for themselves, with little or no introduction, explication, or summary by an outsider. Another consideration is the choices made about delivery as a result of attempting to appeal to a variety of audiences--i.e., the film maker, the producer, the sponsor, those in the film whose story is being told, and the general public.

The classical canons, then, provide a systematic starting point for the analysis of documentary films; with this foundation students are better able to understand and apply the theories of contemporary rhetorical theorists. This discussion also serves as a useful review for students who may not have had Classical Rhetoric or who have been away from it for some time.

Documentary Film: Webster Groves Revisited

Because of its emphasis on audience reactions, Webster Groves Revisited is highly suitable for analysis in terms of the classical canons, which assume an audience-centered orientation. The class may want to refer to Sixteen in Webster Groves, shown the previous week, to make their analyses more complete. Again, the large amount of material available on this pair of films makes them especially valuable openers for the course; students have enough information available in order to analyze the films thoroughly.

Reading Assignments

Brockriede, Wayne E. "Toward a Contemporary Aristotelian Theory of Rhetoric," pp. 39-49 in Johannesen.

Ehninger, Douglas. "On Systems of Rhetoric," pp. 327-39 in Johannesen.

Hendrix, Jerry; and Wood, James A. "The Rhetoric of Film: Toward a Critical Methodology." Southern Speech Communication Journal, 39 (Winter, 1973), 105-22.

Resources for the Instructor

Bluem, A. William. Documentary in American Television: Form-Function-Method. New York: Hastings House, 1965, pp. 13-16.

Karimi, A. M. "Film Theory: Some Current Problems and Issues." Southern Speech Communication Journal, 43 (Spring, 1978), 248-64.

McCann, Eleanor. "The Rhetoric of Wild Strawberries." Sight and Sound, 30 (Winter, 1960/61), 44-45.

Rose, Nicholas. "Audience Research." In Sixty Years of 16mm Film: 1923-1983. Des Plaines, Ill.: Film Council of America, 1954, pp. 202-213.

Winters, Barry Anson. "Rhetorical Criticism as a Tool for the Analysis of the Documentary Film: A Burkeian Criticism of The River." Thesis University of Oregon 1966, pp. 14-15.

Third Meeting

Lecture-Discussion Topic: I. A. Richards

Documentary Film: The Strange Case of the English Language

This film discusses the problems inherent in language, compares English to other languages, and gives various examples of contemporary speakers using language. It illustrates many of the central concerns of Richards, such as ambiguity, metaphor, and the need for a flexible approach to language. This film is unusually appropriate for illustrating Richards' ideas because it treats language per se; most of the documentaries shown do not have this close correspondence to the principles illustrated.

Reading Assignments

Excerpt from The Philosophy of Rhetoric, pp. 117-26 in Johannesen.

Nichols, Marie Hochmuth. "I. A. Richards and the 'New Rhetoric,'" pp. 127-47 in Johannesen.

Bilsky, Manuel. "I. A. Richards' Theory of Metaphor," pp. 148-59 in Johannesen.

Fourth Meeting

Lecture-Discussion Topic: Richard Weaver

Documentary Film: Madness in Medicine

One of Weaver's primary contentions is that language is sermonic; that it inherently expresses attitudes, values, intentions, and the like. He also believed that a hierarchy of goods and values exists in a society--exemplifies by god and devil terms--and that one of the functions of rhetoric is to maintain this ultimate order. Madness in Medicine attempts to define mental illness, but throughout, one realizes that the label itself encourages us to think about and to treat those so labelled in particular ways. Thus the "sermonic" nature of language is strikingly obvious. Equally apparent in the film is the prevalence of god and devil terms surrounding the paradigm of mental illness. Mental illness is seen as a devil term, which allows patients to be subjected to any treatment that works; thus all treatment modalities, including lobotomies, are god terms. There is a definite hierarchy of values operating here, but one wonders if the rigid and self-righteous values imposed by society are not more sick than those of the mentally ill.

Reading Assignments

"Language is Sermonic," pp. 163-79 in Johannesen.

Johannesen, Richard L.; Strickland, Rennard; and Eubanks, Ralph T. "Richard M. Weaver on the Nature of Rhetoric: An Interpretation," pp. 180-95 in Johannesen.

Fifth Meeting

Lecture-Discussion Topic: Stephen Toulmin and Chaim Perelman

Documentary Film: The KKK: The Invisible Empire

Perelman and Toulmin are treated together because they both sought to develop a practical system of argumentation useful in everyday affairs. Perelman stresses the orientation of argumentation to various audiences, while Toulmin develops a framework for understanding and analyzing those arguments which fall outside of traditional logic. This combination works well for the analysis of the Ku Klux Klan as portrayed in this documentary. Students are able to distinguish the basic data, warrant, and claim of the Klan's ideology and then to analyze the different forms this argumentation assumes for different audiences. The Klan ideology, for example, seems to have one meaning for those secretly initiated into the organization, another for the public who witnesses the cross-burnings and white hoods of the Klan's public rallies, another for those minorities attacked by the Klan, and another for the general public not directly acquainted with Klan activities. Another point for discussion involves the manner in which arguments can be adapted to meet the needs of the advocate. The Klan, for instance, espouses the traditional values of America--such as liberty and justice--but these receive an unusual interpretation when applied to Blacks, Jews, and other minority groups. This documentary, then, offers ample opportunity for isolating and examining the parts of an argument, argumentative techniques, and the role of the audience in the argumentative process.

Reading Assignments

Excerpt from The New Rhetoric, by Chaim Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, pp. 199-221 in Johannesen.

Dearin, Ray D. "The Philosophical Basis of Chaim Perelman's Theory of Rhetoric," pp. 222-38 in Johannesen.

Brockriede, Wayne E., and Ehninger, Douglas. "Toulmin on Argument: An Interpretation and Application," pp. 241-55 in Johannesen.

Manicas, Peter T. "On Toulmin's Contribution to Logic and Argumentation," pp. 256-70 in Johannesen.

Sixth Meeting

In-class midterm

Seventh Meeting

Lecture-Discussion Topic: Marshall McLuhan

Documentary Film: The Land of Hype and Glory

McLuhan probes the importance of form in society, suggesting that the media of communication dictate the content of and reactions we have to any communication message. The Land of Hype and Glory examines two extreme examples of style over substance--the rock group Kiss and the publication of a best seller, a novel billed as such before it is even written. In both instances, the audience is assaulted by the medium to the point that the content itself is meaningless. A question posed to "Kiss" best illustrates this notion: when asked why one of the members of the group vomits blood in the course of the show, the response was, "Why are you looking for meaning where there is none?"

Reading Assignments

Excerpt from Understanding Media, pp. 273-87 in Johannesen.

Gronbeck, Bruce E. "Rhetoric and/of McLuhan," pp. 288-301 in Johannesen.

Sloan, John H. "Understanding McLuhan," pp. 302-308 in Johannesen.

Eighth Meeting

Lecture-Discussion Topic: Kenneth Burke

Documentary Film: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.: An Amazing Grace

This film presents the contributions of Dr. King to the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, stressing in particular the strength of his moral convictions and his attitudes on non-violent resistance. Burke's view of the communicator as dramatic actor and the act as dramatic strategy designed to meet the actor's goal are especially appropriate for the analysis of documentary film, by definition a "dramatization of reality." One Burkean

approach to the King film is to use the pentad--i.e., to examine the scene, act, purpose, agent, and agency. By means of the pentad, the critic could look at the film from the point of view of its content as well as from the perspective of those involved in its production. King, for example, is the agent as far as the film's content is concerned, while the film maker is the agent at the production level. Both perspectives involve rhetorical choices and strategies and thus both are fruitful areas for discussion. I will briefly describe the components of the pentad as they apply to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to show how the instructor can approach the film in terms of both content and form.

Perhaps the foundation of the pentad is the scene, or setting for the action. Here we would look at the historical evolution of the Civil Rights movement in order to understand King's motives as portrayed in the film. The immediate scenes--those places and events included in the film--also would be examined for what they reveal about the possible avenues open to King and the environment in which he had to work. Turning to the film maker, we would look at the scenes for clues to the motivations for making the film--i.e., what information was left out, which scenes receive emphasis because of their position in the film or their length, and so on.

A discussion of the act would involve consideration of the strategies King employed as a leader of the Civil Rights movement. Special emphasis would be given to his non-violent methods of persuasion since this is a focus of the film. The physical characteristics of the film, on the other hand, constitute the act from the film maker's perspective. A careful examination of the type of visual, narrative, music, and sound effects tracks can provide the critic with useful insights. In Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., for example, the bulk of the film consists of actual recordings of King speaking on various occasions, with little narration to tie the events together. In other words, King's words are intended to speak for themselves. Other considerations here might be camera angles, whether subjects were manipulated for any scenes, what kind of editing of scenes occurred, and the factors involved in publicizing and distributing the film.

The purpose for making the King documentary already has been alluded to; it was produced to show King's contributions to the Civil Rights movement and to reinforce in viewers the value of moral commitment. To understand this two-fold aim, students could inquire into the motives of the film maker and producer, the involvement of the Black community in its production, and the choices made which emphasized moral conviction over other aspects of King's character.

To understand the agent, one must first look at King as spearhead of the Civil Rights movement. Other agents were operating, though, at the level of the film's production, and students should understand the relationships among and inputs of those responsible for its production. Was the documentary the brainchild of one producer or a group decision from within CBS? And whose views prevailed if differences of opinion emerged during the filming? Students may even want to inquire into who comprised the technical staff--the camera operators; composers, conductors and performers of the musical score; the film editors; and so on. All of these people can be viewed as agents in regard to this documentary.

Finally, the agency or means by which the agent seeks to achieve his/her purpose, is evident at several levels in the King documentary. Students can examine the strategies used by King to identify with his various audiences. King, for example, drew heavily on the Black religious context, on a problem-solution approach, and on appeals to a better future for achieving a sense of unity with his audiences. One might also consider the reasons why the medium of a documentary is an effective format for telling King's story.

The pentad, then, offers one Burkean approach for analyzing documentaries. I have only sketched the foundations of such an analysis. To do justice to Burke, one should look at the pentadic ratios which emerge; such an approach can suggest which component dominates and why. A variety of other approaches can be found in Burke's writing that would reveal useful insights about the King film. An instructor might concentrate on identification and how the film promotes consubstantiality among both Black and white viewers. Another approach might be Burke's notion of hierarchy, which seems especially valuable given the emphasis on moral order in this film. With Burke especially, ideas for critical application are endless, and virtually any documentary can be used to illustrate his ideas about rhetoric.

Reading Assignments

Excerpts from A Grammar of Motives and A Rhetoric of Motives, pp. 75-95 in Johannesen.

Nichols, Marie Hochmuth. "Kenneth Burke and the 'New Rhetoric,'" pp. 96-113 in Johannesen.

Ninth Meeting

Lecture-Discussion Topic: The Future of Rhetoric

This class session is devoted to summarizing the principle trends in rhetoric which emerge from a study of contemporary theorists. This summary serves as a starting point to explore and discuss the future of rhetoric --is it relevant to contemporary society or merely a dinosaur? Can it survive increasing technology? What are its strengths and its weaknesses? This discussion provides a general backdrop for the students' final exam papers on rhetoric in the year 2000, to be shared at the last class meeting.

Documentary Film: none

Reading Assignments

"Editor's Introduction: Some Trends in Contemporary Rhetorical Theory," pp. 1-6 in Johannesen.

Selections from The Prospect of Rhetoric, ed. Lloyd F. Bitzer and Edwin Black (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1971).

Tenth Meeting

Lecture-Discussion Topic: Share responses to the final exam question

Documentary Film: none

Conclusions

The presentation and illustration of rhetorical principles by means of documentary film offers distinctive opportunities to the student and instructor. First, as an especially rhetorical medium, documentary film can vividly convey what often seem to students to be arm-chair theories. Such a course also allows students to realize the range available within rhetorical criticism: not only are non-discursive phenomena of all kinds amenable to rhetorical analysis, but virtually every rhetorical theory studied can provide a framework for studying everyday phenomena. Thus the student comes to understand criticism as useful both when a particular theory is applied to a situation as a means of better understanding it, and also as intrinsic criticism, in which the material itself suggests a suitable approach. The result is a student who views rhetoric as flexible, viable, and practical, and who truly understands Aristotle's definition of rhetoric as the study of "all the available means of persuasion."

Supplementary Bibliography

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NOTES

[1]Erik Barnouw, Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film (New York: Oxford Press, 1974), pp. 5-13.

[2]Lewis Jacobs, The Documentary Tradition: From Nanook to Woodstock (New York: Hopkinson and Blake, 1971), pp. 7-9.

[3]A. William Bluem, Documentary in American Television: Form-Function-Method (New York: Hastings House, 1965), p. 13.

[4]Ibid., p. 14.

[5]Winters reviewed eight film journals to determine the extent to which rhetorical theory is used in film criticism. He found only one review which dealt with the rhetorical nature of film. Even so, Eleanor McCann's "The Rhetoric of Wild Strawberries (Sights and Sounds, 30 [Winter 60/61], 44-45), cannot be called an exercise in rhetorical criticism for she is concerned with only one rhetorical device--the oxymoron. And, after an initial mention of this device, she devotes the remainder of her essay to a summary of the film's plot. See Barry Anson Winters, "Rhetorical Criticism as a Tool for the Analysis of the Documentary Film: A Burkeian Criticism of The River," Thesis University of Oregon 1966, pp. 25-27.

[6]A list of these articles can be found in the "Resources for the Instructor," Second Meeting, p. 8.

[7]Another documentary excellent for use with this discussion is The Making of a Documentary, in which CBS shows the choices and decisions involved in filming the documentary, The Catholic Dilemma. Because we wanted to show both Sixteen in Webster Groves and Webster Groves Revisited--which is unrealistic to do in one class period--we omitted this documentary.

[8]Arthur Barron, "Sixteen in Webster Groves and The Berkeley Rebels," in The New Documentary in Action: A Casebook in Film Making, by Alan Rosenthal (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), pp. 133-35.

[9]Robert Edmonds, About Documentary: Anthropology on Film (Dayton: Pflaum, 1974), p. 14.

[10]Winters, "Rhetorical Criticism as a Tool for the Analysis of the Documentary Film," pp. 20-23.

[11]This classical analysis draws heavily on Jerry Hendrix and James A. Wood, "The Rhetoric of Film: Toward a Critical Methodology," Southern Speech Communication Journal, 39 (Winter, 1973), 108-112.

[12]See Edmonds, About Documentary, pp. 26-32.

[13]Edmonds again provides an especially useful discussion of objectivity and truth and their relation to documentary film. See ibid., pp. 16-25; 41-45.