

Original Paper

The American Documentary *Fahrenheit 9/11* under the Vision of Structural Anthropology

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Abstract

This thesis starts from structural anthropology, combines some shooting methods of film-documentary, and conducts initial structural analysis to the documentary Fahrenheit 9/11, which was directed by Michael Moores and which won an award at Cannes International Film Festival. On the basis of confirming the effectiveness of the documentary, this thesis analyzes how the film director uses methods of shooting and organizing to criticize the series of domestic and diplomatic policies adopted after the September 11 attacks by the U.S. president G·W·Bush.

Keywords

the American documentary, Fahrenheit 911, language

1. Introduction

The “September 11 Attacks” are the most serious terrorist attack occurring in continental United States. Its victim number reached 2996. Regarding the statistics of the property loss of this attack, different parties had different figures. The United Nations issued a report claiming that this terrorist attack led to the economic losses of 200 billion USD, equaling to 2% of the GDP of that year. This attack’s damage to global economy even reached 1000 billion USD. Furthermore, this event had an in-depth impact on the psychology of the U.S. citizens—their economic and political security was seriously weakened. In the following I will conduct structural combing towards the film and analyze it in detail.

2. A Generalization of 911 Attacks

At 8:45 and 9:03, September 11th, 2001, Eastern Standard Time, two passenger planes successively hit against New York WTC; almost at the same time, at 9:43, another passenger plane hit against the Pentagon. These three plane collisions caused the death of about 4,000 people. Later, bomb blasts

happened next to the Capital Hill, the State Department and the White House. This is the most serious terrorist attack aiming at America's core institutions ever recorded in history. According to this attack, the documentary *Fahrenheit 911* started from the election scandal of 2000, so as to make people think about the Iraqi event. The September 11 attacks are the key event that the film wants to show. The screen started with complete darkness, and then a series of terrified sounds filled the scene: cries, alarming sounds, the sound of wireless communication, etc. Then the screen became bright, the whole New York was at an atmosphere of panic and turmoil. The collapse of the World Trade Center caused an enormous disaster. Then, there are a lot of human features. These are distorted faces caused by fear and nervousness. These sets of symbolic scene lay the keynote of the documentary. The film gathered a large number of materials, which are sufficient to prove that the greatest power of the world is at the hand of an irresponsible president. In order to make people believe in this certain proof. Moores applied a large number of TV data, files and proof obtained via interviews. He is hidden out of the scene, but all his attitudes are demonstrated via continuous off screen voice. Moores used the much disputed montage and, ironically, he used the background music which seemed to be arguing with G·W·Bush. Half of the scenes were shot in Iraq, telling people that American soldiers are confusing their responsibility in Iraq and are there for the wrong reasons. As the first person who dared to tell this history, Moores analyzed the series of factors which caused the September 11 Attacks and revealed the reason why America walked on the road of war. He accused that G·W·Bush was the chief culprit of the current confusing situation of the U.S. and stated that "Fahrenheit 911" was the temperature at which freedom began to burn.

3. An Arrangement of the Structure and Content of the Film

At the first 7 minutes, the film starts from the presidential election of 2000, U.S., and points out the doubts of the election and the unprecedented confusion of the inauguration. From 7' to 13'32", Bush's inability during the first 8 months of his taking office is demonstrated. From 13'42" to 17', the on-the-spot situation of September 11 Attack is expressed. The whole scene is filled with terror, confusion and darkness. The background music is sad, soothing and full of tension. The number of death exceeds 3,000. From 17', the film begins to tell the cause and effect of the September 11 Attacks and unfold the theme of the film. It begins to tell the main relationships contained in September 11 Attacks, which include the White House's attitude, the complex relationship between Bush Family and the Saudi Arabia, the civilians' reaction, how the government manipulates the civilians via the psychological panic brought by the attacks, how the middle and upper class of the society make money via national calamity and the backstage deals between regime and the consortium, etc. It points out that after the September 11 Attacks the U.S. president needs a scapegoat, namely Saddam who attempted to murder George Herbert Walker Bush. The film gives hints to the following series of relationship: Bin Laden provoked the September 11 Attacks, the military expenditure of the U.S. increased, the income of No.11th munitions merchant Carlisle Companies Incorporated increased (Bush and George Herbert

Walker Bush used to work for it)—the Laden family’s income increased—the Bush Family’s income increased.

To be more specific, within the year after the occurrence of the September 11 Attacks, Carlisle Companies Incorporated earned 0.237 billion USD in total, and paid Bush Family 0.14 billion USD during the 12 years! This obviously casts doubts on Bush for the War in Afghanistan after the September 11 Attacks and the “deliberate” neglect of the prior alarm. Secondly, Bush shifted the blame of the September 11 Attacks to Iraq, and did not mention the al-Qaeda at all. To initiate a war in Afghanistan is a forced choice—Bush had a special intention for warring in Afghanistan, he wanted to build a Caspian Sea—Afghanistan—Arabian Gulf petroleum transportation pipeline. After the establishment of this pipeline, two companies would benefit from it the most—Unocal and Enron—two largest sponsors of Bush.

The 49’30” shows that at the same time, the Bush administration launches a psychology war in all states of the U.S., causing people’s universal fear; meanwhile, he uses the excuse of eliminating terrorism to deprive the general public of their rights, and forces people to obtain security at the cost of relinquishing their rights. The developed public media system makes fear spread fast and wide, thus they have to seek protection from their leader, this leads to the result that the government successfully makes the general public support the Iraq war by taking advantage of their fear. The Patriot Act makes the dictatorship and despotism be implemented, and the September 11 Attacks are the best opportunity sought by all previous presidents since Thomas Woodrow Wilson.

1: 08’40” shows the condition of the starting day of Iraq War. On March 19th, 2003, Bush made a nationwide television speech, declaring war against Saddam’s regime. The U.S. soldiers became the enemies of all Iraq people, but they still thought that they were here to liberate them. In Iraq, most of the allied nations temporarily called together by the U.S. were useless. Bush made people believe that there was a great threat (which did not exist at all) by the attack of the public opinions and the huge fear within people’s mind. Further, he did not allow the media to report the people killed in action and their coffins, meanwhile he set limit on the report of the wounded. This covered the fact that this war had led to the greatest number of death since Vietnam War. Regarding the source of soldiers, the regions whose economies collapsed and joining the army became the only opportunity of employment became the ideal source.

At 1: 34’, the main scene returned from Iraq to the U.S. Lyra Lipscomb represented the real condition of the ordinary American families. At 1: 36’27”, this scene was inserted: the soldiers at the Iraq War did not understand why the Iraqis hated them so much, because they were in this war to “free” the Iraqis. They hated Iraq. Offscreen voice: “when a president dispatches a group of children to the battlefield for a lie, this is the result”. At 1:38’, the scene returned to Washington, the soldier Kerp Hands began to reflect on himself. He was reluctant to kill the poor civilians and preferred to be put in prison for this. Meanwhile, Bush was against giving benefits to the part-time workers at the army, and no one cared about those veterans. In addition, the benefits of the disabled soldiers were not guaranteed. Lyra

Lipscomb's son died from the Iraq War. This changed her thoughts completely. The September 11 Attacks made over 3,000 U.S. families break apart; but the Iraq War made the U.S. soldiers' and Iraq people's families break apart.

At 1:47', the scene turned to a transnational corporation symposium held by Carlisle Companies Incorporated on how much money they could earn in Iraq. The participants were all benefitters of the Iraq War. Their business ranged from oil production, weapons and equipment, daily communication and food & beverage of the soldiers, re-construction of Iraq, etc. Who would be paying this bill? Or who would make these companies benefit? They are the non-privileged stratum—the civilians (they paid the taxes) and the resources grabbed from the Iraqi people. The meeting participants claimed that: "without oil no one will care about Iraq. The war is good for the merchants but bad for the civilians."

3. An Analysis of the Film

The whole film uses a large number of shooting data acquired from field interviews and matches them with corresponding TV data to form many ingenious montages, thus forming a sarcastic documentary. In the film, Moores participated in the film himself, so this documentary is participatory. The feature of this documentary is "the theme goes first". The viewpoints are argued via interviews, official documents and news influence. In all, the film emphasizes on the following contents:

- 1) The ambiguous relationship: the film denounces the Bush Family and the vice president Cheney, and analyzes the 30-year benefit tangle between Bush Family and the Saudi Arabia royal family/rich and powerful people;
- 2) Stupidity: Moores makes Bush become a clown of a dark comedy which is full of miserable disasters. Here, Bush not only has his clownish grimace, but also writes his own funniest lines. Moores uses Bush's indecent speech to depict him a childish idiot instead of a wise leader shaped by the government.
- 3) Act evilly in collusion with each other: Moores says: "the American media is the cheer leader of the Iraq War". The Media and the politicians collude with each other, banging the drum for this war which has no justifiable reason.
- 4) Anti-terrorist and control: after the September 11 Attacks, Bush administration uses "anti-terrorist" as the excuse to deepen its control of people's comprehensive and basic rights of speech and person, and killed the essence of the so-called American democracy paraded by the western world.

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