

ITHACA COLLEGE LONDON CENTRE

BRITISH DOCUMENTARY SPRING 2007

Instructor: Prof. Bevan Jones

10.30AM – 1.15PM Mondays

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Purpose of Course

To study the canon of British Film and Television Documentary from the end of the 19th Century to the beginning of the 21st Century.

The British Documentary tradition has had considerable global influence on documentary practice and is still closely entwined with the social and political development of contemporary Britain. It has a rich and distinctive history and sustains one of the most vigorous strands of British television network programming. Drama-documentaries tackling – and attracting - major public controversies have a high profile in the UK and will form a significant part of the course.

Learning Outcomes

Successful completion of the course will give students:

- A working knowledge of some key British documentary texts
- An insight into the theoretical documentary principles established, modified and challenged in the UK
- An understanding of the various schools and sub-genres of documentary
- A grasp of the moral and practical dilemmas faced by documentary-makers
- An overview of the wider structural, political and social contexts within which documentaries are created

Course Methodology

The course will consist of lectures, guest speakers and, if possible, trips to off-campus events. Attentiveness and participation in class meetings are required.

Attendance at every class is mandatory and assignments must be submitted on the due dates. Failure to attend will result in a lowered grade.

Students should avail themselves of the 'living textbook' provided by the prominence given to documentaries in the British Press and by British Broadcasting and bring their observations for discussion in class. Guidance will be given throughout the course on reading, viewing and listening. Constructive use of concrete examples from such viewing, reading and listening will play an important part in each of the four assessments.

Assessment and Grading

There will be three assessments in the course:

- Mid-term essay due at end of last class before Spring break - value 40%
- Final Paper due at end of last class – value 40%
- Formal and informal class participation/presentation – value 20%

Draft Weekly Schedule (subject to availability of speakers)

Week 1

Introduction to course and to British Documentary

Topics/screenings

- Primitives, Pioneers, 'Factuals' and early Newsreel
- 'Reel Truth'

Week 2

Foreign inspiration and the construction of the Griersonian model

Topics/screenings

- The international marketplace for actuality
- 'Nanook of the North'
- 'Man with a Movie Camera'
- 'Coal Face'

Week 3

British Attitudes to public information.

Key Griersonian Texts and their contribution to War propaganda

Diagnostic paper set

Topics/screenings

- Creativity and the 'truth claim'
- 'Spare Time'
- 'Night Mail'
- 'Listen to Britain'
- 'Fires Were Started'

Week 4

Social realism and Free Cinema

An introduction to Non-Fiction Film Theory

Diagnostic paper due

Topics/screenings

- Reformism meets Reportage
- 'Every Day Except Christmas'
- 'We Are The Lambeth Boys'

Week 5

The arrival of television

Topics/screenings

- The institutional problem solved and the new freedoms
- 'The Elgar Film'
- 'The War Game'

Week 6

The rise of Reality TV

Topics/screenings

- Whose History?
- 'I'll Do Anything to Get On TV'

Week 7

Deceptively simple – the Observational documentary

Topics/ screenings

- Are social critiques exploitative?
- '49 Up'

Mid-term assignment due 26th February

Subject: In the first half of the semester, we have seen a number of British Documentaries made for cinema and television from the beginning of the 20th Century to the 1960s.

What aspects of British society have been of concern to the makers of the material we have viewed in class?

How effective do you think the pioneers were in reflecting their concerns?

Discuss.

2,000 words.

Week 8

The Authored documentary

Topics/screenings

- Guest speaker and Grierson Award nominee, Carol Morley
- 'The Alcohol Years'

Week 9

Oral History on Television

Topics/screenings

- Guest speaker: Oral History TV Producer Gavin Weightman

Week10

The Investigative documentary

Topics /screenings

- The work of Nick Broomfield
- 'The Leader, His Driver and the Driver's Wife'

Week 11

Recent Drama- Documentary

Topics/screenings

- Documentary as journalism
- 'Bloody Sunday'

Week 12

Campaigning through documentary

Topics/screenings

- Jimmy McGovern and the Hillsborough Families
- 'The South Bank Show: McGovern the TV writer
- 'Hillsborough'
- 'World in Action'

Week 13

Can Documentary be Fun?

Topics/screenings

- Descending to the level of your subject matter
- 'Scandal in the Bins'

Week 14

Course summary and review.

Final Assignment Due 13th April

Subject: The documentaries we have viewed in class have used a variety of narrative techniques to get their message across and reinforce their 'Truth Claim'.

Discuss the virtues of the various techniques and assess their success in persuading audiences of their validity.

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

Barnouw, Eric. *Documentary. A History of the Non-Fiction Film* (Oxford UP 1993)

Barsam, Richard. *Nonfiction Film. A Critical History* (Indiana UP 1992)

Creber, Glenn. *The Television Genre Book* pp.124 – 139 (BFI 2001)

MacDonald, Kevin and Mark Cousins. *Imaging Reality: The Faber Book of Documentary* (Faber and Faber 1996)

Paget, Derek. *No Other Way to Tell It: Dramadoc/Docudrama On Television* (Manchester UP 1998)

Winston, Brian. *Claiming The Real* (BFI 1995)