

Abstract

Conventional Markers of Authenticity in Documentary

John Grierson called documentary the “creative treatment of reality”. No matter how creative documentary filmmakers deal with the real “actuality”, they need to convince audience of the authenticity of their filmmaking. Based on Charles Peirce’s semiotics theory, this research attempts to find out how documentarians construct authenticity by applying conventional techniques. Through textual analysis of three Oscar award-winning documentaries, the research concludes that talking head interview is the most prominently used visual marker of authenticity; voice-over and narration is the most prominently used audio marker of authenticity; the use of archival material is also a prominently used conventional technique that communicate authenticity to audience. This research contributes to the understanding of the cinematic language of documentary from a perspective of semiotics theory.