Temporality and Documentary

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The temporalities of the image have long been a focus for theoretical and analytical discussion, both in photographic studies, where the paradoxes of 'stillness' have been at the centre of debate about the distinctive aesthetics of the medium,[1] and in film studies, where the narrative and symbolic organisation of shots which move spectators through the flows and disruptions of seemingly co-present eventuality have required attention in any address as to how cinema works.[2] My concern here is with the character of time in documentary film and television, a topic which has received far less direct attention than time in fiction and one which raises distinctive questions not only about audio-visual production but about the broader contours of contemporary processes of knowing in mediated modernity. 'Documentary', across its varied phases of development and intra-generic elaboration, was seen by its 1920s and 1930s pioneers as the deployment of elements of aesthetic modernism, drawing from the Soviet example among other reference points, in a contribution to the discourses of political and civic modernism, placing the citizen-viewer visually and aurally within a complex, industrialised social system and thereby engaging with new ideas about public connection and public communication.[3]

Time in documentary can usefully be seen to be of two broad kinds, each of which has a special importance to the organisation of documentary as a project of informational expression. First of all, there is time as historical time, the specific times at which the images and sounds were recorded, whether or not these times are made explicit to the viewer, perhaps as part of a strategy of historical exposition. Variations here across decades, years, days and even hours can be significant, perhaps particularly in documentary material which extensively combines material from different times without indicating these differences to the viewer. In documentaries which have a marked interest in development over time, which many do, historical time becomes a feature of what we can call narrative time or expositional time, the organisation of the viewing experience as, self-consciously, one of recognising the *passage* of time. Secondly, time, as *durational design*, enters documentary production as a crucial factor in documentary planning and practice – how long to hold shots on the screen, what value to give to sequences within the overall structure? Here, documentary practice shows a wide range of variations, some of it related to the very different approaches (e.g. observational, expositional, dramatic) which documentary producers have taken towards their topics.

A third dimension of time can be seen to be at work too, although this is a more general feature of audio-visual engagement. We can call it 'phenomenological time' and it derives from the alignment of the 'time' of what is happening on the screen with the 'time' of watching. It follows from the inherent 'immediacy' of watching cinema and television (classically demonstrated in those stories of some members of the audiences for early actuality films fleeing the cinema in panic as an on-screen train approached straight down the line of viewing). Essentially, it is a (temporary) modifier of historical time, introducing a co-temporality of viewing

relations which does not in most cases significantly displace knowledge about the specific temporality of what is shown. Nevertheless, the sense of temporal co-presence is a powerful dimension of getting and sustaining viewing engagement, providing a form of relationship to the screen across which a range of different historical times and of durational values can be organised and projected.

After some further development of the general theme, I want to pursue my discussion of the dimensions of time by referring to three very different documentaries, all of which have received critical acclaim and all of which are, in 2011, readily available on DVD through mainstream distributors

Generic identity and sub-generic variety.

I noted above that what I have termed historical time and durational time are key dimensions of documentary production, often interconnected. Documentary, a broad and varied array of non-fictional audiovisual work whose definition and borderlines are regularly subject to dispute, can be seen to lie between the broad generic clusters of 'news' and of 'drama' in its temporalities. With 'news' (and the study of the temporality of the news in newspaper, broadcasting and the web is clearly a major strand in the understanding of mediated modernity) it shares an interest in what we call an informational economy – what different times need referring to and depicting within what temporal strategy of looking and speaking in order to produce 'appropriate' knowledge (commercially as well as socially so). With 'drama' it shares what we call an aesthetic economy, engaging with what is the most pleasing, the most satisfying, way of organising depiction in terms of the different times, the passage of time and the time-values given to particular shots and scenes. It is true that news also

has its aesthetic economy alongside its informational structures and also true that drama often works with an informational design alongside its aesthetic planning, but I am talking here of priorities not mutually exclusive options.

What I have indicated above as durational temporality clearly involves both aesthetic and informational factors, decisions about which will be made not only in relation to the particular subject matter being portrayed and the stylistic preferences of the production team but also in relation to the primary audience being sought. For instance, judgements about the time-values to employ in relation to a programme designed for a prime-time television audience may be very different from those applied in producing work for a minority arts channel. Here, it is worth noting the way in which established subcategories of documentary introduce very different temporal options. I hope to bring this out in more detail in the section which follows but an example of a major difference would be that between the time-frames and pacing of constructed action in work using drama-documentary methods as against those frames of observed action which are central to work in the 'fly on the wall' tradition and which have become a key component of much reality television.[4] There is also the varying length of time given to interviews in the wide range of work which uses spoken, recollective testimony as a central feature of discursive design and the time-allocations seen as appropriate and effective for the various forms of visualization which can be used in combination both with interview and with commentary speech and sometime simply with music or silence. These latter forms importantly include archive footage as well as material shot specifically for the purpose. The literalist, denotative function of much visual footage in documentary is, in some work, combined with the marked use of a more associative, symbolic approach and this combination brings its distinctive time-values too, drawing on the

aesthetic repertoire of screen fiction and (particularly where still frames are used) of photography.

Example 1: *Spare Time (*prod. A. Cavalcanti; dir. H. Jennings, *Crown Films*, 1939).

My first example comes from the classic period of documentary and is a film released just before the start of World War 2. It was devised and directed by a major figure in the British Documentary Film Movement, Humphrey Jennings, and shows some of his characteristic approach both to denotative and associative use of images and to the organisation of durational time. That it is a film about time makes it a particularly interesting example for this chapter, since its approach to 'spare time' is very much framed within the terms of industrial modernity and perceptions of the work-times that operate within different sectors. Essentially, it is divided into three sections which use sounds and images to evoke the nature of 'spare time' within the steel, cotton-mill and coal industries. Within its simplistic structure, spare time in these industries is seen to be differentiated by the different work routines established by them. In each industry, forms of music (brass band for steel, a kazoo band for cotton and Welsh male voice choir for coal) serve to strengthen distinctiveness and serve as the sounds across which diverse, often very brief, images of leisure activities are depicted as a coherent flow.

The commentary, spoken by the poet Laurie Lee, is brief and restricted to the opening, the start of each of the three sections, and the end. The film opens as follows:

This is a film about the way people spend their spare time. People in three British industries – Steel, Cotton and Coal. Between work and sleep comes the time we call our own. What do we do with it?

These sentences neatly capture a framing of personal time within industrial time. While the division into three industries indicates the sociological dynamics typically at work in the Documentary Film Movement, the use of 'we' and 'our' gives that (aspirational) sense of democratic community which many films of the Movement variously display and which also informed, for instance, the Mass Observation movement, also concurrently active.[5]

In line with Jenning's signature aesthetic of sympathetic observationalism, each section does not 'tell' us anything about what we see apart from the brief introductions offered by the commentary, which is merely gestural for the final section. The passages of commentary, as they appear at three points in the film, are as follows:

Steel – the 3 shift system means that the steel-worker's spare time may come in the morning, or the afternoon.

Then, the more terse:

The Mills open at 8 and close at 5. Saturday afternoons and Sunday off.

And then the terser still:

Finally, Coal.

How does Jennings' economy of time work within this framework? First of all, it is concerned to provide a 'time to look' which will be not only cognitive but affective in its impact. It is not, therefore, a detailed scrutiny that the film is encouraging so much as a casual seeing, a glimpsing or a glancing rather than a gaze, to use the visual terms applied to television by John Ellis[6], one which will be all the more powerful for its very sense of the incidental, the unaware occurring alongside the more posed and arranged. So, for instance, we see people within the intimate, personal time-frames of relaxing with a drink in a public house, repairing a bicycle puncture and having tea as well as the more public, recreational frames of the football match, the fairground and the various musical activities that are pivotal for each section. The holding of the shot is just long enough to give time to pick up some details of the scene, and of the person, and just short enough to remain 'a passing glance' rather than anything more considered and intensive. The images are offered largely in their own terms, interconnected underneath the flow of the music and without words. They are not 'evidence' for an exposition or argument but a loose and broad illustration of the *descriptive* account, concerning the patterns of industrial work and spare time, which the film sets up in its opening commentary. A closer examination of a selected stretch of the sequence given to 'coal' usefully provides a more precise sense of the interconnections and durational values at work:

Shot slowly panning along a Welsh valley with mines and cottages: 17 seconds

Funfair entrance, with people going in, dancing: 5 seconds

Fairground ride, mixed shots: 6 seconds

Shooting gallery: 3 seconds

Skittles alley: 3 seconds

Pithead in silhouette: 4 seconds

Lady at piano, joined in sequence by members of a choir, singing: 50 seconds

Interior of pub, shots of drinkers, billiards and cards: 25 seconds

Puppet theatre action and then cutaway to audience: 5 seconds

Choir again: 15 seconds

Street outside, couple against shop window (man reading newspaper) and then shop

counter scene: 10 seconds

Choir again: 25 seconds

Tracking shot down pavements and past shop windows at night: 10 seconds

YHA basketball game inside hall: 10 seconds

Terraced houses at night: 3 seconds

Woman preparing food: 3 seconds

Man reading newspaper and then being poured a cup of tea at

table: 15 seconds

Man putting on scarf and leaving house: 10 seconds

Men walking down alleyway at night: 10 seconds

Colliery w heel: 10 seconds

Men with lamps and helmets moving towards cage at night, they enter cage and it

descends: 20 seconds

Even in this rough analysis, approximately 20 different scenes, some involving

several cuts of shot, are presented. The longest is clearly the scene involving the

choir, first around the piano and then in a larger group. This accounts for 1 min 30

seconds of time, dominating the sequence visually to augment the way in which the music of the choir provides the soundtrack for everything following its first appearance. It can be seen that while some of the scenes are of a kind of public space (the fairground, the pub, the choir, the basketball game, the street and the shops) some are domestic or more narrowly personal (the couple outside the shop) and then finally occupational (the men going to work and entering the cage). Some give the viewer time to pick up on faces, movements and behaviour, some are offered as quick glimpses, fleeting impressions. It is this mix of public and private space, of the formal and the casual within a rhythm of different durational units, conveying community through a sequence of sightings, that marks Jennings' imaginative management of time.

Jennings would later bring aspects of this approach to their most acclaimed fruition in his wartime classic, *Listen to Britain* (1941), which eschews commentary completely to allow a strongly sociable form of visual engagement (people like *us*; the variety that makes up *us*) confident in the capacity of its images to work, in their richly associative power, as a sequence almost entirely without words except those of song. Something of *Spare Time*'s own sociality comes through again in its closing comments:

As things are, spare time is the time when we have a chance to do what we like, a chance to be most ourselves.

This claim, while understating the constraints and restrictions of social class, confirms the project of the film as a location of the individual within a version of the social and the economic. This is not the place to explore further the framework by which

working class 'spare time' is seen as almost entirely the differentiated product of the production schedules of industry and to be largely illustrated by the activities of men (women feature mostly in their domestic *working time*, although not surprisingly 'cotton' provides some exception to this). However, perhaps that 'as things are' signals at least the possibility of different and better general circumstances.[7]

Example 2: *Fahrenheit 9/11* (dir. Michael Moore, *Dog Eat Dog Films*, 2004).

My next example is taken from one of the most widely seen and discussed documentaries of the last decade, although the question of just how far it can be considered a 'documentary' at all has provided a strand of the debate about it[8]. In his exploration of the factors involved in the invasion of Iraq two years after the attack on the World Trade Centre, Moore works strategically both with historical time and durational time. There are the various 'times' of the past, crucially the time of the attack itself. There are then the 'political times' that lie behind the election of Bush in 2000 and the establishing of specific contexts of action, both domestic and foreign. Moore also works strongly both with expositional time, the according of durational value to the multiple elements of his account, and with several strands of narrative time, observing things happen, including events which he himself has 'staged' in the manner that has become part of his signature style as a director-presenter.

My first extract comes from early in the film. It is the immediate post-title section, following the lengthy pre-titles sequence (discussed below). After Moore's credit has faded, there is then a remarkable period of just under 3 minutes, the first minute of which consists of sounds and voices against a black screen, the remainder music over

images. This is Moore's depiction of the 9/11 attack. 'Underneath' the dark, empty screen we hear aircraft noises, cries, urgent shouts about smoke and flame, a brief, frightened indication of place ('there's something happening at the World Trade Centre'….). an explosion, more aircraft noises, sirens, screams, brief phrases like 'no idea' and, repeatedly, 'let's go, let's go'. When images return to the screen, they are of faces looking upwards in stunned bewilderment, shock and grief. A slow musical score develops, accompanied by the tolling of a bell. People are seen sitting on the pavement, consoling one another and, again, looking upwards. Light debris, including paper, falls thickly from the sky, is caught within a dense haze of smoke and dust and lies, blown around, on the ground, framed by high buildings. The camera pans across a notice-board on which are pinned requests for information about the missing, over which Moore begins his commentary 'On September 11, 2001…..

As a way into his exposition, this is a strongly strategic use of durational time to depict a defining moment of historical time. The audience is immediately 'enclosed' by the events as a consequence of the imaginative work it has to perform from the sound and visual cues provided. The 'bad time' of the attack is essentially generated as an 'inner' experience of imagination, working not only on the material of the film but on the full range of remembered mediated referents, rather than an 'outer' one of sensory perception. It is notable than when images return to the screen, they show the reactions of people to the destruction but not the centre of destruction itself. The deliberate exclusion of any clear image of the Trade Centre towers further marks the sequence as being one designed to elicit the work of imagination (the real horror of the incident made subject to *reflection*) rather than of spectacle. Only the debris, slowly swirling in descent, cues the physicality of the incident. The behaviour of the

people on the ground, their faces all drawn upwards, is the main visual connection with the magnitude of events.

Moore's breaking of established documentary conventions in this sequence is clearly grounded in his belief that there are so many strong points of reference already established to occupy his audience's thoughts that textual restraint and the opening up of space for a reflective process will produce a more powerful effect than intensity or plenitude. In this, he is surely right.

My second extract involves another moment of 'bad times'. It comes before the sequence discussed above, in the lengthy pre-title section, and it shows Moore working across historical time as 'time remembered' or, more accurately, as 'time mis-remembered' or even 'dream time'. The management of time here, including the tenses of the commentary, produce an effect which allows the development of argument, a social (and political) 'closeness' in the address to the viewer and a vital element of comedy. Here is part of his reflections on the Presidential Election of 2000.

Over archive news images, we hear the following (I cite only the first and last section of the full sequence):

<EX>

Gore: God bless you, Florida! Thank you!

Moore: Did the last four years not really happen?

          Look, there's Ben Affleck. He's often in my dreams.

And the *Taxi Driver* guy. He was there too.

And little Stevie Wonder, he seemed so happy…like a miracle had taken place.

Was it a dream?

Crowd: We want Gore!

Moore: Or was it real?

It was election night 2000, and things seemed to be going as planned.

[*Moore then develops the account, with clips, of how the election was first 'called' for Gore by television stations, and how Fox news then called it for Bush, to be followed by the networks reversing their earlier predictions*].

Moore: How does someone like Bush get away with something like this?

[*Across shot of Bush laughing with colleagues*]

Well, first, it helps if your brother is the governor of the state in question.

Bush [*speaking to his brother in aircraft*]:

You know something? We are gonna win Florida. Mark my words. You can write it down.

Moore: Second, make sure your campaign chairman ... is also the vote-count woman and that her state hires a company ... to knock voters off the rolls who aren't likely to vote for you. You can usually tell them by the colour of their skin. Then make sure your side fights like it's life or death.

James Baker: This talk about legitimacy is overblown.

Crowd: President Bush! President Bush!

Moore: And hope the other side sits by and waits for the phone to ring. And even if numerous independent investigations ... prove that Gore got the most votes … it won't matter, as long as all your daddy's friends ... on the Supreme Court vote the right way.

Gore: While I strongly disagree with the court's decision, I accept it.

Senator Tom Daschle: What we need now is acceptance. We have a new president-elect.

Moore: It turns out none of this was a dream. It's what really happened.

Here, 'time-remembered' allows a 'reconstruction' of what happened, using television clips against an ironic commentary, injecting immediacy by occasionally moving into the present tense and connecting with the audience through the performance of a memory which is still offered as partial and possibly faulty, its 'truth' still proving hard to accept. There are a number of ways in which this contextual work might have been accomplished but Moore's discursive choice provides a tightly referential sequence drawing on news footage and offsets it with the dark comedy of his spoken account, both of which are central components in the success of the film as a whole.

My final sequence from *Fahrenheit* concerns the management of historical time and narrative time in relation to one of the 'ordinary' people through whom Moore traces the impact of the Iraq War both on emotions and attitudes. Lisa Lipscomb appears in four sequences. In the first one, she is identified as working as an administrator in an employment training project in Flint, Michigan (Moore's home town). She talks of the strong military tradition in her family and the benefits of a military career given the scarcity of other options available. In the second sequence, she is shown placing the US flag outside her house, as she does every morning. She describes herself as a 'proud American' whose family is of the kind that constitutes 'the backbone of America'. She describes her early resentment of anti-war protestors, whose actions she thought a 'slap in the face' given the military involvements of her family. In the third sequence, she is shown with other members of her family at home. Here, she tells the story of her foreboding about the deployment of her son in Iraq and then of hearing the news on television about a Blackhawk helicopter than had been

brought down. The next day she received a phone-call informing her of her son, Michael's, death. In recollecting and recounting this event, she shows visible distress as she talks of dropping the phone and falling to the floor. She reads out Michael's last letter and her husband, alongside her, asks 'for what' their son died. In the fourth sequence, she is shown walking to the White House during a visit to Washington for a conference connected with her work in Flint. A peace protester is encamped near the building, surrounded by placards and making an address to anyone who will listen. Lipscomb has both an exchange with the protestor and an argument with a bystander who refers to what is happening as 'staged'. Followed by the camera, she moves to the front of the White House where she comments, as she stands looking at it, that it has been a difficult place for her to come to but a 'place to put all my pain and all my anger and to release it' .

The key point about the management of time here is that Moore requires Lipscomb to show *patriotic* opposition to the war and to present viewers with her conversion to a critical view as something happening during the course of the filming. This sense of strategic narrative development is made clear in the fact that the most important thing about Lipscomb's story is the loss of her son and that Moore's first meeting with her occurred some time *after* this loss. That this fact is not revealed in either the first or second sequence involving her, despite it being known to Moore, indicates the level of control over historical times, through times of filming and of edited sequentiality, being operated in the interests of narrative and then of expositional cogency.

These three examples from one of the important non-fiction films in recent history indicate, in their modes of appeal and claims-making and their aesthetic and

emotional profile, some of the centrality as well as the complexity of documentary time.

Example 3: *Man on Wire* (Dir. James Marsh, Wall to Wall, 2008).

My last illustrations, which I will treat more briefly, come from another highly successful theatrical release, attracting large audiences and winning both BAFTA awards and an Oscar for best documentary feature. The film tells of, and shows, the story of Philippe Petit's 1974 high wire-walk between the twin towers of the World Trade Centre. It traces the history of Petit's career as a wire-walker, uses drama-documentary methods to portray the carefully-planned business of the team members gaining entry to the top floors of both buildings with all the equipment necessary to perform the feat, and reaches a climax in an actuality record of the act itself, provided by extensive still photography. Throughout, interview testimony by those involved is inserted within the dramatic and actuality sequences, providing experiential detail through a conventional documentary mode of address. Once again, I think there are distinct aspects of the economy of time at work that we can identify.

First of all, there is the 'home movie' archive of time past. Not for the first occasion in contemporary documentary, the availability of an extensive personal archive of film, video and photographs made by the film's subject determines the overall design. In *Man On Wire,* it allows the film to work with 'embedded times', allowing us to look not only at earlier high-wire events performed by Petit but at his filmic record of practicing and planning for the New York project. This directness of referentiality removes the need for the more extensive dramatization or compilations

of stock footage which might have otherwise been necessary to portray aspects of the biographical past. It draws the audience into more intimate relationships with members of the team, seen, as it were, outside of the 'professional' gaze of the interview camera, self-documenting their prior exploits, their planning, their rehearsals and their obvious pleasure in working together. Rather than being a retrospective construct, 'time past' becomes a vivacious and engaging series of actuality episodes, to set off against the urgencies of narrative time (discussed below) the essentially still, climactic time of the Trade Centre walk itself, and 'time present' - the time of the interviews looking back on events.

A second key aspect of the time structure of the film is provided by its dramatization, its strong strand of narrative immediacy. A crucial element of Marsh's approach is his decision to have a dramatic narrative running through the film, right up to the walk itself, a narrative beset with obstacles overcome and near-miss disasters, of entry to the building, overnight waiting and avoidance of security guards and the early morning 'technical' preparations for the feat (including setting up the wire and its stabilising ropes). This narrative, shot in monochrome, is interspersed both with the 'home movie' material discussed above, and with regular interviews with those involved. Even more significant is his decision to begin the movie with this narrative, giving the film something of the character of a 'heist movie' from its opening scene, as many critics pointed out and as Marsh has said was an early part of his plan. Against a brisk musical score, a pacey sequence of 'fragmentary' images shows, for instance, crates being packed, nailed shut and transported, special kit being checked, diagrams and planning sheets, watches being looked at, van doors being closed, scenes from the windows of a moving vehicle, a man with a camera held to his chest apparently photographing the inside of a building whilst walking through its

lobby. This all replicates, indeed almost parodies, the generic time of the action movie opening, with its mysteries and its urgent energy of unfolding events. By framing all his other times within this exciting narrative dynamic, Marsh ensures foreword momentum for his entire account and at the same time makes a strong engagement with popular audience subjectivity, holding out the promise of 'good viewing'.

A third component of the film's time scheme I want to comment on here is what I called above the 'climatic' time of the wire-walk itself. From the time of Petit first setting off from the edge of one of the towers to the moment of his return (and arrest by the police) provides approximately 7 minutes of screen time (Petit was actually on the wire for around 45 minutes), the walking itself distributed across about 30 still images. The images show Petit on the wire, taken from both of the towers and from the ground. They show spectators on the ground looking up and the view down to the ground from the top of the towers. Many of the images are slowly zoomed into and out of, reframing the central figure with varying degrees of context and giving a flow of movement to the held pictures, over which tranquil, solo piano melody is played and various interview voices are heard providing recollective accounts, both in voice-over and in-shot speech, interspersed with the images of the walk. Within the film's account, this is 'magical' time, the time of the completion of the long prepared- for act, and, for the spectator, a time to gaze in awe. The durational values, the quietness and 'stillness', support this culminating spectacularity, a phase not only of physical completion but also of emotional and even spiritual transcendence for those involved. What is also very clear at this point, as it has been in some of the earlier scenes, is the connection between this special time and the later special time of '9/11', involving the same building (and, of course, portrayed in *Fahrenheit 9/11,* discussed earlier). Part of the broader meaning of the wire-walk is its historical framing by what happened 37

years later. Generated out of the busy, indeed frantic, dramatized time of the last

stages of preparation, this culminating, placid time gives way in its turn to the busy

mix of news archive materials, including interviews with police officers, shots taken

from a helicopter, and the reflections from those involved which form the film's last

section.

Marsh, as I hope to have shown, works across a number of dimensions of time in the

construction of his film, his account made distinctive by the quite complex and

embedded biographical times which are drawn upon and the very special nature of the

time of the walk itself. His solutions to the challenges posed, involving, as we have

seen, the immediacy values of crime drama, were a key part of the film's critical and

popular success.

Time Values and Time Relations.

I have looked at three documentary films which use very different styles to explore

widely varied themes. I have attempted to explore in my analysis the way in which

time is centrally involved in their aesthetic and epistemological organisation. I

suggested earlier that in many documentaries (and my last two examples above

demonstrate this clearly) historical time is highly significant, our knowing (if only

approximately) when the various images and sounds were recorded being an

important aspect of following both the 'story' being offered and the stages of the

expositional account, with its indications of causality and consequence. In history

programming particularly, the combination of the historical times relating to archive

materials, different 'thens' often running underneath a commentary firmly marked as

'now', has sometimes been the focus of debate, particularly between historians and

broadcasters.[9] I have also shown how durational time, involving judgements about what time value to give to a shot or a sequence within an overall aesthetic and discursive design, poses questions with several different answers in documentary production. The kind of 'seeing' we are offered by documentary, the way in which the world is rendered for our gaze, our understanding and our feeling, turns extensively on the amount of time allocated to the various elements of the portrayal. In a television culture which places an increasing premium on pace, on rapidity of transition, in much of its programming, the option of 'slowness', of the opening-up of 'time for thought', has been marginalised by some production teams but seen as a priority by others. This connects with the cultural demographics of film and television, since time-values have implications for the aesthetic positioning of a documentary within 'media space' and 'arts space'. This is a positioning, initially broadly framed by genre but then relating more narrowly to the individual work itself, that affects how it is distributed and marketed and who is likely to get to see it or to feel that it is 'for them'.

It might be useful, finally, to note those broader connections with the temporalities of modernity which the documentary form has displayed across its various developments and many approaches. Conceived as, among other things, an exciting way of portraying the world,[10] it has played with devices of temporal condensation (eliding and collapsing), imbrication (interconnecting and overlapping), acceleration (the aesthetics of editing and narrative design) and expansion (the long, slow looks of observational work) in ways which relate to, but also differ from, those of fictional cinema. Through its techniques of recording and editing, it has provided viewers with what are sometimes very different modes of imaginative 'time-play' and of relations to time past, present and future, to complement the terms of their own

time-embeddedness. With its resourceful use of archive and testimony, reconstruction and actuality, its discourses of showing and telling have been a central part of the contemporary culture of knowing, involving recognition both of forms of the 'ordinary' and of the 'exotic'. In doing this work, it has contributed both affirmation and criticism, sometimes (as we have seen above) combining the two.

For all the changes that have impacted upon the economy of documentary, tending to constrain certain types of production and to encourage the intensive development of others[11], this broad area of audio-visual production – generically positioned, I noted earlier, somewhere between 'news feature' and 'drama', and now increasingly involving variants of 'talkshow', 'gameshow' and 'sitcom' – remains a significant form of public mediation. Those who have worked in this area, internationally, have often used its possibilities for the organisation of times and timings as part of an imaginative response to the challenges of thinking and feeling in the diverse settings of modernity.

[1] A very useful collection of critical commentary is to be found in David Green and Joanna Lowry (eds.) *Stillness and Time: Photography and the Moving Image* (London: Photoforum/Photoworks, 2006).

[2] Laura Mulvey's *Death 24x a Second* (London: Reaktion Books, 2005) provides a provocative commentary on this and related issues.

[3] Among a vast literature, Brian Winston's *Claiming the Real* (London: British Film Institute, 1995, revised edition 2010) is a widely-cited account of the political and social frameworks in which the 'classic', formative work was produced. More specific attention to Grierson's social and political perspectives in an intellectual context is offered in Ian Aitkin's *Film and Reform* (London: Routledge 1992), while Bill Nichols 'Documentary Film and the Modernist Avant Garde', *Critical Inquiry* 27.4 2001, 580-610, examines connections with contemporary aesthetics, including Soviet cinema, in a way that supports some of the arguments to be developed in this chapter.

[4] Again, Winston's *Claiming the Real* includes an important, historical discussion of 'observational' approaches to documentary design.

[5] A very fine account of Jennings' work, this particular film and the relationship with the sociological and literary project of Mass Observation is contained in Keith Beattie, *Humphrey Jennings* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010).

[6] In John Ellis, *Visible Fictions* (London: Routledge, 1982).

[7] A point made by a number of commentators on the film, including Beattie in *Humphrey Jennings*.

[8] The film is widely discussed in what is now an international literature. An early perceptive review is Mandy Merck, 'Fast train coming: the political pedagogy of Fahrenheit 9/11' in *Radical Philosophy* 128, November-December , 2004, 2-5. A wide-ranging critical discussion is presented in Stella Bruzzi's *New Documentary* (2nd Edition, London: Routledge, 2006). A more focused treatment of how the film works politically, touching on the criticisms of those who judge it to depart from the established conventions of 'documentary', forms part of John Corner's 'Documenting the Political: Some Issues', *Studies in Documentary Film* 3.2, 2009, 113-129. I have drawn on parts of this article in developing the present chapter.

[9] The history and range of debates here are discussed in Ann Gray and Erin Bell (eds.) *Televising History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave/Macmillan, 2010).

[10] Grierson's emphasis on 'drama', 'the living scene' and the 'living story' indicate this commitment to engaging the audience sensorily, often by strongly kinetic sequences. See the account of his use of these terms in John Corner, *The Art of Record* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996).

[11] 'Reality television' has undoubtedly been the most important and controversial development. See, for instance, the accounts in Sue Holmes and Deborah Jermyn (eds.) *Understanding Reality Television* (London, Routledge, 2004) and in Susan Murray and Laurie Ouellette (eds.) *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture* (2nd edition, New York: New York University Press, 2008). A general account of continuing issues surrounding the generic identity of documentary, descriptively and normatively, is given in John Corner 'Documentary studies: dimensions of transition and continuity', pp. 13-28 in Thomas Austin and Wilma De Jong (eds.) *Rethinking Documentary* (Maidenhead: Open University Press/McGraw Hill)