

# Documentaries

## Types of Form in Documentary Films

Many documentaries are organised as narratives, just as fiction films are. William Wyler's World War II-era *Memphis Belle* follows the course of a single raid over Germany, seen largely from inside a B-17 bomber. There are, however, other, non-narrative types of documentary form. A film might be intended to convey information in a simple fashion and hence draw upon what we can term **categorical form**. Or the filmmaker may want to make an argument that will convince the viewer of something. In this case the film draws upon **rhetorical form**.

### Categorical Form

*Categories* are groupings which individuals or society create to organise their knowledge of the world. Most of the categories we use in life not strict, neat or exhaustive. We tend to group things based on a commonsense, practical approach or on ideological views of the world.

If a filmmaker wants to convey some information about the world to audiences, categories and sub-categories may provide a basis for organising the film's form. The categorical film often begins by identifying its subject and patterns of development are simple.. This does risk boring the spectator if it is too repetitive. The challenge is to introduce variations and to make us adjust our expectations.

For example, the filmmaker may choose a category which is exciting or broad or unusual enough to present many possibilities for stimulating interest. Interesting film techniques may also be used or small scale narratives may be used.

### Rhetorical Form

In this form, the filmmaker presents a persuasive argument. The goal is to persuade the audience to adopt an opinion about the subject matter and perhaps act upon that opinion. Rhetorical film can be identified by four basic attributes

- It addresses the viewer openly, trying to move him or her to a new intellectual conviction.
- The film will not be an issue of scientific truth, but a matter of opinion. They express an ideology.

- If the conclusion cannot be proved beyond question, the filmmaker will appeal to our emotions, rather than presenting fact.
- The film will attempt to persuade the viewer to make a choice that will have an effect on his or her everyday life.

### **Arguments from source**

Some of the film's arguments will usually present the film as a reliable source of information. The people who made it will try to give the audience the impression that they are intelligent, well informed, trustworthy, sincere etc.

### **Subject-centred arguments**

The film will employ arguments about its subject matter. The film may appeal to beliefs common at the time in a given culture.

### **Viewer-centred arguments**

The film may appeal to the emotions of the viewer.