

# Appendix A: Glossary of Film Terminology

The following are terms generally applied to *nonfiction films*. *Video Editing and Post Production* by James Caruso and Mavis Arthur was a big help in developing this glossary. Most of these terms are further described in Chapter 1 of this book.

## Modes of Nonfiction Film

- *Expository*: documentaries that are intended to inform and/or persuade the audience about an issue.
  - direct address: uses narration and/or text track that clearly states the filmmaker's intent.
  - (Indirect) • poetic: uses visuals and sound (and sometimes text) to allow the viewer to infer the film's intent.
- *Observational*: documentaries in which the filmmaker tries to minimize his or her presence as much as possible, acting as a "fly on the wall."
- *Interactive*: documentaries in which the filmmaker involves himself or herself in the on-screen action, often through interviews and narration.
- *Reflexive*: a film that is aware of itself as a film and often presents the dilemmas or the contradictions associated with documentary filmmaking.

## Parts of Nonfiction Films

- Visual Track
  - *A-roll*: also called primary footage; contains all the original footage (audio and visual) captured by the filmmaker.
  - *Archival (found) footage*: visuals—or sound—that the filmmaker him- or herself did not create: e.g., news broadcasts, home movies, newspaper headlines. These can be moving or still images.
  - *B-roll*: the secondary shots used to cover or to cut away from the A-roll and/or voice-overs. The B-roll can come from the primary footage and/or archival footage.
  - *Cutaway*: a shot specifically inserted that takes the audience away from the primary footage. This is often used to explain something on the A-roll or as a transition to the next scene.
  - *Cut-in*: a shot inserted that highlights a specific part of the primary footage. An example might be a close-up of a hand tapping nervously during an interview.
- Audio Track
  - *Diegetic*: any sound (music, dialogue, . . . ) that could logically be heard by someone within the film, at the time of recording.
  - *Nondiegetic*: any sound (music, voices, sound effects) that could not logically be heard at the time of recording and has been added by the filmmaker afterward.

- *Narration*: some films will use a third-person narration (the "voice of God") delivered by someone who does not reveal him- or herself either by name or by appearance, while other films use a first-person narration ("I") by someone who identifies him- or herself (oftentimes the filmmaker), and the narration can be delivered on screen or it can be recorded afterward and added on a B-roll audio.
- **Text Track (or Graphic Track)**: written information that appears on screen added by the filmmaker in postproduction. Examples are subtitles, identifications, charts, and graphs.

## Other Terms

- *Cinema verité*: literally "film truth," it refers to a type of interactive documentary that tries to present a version of reality by documenting the encounters between subject and filmmaker. A popularized form of the term refers to the handheld camera style of filmmaking.
- *Direct cinema*: though similar in many ways to *cinema verité*, direct cinema describes those films in the observational mode that have little interaction between filmmaker and subject.
- *Mockumentary*: a fiction film that intentionally takes on the style of a documentary, often for humor's sake.
- *Docudrama*: a fiction film that is based on real-life events.
- *Ethnographic filmmaking*: similar to the work of an anthropologist, an ethnographic filmmaker has a goal to observe a "culture" (broadly defined) and present his or her findings to an audience unfamiliar with the culture.
- *Montage*: editing together several different types of shots, each of short duration, for a particular effect. Typically, a montage in nonfiction film will include visuals and music (sometimes with text), though often without voices.
- *Realism*: although all nonfiction films are in most ways considered "real," this term is used to describe the feelings and degree of reality the filmmaker chooses to include. For example, obvious reenactments, though "real," do not have a high realism quotient, whereas raw, unedited footage feels more real to the audience.

The following are terms regularly associated with fiction films, but they are frequently relevant to documentaries as well.

## Framing/Shots

- *Long shot (LS)*: a shot taken from some distance; shows the full subject and perhaps the surrounding scene as well.
- *Establishing shot (ES)*: often a long shot or series of shots that sets the scene or shows the space of a scene.
- *Close-up (CS)*: the image being shot takes up at least 80 percent of the frame. There is also the extreme close-up, which would show one part of the body or a portion of an object.
- *Medium shot (MS)*: in between LS and CS; people are seen from the waist up.

## Camera Angles

- *Low angle* (LA): camera shoots subject from below; has the effect of making the subject look larger than normal—strong, powerful, threatening.
- *High angle* (HA): camera is above the subject; usually has the effect of making the subject look smaller than normal—weak, powerless, trapped.
- *Eye-level* (EL): accounts for 90 to 95 percent of the shots seen because it is most natural; camera is even with the characters' eyes.
- *Dutch angle*: shot that is tilted sideways on the horizontal line; used to add tension to a static frame, it creates a sinister or distorted view of a character. dangerous or evil looking, may convey split personality or moral ambiguity.
- *Front/rear*: soft, direct lighting on face or back of subject—may suggest innocence.

## Editing Techniques

The most common is a "cut" to another image. Others are:

- *Fade*: scene fades to black or white; often implies that time has passed.
- *Dissolve*: an image fades into another; can create a connection between images.
- *Crosscutting*: cut to action that is happening simultaneously.
- *Flashback*: movement into action that has happened previously; often signified by a change in music, voice-over narration, or a dissolve.
- *Eye-line match*: a shot of person looking, then a cut to what he or she saw, followed by a cut back for a reaction.

## Camera Movement

- *Pan*: stationary camera moves left or right.
- *Tilt*: stationary camera moves up or down.
- *Zoom*: the camera is stationary but the lens moves, making the objects appear to grow larger or smaller.
- *Dolly*: the camera itself is moving with the action—on a track, on wheels, or held by hand; often called "trucking" when the camera moves left or right.

## Lighting

- *Low-key*: scene is flooded with shadows and darkness; creates suspense/suspicion.
- *High-key*: scene is flooded with light; creates bright and open-looking scene.
- *Neutral*: neither bright nor dark—even lighting throughout the shot.
- *Bottom/side*: direct lighting from below or from one side; often