

Documentary Film: Theory and Practice

Course Code: SML7 050

Credit Value 30

Module Organizer: Athena Mandis

This is an optional module for the MA in Film Studies.

Assessment:

Documentary Film: Theory and Practice Essay (3000 words) 50% weighting

Documentary Film: Theory and Practice (Production work in pairs) (8 to 15 minutes) 50% weighting

Documentary in its simplest of forms is a recording of an act. The film camera is first and foremost a recording instrument, whether it captures 'life caught unawares' or a fictional scenario. This course examines the history of 'non-fiction' filmmaking in the 20th and 21st century through the understanding of documentary styles and genre. Political, social, ethical and historical issues will be addressed through the engagement of theory and practice.

'All films are documentaries' (Jean-Luc Godard). Documentary is a growing discipline both in practice and theory. The proposed module will complement the existing provision on the MA in Film Studies by offering students the opportunity to develop their understanding of documentary in both theory and practice. The module focuses on the foundations underpinning different documentary genres and trends throughout 20th and 21st century. The module asks students to engage in this understanding through both practice and critical study.

Aims:

To enable students to develop practical, intellectual and critical understanding of the different kinds of genre within documentary film.

To develop practice-based abilities both technical and in terms of production roles for documentary making.

To enable students to demonstrate self-direction and originality in tackling and solving problems, managing relationships, and acting autonomously in planning and implementing tasks.

To critically evaluate and analyze documentary work.

Learning outcomes:

At the end of this module students will have gained:

An understanding of issues related to Documentary practice theory in relation to genre

Practical production skills in relation to critical knowledge

An understanding of production technique in relation to camera, sound and lighting.

The ability to present and discuss ideas within the context of an academic presentation

The ability to organize and plan a short production

The ability to work co-operatively and creatively to fulfill the requirements of the course.

The ability to analyze theoretical issues related to documentary theory through the framework of critical practice

Reading

Barnouw, Erik, *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974). A useful and readable history.

Bruzzi, Stella, *New Documentary: A Critical Introduction* (London, New York: Routledge, 2003). An excellent study of recent films and therefore a good starting point for this course.

Nichols, Bill, *Introduction to Documentary* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001). An important study by a highly respected film historian although biased towards American films and overly fond of categorization.

Paul Ward, *Documentary: The Margins of Reality* (London, New York: Wallflower: 2005). A short but informative overview in the 'Short Cuts' series.

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