

Analysis of the Aesthetic Essentials and Existential Meaning of Contemporary Mocumentary

Lei Xi^a, Zaining Wang^{b,*}

School of Journalism and Communication, China West Normal University, Nanchong, 637009
Sichuan, China

^a227468855@qq.com, ^{b,*}58993597@qq.com

Abstract. Mocumentary, also called “pseudo-documentary”, as a category born from the hybridization of documentary and drama, under the outer packaging of the documentary, actually carries the fictional plot of the drama. As a film mode between documentary and drama, the pseudo-documentary adopts the documentary packaging method, which further promotes and merges the confluence of documentary and drama since the “New Record” movement, and provides realist theme dramas. The most essential means of expression. Since the creation of the “new documentary film” movement, the mocumentary has further merged the confluence of drama and documentary. Under the expression of realism, it presents rich and diverse themes. The exotic orientation of form and content has created the unique aesthetic characteristics of mocumentary and also brought different ontological meanings. This dual orientation of form and content has caused the unique aesthetic characteristics and controversy of the topic of mocumentary. When exploring its ontological attributes, whether a mocumentary belongs to the unique category of documentary or the innovative paradigm of drama is still a matter of debate in academic circles.

Keywords: Mocumentary; Aesthetic characteristics; Realism.

1. The Birth of Mocumentary

Dating back to the 1930s and 1950s, mocumentaries showed their germination and prototype in some fictional radio and television programs. At that time, the April Fools’ Tricky Program created a man-made plot trap in the form of pure-recording to achieve TV entertainment effect. As the earliest form of Mocumentary, the pure borrowing of recording style to pave the way for entertainment may be a necessity in the birth process. With the continuous use of this creative method and the expansion of academic literature, pseudo documentary as a proper noun-mockumentary-was included in the Cambridge English Dictionary in 1965. The birth of “mockumentary” means the independence of the pseudo documentary’s body. In 1967, the black and white films “Diary of David Holtzman”, “One Night Carnival” and other films were born, which truly established the unique aesthetic pursuit and formal style of the pseudo documentary, which was obtained as a new film paradigm. From the common attention of ordinary audiences to scholars and experts, pseudo documentaries have their own “foothold” in the field of film.

In the subsequent development, Mocumentaries gradually evolved into a set of mature genre styles, and moved towards commercial success in the market. One film that has to be mentioned in the history of pseudo-documentary is “Witch Blair”. It has created a business myth that hit big with a small pulse, with an investment benefit ratio of more than 1: 3000, which further allows pseudo-documentary, this tricky film model, to be recognized. Subsequently, whether it is a political theme, a horror theme, a realism theme, even a comedy theme, or a science fiction theme, they all try to “put down their bodies” and borrow the recording principles of “real movies” to provide change and innovation for themselves. Woody Allen’s “Chameleon”, Brielle’s “Assassination of Bush Jr.”, Matt Reeves’ “Cloverford Archive”, Bromkamp’s “The Ninth District”, etc. have all become the classics in the pseudo documentary.

2. Aesthetic Essentials of Pseudo Documentary

2.1 Simulated Realism

The documentary master Evans once said: The trend of contemporary documentary development is that feature films and documentaries are close to each other's position. The two types of films that were completely opposed to each other in the past are gradually completing the integration and unification of opposites. The barriers between feature films and documentaries are melting, becoming a unique sight in the history of film.

Since the Italian neo-realism, the feature film has achieved the care of real life through documentary methods, which has become an important means of film creation. However, whether it is real shooting, the use of non-professional actors, long-lens narratives, and neo-realism are operating paradigms which are built under the feature film, and do not completely apply the principles of documentary creation. It is quite different from "direct movie" and "truth movie". It can be said that Italian neorealism is a compromise of Documentary. Since the birth of documentaries, there has been no noble humanistic appeal and social critical consciousness like Italian neo-realism. By concatenating the expression methods of "real movies", the theme is often divorced from reality, as can be seen from the classic films of documentaries.

Whether it's "Witch Blair", "Death Video", "Assassination of Bush", or "Ninth District", realism has become the props and background of the film, and its role is only to pave and render the realism of the film. There is no heavy social thinking included. Even if it is the theme of the movie "Assassination of George W. Bush" that is close to the horizon of public life, it just explored the Iraq War, patriotic awareness and the security mechanism of the US government through the explosive topic effect, and did not touch the vital pulse of the lives of the lowest people. It is only a grand thinking at the national and social level.

In recent years, documentary soap operas produced using Documentary techniques have become the new favorite of television media. The documentary soap opera (Docu-soap) mixes two separate concepts: documentary and soap opera. It combines the visual habits of "real movies" with the drama of soap operas, and arranges actors to perform live performances around fixed group characters and fixed situations. The success of documentary soap operas satisfies the need for realistic performance of sitcoms, and is a typical simulated realism.

Therefore, the realism embodied in the Documentary is exactly a kind of "tool reality". It is an attempt to complete the mixture and collage between different styles of images in the context of postmodernist culture, and it has been very successful try. In the post-industrial era, the dissemination of images has a more mature commercial mechanism. The documentary creation method is used as a shooting mode in the wave of commercialization, in order to allow the film to have higher recognition and more popular market feedback.

2.2 A Mixture of Real and Fiction

Documentary is based on the creation and mixing of "real" and "fictional". In order to achieve the sense of realism and recording required by the film, the pseudo-documentary uses the skillful shaking photography to create the illusion of real dv shooting, and the post-synthesis sound effects to create the impression background of the live synchronic sound, and even the use of digitally synthesized images to increase audience viewing Illusion. The use of fiction to express reality is often more touching than reality. In the "Assassination of George W. Bush", the image of the former President of the United States being hit by bullets in the picture and bleeding in the head is the fake image carefully constructed by the producer. By digitally synthesizing President Bush's head photos and the head photos of the avatars in the picture, the creator completed this stunning picture, venting the explosiveness of the topic with direct pictures to achieve an unparalleled effect.

Looking at the classic Documentaries with various forms and diverse themes, it brings us not only the tension and depth of the film theme under realism, but also the dialectic of the paradox symbiosis of truth and falseness Thinking. Pseudo-documentaries combine reality and fiction, making people unclear where is true and false. This pair of dialectical ideas serves the creators

artistically, updating and expanding our inherent concepts and thinking about what is true and what is false, and even broke the strict barriers of real life and false structure. In the movie “Long Live Rock and Roll” by Lopinna, a bohemian and pretentious heavy metal band spinal tap is presented, describing the music and life of this young group. Fictional bands and fictional characters themselves do not exist, but after the film was screened, the huge response caused the actors to continue to bring life from the role of the movie. They still use the name in the movie and sang around on the music album. Yes, the virtual reality in the movie will be confirmed in life. Fiction has born reality, and the video stream has become life. In this way, mocumentaries connect reality and fiction, and become a medium to connect two contradictory bodies.

3. Ontology Value of Pseudo Documentary

Whether a Mocumentary belongs to a documentary film or a feature film or a brand-new independent film is still controversial in academic circles. Some scholars believe that Mocumentaries express the subject’s truth and inner truth, and pursue a higher level of authenticity, and have all the characteristics of documentaries. They suggest that Mocumentary should belong to a documentary or a unique type of documentary. Other scholars have suggested that mocumentaries are only covered in documentaries, but in fact they are the core and ontology of feature films. The reason why there is a “pseudo” word is because it belongs to the category of drama. Regarding this controversy, the author would like to analyze and explain from the definition of documentary and drama.

The definition of the documentary has always been divergent and controversial. The author here has selected the earliest documentary filmmaker John Grierson’s interpretation of the documentary, although the aesthetic pursuit and conceptual connotation of documentaries have evolved over time is an indisputable fact. But in order to analyze the essential attribution of Mocumentaries, it may be acceptable to all parties to adopt the most conceptual explanation.

John Grierson defined documentaries as those films that “creatively dealt with current affairs or news materials”. “Generally speaking, documentaries refer to all movies except feature films. The concept of documentaries is relative to feature films because a feature film is a fiction, staging, or reconstruction of reality. “It can be seen that the Mocumentary is totally inconsistent with John Grierson’s delineation of documentary due to the fiction of its content. Although the pseudo documentary has the shadow and charm of the documentary in terms of name, visual image style, and editing techniques, the most critical content deviates from the core concept of the documentary. So since Mocumentaries are not a category of documentaries, are they part of the category of feature films or feature films?

4. Conclusion

The definition of a feature film is that: a comprehensive film, containing drama, music, art, and other artistic factors, mainly to shape characters, a story plot (reflecting life), and a movie played by an actor, which is different from other films. Acting by actors is a basic feature that distinguishes them from other films. Because the fictional pseudo documentary of the plot must be completed by the actor, this is the most important point of interpretation in line with the drama. Therefore, the essence of Mocumentary is a drama, but its ambiguous name has always caused some ambiguity and misinterpretation of its film attributes.

However, there is another situation in which the content of the Mocumentary is real as real life, but it is interpreted by actors, such as “24 City”, “Schindler’s List” and so on. This kind of film starts from a real event, and is reproduced as a documentary or documentary style image after being directed and recreated by the director. If this kind of film is included in a pseudo documentary, it will inevitably cause confusion. Therefore, we can call this kind of film “documentary drama” or “Documentary feature film”. A “documentary drama” is a drama that is closer to a documentary than a Mocumentary. Both are the result of the transition from the polarities of the creation mode of

documentary and drama to the middle. They are both attempts to integrate real and fiction in the context of postmodern culture.

References

- [1]. Li Yue. Telling the truth with lies [J]. China Television (Records), 2011, (12).
- [2]. Zhao Xi. The fusion of “true” and “fictional” in film and television creation [J]. Modern Communication, 2009, (2).
- [3]. Sun Hongyun. The Mix of Reality and Fiction [J]. China Television (Records), 2011, (10).