

THE DOCUMENTARY FILM BOOK

Edited by
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palgrave
macmillan

A BFI book published by Palgrave Macmillan

2.1 Problems in Historiography: The Documentary Tradition Before *Nanook Of The North*

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However defined; whether cinematic order, genus or species; whatever the questions of authenticity, the demands of narrative and the quagmire of ethics, moving-image documentary has persisted as a potent type of cinema. It has a sturdy history. Given a general western addiction to realistic modes of representation (validated by the scientism of photography), coupled with a mature conception of the nature of evidence, this is scarcely surprising. Nevertheless ...

The beginnings of documentary have been underconceptualised and underexplored. Even now, many sources see the documentary film as having an early, promising pre-history with the short films of Auguste and Louis Lumière, but the mode itself only appearing with Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1922).¹ This is already a retrospective assertion, a striking anachronism, since the term was coined, according to Anglo-American mythology, by John Grierson in 1926, when he wrote that, 'Of course *Moana* [1926], being a visual account of events in the daily life of a Polynesian youth and his family, has documentary value.'² Both of these elements have a special relevance in explaining the history they constitute, but each is also symptomatic of problems that have impeded a proper history. The Lumières' achievements, to which we will return, gives documentary a media-specific cast and implicitly asserts that it was with the beginning of cinema (motion pictures) that the first glimmers of its documentary potential were recognised. In fact, this media-specificity has had to give way in the current era of digital video in which video documentaries are seen as straightforward continuations of the documentary film tradition.

The privileging of *Nanook of the North* and its retrospective association as the starting point of documentary obfuscates much more than it illuminates. Underneath a nonsensical embrace of an extraordinary auteurism, there is perhaps one underlying logic: that this moment follows closely upon the formation of the classical Hollywood cinema in the USA. Documentary has been defined against Hollywood cinema and fiction film by critics and theorists such as John Grierson and Dziga Vertov, but also by the French. So the moment when motion pictures achieved a

particular stability and status with the vertically integrated studio system (c. 1919–20) and the international dominance of American productions contributed to the generation of a non-fiction counterpart defined as documentary.³ This may help to explain why the term 'documentary' was so quickly embraced, but it works within an historical paradigm that this chapter rejects.

The early history of documentary requires an exploration of several strands, one of which is the history and etymology of the term itself. The term 'documentary' dates back to the late eighteenth century, where it appeared in a judicial or governmental context. London newspapers were using the term 'documentary evidence' as early as 1786.⁴ News coverage of the lengthy trial of Warren Hastings in the House of Lords and Parliament from 1788 to 1791 generated numerous references to 'documentary proof' and 'documentary and oratory testimony'.⁵ 'Documentary' was thus an adjective referring to documents in a legal context. By the mid-nineteenth century, the use of the term 'documentary' was broadened beyond the legal framework to include scholars and others looking at documentary evidence.⁶ The 'documentary value' of photography was heralded by the 1850s.⁷ Likewise, Richard Harding Davis's book, *The Cuban and Porto Rican Campaigns* (1898), consisted of a hundred illustrations from photographs, which were said to have documentary value.⁸ By the 1890s, the term 'documentary photograph' was beginning to be used with some frequency: the French photographer Leon Vidal (1833–1906) was trying to establish a Museum of Photographic Archives and Documentary Photographs⁹ by the early twentieth century.¹⁰ 'Documentary' as a term was also associated with non-fiction film. In a brief article on a Pathé news film of a 1922 horse race, C. R. G. remarks that 'Many people will find it interesting not only as a vivid reproduction of the spectacle but also as a piece of documentary evidence.'¹¹ By the 1920s commentators were often referring to the 'documentary interest' or 'documentary values' of photographs, reproductions, illustrative material and even film.¹² The term 'documentary' or 'documentary films' was imported to the USA from French-speaking parts of Europe. New York

Times correspondent Martha Gruening, writing from Paris, refers to the 'documentary travel film'.¹³ Meanwhile, the Catholic Church applauded 'instructive documentary films' being made in Belgium.¹⁴

'Documentary' was a term that was more or less quickly applied to well-established non-fiction screen practices and typically embraced or superseded terms such as 'travel film', 'educational film' and 'illustrated lecture'. The term 'illustrated lecture', which had been standard nomenclature for documentary-like programmes in the nineteenth century, had become inadequate and antiquated: a new term was needed and 'documentary' filled the bill. Between the 1850s or 60s and the 1920s or 30s, the illustrated lecture was a cultural form that was fundamentally connected to audiovisual presentations involving projected images using lantern slides and then film. It might, therefore, be tempting to trace documentary back to the origins of photography and the emergence of photographic techniques (the development of photographic glass slides) and practices, which soon came to characterise the illustrated lecture using photographic slides – what was frequently called 'stereopticon lectures' in the USA. As we have seen, the term 'documentary' was sometimes associated with photography, giving this some appeal. However tempting as this formulation might be, this would merely push backwards in time a reliance on a form of media-specificity that an adequate delineation of the form's long history cannot sustain. (Indeed, in recent years the animated documentary has enjoyed something of a boom.) In the early nineteenth century, in the era before photography, there were exhibitors who gave lantern-slide lectures that operated within what Bill Nichols refers to as the discourse of sobriety. On topics such as astronomy and travel, they operated within a non-fiction framework while using painted lantern slides. On the other hand, there were also illustrated lectures that used other kinds of visual aids besides projected images (science demonstrations, artefacts and so forth). Granted that such practices were less clearly delineated, recognisable strands of the documentary clearly go back much further. Where to begin?

THE HISTORY OF NON-FICTION SCREEN PRACTICE

The history of documentary might be said to begin with the introduction of projected images on the screen for non-fiction purposes, in short with Althanius Kircher and Christiaan Huygens in the 1640s and 50s. Although Kircher's exhibitions with his catoptric lamp – which relied on the sun rather than a candle or other light source – were generally used to depict fictional tales, there were two ways in which his presentations were aligned with the documentary tradition: first, stressing the importance of demystifying the projected image, Kircher presented the apparatus within the framework of

a technological demonstration or lecture illustrated with various apparatuses; second, anticipating later science-oriented presentations involving projected images, he often showed live flies: 'smear honey on the mirror and behold how the flies will be projected on the wall through the surface of the mirror with extraordinary size'.¹⁵ If Kircher enjoyed presenting satirical scenes and theatrical tragedies, his fellow Jesuit Andreas Tacquet used a catoptric lamp to give an illustrated lecture about a missionary's trip to China.¹⁶ The lantern was also used to present illustrated lectures on the life of Christ – certainly seen as part of the discourse of sobriety – dealing with history, biography and religion.

My goal is not to present an unbroken genealogy from Kircher to the present day, even assuming this was possible. By the early nineteenth century, the illustrated lecture was becoming a more established presence in Anglo-American public culture. As Richard Altick has shown, illustrated lectures on astronomy had become quite common.¹⁷ In 1825, a London optician was advertising his instructive lectures on astronomy using a 'Phantasmagoria Lantern'.¹⁸ The following year in Philadelphia, J. L. Rhees was offering a series of lectures on geography and natural history, which were 'illustrated by magic lantern representations'.¹⁹ In 1842 at London's Kensington Hall, Joshua Coffin delivered an illustrated lecture on Palestine using fifty-five paintings projected by the magic lantern.²⁰

Illustrated lectures could use a variety of visual aids and sometimes involved the demonstration of new technologies, such as Alexander Bain's illustrated lecture on 'The Electro-magnetic Printing Telegraph' at the Royal Polytechnic in London.²¹ In 1861, Mr Rarey gave an 'illustrated lecture on his power over the horse at the Brooklyn Academy of Music ... when several vicious horses were effectively subdued'.²² Dr Robert A. Fisher lectured on 'Gunpowder, Cannon and Projectiles' using large diagrams, models, shells and chemical experiments.²³ Early exhibitions of the phonograph, like the one that occurred at Chickering Hall in New York City on 23 March 1878, also functioned in a similar way.²⁴ The extensive use of illustrated lectures and the balance between those using lantern slides versus other illustrative material is suggested by an 1855 report by the Pennsylvania Hospital for the Insane: 132 events were held in the lecture room for its inmates. Dr Lee delivered forty lectures: one on the construction and uses of the magic lantern, four on Canada and the fur trade, two on the Arctic regions, two on the polar regions and two on ornithology. These were undoubtedly among the fifty presentations that used the magic lantern and dissolving views, while others – one on the telegraph in operation, two on electro-magnetism and four on electricity – probably involved scientific demonstrations.²⁵ This underscores an important conceptual tension that an understanding of documentary and the documentary tradition requires. On

one hand, there were many illustrated lectures that could (in theory) be transferred to digital formats with striking continuities and produce something one would describe as a documentary. Nevertheless, 'illustrated lecture' as a term was more flexible and expansive.

The development of photography did not give lanternists initial access to projected photographic images: this had to wait for the development of the albumen and collodion processes in the late 1840s. These new photographic techniques enabled a photographic image to be transferred to a glass surface, while earlier processes (daguerreotypes and talbotypes) had used either a silver-plated copper surface or paper as a base. When John A. Whipple and William B. Jones of Boston patented an albumen process (using egg whites as an adhering agent) in June 1850, they had apparently been using it for several years.²⁶ The Langenheim brothers, William and Frederick, had also been working with the albumen process and played an important role in the introduction of photographic lantern slides.²⁷

During the 1840s, the Langenheims facilitated the introduction of several new photographic processes into the USA. Interested in the process of paper photography developed by William Henry Fox Talbot, they became its exclusive agents in the USA. While licensing the talbotype process was not commercially rewarding, the venture encouraged them to adopt and to improve the albumen process. Employing glass as a support for the emulsion, the Langenheims began making photographic lantern slides. In introducing these new slides, the brothers claimed:

The new magic-lantern pictures on glass, being produced by the action of light alone on a prepared glass plate, by means of the camera obscura, must throw the old style of magic lantern slides into the shade, and supersede them at once, on account of the greater accuracy of the smallest detail which are drawn and fixed on glass from nature, by the camera obscura, with a fidelity truly astonishing. By magnifying these new slides through the magic lantern, the representation is nature itself again, omitting all defects and incorrectness in the drawing which can never be avoided in painting a picture on the small scale required for the old slides.²⁸

By 1851 they were exhibiting slides at London's Crystal Palace Exhibition, where these hyalotypes received extensive praise.²⁹ Views were of buildings and landmarks in Philadelphia (US Custom House, Penitentiary of Pennsylvania), Washington (Smithsonian, the Capitol) and New York (Croton Aqueduct), as well as portraits of well-known Americans. Their early positive pictures on glass slides were mounted in rectangular wooden frames that were 3½ x 6½ inches with a 2¼ inch or 3 inch circular opening for the image. Many were hand coloured and they cost

\$4-5 apiece. The Langenheims thus saw their introduction of photograph slides as an extension of existing magic lantern practices.

The progress made in photographic processes moved back and forth between Europe and the USA as the Langenheims' innovations were adapted to the stereoscope. The move from daguerreotypes to more modern photographic images for the stereoscope was not straightforward. Writing for the *Philadelphia Photographer*, M. A. Root reported that:

Mr Niepce's process of making negative pictures by using albumen in combination with iodide of potassium, was published in the early part of 1848. In this, his process, he states distinctly that the positive pictures are always best taken on paper.

Mr Langenheim informs me that he, 'by modifying Niepce's process, obtained the first positive pictures on glass to be viewed by transmitted light, in 1848. And in 1849' he says, 'I exhibited for the first time such positive glass pictures by means of the magic lantern in the Merchants' Exchange at Philadelphia.

'While in Paris, in 1853, I was introduced to the celebrated optician Dubosque-Soleil, to whom I showed some of my magic lantern pictures, made by me in Philadelphia. He was delighted with them, and asked my permission to show them in a scientific magic lantern exhibition, which he had to give in one of the public institutions, and during this exhibition he showed these pictures, stating to the audience that they were the first pictures of the kind ever shown in Paris.'

In conversation, Mr Dubosque told me that when he was engaged in 1851, to arrange the display of his articles for the 'World's Fair' in London, he saw my photo magic lantern pictures, the first he had ever seen, and thinking that such photo-positive pictures on glass might be used to supersede the daguerreotype pictures, until then manufactured for him by Mr Ferrier; he had at once written to Mr Ferrier, to come over [from] London to examine my transparent positive pictures taken on glass, and that since then they had tried and made such transparent positive pictures on glass for the stereoscope.³⁰

Photographers in France and England soon enjoyed a booming business in making glass slides for the stereoscope, but this innovation happened somewhat later in the USA. It was again the Langenheims who responded to European developments by making the first stereoscopic glass slides in the USA during the summer of 1854.³¹ Nevertheless, in the latter part of 1858 the production and sale of stereoscopic glass slides was still getting started in New York City, with landscapes on paper selling from \$6-9 per dozen and landscapes on glass from \$15-30.³²

Antoine Claudet tried to project individual halves of a stereoscopic slide and retain or re-create a 3-D effect in 1857.³³ The resulting achievement, which he called the stereomonoscope, received significant attention in the press and among scientific journals. The *Chicago Press and Tribune* reported,

M. Claudet, the veteran photographer, has accomplished a particularly [impressive] result in his art, enabling him to produce the stereoscopic illusion by the agency of a single picture. In the centre of a large black screen, there is a space filled with a square of ground glass, upon which, by some light managed behind the screen, is thrown a magnified photographic image representing a landscape, a portrait, or any other object. When the observer looks naturally at the object or picture, with the two eyes, without help of any optical instrument, an extraordinary phenomenon takes place – the picture is seen in perfect relief, as when two different pictures are looked at through a stereoscope. ... By this remarkable discovery, M. Claudet has solved a problem which has always been considered an impossibility by scientific men – for the stereomonoscope, by its very name, must sound like a paradox to the ears of those who are versed in the knowledge of the principles of binocular vision, until they have had the opportunity of repeating the experiments by which M. Claudet has found a new fact which they had not noticed or explained before.³⁴

In fact, although projecting a single photographic image did not produce a 3-D effect, viewers did experience a visceral sense of depth that was much stronger than if a photograph was merely viewed on paper or a metal surface. Claudet believed (wrongly) that projecting a photographic image onto a ground glass was the key to retaining a three-dimensional sense of depth.

Chemist John Fallon of Lawrence, Massachusetts, apparently acquired one of Claudet's lanterns and, after refiguring and discarding elements, offered what was referred to as an 'improved stereopticon', which he exhibited in the 1860s. According to one press report,

Although the stereopticon was exhibited for a time in the Polytechnic Institute, and in the Hall of Illustration, Regent's Park, London, yet it did not advance beyond the first discovery. J. Fallon, Esq., of Lawrence Mass, the chemist of the Pacific Mills, who has devoted thirty years to photology, imported from England one of these instruments for his own family. But under his hands it was developed into something so perfect that his friends desired that others might have the pleasure which he enjoyed. He has sent it forth on a charitable mission, and for churches, Sabbath schools, and sanitary commissions its charities can be counted by thousands. In

Massachusetts, such men as Prof. Agassiz, Longfellow, Hillard, Holmes, Rev. Dr Park, and many other leading representative men 'assisted' with delight at many of the exhibitions, and the first two aided in delineating the scenes.³⁵

By January 1861, announcements for the 'stereopticon' were appearing in such American periodicals as the *Saturday Evening Post*, which remarked that 'It produces in a wonderful degree the impression that you are gazing upon the real scenes and objects represented.'³⁶ *Arthur's Home Magazine* hailed this 'triumph of science and art combined' and declared,

No picture or dioramic view is comparable with the 'Stereopticon' in giving a just idea of scenery or architecture. You seem to stand in the very place that is represented, and to see everything just as it exists, in all its true portions.³⁷

After being exhibited in the Boston area and in non-theatrical venues, Fallon's stereopticon opened at Toro Hall in Hartford, Connecticut, on 23 December 1862, where the effects were declared to be 'brilliant and startling, and the representations singularly truthful'.³⁸ It then moved to Hartford's larger and more prestigious Allyn Hall for a week in mid-January.³⁹ Exhibitor J. Leyland supervised the Brooklyn, New York, debut of this 'scientific wonder of the age' at the Atheneum on 14 April 1863. Although audiences were embarrassingly small at first, the city's leading citizens (including Mayor M. B. Kalbfleisch and Charles J. Sprague) urged Fallon and Leyland to remain 'so that all may enjoy its beauties and profit by its instructions'.⁴⁰ It ultimately ran almost continuously for six weeks with a 25 cent admission fee. The evening debut consisted of 'a choice selection of landscapes, architectural views and sculptures gathered from travels in the most illustrious parts of Europe, Asia and our own country'.⁴¹ The mistaken belief that 'half of a stereoscopic view could be made to present a solid (i.e., stereoscopic) effect' persisted.⁴² The *New York Journal of Commerce* commented that the stereopticon,

has been developed into something so brilliant and beautiful that the pictures produced are as much beyond the ordinary photograph as that, in fidelity and beauty, is beyond the old fashioned engraving. In short, the delight which one person has in looking through the stereoscope, a thousand persons can have at once – so that there is sympathetic and social pleasure. The Stereopticon, as it is called, takes the ordinary glass stereoscopic view, and by fine lenses and the most intense of artificial lights, throws and magnifies the miniature view upon a canvas to such an extent that every one in a building as vast as the

Academy of Music can see with distinctness each scene. There is no straining of the vision; there is no wearying of the eye as in the stereoscope, but one merely sits and gazes upon the sublime scenery of the Alps, the renowned old abbeys, the busy streets of London, Paris, Naples, and Grand Cairo; the grand, awe-striking remains of Egypt, and the solemn instructive scenes of Palestine. In the same manner and with the same ease that we look upon a real landscape from the deck of a Hudson River steamer. The distant and the rare are brought to us – or rather like a magic mat of the Arabian tale we are borne on swift and brilliant wings to the ends of the earth. The treasures of statuary art from the Louvre, the Vatican and the Museo Borbonico are ours. Nothing seems so dream-like as the Apollo Belvedere, the Venus de Medici, and the *chefs d'oeuvre* of the great Thorwalden, which appear upon the scene in all their roundness and beauty.⁴³

Another reviewer echoed many of the same sentiments, remarking that 'you can imagine yourself borne away on the enchanted carpet of the Arabian tale, and brought where you can look down upon the veritable Paris, and Rome, and Egypt'.⁴⁴ Leyland soon made almost daily programme changes, devoting each illustrated lecture to a specific country or region: *Great Britain, France, Switzerland and the Rhine, and Italy*.⁴⁵ For another popular programme, the 'wall photographer' exhibited photographs of statuary. These evening shows – with Wednesday and Saturday matinees at reduced fee – were 'attended by the learned and scientific portion of society as well as others'.⁴⁶ Within a few weeks, P. T. Barnum had introduced the 'Great English Stereopticon' as his principle attraction at the American Museum, with 'photographic views of scenery, celestial and animated objects, buildings, portraits, &c, &c'.⁴⁷ It was soon followed by Fallon's stereopticon at Manhattan's Irving Hall for a five-week run.⁴⁸ The stereopticon was launched with an array of competing exhibitions that anticipated in some ways cinema's novelty year thirty-three years later.

A combination of factors contributed to the sense that the stereopticon was a new and important media form. The powerful illusory effect of the stereopticon was similar to the experience that spectators would have with the first projected films – the sense of being transported to a different place (and time). Commentators were impressed by the realism and the immediacy of the image – with the sense of 'being there'. These 'wonderful exhibitions' produced 'brilliant and startling' effects as well as representations that were 'singularly truthful'. 'The Old World and the New, are brought in all their beauty and grandeur to our very doors'.⁴⁹

Programmes were initially composed of a miscellaneous collection of slides – the stereopticon of attractions, to coin a phrase, but exhibitors quickly gathered together enough photographic views of particular subjects so that

they could be forged into coherent non-fiction programmes. One could say that the novelty of such slides momentarily disrupted the established practices of the illustrated lecture, but then reaffirmed and expanded them. Although photographic slides would eventually be used for fiction – Bamforth and York & Company were prolific producers of life-model lantern slides – photography and photographic slides were a boon to the documentary tradition in that photography generated images that were more detailed, objective and (soon) cheaper to produce than the painted slides on which showmen had had to rely previously. It would be a mistake to refer to the resulting programmes as 'documentaries'. They went by various names – names that varied from country to country – but, they were certainly part of what we must recognise as the documentary tradition. Their resemblance to the heavily narrated, expository documentaries of the 1930s and beyond should be obvious to all. Moreover, we can recognise a number of genres, which were already well established in the 1880s, if not before, for which there is remarkable continuity even to this day. They would include the war programme, the science programme, the religious programme, the 'city symphony' programme (to use an anachronism), the political programme and so forth. The travel genre quickly broke down into a number of popular sub-genres focused on exploration in the polar regions, the African Safari, the travelogue of Europe, Asia and the Americas and so forth. Almost without exception, each has its own complex, rich genealogy. The documentary tradition flourished in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century with 'documentary-like' programmes. To not see this, takes an incredible act of blinding willpower.

War has been a prominent and recurrent subject in the documentary tradition as can be seen by simply focusing on the Anglo-American tradition. There were illustrated lectures on the Crimean War (1854–55), though it does not appear that Roger Fenton's photographs – or photographs in general – were used. David Francis reports that slides for illustrated lectures on the Crimean War at the Royal Polytechnic were hand painted.⁵⁰ In New York, by June 1864 Fallon's stereopticon devoted its final programme to the Civil War with *The Army of the Potomac*:

The views illustrate the army from the first battle of Bull Run up to its present position under the commands of Gen. McDowell, Gen. McClellan, Gen. Burnside, Gen. Hooker, Gen. Meade and Lieut. Gen. Grant are vouched for by all our generals, and bring the battle fields, their incidents and localities, before us in the most faithful and vivid manner, each view being reproduced on a canvas covering a surface of over 600 square feet.⁵¹

Stereopticon lectures on the Civil War became immensely popular in the USA and remained common until the late

nineteenth century. Very soon after the arrival of cinema, cameramen began to take films in war zones and also make re-enactments closer to home. These were shown as individual news films or in small groups but they were also combined with lantern slides to give illustrated lectures on the war. In his examination of early war films, Stephen Bottomore notes that Frederic Villiers took more than a dozen films of the 1897 Greco-Turkish War and used them for lectures on his return to England (the images on the screen almost certainly included lantern slides since Villiers also brought a still camera with him).⁵² In the USA, the Spanish-American War was an immensely popular subject for the screen. The Eden Musee offered A *Panorama of the War* while Lyman Howe devoted his Autumn 1898 programme to a sustained narrative treatment of the War.⁵³ Dwight Elmendorf gave illustrated lectures such as *The Santiago Campaign and the Destruction of Cervera's Fleet – War Through a Camera* at New York's Carnegie Hall and on some occasions integrated films into his programmes.⁵⁴ Soon after showmen in Britain were offering extensive programmes on the Boer War, complete with lectures and sound effects – again integrating slides and films.⁵⁵

Exhibitors began to integrate slides and films into their illustrated lectures to create a documentary-like programme; this was already the case in the late 1890s and the practice continued into the 1920s and beyond.⁵⁶ Burton Holmes used it for his presentation *Manila (1899–1900)* on the Filipino-American War and *Port Arthur: Siege and Surrender (1905–06)* for his treatment of the Russo-Japanese War.⁵⁷ The same approach was used in many cases for the Balkan War of 1912. British war correspondent Angus Hamilton visited the USA in early 1913 and gave a series of lectures on *The Balkan War* in New York, Pittsburgh and other cities – again interweaving slides and film.⁵⁸ The reasons for this practice were multiple. Illustrated lectures were generally assembled and exhibited by individual showmen. It would have been prohibitively expensive to fill an evening-length programme with films, which were expensive to produce or to buy. The motion-picture camera was bulky. Still images were not only much cheaper, they were much easier to produce so there were many more images to choose from. Moreover, lantern slides were often hand coloured and quite beautiful. Although projection technology was improving, problems with flicker persisted for many, even after 1903 when the three-blade shutter was introduced. The alternation between stills and motion pictures was also an alternation between colour and movement. Clearly one feature of all this was that the lecturer was in charge of post-production – the gathering and organisation of material, the writing and delivery of a lecture, the choice of music and so forth – and the author of the programme. Many lecturers continued to use only slides but the combination of the two became very

common around 1906, at the time of the nickelodeon boom.⁵⁹ Not surprisingly, these illustrated lectures tended to be presented outside the network of commercial motion picture theatres or nickelodeons.

The emergence of the feature film in 1912–13 would have a significant if complex impact on the documentary tradition. At first, films were often being shown in legitimate theatres during the summer months when they were normally dark, providing the theatre owners with extra income. Many of these early feature-length programmes were non-fiction. Some were in Kinemacolor, such as *Actual Scenes of the Balkan War*, which was paired with *Making the Panama Canal* (both 1913) in many venues.⁶⁰ These programmes were now composed exclusively of motion pictures, though they still generally had a lecturer. However, there was often more than one set of the same films being shown and it was not the lecturer so much as the programme itself that was being promoted. Paul Rainey's *African Hunt* (1912), for instance, was showing at New York's Lyric Theater in the spring and summer of 1912. There was generally still a lecturer and while s/he was mentioned in reviews, s/he was no longer seen as the author. In any case, documentary-like programmes composed exclusively of motion pictures were major contributors to the ascendancy of the feature film.

With the onset of World War I in 1914, the English, French and Germans began to produce feature-length non-fiction films (as well as shorter news films) to present their side of the war. These were meant to inspire each nation's populations, but they were also used to win over the hearts and minds of citizens in neutral countries such as the USA. At the very end of 1915, Official French Government War Films were released under the title *Somewhere in France*. From Great Britain there was *Britain Prepared* (December 1915).⁶¹ At about the same time, the Germans offered *Deutschwehr War Films*, with proceeds from admissions going to German War widows and babies. As one reviewer remarked:

While the pictures linger on the details behind the lines which play so important a part in modern war, they have some elements of novelty and are not without interest. But showing pictures of a noble church razed almost to the ground with the explanation in a subtitle that it had been used as a fortress, and showing a pasture on which cows are grazing to prove that Germany suffers from no lack of food, smacks too much of propaganda and too little of entertainment for the observer who is neutral either in fact or desire.

As a matter of fact they are cleverly designed to warm the hearts of those who love the fatherland, to bolster such hearts with confidence and to disprove widespread statements as to conditions in Germany. But they shed no new light on any phase of modern warfare.⁶²

In New York City, the Commissioner of Licensees, Mr George H. Bell, had declared that there must be no pictures of victories or defeats and that films displaying partiality would be suppressed.⁶³ However, his concern focused on fiction films where manipulation seemed more obvious. Because these films were non-fiction, it was assumed at first that they would be objective. Many officials believed that non-fiction programmes would provide information rather than fan emotions, but war documentaries soon challenged those assumptions.

The first great non-fiction war film – and one is tempted to argue the first landmark war documentary – was *The Battle of the Somme*. The completed five-reel film (approximately sixty-three minutes) premiered on 10 August 1916 at London's Scala Theatre while the battle itself was still being fought. On 21 August the film was shown simulatenously in thirty-four London movie houses and in provincial cities the following week.⁶⁴ It was screened privately (but widely reviewed) in New York City in late September and then presented in a succession

of major pictures houses the following month. Under these circumstances, it was no longer possible to train and assign lecturers to the screenings. Intertitles had to do all the work of communicating verbal information, and this was desirable because it assured a standardised presentation – an important consideration in the propaganda effort. In short, if Paul Rainey's *African Hunt* was still in some sense an illustrated lecture, *The Battle of the Somme* was not.

The British followed *The Battle of the Somme* with *The Battle of the Ancre and the Advance of the Tanks* (1917). With the USA's entry into war in April 1917, the Committee on Public Information, or Creel Committee, produced a wide variety of motion pictures for informational and propagandistic purposes. Among them were three feature-length films: *Pershing's Crusaders* (May 1918), *America's Answer (to the Hun)* (August 1918) and *Under Four Flags* (November 1918). While there were often brief introductory talks by 'four-minute men' before the films, these films were screened without lecturers and depended on

The Battle of the Somme (1916): intertitles had to do all the work of communicating verbal information



their intertitles for a standardised presentation in all parts of the country.

The above sketch of non-fiction war programmes could be done for all the other genres and sub-genres of the documentary tradition that flourished in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. With *Nanook of the North*, for instance, Robert Flaherty creatively engaged a genre that goes back, at least, to the late 1880s when Robert Peary gave illustrated lectures on the Eskimos or Inuit, after one of his early efforts to reach the North Pole. One might appreciate (but also analyse) the sentiment that has led to the designation of *Nanook* as the first documentary, but which is at best an honorary and retrospective labelling. Of course, *Nanook* possesses many remarkable qualities that make it ground-breaking, such as the loving, respectful treatment of a superficially ordinary, fourth-world indigenous man and his family. But these are not criteria that define the documentary as such.

Bill Nichols has offered a number of criteria for conceptualising documentary, but, from a historical point of view, the consolidation of creative control within the production company in the non-fiction arena, which is to say the emergence of the non-fiction film-maker who produced a standardised product that did not depend on his/her physical presence at the point of exhibition, seems a key element or shift. In this respect the role of non-fiction in the emergence of the feature film in 1912–13 was an important moment, but it was World War I and the demands for massive, rapid dissemination of a standardised non-fiction work of propaganda that led to the systematic application of innovations that characterised documentary as a practice. Some might have once objected that these films are propaganda not art, but, as we now recognise, many subsequent films in the documentary tradition are propaganda – and one cannot help but recognise the many parallels between *The Battle of the Somme* and John Huston's *The Battle of San Pietro* (1945, USA). Of course, the arrival of recorded sound ironically meant that documentaries often looked and sounded more like the illustrated lectures of the pre-World War I era; nevertheless, the mode of production was further centralised – extended to embrace sound (music and other forms of sound accompaniment had remained outside the control of the documentarian). In this respect, we can think of the documentary tradition, a particular strand of non-fiction audiovisual practice, as originating in the seventeenth century and developing through a remarkable series of technological innovations until it assumes a series of characteristics of modern mass media and modern mass culture. That this should happen in the midst of World War I and, in fact, concurrent with the development of the Ford assembly line should hardly be a surprise.

NOTES

1. Erik Barnow *Documentary: A History of the Non-fiction Film* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993 [1974]), pp. 2–48; Jack C. Ellis, *The Documentary Idea: A Critical History of English-Language Documentary Film and Video* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1989), pp. 9–27.
2. John Grierson, *New York Sun*, 8 February 1926.
3. One weakness of this chapter must be acknowledged upfront: the Anglo-American myopia of my own research and knowledge. There are histories that are emerging of documentary in other national cinemas and some may be taking an approach similar to what I am offering here, but they have not been integrated into the Anglo-American scholarly apparatus. The Goethe Institute, for instance, offers a brief English-language history of German documentary, which begins with Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin. Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt* [*The Symphony of the City*] (1927), see: <http://www.goethe.de/kue/flm/fmg/en43803.htm>. Accessed 2 September 2012. Perhaps for this early-ish, pre-1922 period, this failing can also be a strength because it allows us to focus on language in the English-speaking realm. For instance, the fact that the term 'documentary' was borrowed from the French allows us to see the ways in which French documentary practice has a particular place in the Anglo-American tradition.
4. Anon., 'St Eustatia Prize Bill', *London Chronicle*, 4 July 1786, p. 23.
5. Anon., 'House of Lords', *London Chronicle*, 1 March 1788, p. 215; Anon., 'House of Lords', 12 April 1788, p. 359; Anon., 'Account of the Trial of Warren Hastings, Esq.', *American Magazine*, July 1788, p. 516; Anon., 'Sketch of Mr Hastings's Trial', *Connecticut Courant*, 22 August 1791, p. 2. Hastings, who had been Governor General of Bengal, was charged in Parliament with high crimes and misdemeanors and impeached in 1787. His trial ran from 1788 to 1795.
6. Anon., 'New Greece', *Observer*, 6 October 1878, p. 6. These conclusions are based on a sampling of periodicals dating back to the late eighteenth century using random word search engines (in particular the *London Observer* and the *Hartford Courant*).
7. Anon., 'Exhibition of the Photographic Society', *Observer*, 9 January 1859, p. 5. See also Anon., 'Miniature Painting', *The Crayon*, 1 August 1860, p. 228, in which photographs enable painters to depict a scene with topographical accuracy that generates 'documentary value'.
8. Anon., 'Stories of War and Peace', *New York Tribune*, 10 December 1898, p. 4.
9. Anon., 'Notes and News', *Photographic Times and American Photographer*, 27 April 1894, p. 267; see also Anon., 'On the Ground-Glass', *Wilson's Photographic Magazine*, 1 May 1894, p. 192.
10. A review of Arnold Wright's *Twentieth Century Impressions of Hong Kong, Shanghai and other Treaty Ports of China* (1908)

- characterised it as 'all hard fact and documentary photograph'. (Anon., 'New Books', *The Scotsman*, 4 February 1909, p. 2).
11. Anon., 'The Grand National Film', *Manchester Guardian*, 4 March 1922, p. 6.
 12. Anon., *Merchantmen-at-Arms* [book review], *The Scotsman*, 15 December 1919, p. 2; Anon., *Old English Sporting Books* [book review], *The Scotsman*, 3 November 1924, p. 2; Anon., *Col Charteris and the Duke of Warton* [book review], *The Scotsman*, 2 March 1925, p. 2.
 13. Martha Gruening, 'European Revolt Against Our Films', *New York Times*, 31 October 1926, p. X6.
 14. Anon., 'Vatican Repudiates Attack on Our Movies', *New York Times*, 29 July 1927, p. 17.
 15. Athanasius Kircher, *Ars magna lucis et umbræ*, Amsterdam, 1671 (1646), pp. 792-4.
 16. H. Mark Gosser, 'Kircher and the Lanterna Magica: A Re-examination', *Journal of the Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers* vol. 90 no. 10, October 1981, p. 975.
 17. Richard Altick, *Shows of London* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978), pp. 364-5. But these exhibitions were not limited to the UK or prestigious lecture halls. In Charleston, South Carolina, a church sponsored a series of lectures on astronomy, illustrated with the magic lantern, to the disapproval of a church periodical. (Anon., 'Church Desecration', *Episcopal Recorder*, 12 April 1845, p. 14.)
 18. Advertisement, *Observer*, 27 March 1825, p. 3.
 19. Advertisement, *Philadelphia Recorder*, 9 December 1826, p. 147.
 20. Anon., *Episcopal Recorder*, 20 December 1842, p. 151.
 21. Anon., 'Electro-Magnetism', *New York Mirror*, 25 September 1841, p. 312.
 22. Anon., 'The News', *New York Herald*, 24 January 1861, p. 4.
 23. Anon., 'Brooklyn Items', *New York Tribune*, 11 January 1862, p. 3.
 24. Anon., 'The Phonograph Exhibited', *New York Times*, 24 March 1878, p. 2.
 25. Anon., 'Report of the Pennsylvania Hospital for the Insane: For the Year 1855', *New Hampshire Journal of Medicine*, 1 May 1856, p. 47.
 26. Patent No. 7,458, Improvement in Producing Photographic Pictures upon Transparent Media, issued 25 June 1850.
 27. Louis Walton Sipley, 'The Magic Lantern', *Pennsylvania Arts and Sciences*, 4 December 1939, pp. 39-43ff.; Louis Walton Sipley, 'W. and F. Langenheim - Photographers', *Pennsylvania Arts and Sciences*, 1937, pp. 25-31. The crucial work on the magic lantern in the USA remains Xenophon Theodore Barber, 'Evening of Wonders: A History of the Magic Lantern Show in America', PhD thesis, New York, 1993.
 28. Langenheims, quoted in *The Art-Journal*, London, April 1851, p. 106.
 29. See Anon., 'The King of Arms', *Observer*, 4 May 1851, p. 3.
 30. M. A. Root, 'The Magic Lantern: Its History and Uses for Educational and Other Purposes', *Philadelphia Photographer*, 1 December 1874, p. 11, emphases original.
 31. Frederick Langenheim to H. H. Snelling, 19 September 1854, in 'Personal and Fine Art Intelligence', *Photographic and Fine Arts Journal*, 1 October 1854, p. 319.
 32. Anon., 'The Stereoscope', *New York Tribune*, 9 November 1858, p. 3.
 33. Anon., 'Photographic Inventions', *Scientific American*, 25 May 1861, p. 326.
 34. Anon., 'New Inventions', *Chicago Press and Tribune*, 14 May 1859, p. 3.
 35. Anon., 'An Optical Wonder', *Louisville Daily Journal*, 29 April 1863, p. 1. The same basic review was also reprinted in *The Merchants' Magazine and Commercial Review* vol. 48, May 1863, p. 430.
 36. Anon., 'The Stereopticon', *Saturday Evening Post*, 5 January 1861, p. 2.
 37. Anon., 'The Stereopticon', *Arthur's Home Magazine*, April 1861, p. 17. Whether all these stereopticons can be attributed to Fallon is unclear: a stereopticon was shown at Temperance Temple in Baltimore on 4 February 1862, but it was quite possibly a renamed magic lantern and not Fallon's. (Anon., 'Temperance Temple', *Baltimore Sun*, 4 February 1862, p. 2.)
 38. Anon., 'Amusements', *Hartford Courant*, 18 December 1862, p. 2.
 39. Advertisement, *Hartford Courant*, 12 January 1863, p. 3; 'The Stereopticon', *Hartford Courant*, 14 January 1863, p. 2.
 40. Mayor M. B. Kablefleisch et al. to John Fallon, 25 April 1863, reprinted in *Brooklyn Eagle*, 4 May 1863, 17.
 41. Anon., 'The Stereopticon at the Athenaeum', *Brooklyn Eagle*, 15 April 1863, p. 3.
 42. Anon., *New York Journal of Commerce*, as quoted in *Louisville Daily Journal*, 29 April 1863, p. 1. Bertel Thorvaldsen (19 November 1770-24 March 1844) was a Danish/Icelandic sculptor.
 43. Anon., *New York Journal of Commerce* as quoted in *Louisville Daily Journal*, 29 April, p. 1.
 44. Anon., 'Modern Miracles', *Brooklyn Eagle*, 15 April 1863, p. 3.
 45. Anon., *Brooklyn Eagle*, 29 April 1863, p. 1; Anon., *Brooklyn Eagle*, 15 May 1863, p. 1.
 46. Anon., 'The Stereopticon', *Brooklyn Eagle*, 7 May 1863, p. 3.
 47. Anon., *New York Daily Tribune*, 4 May 1863, p. 7.
 48. Anon., 'Irving Hall', *New York Times*, 18 June 1863, p. 2.
 49. Anon., 'Touro Hall', *Hartford Courant*, 24 December 1862, p. 2.
 50. David Francis, email correspondence, 23 July 2012.
 51. Anon., *New York Daily Tribune*, 27 June 1864, p. 3.
 52. Stephen Bottomore, 'Filming, Faking and Propaganda: The Origins of the War Film, 1897-1902', PhD dissertation, University of Utrecht, 2007, chapter 3.
 53. Charles Musser, *Before the Nickelodeon: The Early Cinema of Edwin S. Porter* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Lyman H. Howe, programme, Autumn 1898, reprinted

- in Charles Musser, with Carol Nelson, *High Class Moving Pictures: Lyman Howe and the Forgotten Era of Travelling Exhibition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991).
54. Anon., 'War Through a Camera', *New York Times*, 18 January 1899, p. 7; Anon., 'The Santiago Campaign', *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 4 April 1899, p. 3.
 55. Bottomore, 'Filming, Faking and Propaganda', chapter 11.
 56. Henry Evans Northrop integrated Lumière cinematographe films with lantern slides for his illustrated lecture 'A Bicycle Trip Through Europe' in March 1897. (Anon., 'An Illustrated Lecture', *Brooklyn Eagle*, 9 March 1897, p. 7.)
 57. Anon., 'Historic Siege', *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 11 October 1905, p. 4, reprinted in Musser, with Nelson, *High-Class Moving Pictures*, pp. 311–12.
 58. Anon., 'Hamilton Praises Turks', *New York Times*, 20 February 1913, p. 20; Anon., 'Lecture on the Balkan War', *Pittsburgh Press*, 3 April 1913, p. 3.
 59. Edward Curtis, for instance, gave a series of illustrated lectures on American Indians, combining slides and films, in 1906–07 (Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, Ticket No. 31, 27 April 1907, reprinted in Musser, with Nelson, *High Class Moving Pictures*), p. 181.
 60. Anon., 'New England', *Moving Picture World*, 3 May 1913, p. 502; Anon., 'Novelties in Kinemacolor', *New York Times*, 2 March 1913, p. X8.
 61. Luke McKernan, 'Propaganda, Patriotism and Profit: Charles Urban and British Official War Films in America during the First World War', *Film History* vol. 14 no. 3–4 2002, pp. 369–89.
 62. 'Pictures at Chestnut German Propaganda', *Philadelphia North American*, 9 May 1916, p. 8.
 63. 'Facts and Comments', *Moving Picture World*, 3 October 1914, p. 35.
 64. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Battle_of_the_Somme_%28film%29. Accessed 3 March 2013.