

Documentary Film-making in Theory and Practise

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Course Description

The course is formed of two sections; while the students will be informed of the history of the genre they will also make their own short documentary film. The aims of the course are to foster an understanding of documentary as a diverse form, with a range of styles and genres, to root this diversity in its various historical and social contexts, and to introduce you to some analytical tools appropriate for study of your own and other filmmakers' work.

Learning outcomes

By the end of the course the students will be able to

- Distinguish between, and critically evaluate, the principle 'modes' of documentary making
- Be able to read a documentary text closely and write about how it communicates meaning
- Understanding documentary production in its social and historical context
- Be conversant with, and sensitive to, current debates about documentary ethics and aesthetics.
- Produce their own short film, making informed and creative decisions at every stage of production process.

Instructor

Turkish/French national Baris did his MFA at H.E.A.R. (Haute Ecoles des arts du Rhin) Strasbourg/Mulhouse, Ecole Superieur des Beaux Arts, France.

He participated many international mixed exhibitions including "Regionale" at Kunsthalle of Basel, the 11th Biennial of Young Artists from Europe (Athens), at Institut Français in Freiburg and in Venice. His co-directed film "Tülay German: Years of Fire and Cinders" have been nominated and screened in international film festivals including Oberhausen Film Festival and Istanbul Films Festival.

Assesment Methods

In-class participation and presentation, **30**

Essay, **30** (1500 words)

Final Project, 'a 5 to 10 minutes short documentary' **40**

Bibliography

1) History / Accounts on Documentary

The Art of Record, John Corner (Manchester, 1996)

Claiming the Real, Brian Winston (BFI, 1995)

Documentary, Erik Barnouw (Oxford, 1974)

Documentary, Bill Nichols (Indiana, 2001)

Documentary – The Margins of Reality, Paul Ward (Wallflower, 2005)

New Challenges for Documentary, Alan Rosenthal (University of California Press, 1988)

2) Technical / Production Handbooks

Directing the Documentary, Michael Rabiger (Focal Press 1992)

Documentary in the Digital Age, Maxine Baker (Focal Press, 2006)

Theorising Video Practise, Mike Wayne (Lawrence and Wishart, 1997)

The Technique of Documentary Film Production, W. Hugh Baddeley (Focal Press, 1963)

* Filmography is included under the syllabus, under each week and documentary film 'modes'.

Syllabus

TERM 1 HISTORY

Week 1

Topics: **Documentary Dilemmas**

Introduction to the course and contentious issues around the documentary form. An overview of the scope of documentary, debates about committed documentary, conceptual documentary and political documentary.

Viewings: Examples from Contemporary Documentaries

Agnes Varda films.

The Act of Killing.

Week 2

Topic: **Nineteenth Century Legacy and films of record**

The documentary impulse and the reaction against 'constructed' images: the first moving images: early newsreels: looking at other cultures. Nanook of the North becomes the first recognised documentary.

Viewings:

Nanook of the North US 1922

The Battle of the Somme GB 1916

***Presentation of the video project

Week 3

Cinema-verite, observational cinema and the lure of the 'real'

A discussion of "Direct Cinema" in the US in the 1960s and its legacy

Viewings:

Titicut Follies, dir Fred Wiseman US 1967

Salesman dirs David and Albert Maysles US 1969

*** Shooting the video project

Week 4

Topics: **Formalism, Revolution and the cinematic subversion**

Revolutionary politics, artistic modernism and the cinema montage in the Soviet Union in the 1920s. Dziga Vertov and Kino Eye, versus Sergei Eisenstein and the montage of attractions.
Artistic subversion, abstraction, surrealism across Europe.

Viewings:

Man with a Movie Camera dir. Dziga Vertov USSR 1928

Social Democracy and the Voice of the People

The British documentary movement of the 1930s and the American 'New Deal' documentarists. Romantic lyricism versus stark information.
Germany in the 1930s. National Propaganda and deconstructive analysis.

Viewings:

The Plow that Broke the Mountains dir Pira Lorenz US 1936
Housing Problems, British Commercial Gas Association 1935
Triumph of the Will, dir. Leni Riefestahl 1934
Kuhle Wampe, scr. Bertolt Brecht 1932

*** Shooting the video project

Week 5

Topic: **Surrealism and the unconscious**

From Salvador Dali and Luis Bunuel to Chris Marker

Viewings:

Land Without Bread, dir Luis Bunuel Spain 1932
La Jetee, Dir. Chris Marker, France
Sans Soleil, dir. Chris Marker, France 1983
Meshes of the Afternoon, dir Maya Deren, US 1943

*** Editing the video project

Week 6

Topic: **Re-thinking ethnographic film**

Reflexivity and the work of Jean Rouch as an ethnographic filmmaker.
Comparison between 'Direct Cinema' and cine-verite in France.
The possibility of unmediated observation.
"My aim is not to film life as it is, but life as it is provoked." Jean Rouch

Viewings:

Les Maitres Fous, dir Jean Rouch, France 1955
Chronicle of a Summer, dir. Jean Rouch – Edgar Morin 1961

*** Editing the video project

Week 7

Topic: **Autobiographical films**

How does the injection of the personal/confessional mode affect documentary's

'truth claims'? Is the collapsing of the subject/author divide a way through some of documentary's ethical and aesthetic dilemmas?

Viewings:

Six O'clock News, dir. Ross Mc Elwee

Nobody's Business, dir. Alan Berliner

Whited Sepulchre, dir. Tony Dowmunt

Topic: How does television use and abuse documentary form? & Web documentaries

The proliferation of television genres. Documentary is breaking its boundaries – both expanding its traditional areas and flowing over into docu-drama, reality shows and newer interactive forms.

Viewings:

Whatever is current

*** Screening the projects