Praise for the first edition of New Documentary: A Critical Introduction:
‘It’s refreshing to find a book that cuts through the tired old debates that have
surrounded documentary film and television. It heralds a welcome new
approach’, Sight and Sound

‘This book is going to be essential reading for any media teacher with a serious
interest in documentary and is highly recommended for centres selecting
“Documentary” as one of the two “Textual Topics” on AQA’s Media spec’, In
The Picture

New Documentary provides a contemporary look at documentary and fresh and chal-
lenging ways of theorising the non-fiction film. As engaging as the original, this sec-
ond edition features thorough updates to the existing chapters, as well as a brand new
chapter on contemporary cinema release documentaries.

This new edition includes:

• Contemporary films such as Capturing the Friedmans, Être et avoir, Farenheit
9/11, The Fog of War and Touching the Void as well as more canonical texts such as
Hoop Dreams and Shoah.
• Additional interviews with influential practitioners, such as director Michael Apted
and producer Stephen Lambert.
• A comprehensively revised discussion of modern observational documentary,
including docuseries, reality television and formatted documentaries.
• The work of documentary filmmakers such as Nicholas Barker, Errol Morris, Nick
Broomfield, Molly Dineen and Michael Moore and the work of Avant-Garde film-
makers such as Chris Marker and Patrick Keiller.
• Gender identity, queer theory, performance, race and spectatorship.

Bruzzi shows how theories of documentary filmmaking can be applied to contempo-
rary texts and genres, and discusses the relationship between recent, innovative exam-
pies of the genre and the more established canon of documentary.

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New Documentary
Second edition

Stella Bruzzi
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Introduction

There have been several key developments in documentary film and television production since the first edition of this book appeared in 2000. In terms of generic renewal, the important evolutions that have taken place in recent years have been the renewed popularity of documentaries in the cinema (in the wake of Michael Moore’s *Bowling for Columbine*) and the advent of reality television and its close relative the formatted documentary. What both of these indicate is that documentary has become a global commodity in a way it simply was not a mere six years ago. These recent interventions also serve to consolidate and reinforce the central tenet of the first edition of *New Documentary*, namely that documentaries are performative acts, inherently fluid and unstable and informed by issues of performance and performativity. The latter have become increasingly forefronted as defining concerns of documentary, from the continued rise of documateurs such as Michael Moore, to the centrality of performance to reality television and finally to the increased presence of reconstruction in historical documentary where the use of drama has become almost a prerequisite.

Because documentary output has evolved so dramatically over the past few years it did not seem sufficient, when approaching this second edition, to merely tack on a new chapter. All existing chapters have been reviewed and updated, and some have been more radically overhauled. Major changes have been made to the discussion of ‘docusoaps’, for example, with which the old chapter on British observational documentary television concluded. Although some docusoaps have survived, the sub-genre – which had been such a major component of popular television, particularly in Britain – died around the millennium, almost as abruptly as it had risen. In the wake of the phenomenal global success of Endemol’s *Big Brother* has come ‘reality television’, which in turn has spawned formatted documentaries such as *Wife Swap* and *Faking It*. Under the revised title of ‘New Observational Documentary’, Chapter 4 now gives far more prominence to the rise of ‘factual entertainment’ since docusoaps by focusing on reality television and formats. Although for slightly different reasons, Chapter 3 on documentary journeys has been similarly overhauled to take into consideration a wider range of documentaries and now includes discussions of *Sherman’s March*, *Hotel Terminus*, *Seven Up* and *Hoop Dreams*. It is hoped that this chapter now offers a more comprehensive analysis of why the journey has been such an endur-
ing nonfictional narrative structure. Chapter 5’s discussion of documentary images of the president now includes more recent examples, such as Michael Moore’s critique of George W. Bush in *Fahrenheit 9/11* and finally Chapter 7 is an entirely new chapter in which I offer an analysis of four of the most significant and popular cinema-release documentaries since 2000: *Être et avoir*, *The Fog of War*, *Capturing the Friedmans* and *Touching the Void*.

*New Documentary* was and is primarily a work of theory. In the first edition I remarked that ‘theoretical writing on documentary has, by and large, not kept pace with developments in critical and cultural theory’, a claim that is still valid but should perhaps be modified in the light of some recent publications, such as Michael Renov’s *The Subject of Documentary* in which Renov reassesses and develops previous arguments about and definitions of documentary, particularly in relation to fiction film and subjectivity. Although my book’s thesis is historically broad, *New Documentary* is not intended as a general introduction to non-fiction film and television. Because of this continued emphasis on a thesis (the belief, as laid out at greater length later in this Introduction, that documentary should be viewed as a performative act) to have singled out a particular historical moment might seem odd. However, this concluding chapter, through its analysis of four notable documentaries, also offers historical proof of the pervasive influence now of performative ideas, an influence amply supported by the domination on the small screen of reality television and its subsidiaries. The emphasis of *New Documentary* remains the British, American and European (primarily French) documentary traditions, within both cinema and television. To expand the book’s terrain further than I already have would have made the project unwieldy and probably incoherent. A stated aim of the first edition was to tackle more contemporary documentaries that are, by and large, available for study and viewing. I have stuck by this when revising my original book, as I have stuck by my other intention of offering an alternative way to understand documentary in relation to the performative. The problematisations of the ‘real’ that have taken place both within theory and within practice since the publication of Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* in 1990 seem so fundamental that it now would be blinkered to offer a view of documentary that did not encompass them. To pursue the same metaphor a little, applying notions of performativity to documentary has been, to me, akin to finding a new pair of spectacles through which to look at nonfiction film and television. As I did in the first edition of *New Documentary*, I will now divide this Introduction into a section on ‘Theory’ and an explanation of ‘Organisation and structure’.

**Theory**

As my underpinning rationale is the importance of performativity in relation to documentary, the first issue relating to how documentary has hitherto been theorised needs to be addressed. There has been a consistent necessity amongst those who have written about documentary to make sense of an otherwise unmanageable number of texts, movements and historical moments through the
construction (or imposition) of a family tree that seeks to explain the evolution of documentary along linear, progressive lines. The most influential and widely used writer on documentary has been Bill Nichols, whose numerous books on the subject have no doubt shaped most courses on documentary in universities since the 1980s. Nichols has offered the most influential documentary genealogy; there are others, such as Paul Rotha’s early ‘evolution of documentary’ outlined in *Documentary Film* in 1936 or Erik Barnouw’s genealogy of sorts in *Documentary: A History of the Non-fiction Film* (1993), but Nichols’ ‘family tree’ is the one that has stuck, although hybrid, eclectic modern films have begun to undermine his efforts to compartmentalise documentaries. Nichols has, to date, identified five modes: the Expository, the Observational, the Interactive, the Reflexive and the Performative. He is keener on some modes than on others (the Interactive and the Reflexive, particularly) but his categories are often – and increasingly – defined negatively, that is in terms of what they do *not* as opposed to *do* represent.

After the publication of the first edition of *New Documentary* it was clear that some people saw this critique of Bill Nichols’ schema as unfairly aggressive and, paradoxically, defensive (a term used as I recall in a review of my book by Jane Roscoe); what I perhaps did not make clear was that I made particular use of Nichols’ genealogical paradigm because it has become so important and influential. On some undergraduate courses Nichols’ modes are attributed as if they are not one way of looking at documentary history and production, but *the* way. Nichols himself has indicated he believes this to be the case when he writes, for example, by way of an introduction to the performative mode in the mid-1990s (the ‘new mode in town’): ‘Things change. The four modes of documentary production that presented themselves as an exhaustive survey of the field no longer suffice’ (Nichols 1994: 93). Since when could Nichols’ four earlier modes (at this time: the Expository, the Observational, the Interactive and the Reflexive) offer an exhaustive survey of documentary? Like any other map for understanding documentary, Nichols’ ‘family tree’ is necessarily circumscribed by his own preferences and areas of knowledge; of much more enduring interest than these reductive categories is Nichols’ detailed engagement with individual documentary texts. As Michael Renov remarks in *The Subject of Documentary*, Nichols’ *Representing Reality* was a ‘groundbreaking study’ (Renov 2004: 22) – but not for its pedalling of a Darwinian model of documentary history. Maybe as a result of this omniscience, the definitions Nichols offered in the mid-1990s of his ‘modes’ were excessively crude (it seems to me, for instance, that when Nichols comes to adding the performative mode in *Blurred Boundaries* in the mid-1990s, he feels compelled to perpetuate the family tree rather than admit that, because of increased documentary heterogeneity and complexity, the compartmentalisation of documentary has become too reductive). The table that sets out the modes in this book is breathtakingly simplistic, and exemplifies the fundamental problem with the ‘family tree’ which is that it imposes a false chronology onto what is essentially a theoretical paradigm, so the Expository documentary is attributed to the 1930s, the Observational Documentary to the
1960s, and so on through to the Performative documentary, attributed to the 1980s–90s (Nichols 1994: 95). The years between the Second World War and the advent of observational cinema in the 1960s must have been, if one follows this model, numbingly dull. The chronology offered here is hugely problematic. It is, for example, simply not tenable to maintain that voice-over (the *sine qua non* of the Expository mode) is any less popular a device in non-fiction film now than it was; narration is everywhere, likewise observation – frequently in the same documentary.

A problem with the Nichols ‘family tree’ is that, in order to sustain itself, wildly heterogeneous documentaries are forced to co-exist, very uncomfortably at times, within one mode – a dilemma that is examined more specifically in Chapter 2 of this book. Since *Blurred Boundaries* Nichols has himself engaged with such issues. In *Introduction to Documentary* he suggests a slightly different configuration of documentary groups, now arguing for six modes starting with the Poetic (a new category in which he places films that emphasise ‘visual associations, tonal and rhythmic qualities, descriptive passages’ [Nichols 2001: 33]), which is followed by the more familiar Expository, Observational, Participatory (the renamed ‘Interactive mode’), Reflexive and Performative. It is entirely legitimate to suggest that there are different types of documentaries that display or prioritise different formal characteristics; what is less tenable, however, is Nichols’ previous contention that such categories follow on from each other, a problem that Nichols himself addresses to an extent in *Introduction to Documentary* when he writes: ‘These six modes establish a loose framework of affiliation within which individuals may work; they set up conventions that a given film may adopt; and they provide specific expectations viewers anticipate having fulfilled’ (Nichols 2001: 99).

If, however, it is the case as Nichols had in fact identified earlier that ‘None of these modes expel previous modes; instead they overlap and interact. The terms are partly heuristic and actual films usually mix different modes although one mode will normally be dominant’ (Nichols 1994: 95), then have such genealogical tables become redundant? The result – whether conscious or not – of having imposed this ‘family tree’ on documentary history is the creation of a central canon of films that is exclusive and conservative. With this in mind, I have attempted here to present a not overly prescriptive underpinning theorisation of documentaries that helps to suggest links between diverse kinds of documentary filmmaking, from independent art house films to the most popular forms of televisual factual entertainment.

An insistent implication of Nichols’ ‘family tree’ is not merely that documentary has pursued a developmental progression towards greater introspection and subjectivity, but that its evolution has been determined by the supposedly generic quest of documentary filmmakers for better and more authentic ways to represent reality, with the implied suggestion that, somewhere in a utopian future, documentary will prove able to collapse altogether the difference between reality and representation. Documentary and fiction are forever the polarities that are invoked in this debate and Nichols’ 1990s genealogy bizarrely begins with
‘Hollywood fiction’ whose deficiency is the ‘absence of “reality”’ (Nichols 1994: 95). The inverted commas around ‘reality’ are significant here, as if the real can never be authentically represented and that any film, whether documentary or fiction, attempting to capture it will inevitably fail. Michael Renov (1986: 71–2) likewise asserts

it is important to recall that the documentary is the cinematic idiom that most actively promotes the illusion of immediacy insofar as it forswears ‘realism’ in favour of a direct, ontological claim to the ‘real’. Every documentary issues a ‘truth claim’ of a sort, positing a relationship to history which exceeds the analogical status of its fictional counterpart.

It is certainly unlikely that either Nichols or Renov have ever been so naïve as to be unwilling or unable to ascribe to the relationship between reality and representation a fruitful dialectical relationship; however, when working with much writing on documentary of the past 20 years it sometimes seems necessary to remind theorists that such a dialectic need not be instinctively treated with distrust. And sometimes it becomes necessary to remind ourselves that reality does exist and that it can be represented without such a representation either invalidating or having to be synonymous with the reality that preceded it.

Repeatedly invoked by documentary theory is the idealised notion, on the one hand, of the pure documentary in which the relationship between the image and the real is straightforward and, on the other, the very impossibility of this aspiration. In this vein Brian Winston somewhat hysterically suggests that, in the future, documentary will simply be mounting a panicked rear-guard action against marauding fakery:

It seems to be likely that the implications of this technology [for digital image manipulation] will be decades working themselves through the culture. However, it is also clear that these technological developments, whatever else they portend, will have a profound and perhaps fatal impact on the documentary film. It is not hard to imagine that every documentarist will shortly (that is, in the next fifty years) have to hand, in the form of a desktop personal video-image-manipulating computer, the wherewithal for complete fakery. What can or will be left of the relationship between image and reality?

(Winston 1995: 6)

Winston here is obviously writing before docusoaps, before reality television and before the penetration into documentary production of a more relaxed as well as knowing acceptance of performative fluidity. Since Winston wrote this, it has become even clearer that the authenticity of documentary is not thrown into doubt because a couple of charlatans exhibit the ‘wherewithal’ to create fake documentaries. To paraphrase This is Spinal Tap, the most adored faux documentary of all time: it’s a fine line between the real and the fake, and what is of far more
The growth of hybrid media forms that, while trafficking in the ‘real’, occasionally even miming the tropes of a documentary style, cannot be said to adhere in any meaningful way to the standards of a documentary praxis (as to ethics, rhetoric, or pedagogy) developed over the past seventy years.

(Renov 2004: 21–2)

Too often in the past documentary was seen to have failed (or be in imminent danger of failing) because it could not be decontaminated of its representational quality, as Erik Barnouw (1993: 287) suggested when declaring

To be sure, some documentarists claim to be objective – a term that seems to renounce an interpretative role. The claim may be strategic, but it is surely meaningless. The documentarist, like any communicator in any medium, makes endless choices. He (sic) selects topics, people, vistas, angles, lens, juxtapositions, sounds, words. Each selection is an expression of his point of view, whether he is aware of it or not, whether he acknowledges it or not.

Barnouw’s claim is simple but erroneous: that the minute an individual becomes involved in the representation of reality, the integrity of that reality is irretrievably lost. What is, time and time again, entered into is the perennial Bazin vs Baudrillard tussle, both of whom – from polar perspectives – argue for the erosion of any differentiation between the image and reality, Bazin because he believed reality could be recorded, Baudrillard because he believes reality is just another image. Because the ideal of the pure documentary uncontaminated by the subjective vagaries of representation is forever upheld, all non-fiction film is thus deemed to be unable to live up to its intention, so documentary becomes what you do when you have failed.

The intention of New Documentary is to question such theoretical assumptions from a variety of perspectives, both theoretical and historical. As indicated above, the book is an indirect response to the impact of Judith Butler’s writing on critical theory. The underpinning idea of New Documentary is that the pact between documentary, reality and the documentary spectator is far more straightforward than many theorists have made out: that a documentary will never be reality nor will it erase or invalidate that reality by being representational. Furthermore, the spectator is not in need of signposts and inverted commas to understand that a documentary is a negotiation between reality on the one hand and image, interpretation and bias on the other. Documentary is predicated upon a dialectical relationship between aspiration and potential, that the
text itself reveals the tensions between the documentary pursuit of the most authentic mode of factual representation and the impossibility of this aim. This is not a new phenomenon – the fissures are there in Huston’s war documentaries, for instance, or the ‘collage junk’ films of Emile de Antonio – it just has not been talked about much within the parameters of documentary theory, a body of work that has assumed and prioritised (although not exclusively) the documentarist’s putative desire to attain the ‘grail’ of perfect authenticity.

Another influence as I conceived of this book was the writing on documentary of Noël Carroll, who argues combatively and wittily with how film studies has theorised the nonfictional image. At the start of ‘Nonfiction film and post-modernist skepticism’ Carroll identifies, as I have above, the central dilemma of theory to be the belief that documentary is ‘necessarily biased’ because ‘motion picture technology is inherently and necessarily selective’, and that any claims it might have to objectivity are thus ‘foreclosed a priori’ (Carroll 1996b: 283). As Carroll goes on to make clear:

This argument contains two notions worth scotching: first, that there is something about nonfiction film, due to its inherent nature, that renders it, in contradistinction to other things (such as sociological treatises), uniquely incapable of objectivity; and second, that selectivity guarantees bias.

(p. 283)

It became important to me to marry in some way Carroll’s philosophical precision and skepticism with notions of performativity and the belief that a documentary’s meaning, its identity is not fixed but fluid and stems from a productive, dialectical relationship between the text, the reality it represents and the spectator. In addition to Carroll, the writing of Dai Vaughan has been significant in this, particularly his belief – cited at other times in New Documentary – that ‘What makes a “documentary” is the way we look at it’ (Vaughan 1999: 84). Vaughan then argues that ‘To see a film as documentary is to see its meaning as pertinent to the events and objects which passed before the camera: to see it, in a word, as signifying what it appears to record’ (pp. 84–5). Although Vaughan acknowledges the ‘theoretical difficulties’ of this definition, he is eager ‘to avoid the labyrinth of rules and exceptions, and exceptions to the exceptions, which awaits anyone who tries to identify documentary by generic or stylistic criteria’ (p. 85). What both Carroll and Vaughan accept – and this has the potential to be hugely liberating – is that filmmakers and spectators alike comprehend the inherent difficulties with representation in the nonfiction film but that this understanding does not invalidate either the documentary film or the documentary pursuit; that a documentary itself is the crucial point at which the factual event, the difficulties of representation and the act of watching a documentary are confronted – if not resolved.

The dominant theoretical preoccupations directly criticised by Carroll and indirectly cited by Vaughan are relatively recent interventions. Many antecedents of the modern documentary were not so haunted by issues of bias, performance
and authorial inflection – Esfir Shub did not consider the fact/fiction divide between her portrayal and Eisenstein’s of Russia’s recent political history to be particularly significant, identifying the fictionalised *Battleship Potemkin* as the catalyst to her search for newsreel material with which to compile another film to ‘show the revolutionary past’ (Jay Leyda, quoted in Macdonald and Cousins 1996: 58). In this frame of mind, the repeated use of Eisenstein’s dramatisation of the storming of the Winter Palace in *October* as a piece of newsreel is not so anomalous. The suspicion with which Robert Flaherty’s reconstructions in *Nanook of the North* or *Man of Aran* is now frequently treated stems not from an understanding of why he reconstituted an Arran family or recorded their dialogue in a studio (technical limitations, a desire to make a record of a lost way of life, and so on) or of how such films may have been understood for what they were by contemporary audiences. Likewise, John Grierson’s early definition of documentary in light of Flaherty’s work as ‘the creative treatment of actuality’ (Rotha 1952: 70) has been viewed as contradictory. As Winston (1995: 11) suggests: ‘The supposition that any “actuality” is left after “creative treatment” can now be seen as being at best naïve and at worst a mark of duplicity’.

And yet, as Winston later points out, Grierson himself differentiated between documentary and other, lesser, forms of non-fiction film, and openly acknowledged the ‘contradictions’ in his definition by stressing repeatedly that the element which documentaries possessed but which other forms of non-fiction film lacked was ‘dramatisation’ (Winston 1995: 103). Grierson, the Soviets, Paul Rotha and other early practitioners and theorists were far more relaxed about documentary as a category than we as theorists have become, and it is intriguing how, as particularly the additions to this revised edition demonstrate, documentary has in various ways returned to its more relaxed roots with dramatisation, performance and other forms of fictionalisation and narrativisation becoming once more predominant.

Worries over authenticity and the evolution of documentary are frequently linked to the increasing sophistication of audio-visual technology. Whereas technical limitations certainly influenced the kinds of documentaries that were feasible in the 1930s when Grierson was first writing, this is no longer the case, so the return we are currently witnessing to a more fluid definition of documentary must have another root. The role of American *cinéma vérité* has proved the crucial historical factor in limiting documentary’s potential and frame of reference, and it is significant that, although many theorists suspect and criticise direct cinema, most of them dedicate a large amount of time to examining it. Richard Leacock and his fellows believed that the advancements in film equipment would enable documentary to achieve authenticity and to collapse the distance between reality and representation, because the camera would become ‘just a window someone peeps through’ (Donn Pennebaker quoted in Winston 1993: 43). As Errol Morris has bluntly put it:

> I believe that *cinéma vérité* set back documentary filmmaking twenty or thirty years. It sees documentary as a sub-species of journalism. ... There’s
no reason why documentaries can’t be as personal as fiction filmmaking and bear the imprint of those who made them. Truth isn’t guaranteed by style or expression. It isn’t guaranteed by anything.

(Quoted in Arthur 1993: 127)

As Morris’s timescale suggests, it has taken time for documentary filmmaking to rid itself of the burden of expectation imposed by direct cinema; furthermore, virtually the entire post-vérité history of non-fiction film can be seen as a reaction against its ethos of transparency and unbiased observation. Ironically, the aesthetics of observational/vérité cinema have become the sine qua non of faux documentaries, the way to signal, therefore, the fakery of the documentary pastiche in series such as Tanner ’88, The Office or The Thick of It and films such as This is Spinal Tap, Man Bites Dog and A Mighty Wind. It is no longer technical limitations that should be blamed for documentary’s ‘contradictions’ but rather the expectations loaded onto it by its theorisation. It can legitimately be argued that filmmakers themselves (and their audiences) have, much more readily than most theorists, accepted documentary’s inability to give an undistorted, purely reflective picture of reality. Several different sorts of non-fiction film have now emerged that propose a complex documentary truth arising from an insurmountable compromise between subject and recording, suggesting in turn that it is this very juncture between reality and filmmaker that is at the heart of any documentary.

Documentary practice and theory have always had a problem with aesthetics – or to be more precise with aestheticisation; as John Corner observes, ‘The extent to which a concern with formal attractiveness “displaces” the referential such as to make the subject itself secondary to its formal appropriation has been a frequent topic of dispute’ (Corner 1996: 123). What has occurred in the past few years especially (in what Corner – when writing about reality television – has referred to as a ‘postdocumentary’ age [Corner 2002: 257]) is that the aesthetics of documentary – the acknowledged imposition of narrative structure, for example, or stylisation – have now become overt as opposed to clandestine components. The discussion in Chapter 1 of Abraham Zapruder’s 8-mm recording of the assassination of President Kennedy posits that there is an inverse relationship between style and authenticity: the less polished the film the more credible it will be found. The latter chapters of this book confront the problems of aestheticisation and accept authorship and stylisation as intrinsic to documentary. Likewise, the role performance plays in documentary has become, in several instances, not the death of documentary but rather a crucial way of establishing its credibility, as the dialogue on the subject of control between Molly Dineen and Geri Halliwell in Geri illustrates. The later films of Nick Broomfield take this notion of constructed truth a stage further as they build themselves around the encounters between subjects and Broomfield’s on-screen alter ego – encounters that, in turn, form the basis for a reflexive dialogue with the spectator on the nature of documentary authenticity. Likewise, the stylistic excesses of Errol Morris’s documentary features, the visual tricks used in other recent films such
as *The Kid Stays in the Picture* or *Tarnation* or the way in which *Être et avoir* has had to be reassessed in the light of the legal battles that have followed its release and concomitant success have necessarily served to indicate the continued reflexivity of much documentary practice. What has emerged in recent documentary practice is a new definition of authenticity, one that eschews the traditional adherence to observation or to a Bazinian notion of the transparency of film and replaces this with a multi-layered, performative exchange between subjects, filmmakers/apparatus and spectators.

When arguing against Bill Nichols’ presupposition that objectivity in the documentary is impossible, Noël Carroll points out that, because documentaries do not, on the whole, reveal the process of their construction, it does not follow that they automatically deny the existence of these processes (Carroll 1996b: 293). To conclude, Erik Barnouw’s assumption is that the intervention of the camera necessarily distorts and alters human behaviour, *ergo* that the resulting piece of film cannot be objective or truthful so that film is deemed to have failed. Why failure? It is perhaps more generous and worthwhile to simply accept that a documentary can never be the real world, that the camera can never capture life as it would have unravelled had it not interfered, and the results of this collision between apparatus and subject are what constitutes a documentary – not the utopian vision of what might have transpired if only the camera had not been there. If one is always going to regret the need for cameras and crews and bemoan the inauthenticity of what they bring back from a situation, then why write about or make documentaries? Instead, documentaries are performative acts whose truth comes into being only at the moment of filming – a moment that, in turn, signals the death of the documentary pursuit as identified by critics such as Erik Barnouw. The paradox that now dominates – as documentaries seem more spontaneous and authentic because they show the documentary process and the moment of encounter with their subjects – is that they also flaunt their lack of concern with conforming to the style of objectivity.

**Organisation and structure**

Although the above introduction to documentary theory has touched on some of the ways in which this book has structured its arguments, I will conclude by outlining briefly its organisation of material. Part I comprises two chapters: the first deals with the issues of film as record or archive, the second with documentary’s use of narration. These discussions are intended to function as a polemical introduction to the problems posed by seeing documentary as an eternal conflict between objectivity and subjectivity, positing that accidental film, such as Abraham Zapruder’s home movie footage of Kennedy’s assassination, exemplifies non-fictional film at its most objective, whilst the use of narration – an overt intrusion of the filmmaker’s bias and didactic point of view – exemplifies documentary at its most subjective. As both discussions conclude, such categorical definitions are crude and invalid, Chapter 1 by focusing on the dialectical re-use of archive material in documentaries such as *The Fall of the Romanovs, Millhouse:*
A White Comedy and The Atomic Café, and Chapter 2 by pointing out the very
different relationships established between the voice-over and the image in films
such as The Times of Harvey Milk, Hôtel des invalides and Sunless. Chapters 3 and
4 follow on from an introduction that looks in more depth at the problems posed
to an understanding of documentary practice by direct cinema – or more pre-
cisely the way in which the exponents of direct cinema defined their achieve-
ments. Chapter 3 takes as its starting point the importance to observational
documentary of the moment of encounter, discussing a series of examples that I
have bracketed loosely together as ‘journey documentaries’: Seven Up and Hoop
Dreams as illustrative of documentaries made over a long time period, Shoah and
Hotel Terminus as examples of investigative documentaries about the Holocaust
and London and Sherman’s March, which are constructed around a series of
chance meetings that then dictate the courses their narratives take. The subse-
quent discussion in Chapter 4 of factual entertainment on television, concluding
with an analysis of the impact of reality television, looks at the role of perform-
ance in observational situations. Part III then tackles the question of perform-
ance in documentary, from, broadly speaking, the perspectives of the
subject-performer and the director-performer. Chapter 5 examines the ways in
which the American presidential image has evolved from the era of Kennedy in
the early 1960s to George W. Bush since 2000. The starting point for this dis-
cussion is the representation of Kennedy in the direct cinema documentaries
Primary and Crisis, progressing to the disillusionment with the presidential
image that follows Nixon’s use of the television broadcast as a platform for lying,
then including a discussion of Clinton era documentaries such as The War Room
and Feed alongside the various feature films about American presidents released
in the 1990s and concluding with an examination of Michael Moore’s vilification
of George W. Bush in Fahrenheit 9/11. Chapter 6 looks at documentaries that
are themselves performative, adopting as its point of departure the use of the
term by J.L. Austin and Judith Butler (thereby understanding the term ‘perfor-
mative’ in a very different way to Bill Nichols in Blurred Boundaries). The films
of Nicholas Barker, Errol Morris, Molly Dineen and Nick Broomfield are exam-
ined as exemplary of the thesis that underpins this whole book: that documen-
taries are inevitably the result of the intrusion of the filmmaker onto the situation
being filmed, that they are performative because they acknowledge the construc-
tion and artificiality of even the non-fiction film and propose, as the underpin-
ning truth, the truth that emerges through the encounter between filmmakers,
subjects and spectators. Chapter 7 is new to this edition and uses a discussion of
four important documentaries of the new millennium (Être et avoir, The Fog of
War, Capturing the Friedmans and Touching the Void) as illustrative of the
renewed success of documentaries in the cinemas and, concomitantly, as a means
of demonstrating how this moment of popularity for the feature documentary
suggests a healthy synergy between history and theory: that the understanding
of documentaries as performative acts has become increasingly prevalent in and
relevant to practice.