

Name: NR

PROJECT 1

History tells a story. In film, this can be presented as a narrative or as a documentary. Based on the two films and the readings, which do you prefer and why?

I prefer viewing history on film be presented as a narrative, as it allows for a range of expression and flexibility in portraying history and reality. Although the documentary, with its 'raw' footage and 'live' images of 'actual events' heightens its sense of urgency and gives it more depth and realism compared to the narrative, what makes the final cut is ultimately selected and arranged with the filmmaker's underlying motive in mind, which may be far from historical truth. This is addressed in Rosenstone's article, in which the audience will 'view reality created only by the film editor', and such a 'reality' might crowd out other historical alternatives and ignore the 'complexities of real situations'.

The content in both genres need to be subjected to the methodologies of examination, analysis and interpretation of the historical discipline to verify that it is indeed presenting a facet of true history. Yet to ignore other film or text-based historical works would be ignoring human history is more complex, and that different realities and perspectives exist to create a more complete picture of truth.

To favour the documentary over the narrative on the basis that it supposedly is more 'real' and 'truthful' is foolhardy, because both genres may be telling the same story in different ways, as seen from *Josie and the Pussycats* and *The Merchants of Cool*. Both are a critique of the culture of consumption, in which social consumption practices shape the individual's sense of identity, its social norms and practices. *The Merchants of Cool* was

brutal and shocking in its presentation, compared to *Josie and the Pussycats* lighthearted and fluffy satire. Yet both had a similar message- that this culture is exploitative, and is supported and driven by the advertising machine, which ultimately has profit maximization as its sole objective.

Here the documentary is accorded more credibility because of its seemingly 'real' presentation and figures of intellectual authority featured on it. This echoes sociologist Howard Becker's notion of the 'hierarchy of credibility'- where society assumes that the word of the powerful bears heavier consequence and truth than the less powerful, which in here is illustrated by three young women in *Josie and the Pussycats*, versus the intellectual 'experts' in the documentary.

Narrative film is not tied down to the quality of 'realism' characteristic of documentaries. This freedom allows history to be presented in a multitude of ways, where even elements of fantasy can be incorporated to enhance the experience of film viewing. The narrative is able to reflect and reveal some historical truth in overt and covert ways, and various genres. This flexibility also accords the viewer some measure of autonomy in interpreting the film, and the autonomy and variety in interpretation gives a more complex but fuller picture of history and reality, which cannot always be said of the documentary. Hence, with its wide mass appeal, high entertainment value and varied ways of presentation and interpretation, the narrative is ultimately more appealing to me.

Project #1: (Written by WL)

Generally, people are more willing to accept documentaries as a more accurate form of representing issues because they seem to deliver facts and open up a direct window onto the issues discussed through interviews carried out with "experts", whereas narrative films tend to use fictional people and situations to convey their messages.

However, according to Rosenstone, both narrative films and documentaries are not true reflections but reconstructions of the issues they discuss because there is a fundamental fiction lying behind each type of film. Although documentaries such as use interviews with various experts to express alternative views, these differences are never allowed to underline the "truth" of the main argument. For example, in *Merchants of Cool*, following the interview of Jimmy Iovine, on the issue of the authenticity of Limp Bizkit, who claimed that the record company was only acting on consumers demands, there was footage showing the company paying radio stations to play the band's song, to emphasize the "truth" of the main argument that bands such as Limp Bizkit are engineered to succeed. While narrative films are not less "real" than documentaries, they might be more "believable". For instance, excerpts taken from interviews may have been taken out of context to suit the main arguments proposed by the documentary, manipulating the "truth" and the viewers. Whereas in a narrative film, viewers already know that the issues discussed are personal reflections of the producer embedded in a constructed environment. Viewers are not "deceived" unknowingly and are given more room to interpret the issues discussed whereas documentaries, due to arranged evidence, predispose viewers to think of the issues like the producer. Therefore I prefer narratives.

Issues addressed by both films are similar, with the only difference

being the way these issues are communicated to the audience. *Merchants of Cool* addresses these issues in a more serious way whereas *Josie and the Pussycats*, a satire, addresses the same issues in an exaggerated and comical way. For example on the issue of authenticity, *Merchants of Cool* portrayed bands like Limp Bizkit as not authentic, being packaged for success. As stated in the documentary, they require "one part authenticity (and) two parts marketing". *Josie and the Pussycats* showed that "talent" and thus authenticity was not essential for bands to make it big when Josie and the Pussycats were signed without having to audition. The issue of subtle advertising was portrayed in *Merchants of Cool* by the scene where "cool" performers performed on stage under the Sprite logo, subtly associating Sprite with being cool. The same issue was addressed in *Josie and the Pussycats* by poking fun at subtle advertising by having the band's rooms entirely decorated with brands like Revlon and McDonald's. Since both films discuss the same issues, how can we say that the documentary is more "real" than the narrative film? If we say that, are we saying that "real" issues cease to exist when they are embedded in a constructed environment? We are more likely to remember the issue of subtle advertising through the satire because it made us laugh and understand the absurdity of consumer culture.

All in all I do not think that narrative films are less "real"; I prefer them because they give me more room for interpretation of issues brought up and tend to leave greater impressions on me.