Documentary film

Documentary = film that deals with facts rather than invented elements, made by filmmakers who believe that they're reporting on the real world

But documentaries have been recognized as a combination of “real” and “manipulated” material—e.g., Robert Flaherty (Nanook of the North, 1922), American ethnologist & explorer

1. Realist tradition--"Objective"
   Our book: “Direct Cinema”
   * Frederick Wiseman (Titicut Follies, 1967; High School, 1968; Hospital, 1970)
   * Cinema verite & aleatory techniques

2. "Midrange"?
   * Often use existing sources PLUS “narrators”
   * John Grierson, the British School, and the role of scripting/pre-planning; our book notes as “Advocacy” documentaries
   * Leni Riefenstahl (Triumph of the Will, 1935)
   * Robert Epstein (The Times of Harvey Milk, 1984)

3. Expressionist/Formalist Tradition--"Subjective"
   * Dziga Vertov (Man with a Movie Camera, 1929)
* The Times of Harvey Milk, 1984, D: Robert Epstein
  * Won Academy Award for Best Documentary
  * "Midrange" Documentary--uses a combination of existing (e.g., news reports) & original (new) footage
  * “Advocacy” Documentary
  * NARRATORS - - several types
    1. Omniscient (or, "Voice of God") Narrator (Harvey Fierstein)
    2. Other External Narrators (news footage, e.g., Dianne Feinstein)
    3. 8 Participant Narrators
      * Insiders
      * Outsiders-who-became-insiders

These “indie documentarists” challenged the status quo!
  * Errol Morris’ The Thin Blue Line, 1988 (he won the 2004 Academy Award for The Fog of War)
  * Michael Moore’s Roger and Me, 1989 (later, he won awards for the 2002 Bowling for Columbine and the 2004 Fahrenheit 9/11)
Genre Theory

1. How do genres develop?
A set of films "copy" an original content/form because it was successful . . . as several copies are made, the content AND form profile becomes recognizable to an audience . . . the audience expects certain things from the film because of its genre. . . a very commercial, American process!

2. A genre may be defined by:

3 Narrative Components:
   1. Plot
      For example, there are two main types of narrative strategy:
      A. Order/conflict (Westerns, gangster, detective)
      B. Integration (musical, screwball, melodrama/"weepie")
   2. Setting
   3. Character(s)

2 Other Aspects:
   4. Common iconography (e.g., in Westerns, white hats = good, black hats = bad)
   5. Form -- structure & techniques (e.g., Busby Berkeley musicals, slapstick comedy, horror, film noir)
3. We can see this development in Giannetti's 4 genre stages:

**Horror**
1. Primitive -- *Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, 1919
2. Classical -- *Bride of Frankenstein*, 1935
4. Parodic -- *Young Frankenstein*, 1974

**Musical**
1. Primitive -- *Gold Diggers of 1933*, 1933
Film Genres--e.g.'s:

* Documentary
* Western
* War
* "Chick Flick"
* Musical
* Epic
* Gothic tale
* Gangster
* Adventure
* Slasher/Dead Teenager

* Film Noir
* Horror
* Weepie/tearjerker
* Biopic
* Science Fiction
* Mystery
* Fantasy
* Disaster
* Animated feature
* “Little Girl” films

* Comedy—Can’t call it a single genre!
  -Romantic
  -Screwball
  -Black/dark
  -Frank Capra
  -etc.

And. . . not really a genre:

Cult film:

-A 2-part definition:
  (1) loyal audience (often with group identification),
  (2) repeat viewing of the film
-How does the age of home video affect cult film status?
-Examples:  Rocky Horror Picture Show
Harold & Maude
The Wall
Your own “personal” cult film?
Genre Hybrids or Intersections:

Western + Sci. Fi. = Westworld ('73)

Sci. Fi. + Film Noir = Blade Runner ('82)

Horror + Musical = Little Shop of Horrors ('86)

Sci. Fi. + Gothic Horror = The Fly ('86)

Film Noir + Animated Feature = Who Framed Roger Rabbit? ('88)

Gothic + Musical + Animated Feature = ??

POW War Film + Animated Feature + Comedy = ??

[and on cable TV:]
Gangster Film + Soap Opera = ??

Has there been more hybridization over time?
Genre Analysis:

**Screwball Comedy** (~1934-40)

**PLOT:** Battle of the sexes (conflict); but conflict is ultimately resolved (integration)

**SETTING:** A fantasy world - - the world of the rich, during the Depression!

**CHARACTERS:** Most are wealthy, don't have mundane, everyday concerns.
   An eccentric couple (mainly the female), often set among staid old-money.

**ICONOGRAPHY:** Nothing very deep . . .
   Icons of wealth are trivialized, denigrated. (e.g., mink thrown on ground); verbal sparring as a euphemism/metaphor for sex (Hayes Office era) . . .

**FORM:** Mostly a "straight shoot" using classical editing . . .
   many CU's compared to other films of that era, liberal use of reaction shots . . . some mickeymousing (not in all films)

**Examples:**
*It Happened One Night*, 1934
*Topper*, 1937
*Bringing Up Baby*, 1938
*Sullivan’s Travels*, 1941 (Screwball, yes, but also “self-reflexive,” a film about film; and, it’s not just the wealthy misbehaving)
Genre Analysis:

Film Noir (1940's-on)

PLOT: Some type of quest, usually after the initial discovery of a death . . . e.g., a man searches for his own murderer (DOA), a reporter tries to clear a murderer's name (Call Northside 777)

SETTING: The dark & gloomy underworld of crime & corruption; almost entirely urban

CHARACTERS: Hero, villains, a gal gone wrong, woman as victim--all are jaded, disillusioned

ICONOGRAPHY: Guns = Power & Aggression; urban images of grime & smoke = depression

FORM: Chiaroscuro lighting; shot in B&W; many night scenes, canted camera or high angle shots sometimes used

Examples:

  Sorry, Wrong Number, 1948
  The Maltese Falcon, 1941
  Sunset Boulevard, 1950
  The Usual Suspects, 1995
  Carl Reiner's Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid (1982) parodied the genre, and used footage from many actual old films noir
Genre Analysis:

Black/Dark Comedy (1960's-on)

PLOT: The most serious of topics (e.g., war, death, dismemberment) is made fun of

SETTING: Cemeteries, funerals, war rooms

CHARACTERS; The deadly serious is often juxtaposed with the buffoon . . . the incongruity is humorous

ICONOGRAPHY: Death (e.g., *The Loved One*'s "slumber rooms"), religion (e.g., picture of the pope in *Harold & Maude*), war & evil (e.g., "Nazi hand" in *Dr. Strangelove*), sex (bomb, cigars, gum in *Dr. Strangelove*). . . icons are objects of derision in black comedy

FORM: Often, but not always, in B&W; music may be used as a comic counterpoint (*Dr. Strangelove*)

Examples (notice how many are also cult films):

*Dr. Strangelove*, 1964
*The Loved One*, 1965
*Harold & Maude*, 1972
*Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, 1975
*Heathers*, 1989
*The Addams Family*, 1991
Genre Analysis:  
**Musical** (1927-1960's, and back again post-2000?)

PLOT: Two different integration plot types most common:  
(1) "Boy meets girl", and (2) "save the old theatre"  
(e.g., Mickey Rooney & Judy Garland; *Blues Brothers*). Each song provides an interim resolution of problems

SETTING: Two types: (1) "Backstage" musicals are set in theatres, clubs, TV, movies, (2) "Music-integrated" musicals are set anywhere

CHARACTERS: Boy, girl, bad guy(s) keeping them apart, buffoon(s)

ICONOGRAPHY: Could be anything for music-integrated; interpretive dance or ballet is common (e.g., Gene Kelly/Cyd Charisse in *Singin' in the Rain*)

FORM: e.g., Busby Berkeley top-shot . . . moving camera at floor level . . . film-style shooting (inc. looping later) allows dance numbers impossible to do on stage

Examples:  
*West Side Story*, 1961  
*The Music Man*, 1962  
*Little Shop of Horrors*, 1986  
*The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, 1996
Genre Analysis:
Horror (Classical--Hollywood, 1930's; U.K. Hammer Films, 1950's)

PLOT: Evil threatens the values of the dominant culture; forces of good are eventually victorious; themes include insanity, alienation, sexual deviance, obsession, and violence; examines what happens when man tampers with God’s natural world

SETTING: (1) the exotic (e.g., castles, Egyptian tombs) provides elements that are brought into (2) ordinary settings (e.g., the city)

CHARACTERS: The Monster--sentimentalized as a misunderstood, good-hearted sacrificial lamb; The [Mad] Scientist--he messes with Mother Nature; The Hero; The Girl

ICONOGRAPHY: Sexuality (e.g., Dracula, Cat People), Church (e.g., crosses in Dracula), “The Dark Side” (e.g., black cats, gypsy spells)

FORM: German Expressionistic style--B&W, chiaroscuro lighting, odd and highly stylized sets and costumes (many directors, cinematographers were German immigrants)

Examples:

Dracula, 1931
The Mummy, 1932
Frankenstein, 1931
The Invisible Man, 1933

The Old Dark House, 1932
The Wolf Man, 1941
The Black Cat, 1934
Bride of Frankenstein, 1935
The Hollywood Studio System (1920's-1960's)

*The greatest movie-producing system the world has ever known.

1. An Oligopoly: A limited number of studios--5 "majors" (#1-#5 below), 3 "minors" (#6-#8), Disney, and two independent producers (#10, #11); others not listed included such small poverty row studios as Monogram, Hal Roach, and Republic. During the Depression, the U.S. Justice Dept. encouraged this; later, the 1948 Paramount Case decision ended it.

2. Moguls: The importance of a handful of similar men in formulating the system

3. The studio characterized by a large physical plant
   * soundstages vs. backlots
   * other facilities that ensured the independence of the studio (e.g., fire station, medical center, sleeping bungalows, restaurants)

4. A stable of contract players (both stars and bit players) and crew; minor contract players, e.g., Ward Bond, Thomas Mitchell, Henry Travers, Wallace Ford, Beulah Bondi

5. The star system
   * the "grooming" of stars under contract
   * star vehicles

6. Studios as family or "protectorates"
* studio head as patriarch (e.g., Louis B. Mayer)

7. Properties developed from within the studios

8. The importance to most studios of the development of one or more genres

*From the 1950's on, this system fell apart with competition from TV, and buyouts by huge conglomerates.

*Each studio had its own "personality" profile:

**The 5 Majors**

1. MGM ("The Supreme")
   Mogul: Louis B. Mayer, Irving Thalberg
   Genres: Musicals, comedies
   Stable: Joan Crawford, Clark Gable, Gene Kelly, Judy Garland, Spencer Tracy, James Stewart, Elizabeth Taylor, Vincente Minnelli
   Other: Mottos--"The Greatest Motion Picture Studio the World Has Even Known," "More Stars Than There Are in Heaven"; prestigious and flashy

2. Paramount ("The Sophisticate")
   Mogul: Adolph Zukor
   Genres: Romantic comedies, epics
   Stable: Cecil B. DeMille, Ernst Lubitsch, Preston Sturges, Bing Crosby, Marlene Dietrich
   Other: The studio with a European accent; its stars
had "sexy elegance, wit and dinner clothes"

3. RKO (Radio-Keith-Orpheum) ("The New Yorker")
   Mogul: Pandro Berman, Howard Hughes (later)
   Genres: Musicals (early), film noir
   Stable: Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers, Katharine Hepburn, Irene Dunne
   Other: The urban counterpart to Fox; only studio to actually disapper, after Hughes bankrupt it and Lucy bought it ("Desilu")

4. 20th Century Fox ("The Rube")
   Mogul: Darryl Zanuck
   Genres: Social message films, action/adventure, soaps, disaster films
   Stable: Shirley Temple, Betty Grable, Tyrone Power, Henry Fonda
   Other: Rural in focus

5. Warner Brothers ("The Slicker" or "The Cynic")
   Mogul: Jack L. Warner
   Genres: Film noir, gangster, weepies, "women's films," war films
   Stable: James Cagney, Bette Davis, Humphrey Bogart, Edward G. Robinson, Erroll Flynn, Olivia de Havilland, John Garfield, Ida Lupino
   Other: The "factory" studio, made movies "fast, cheap and furious"; featured themes of prejudice and inequities, "the cynicism of the sociopolitically disinherited"

The 3 Minors
6. Columbia
   Mogul: Harry Cohn
   Genres: Screwball comedies, "Capra-corn"
   Stable: Frank Capra, the 3 Stooges
   Other: "Poverty Row" studio, borrowed stars from
           other studios; was first to adapt to TV, via
           Screen Gems

7. United Artists
   Mogul: Joseph Schenck
   Genres: "Quality" films
   Stable: The four founders--Mary Pickford, Douglas
           Fairbanks, Sr., Charlie Chaplin, D.W. Griffith
   Other: The first "logo without a lot," just like today's
           model

8. Universal ("The Old Monster")
   Mogul: Carl Laemmle Sr.
   Genres: Horror, weepies
   Stable: Deanna Durbin, Boris Karloff, Bela Lugosi,
           Abbot & Costello, Rock Hudson, Tony Curtis
   Other: Old-fashioned, often behind the times; last
           studio to survive intact

Disney (a category of its own)

9. Disney
   Mogul: Walt Disney
   Genres: Animated features, family films
   Stable: Mickey & Minnie, Fred MacMurray
Other: Has continued to diversify, e.g., with Touchstone Films

**Independent Producers**

10. Samuel Goldwyn (independent producer)
   - Mogul: Samuel Goldwyn
   - Genres: Classics, drama
   - Stable: William Wyler, Ronald Colman, Gary Cooper, Gregg Toland
   - Other: The mogul hired the elite, but was rough himself, known for "Goldwynisms" (e.g., "Include me out")

11. Selznick International (independent producer)
   - Mogul: David O. Selznick
   - Genres: Mysteries, epics
   - Stable: Ingrid Bergman, Gregory Peck, Joseph Cotten, Joan Fontaine, Jennifer Jones, Hitchcock (early)
   - Other: Produced many star vehicles for the stars under "personal" contract