London South Bank University

Module Guide

> 'For the audience... narrative reduces a complex, confusing, overdetermined tidal wave of experiences and half-found awareness into something that is linear, understandable… Narrative makes it seem safe.
>
> This is a lie.'
>
> (Michelle Citron, 1998: 50)

Documentary Theory

AME_4_DCT

School of Arts and Creative Industries

Level 4

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1. MODULE DETAILS

Module Title:	Documentary Theory
Module Level:	Level 4
Module Reference Number:	AME_4_DCT
Credit Value:	20 CAT Points
Student Study Hours:	152
Contact Hours:	48
Private Study Hours:	
Pre-requisite Learning (If applicable):	None
Co-requisite Modules (If applicable):	None
Course(s):	Film Practice
Year and Semester	2019/20, Semester 1
Module Leader:	Jonathan Bower
	Email. bowerj2@lsbu.ac.uk
Lecturer:	Eleonora Sammartino
Division:	Film and Media
Summary of Assessment Method:	Shot-by-shot analysis and essay
External Examiner appointed for module:	Dr Liz Greene, Senior Lecturer in Filmmaking, Liverpool Screen School, Liverpool John Moores University.

2. SHORT DESCRIPTION

This Module explores the history of documentary filmmaking along with the theoretical frameworks that shape our understanding of its claims to represent the world. A 10 week screening programme will introduce students to the major documentary modalities, including those that problematise notions of truth, history and objectivity. The module will also consider how technological, ideological and aesthetic factors impact upon documentary filmmaking and its reception.

3. AIMS OF THE MODULE

The aims of this module are to:
- Present the range of documentary practices and their various modes of address
- Enable a critical engagement with issues of equality and diversity within the context of documentary storytelling and the politics of representation.
- Explore the ways that films might stimulate critical thinking by creating a dialogue between a film's message and its method.

4. LEARNING OUTCOMES

On successful completion of this module students will be able to:

4.1   Knowledge and Understanding

- Explain the significance of cultural and theoretical contexts for understanding a documentary's claim on 'the real'.
- Recognise the formal, ideological and technical parameters of the various documentary modes.
- Explore issues of equality and diversity within the context of documentary film practice.
- Employ relevant research techniques in order to understand the ambitions of a range of documentary films and to develop the skills to deploy these understandings when developing their own documentary films.

4.2   Intellectual Skills

- Critically evaluate and deploy research practices serving historical, aesthetic, ideological, theoretical and technical aspects of documentary filmmaking.
- Critically evaluate the ideological and aesthetic parameters of different documentary modes and learn to manipulate one of these modes in the name of a particular kind of address.
- Develop and sustain learning strategies that facilitate documentary filmmaking and analysis.
- Critically reflect on their own learning and be able to situate their practice within documentary discourse.

4.3   Practical Skills

- Identify shot selection, shot sequences, and the function of both in the construction of meaning in documentary films.
- Identify the choices that documentary filmmakers make, and attribute purpose to those choices.
- Work with an electronic database to source relevant writing on documentary theory and practice.

4.4   Transferable Skills

- Deal ethically with screen subjects and collaborators.
- Recognise and reflect on their own learning.
- Conduct research independently.
- Analyse films at the level of the shot and the sequence, facilitating an understanding of editing.

5.   ASSESSMENT OF THE MODULE

5.1   COURSEWORK 1. 1500 word Essay (70%) – Due December 18th, 2019

1500 word essay addressing two key academic readings, answering a supplied essay question, and

addressing a film screened on the module.

- Time required to complete assessment (30 hours)

6.   FEEDBACK
Feedback will normally be given to students 15 working days after the final submission of an assignment or as advised by their module leader.

General feedback, applying to all students, will also be placed on the module VLE site within 15 working days.

7.   INTRODUCTION TO STUDYING THE MODULE

7.1   Overview of the Main Content

This module involves the close analysis of feature-length documentary films, with particular concern for the *types* of documentaries that exist, and the effects of utilising one type in a given situation. For example, in what situation might a filmmaker choose to place him or herself in front of the camera? What effect might this have on the story or picture that emerges, and what effect might it have on spectators' relation to a film?

The types of documentaries that get made are also reflected in the way they are created, which is a function of technological as much as historical developments. One camera or two? Film or Video? Sync sound or post produced sound? Understanding these basic concerns is fundamental to becoming an effective filmmaker, but it is also fundamental to understanding why a film is the way it is, which in turn helps us to understand the experience it seeks to create.

7.2   Overview of Types of Classes
The module runs for one semester, spanning 12 teaching weeks.

- Screening and Interactive Lectures
- 20 hours student managed learning each week

7.3   Importance of Student Self-Managed Learning Time
There are 152 self-managed study hours associated with this Module in which time you must conduct research, demonstrate an appreciation of what has been written about documentary filmmaking, and show a commitment to writing about the relation between documentary theory and practice. So your self-managed time will also be spent in the library, researching and reading appropriate academic sources and critically viewing non-fiction films and television programmes. As students of film you must become more than passive viewers of the documentaries you watch by reflecting on the choices filmmakers make, by taking notes, and by thinking about the experience of the people both in front of and behind the camera.

7.4   Employability
With its self-managed critical practice this Module reinforces students' understanding that the self-management of skills development is part of the professional ethic of media workers. Likewise the Module's focus on reflexive learning demands that students engage in questions of when and how they learn as part of a method to improve and take control of their learning and development. Employers need staff who can think, rather than staff who conform only to conventions of thought. Becoming an independent, creative thinker occurs only through the hard work of critically engaging with the thinking of others, which means both taking on board the wisdom of others but also developing a personal response to such wisdom and forging an original position over time.

8.   STUDENT EVALUATION

Students will be asked to complete an anonymous Module evaluation towards the end of the Module. Module evaluations are an important part of the University's quality assurance systems and provide a valuable mechanism for obtaining student feedback and identifying ways in which the Module can be improved and updated. In addition to completing evaluations, students may ask their student representatives to raise specific issues regarding Modules at Course Board meetings.

9.   LEARNING RESOURCES

Reading List: Available on Moodle at:
https://lsbu.rl.talis.com/lists/7D5A7A84-51E5-D4F1-5A45-C5DA9CD04492.html?edit

Barnouw, E. (1992) *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film,* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Berry, C; Hamilton A; Jayamanne, L (Eds) *The Filmmaker and the Prostitute: Dennis O'Rourke's "Good Woman of Bangkok".* Chicago: University of Illinois Press*.*

Bruzzi, S. (2006) *The New Documentary.* Oxon: Routledge.

Bryant, M (1997) *Auden and Documentary in the 1930s.* London: The University Press of Virginia.

Citron, M. (1998) *Home Movies And Other Necessary Fictions.* Visible Evidence, Vol. 4. Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press.

Corner, J. (1996) *The Art of Record: A Critical Introduction to Documentary*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Cousins, M. (1996) *Imagining Reality.* London: Faber and Faber.

Dovey, J. (2000) *Freakshow: First Person Media and Factual Television.* London: Pluto Press.

Ellis, J C. and McLane, B. (eds.) (2005) *A New History of Documentary Film*, New York & London: Continuum.

Feldman, S. (1977) "Viewer, Viewing, Viewed: A Critique of Subject-Generated Documentary" in *Journal of the University Film Association*, Vol. 29: 23-26, 35-36.

Grant, B.K & J Sloniowski (1998) *Documenting The Documentary: Close Readings Of Documentary Film And Video.* Detroit, M.I., Wayne State University Press.

Hall, J. (1991) "Realism as a Style in Cinema Verite: A Critical Analysis of 'Primary'". *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 30, No. 4, (Summer), pp. 24-50.

Jerslev, Anne (ed.) (2002) *Realism and 'Reality' in Film and Media.* Northern Lights Film and Media Studies Yearbook. Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press.

Lipscomb, J C. (1964) "Cinema-verite". *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (Winter), pp. 62-63.

Macdonald K. and Cousins M (eds.) (1996) *Imagining Reality.* London: Faber and Faber.

Margulies. (ed) (2002) *Rites of Realism: Essays on Corporeal Cinema.* Durham and London, Duke University Press.

Nichols, B. (1991) *Representing Reality*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

_____. (1994) *Blurred Boundaries: Questions of Meaning in Contemporary Culture.* Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press.

_____. (2010) *Introduction to Documentary*. Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press. (Especially chapter 6 'How Can We Differentiate among Documentaries?')

Plantinga. C R. (1997) *Rhetoric and Representation in Nonfiction Film.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rabiger, M. (1997) *Directing the Documentary.* London: Focal Press.

Renov, M. (ed) (2000) *Theorizing Documentary*. New York: Routledge

———. (2004) *The Subject in Documentary.* Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Rosenthal, A. (1988) *New Challenges for Documentary*, California: California University Press.

Rothman, W. (1997) *Documentary Film Classics,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ruby, J. (1991) "Speaking For, Speaking About, Speaking With, or Speaking Alongside - An Anthropological and Documentary Dilemma". *Visual Anthropology Review*. Fall, Volume 7: Number 2. http://astro.temple.edu/~ruby/ruby/speaking.html

Russell, C. (1999) *Experimental Ethnography: The Work of Film in the Age of Video.* Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press.

Saunders, Dave (2007) *Direct Cinema: Observational Documentary And The Politics Of The Sixties.* London: Wallflower Press.

Tobias, M. (ed) (1998) *The Search for Reality: The Art of Documentary Film-making,* London: Michael Wiese Productions.

Waldman, D. & Walker, J. (1999) *Feminism and Documentary,* Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.

Warren C. (ed.) (1996) *Beyond Document: Essays on Nonfiction Film.* Connecticut, Wesleyan University Press.

Williams, C. (1980) *Realism and the Cinema.* London: Routledge.

Winston, B. (1995) *Claiming The Real: The Documentary Film Revisited,* London: BFI.

9.1   Filmography

Core Filmography

30s Britain 1, The GPO Classic Collection, BFI [includes: *The City* (Elton, 1939), *Spare Time* (Jennings, 1939), *Coal Face* (Cavalcanti, 1935), *Night Mail* (Watt, Wright, 1936)].

Darwin's Nightmare (Hubert Sauper, France, 2004)

The Gleaners and I [aka Les glaneurs et la glaneuse] (Agnes Varda, France, 2000)

Grey Gardens (Maysles Brothers, 1975, USA)

The Leader, His Driver and the Driver's Wife (Broomfield, 1991, UK) [85 mins]

Nanook of the North (Robert Flaherty, 1922, USA)

The Thin Blue Line (Errol Morris, 1988, USA)

The War Tapes (Deborah Scranton, 2006, USA)

Zidane: A 21st Century Portrait (Gordon & Parreno, France, 2006)