COM 321, Documentary Form in Film, Television, & Interactive Media
Notes from and about Barnouw’s Documentary: A history of the non-fiction film

1. Documentarist as . . . PROPHET

Definition(s):
Documentary = moving images that document some real phenomenon or action
Prophet = early practitioner of documentary filmmaking (unusual among Barnouw’s documentarist types, in that it does not seem applicable to later practitioners)

Key Concepts & Issues:
Institutionalization—“court photographers,” both official and unofficial (e.g., Kaiser Wilhelm’s visit to London)
Fakery—from the very beginning of film, so-called documentary footage has often been fabricated either wholly or in part (e.g., Albert E. Smith & J. Stuart Blackton mixing fake footage with genuine in depiction of Teddy Roosevelt’s San Juan Hill charge; e.g., Melies’ 1902 “reconstitution” footage of coronation of Edward VII, shot in Paris, mixed with genuine shots)
Narrative film advances as stifling the progress of documentaries—re editing, mostly
Newsreel—the newsreel is the legitimate offspring of early actualities
Archives—an early call for a depository of documenting footage by Boleslaw Matuszewski in 1898

Key Documentarists:

1. Scientists:
Pierre Jules Cesar Janssen—documenting Venus/sun eclipse in 1874
Eadweard Muybridge & Etienne Jules Marey—documenting slivers of time, freezing motion with their series photography and photo gun, respectively . . . cross-sections of motion in time
Georges Demeny—Marey’s assistant who proceeded to photograph mouths in CU for lip reading training

2. Businessmen:
Thomas Edison—Developed a heavy, fairly immobile camera that frequently shot in the Black Maria studio; “items of the world” were brought before the camera (e.g., strong men, dancers, boxers, vaudevillians); films were viewed by individuals via the kinetoscope beginning in 1894
Louis Lumiere—Developed a very light, portable camera/projector/printer apparatus, the cinematographe, that traveled the world beginning in 1895; by 1897, there were about 100 Lumiere operators filming and exhibiting mixed travelogue programs around the world; at the end of 1897, the Lumiere brothers ceased their “world demonstration tours” and concentrated on selling cinematographies
The role of photography in documentary work—*The Genius of Photography: Fixing the Shadows* (BBC, 2007)

Photography “invented” in 1839 by Louis Daguerre in France and Henry Fox-Talbot in England (competing systems)

Camera Obscura—centuries-old concept inspired inventors to “fix” the image

Eadward Muybridge—to help settle Leland Stanford’s bet, he “took a scalpel to time itself” and created an encyclopedia of zoological motion

Commercial photography—entrepreneurs established photography for portraiture, architecture, landscapes, and other documentary records (e.g., war)

George Eastman—introduced mass production and factory standardization to photography; “You press the button, we do the rest”; the Brownie camera

The Kodak fiends

*Vernacular* photography—[precursors of so many types of documentary] forensic, photojournalism, touristic, scientific, court records, sports records, etc.; *vernacular is vs. pictorialism* (i.e., art photography)

Jacques Henri Lartigue—from age 8 to 18, he documented his world with photos; a rich kid, he had access to the best equipment…he also had a real gift for documenting the real and ordinary activities of his day; his “jumping” photos

For a more contemporary examination of *vernacular* photography, check out the 2013 documentary *Finding Vivian Maier* (D: John Maloof & Charlie Siskel), about a Chicago nanny who took over 150,000 street photographs, demonstrating incredible artistry and a unique eye for social critique and examination. She and her work remained completely unknown until after her death in 2009; collectors who purchased her negatives at auction began to circulate them on the Internet, and the pictures went viral. Since then, there have been numerous art gallery showings of her work.

Also, see the [COM 321 Hale’s Tours PowerPoint](#)—Hale’s Tours were an extension of the Lumieres’ travelogue actualities and “phantom ride” early films