

Documentary Films

- I. Lumiere Bros Silent Films (“Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat” + “First Films”)
- II. Noël Carroll’s (NC) “Fiction, Non-Fiction, and the Film of Presumptive Assertion: A Conceptual Analysis”
 - a. NC looking for a what makes a documentary/non-fiction film *that* kind of film, and not some other kind.
 - b. On the one hand, this is no different than doing ‘ontology of film’ (where we seek a definition of what all *films* have in common that captures *a) what all things share in common*, and *b) excludes anything that is not a film.*) But NC wants to know what makes *documentary/non-fiction films* different from *other kinds of film*.

His method: induction. What’s **that**?

To generalize from particular examples of the thing you mean to define.

E.g.: having seen many frogs living both on land and in the water, I can *induce* (“to call forth or bring about”) the idea that frogs are **amphibious**.
 - c. Grierson’s definition: documentary films are films that involve “a creative treatment of actuality”
 1. Were the Lumiere Bros’ films *creative treatments of actuality*?
 2. If they weren’t creative, why does Grierson specify that a documentary must be creative? (he has in mind Flaherty’s *Moana*: an **art film** that deploys actual events and people)
 - d. NC starts his analysis by focusing on problems with the term “documentary” (as in: a film that documents actual events and persons). The Grierson concept is “too narrow” because it excludes the Lumiere Bros’ films and videotapes of the Rodney King beating at the hands of the LAPD (or: the suffocation of George Floyd at the hands of a Minneapolis policeman).
 - e. Question: NC is looking for a new term/definition that covers what Grierson’s covers, as well as what others call docs/non-fiction films. BUT: how does he **justify** introducing his own, new definition?
 - f. Are there any obvious problems with NC’s justification?
 - g. Why NC’s justification is nonetheless reasonable.
 - h. How is coming up, by inspecting flowering plants and discovering one class of them (orchids) that have characteristics that only *they* have in common, **the same kind of process of definition** that NC is applying to what we **now call documentaries**?

Consider: orchids don’t change their characteristics (except over extremely long periods of time). What does NC say in response to this obvious problem with his method?
 - i. NC turns to focus on problems with the term “non-fiction” as a catch-all term characterizing all documentary films. Main problem: the term is used to capture any film that *tells a story that is not made-up*.

Evidence: Ernie Gehr’s *Serene Velocity* (screen for class).
 - j. Now for NC’s proposal (roughly) for what makes as film a **documentation/documentary**: those that **play the assertion game**. (pg. 4 marked)
 - k. NC’s more-detailed proposal (pg 4 bottom)
 - l. NC’s account of what makes a film **non-fiction** (pg 5 marked)