8. Documentarist as. . . Poet

Definition(s):
After WWII--A loosening definition of documentary—even the fictional, narrative film
*On the Waterfront* (D: Elia Kazan, 1954) was (erroneously, we would say) referred to as a “documentary.”

Key Concepts & Issues:
These films experimented with techniques: time-lapse photography, distorting mirrors, lenses, prisms, reverse action, and manipulations of the sound track (using magnetic recording technology, invented in 1898 but largely ignored until the Germans perfected it during WWII)

Key Filmmakers:
Arne Sucksdorff (1917-2001)
Drawing on his background in woodland exploration, his first short films were “hymns to the Swedish summer”; his first film for Svensk Filmin industri, *A Summer’s Tale* (1941), followed the actions of a fox; his *Gull!* (1944) was interpreted as a parable of Nazism. He was known to engage in reconstructions of events of nature (e.g., the owl and the mouse). He is quoted as saying that a film that is not open to interpretation is a “dead film.” Perhaps his more enduring piece: *The Great Adventure* (1953), a story of two young brothers living on a Swedish farm, and their interactions with foxes and otters over the course of a year.

Bert Haanstra (1916-1997)
A Dutch photographer, he started making films after WWII. His *Panta Rhei* (1951) visually equated clouds (speeded up) with rushing water (slowed down); leaves blowing in an autumn wind with a flock of birds taking off; etc. His most important film, *Glass* (1958), “plays subtly on mixed audience emotions toward industrialization,” showing the breakdown of a glass factory assembly line (although funded by the glass company, which also received a more traditional documentary on the topic).

[Additional in-class example]
Norman McLaren (1914-1987)
A Scottish artist who studied at the Glasgow School of Art, his innovative draw-on-film shorts, influenced by the Soviet Montage, caught the eye of John Grierson. Grierson hired him at the British GPO Film Unit in the 1930s; at the dawn of WWII, McLaren moved to NYC, then to Canada in 1941, after being invited to join the National Film Board of Canada by Grierson. Identified mainly as an innovative animator (working in stop-motion, scratching on film, using pinscreens, etc.), he is also known for (a) trying to create visual versions of music, and (b) advancing work in synthetic sound (what would become electronic music). For the latter, he (1) painted on clear film, (2) scratched on black leader, and (3) photographed sounds on film. His film, *Neighbours* (1952) won the Academy Award for Best Documentary Short (?!?).

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