COM 321, Documentary Form in Film, Television, & Interactive Media
Techniques—Part 1

I. Narration

A. Voiceover

1. Third person
   Voice-of-God/omniscient narrator
   - *Why We Fight* (c. 1942) (VO: Walter Huston; D: Frank Capra)
     (VO: Patricia Clarkson; D: Gerald Peary)
   VO—celebrity/recognizable voice (still omniscient)
   - *Hollywood* (1980) (VO: James Mason; D: Kevin Brownlow)

2. First person
   VO—known subject
   - *Mr. Death: The Rise and Fall of Fred A. Leuchter Jr.* (1999)
     (VO: Fred Leuchter, Jr.; D: Errol Morris)
   VO—celebrity acting as subject
   - *The Civil War* (1990) (VO: Morgan Freeman as Frederick Douglass; D: Ken Burns)
   - *Tales of the Rat Fink* (2006) (VO: John Goodman as Ed “Big Daddy” Roth, the Smothers Brothers as a car and trailer; D: Ron Mann)
   VO—documentarist

3. Second person—Can you think of examples? They are few…
   Propaganda pieces?
   “Mental Hygiene” short films? (e.g., *Shake Hands with Danger* (1980))

B. On-camera narrator

1. Naturally occurring subject dialogue
   - *Titicut Follies* (1967) (D: Frederick Wiseman)
   - *When We Were Kings* (1996) (D: Leon Gast)

2. “Documentarist”
   - *Shine a Light* (2006) (D: Martin Scorsese)
   - *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006) (S & W?: Al Gore; D: Davis Guggenheim)
   - *This Filthy World* (2006) (S & W: John Waters; D: Jeff Garlin)

3. Interviewee on location
4. Interviewee in studio
     (D: Errol Morris)
   - *I Survived* (limbo background—also note use of titles) (c. 2010, series)
     (D: various)
5. Interviewer and Interviewee on location
   - *Faces of America with Henry Louis Gates* (2010, series) (D: various)

C. On-screen text (Titles)

1. Early, silent documentaries
   - *Nanook of the North* (1922) (D: Robert Flaherty)
2. Interspersed with other types of narration
   - *I Survived* (see above)

D. No narration—Relatively rare
   - *A Propos De Nice* (1930) (D: Jean Vigo)
   - *Koyaanisqatsi* (1983) (D: Godfrey Reggio)

ADDITIONAL EXAMPLES…what type(s) of narration are used?

*The Last Angel of History* (1996) (D: John Akomfrah)

*Mea Maxima Culpa: Silence in the House of God* (2012) (D: Alex Gibney; P: Jedd & Todd Wider)
   Terry Kohut: Jamey Sheridan
   Gary Smith: Chris Cooper
   Pat Kuehn: Ethan Hawke
   Arthur Budzinski: John Slattery

*Tower* (2016) (D: Keith Maitland)
   Actors serving as subjects, but not celebrities