

In pairs consider the following...

- What do you consider to be the more TRUTHFUL mode of documentary - Observational or Performative?

Give reasons for your choice and pick some textual examples to support your argument.

Poetic Documentary



Sans Soleil (1983) *Dir. Chris Marker*

Poetic documentary

- The poetic mode of documentary moves away from the "objective" reality of a given situation or people to grasp at **an inner "truth" that can only be grasped by poetical manipulation**
- Codes emphasizes visual associations, tonal or rhythmic qualities, descriptive passages, and formal organization favours mood, tone and texture.
- 'Fully rounded characters' do not exist. People appeared in these films as entities, just like any other, that are found in the material world. d

Poetic documentary - background

- ◉ *Poetic* documentaries first appeared in the 1920's - reaction to the grammar of early fiction film (i.e. the dominant Hollywood mode of representation – e.g. continuity editing, 180 degree rule etc.)



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- The poetic mode moved away from continuity editing and instead organized images of the material world by means of associations and patterns, both in terms of time and space.
 - Joris Ivens *Rain* (1928) is an early example, an observation of a rain shower in Amsterdam



Rain (1929)

- Ivens was a Dutch photographer, who was interested in the possibilities of film creating a sense of tone and movement
- Rain (Iven's second film) was shot over 2 year period and was praised for its impressive cinematography
- Includes a number of 'characters' but no information about them aside from what was visible.
- The film was criticised for focusing too much on technique at the cost of relevance.

Questions

- ◉ *What do we learn about the world during Rain?*
- ◉ *Which filmic techniques does Iven's employ*
- ◉ *What do you think the film is about? Does it have a message?*

Humphrey Jennings

- Humphrey Jennings (1907-1950) was a pioneering documentary film-maker whose style was allowed to develop from a *expository* mode to *poetic* mode.



In pairs research the following;

- Who was Humphrey Jennings? Provide a potted biography of the chap
- How did he become a film maker?
- Who were GPO film unit?
- What was his connection with the surrealist movement?
- Why have his films been labelled as both
 - a) poetic
 - b) Propaganda

What do you expect his films to look like?

Listen to Britain (1942)



Questions

- What world is being represented by Jennings in *Listen to Britain*?
- Can you identify any characteristics of the poetic mode?
- How are the British public represented by the film?

Koyaanisqatsi

Dir. Godfrey Reggio (1983)



Discussion

- In pairs discuss the experience of watching *Koyaanisqatsi*.
- *Did your reaction to the film change throughout?*
- *How does it compare to previous documentaries we have studied?*
- *Would you recommend the film to others?*

Background

- ◉ *Koyaanisqatsi* a Hopi **Indian** word meaning 'life out of balance'
- ◉ It is the first film of the **Qatsi** trilogy, and was released in 1983.
- ◉ *Koyaanisqatsi* was the first full-length commercial 'nonverbal film'.
- ◉ The film was 'created' between 1975 and 1982. Three years were spent shooting footage for the project.

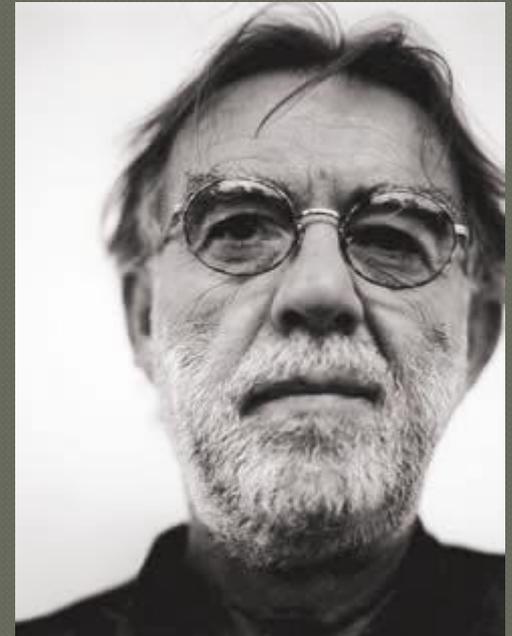
Godfrey Reggio

Born in New Orleans in 1940 and raised in southwest Louisiana.

He entered the Christian Brothers, a Roman Catholic pontifical order, at age 14. He spent 14 years of his adolescence and early adulthood in fasting, silence, and prayer while studying to be a monk.

In 1963, he co-founded Young Citizens for Action, a community organization project that aided juvenile street gangs.

Following this, Reggio co-founded La Clinica de la Gente, a facility that provided medical care to 12,000 community members in Santa Fe, and La Gente.



Questions

- ◉ *What is the film about?*
- ◉ *Does this knowledge of the film-maker's background alter or inform your reading of the text?*
- ◉ *Does this knowledge point towards a **philosophy** or **preferred meaning** within the text?*

Koyaanisqatsi

- *Koyaanisqatsi* can also be viewed as a collaboration between **Reggio** (director), **Ron Fricke** (cinematographer) and **Philip Glass** (Composer)



Soundtrack

- ① *How important is Glass's soundtrack to film?*
- ② *Does the music have a parallel or contrapuntal relationship to the visual images?*



Cinematography

- ◉ Which *visual techniques* does Fricke use within the film?
- ◉ Which parts of the film contain '*stock*' or *archive* footage? What purpose do these have?



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- In interviews Reggio explains that the whole idea about *Koyaanisqatsi* is that you interpret it yourself, but he thinks that if we continue to change as we have then one day we will all speak the same language and wear the same clothes...Identity is being lost.