

What are the differences between Narrative, Documentary, and Experimental Film?

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I have chosen to write my final paper on the topic to define the difference between Narrative Film, Documentary Film, and Experimental Film. I chose this topic for it covers a broad range of films we have watched over this semester. After this class I have learned that all of these types of films have their own uniqueness and place all of their own in the film world. I personally enjoyed the documentary Jim Brown's American Me the most this semester for films.

I am going to look into each type of film beginning with Narrative Film. Narrative Film is defined really just as "to tell a story". This type of film is known to everyone and most common to find out there like in Theatres, TV, DVD's, and the Internet. Another term we use for Narrative Film is Fictional Filmmaking. Fictional doesn't always mean it cannot have reality factors involved or even real historical events in the film. Many times a narrative film will actually combine both veracity and creation. A good example that you can see this is in the movie Titanic by James Cameron. He combined a historical event that really occurred in April 14, 1912 with a love story of two people on board that was created entirely in James Cameron's own head. The love story made a storyline that people can understand and relate to and therefore made it a big hit in the box office. Narrative film is made up of a Three Act Structure. Act 1: Setup, Act 2: Confrontation, and Act 3: Resolution. Both Hollywood and Broadway use the Three Act Structure. There have been other structures and styles used but this seems to be the most used and most successful. I felt that Man on Fire was an awesome Narrative Film we saw in class this semester. It was a story that played on all of my emotions and it used the Three Act Structure. The resolution at the end of the movie is my favorite part, when the main

character gave his life to save the life of the kidnapped girl. The kidnapped girl was the confrontation of course that occurred leading to the phenomenal ending.

*“PEOPLE HAVE FORGOTTEN HOW TO TELL A STORY.
STORIES DON'T HAVE A MIDDLE OR
AN END ANY MORE.
THEY USUALLY HAVE A BEGINNING
THAT NEVER STOPS BEGINNING.”*

Steven Spielberg

Since I do like to know about the background of so many different people and things, I really enjoy Documentary Films. A Documentary Film is defined as a broad category of nonfictional motion pictures intended to document some aspect of reality, primarily for the purposes of instruction or a historical record. There really are no clear boundaries for what makes a documentary film however. There have not been any guidelines or requirements to date. Many different approaches are taken to make a documentary film. In the documentary film *Thin Blue Line* by Errol Morris; it alternates between interviews and re-enactments to tell the story from all sides involved. While in *Jim Brown's American Me* documentary film by Spike Lee, it seems it is filled with Interviews that were very one sided from Jim Brown's point of view primarily. Documentary film is always evolving and we may even see new forms and style take place in the future since there aren't any boundaries. Documentaries typically have far lower budgets. It does make them attractive to film companies however because of the increasing popularity of the documentary genre, and the advent of DVDs, has made documentaries financially more viable. Yet funding for documentary film production remains elusive.

Experimental Film seems so different when it comes to film making. Honestly these movies are harder for me to understand. The definition of Experimental film is an artistic practice relieving both of visual arts and cinema. Its origins come from the twenties during the European Avant-Garde Movements. Today these films end tend to be called “Experimental Cinema”, because it’s possible to make experimental films without any of the avant-garde movement in the cultural field. These films generally have to get distribution through non-profit organizations even in other countries. These films are generally self-financed or financed through small grants, with a minimal crew or, often a crew of only one person, the filmmaker. Experimental Film lacks the narrative side and is known for the use of various abstracting techniques. Lots of different approaches are used like out-of-focus, painting or scratching on film, and rapid editing. Sound can be very weird or abstract or it is often seen in films to not have any sound at all. Although I cannot remember the name I once saw a clip in this class of an Experimental Film that used leaves and bugs and objects with not any sound at all.

It would be very hard to have to choose only one type of film making, and I for one am so thankful to all the creative brains that go into each style. I absolutely love to be sent onto an adventure with films that are in the Narrative Film style. I would go crazy without my chick-flicks to take me to another mystical world far from reality where we can all be in love. But the deeper side of me yearns for the knowledge and understanding I gain from a documentary. I can appreciate the creative broadness in Experimental Films but really have a hard time relating to them at times. Movies are like a rack of different styles of jeans. There’s something that works for everyone.

References:

Wikipedia Encyclopedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Experimental_film

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Documentary_film

Elements of a Cinema http://www.elementsofcinema.com/film_form/narrative-cinema.html