Documentary:
Theory and Practice

BA in Media Studies Final year option
Spring / Summer Terms 2001

course code P4018
credit weighting: 36
assessment weighting: 15%

Convenor / tutor:
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office hour: Weds 12.30 - 1.30

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Production tutor:
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Group e-mail address: mediadoc@central.susx.ac.uk

DOCUMENTARY: THEORY AND PRACTICE
INTRODUCTION

Aims:

The purpose of this course is expand and refine your understanding of the 'rhetoric' of audio-visual documentary (from formal aspects such as camerawork, soundscaping and editing, to professional practices such as selection of interviewees, to the explicit and implicit truth claims embedded in documentary discourse).

The course is designed both as an exploration of the skills of producing an audio-visual 'documentary' and as a contribution to the analysis of such texts, in relation to critical debates over epistemology, ethics, power relations, viewer address and ideology.

It should facilitate both academic and vocational approaches to the medium, by enabling you to identify, create and critique the range of technical, professional, formal and narrative practices through which 'documentary' has been constituted.

Objectives:

You will:

* build on existing skills of collaborative video production, improving your competence in the planning, production and editing of documentary films;

* develop an understanding of the history of documentary -- in terms of both theory and practice -- and deepen your skills in the critical analysis of such texts;

* learn to relate theory and practice, by creating certain rhetorical effects and analysing the ideological, semiotic and ethical implications of your production decisions;

* enhance your ability to reflect self-critically upon the learning process of working on a video production.

Course content:

The course comprises two elements which are designed to mutually inform each other: a theoretical-analytical strand, and a practical project. The former is assessed by a 4,000 word essay, while the latter requires you to work as part of a group to produce a documentary video on a topic of your choice (to be agreed with teaching staff), and an accompanying, individually-authored production critique (see more on assignments below).
The course is largely centred on formal strategies and working conventions adopted within the institutional frameworks of the British and American film and television industries. While its central focus is on film and television documentaries, the course also extends to 'reality programming' and 'infotainment' formats on television.

The course covers: foundational thinking in documentary; theorisations of different modes of documentary; debates over documentary's truth claims; the porous and contested boundary between documentary and fiction; dramatisation and reconstructions; 'infotainment' hybrids on popular television; the ethics of documentary practice.

Methods of Teaching and Learning:

The course will be conducted via seminar discussions, student presentations, video viewing, technical demonstrations, group workshops and individual tutorials.

Each week you will participate in both a practical workshop (led by Lee Gooding) and an analytical seminar (led by Thomas Austin).

To support your participation in these two strands of the course, considerable reading, preparation and production work will be required.

A group e-mail address has been established at: mediadoc@central.susx.ac.uk

You will be expected to check regularly for course-related e-mails. E-mails will be sent to you confirming your first meetings of term. You may also use this address to contact fellow students taking the course, or teaching staff (Thomas and Lee).

Assignments:

You will be expected to contribute regularly to group exercises and discussions, to make seminar presentations as required (slots allocated in week one), and to submit a group video production treatment.

Each week one or two students will make a seminar presentation. The purpose of this exercise is to initiate a debate on the week's set topic, by drawing both on the set reading and on video clips from non-fiction films and tv programmes.

To achieve this aim, you will be asked to combine a presentation based on your own research and reading, with a number of carefully selected points raised for
your audience to discuss. In other words, do not simply regurgitate your reading. Note that you can pause to ask questions during your presentation. Wherever your questions are placed, they should not be simply tagged on as an afterthought. The key is to involve your audience and encourage them to work with you in the application, evaluation and critique of relevant readings. You should use video clips to illustrate your points, and to ask questions of the seminar group.

You should provide a handout listing salient points and questions. Try to make your presentation audience-friendly by making eye contact and speaking from brief notes or bullet points, rather than reading out a closely written text.

Your presentation will be judged according to the following criteria:

= content and understanding
= structure
= presentational skills (including use of equipment where appropriate)
= steps taken to stimulate debate

All seminar members, (not just the presenter(s))! will be expected to be able to critique, evaluate and test out reading against specific textual examples.

You will be able to talk with your tutor in advance about preparations for your presentation.

Unassessed essay:

You are required to submit an essay of 2,00-3,000 words, to be handed in to the Media Studies secretary in EH 145 by Monday of week 8 (Feb 26th).

A list of suggested questions will be circulated in January.

Assessment:

Final assessment is based on three components:

* 4,000 word essay (worth 50% of overall mark)

Topic to be agreed in advance with Thomas Austin (see further details below).

The sooner you begin work on this piece of work, the better. You should certainly have a proposed topic in mind for the (compulsory) tutorials scheduled for week
10 of the Spring term.

* Group video (assessed on collective basis; worth 40% of overall mark)
  video documentary of 10-12 minutes, on a topic to be agreed by the group and
  the instructors. (see further details below)

* Production critique (individually-authored, 2,000 - 2,500 words, worth 10% of
  overall mark). The critique should analyse the production practices, formal
  decisions, editing choices and ethical considerations undertaken in the process
  of making your group video, and how these procedures affected the meaning of
  the completed work.

* All assessed work must be handed in to the Undergraduate Office, Sussex
  House, on or before 5pm, Monday May 21st (week 5 of summer term).

Please make sure you allow enough time for possible technical and computer
delays, and for queuing at Sussex House.

Guidelines for assessed work:

**Essay**

You are asked to write a 4,000-word extended essay for submission by May 21. More than 400 words longer or shorter than this is likely to be penalised.

This essay must include a case study element and show an awareness of methodology. It requires you to engage in depth with a topic - both in terms of reading and theoretical engagement, and in terms of the research you conduct.

It may extend and develop ideas you began to consider in term essay or seminar presentation but must be substantially new written work. The responsibility for avoiding overlap is your own.

**How to Proceed...**

**Deciding on a topic**

- The best advice is to think small. If you take on too much, you will be in danger of not achieving any depth and producing only vague generalisations. Find a question that interests you and ensure that you will be able to access the material that enables you to answer it. Even if the focus seems narrow or very specific to you at the start, you can open up the case study to incorporate the wider issues
The more sharply focused the project, the more in-depth study you'll be able to produce. It is advisable to choose a topic/issue where you have already done some of the groundwork and you can draw on work you have done for this or other courses.

The question or hypothesis:

- A good title captures the issue/problem/hypothesis/question you are dealing with. Sometimes a snappy, more journalistic title works best. Titles often have two parts - a general first part which might indicate the broad topic area, followed by a colon and a phrase which suggests the issue or problem to be investigated. For example.

- Why is your question worth asking, what exactly does it mean, what issues does it raise, what is your initial response, how does your thinking change as you proceed with the research, and what kinds of assumptions are you making that need to be critically examined?

Planning

- Before you write, you should draft a plan that sets out the structure of the essay, the key stages and direction of your argument, and the approximate number of words you are going to devote to each section. Have you achieved a good balance between the sections? Sometimes subheadings for your sections can help you structure your argument and guide the reader.

Drafting

You will need to do more than one draft - possibly even three. Don't panic if your first draft is too long, written awkwardly, or your argument seems confused and gets lost in too much detail of other people's work. This is part of the process. The key is to get your ideas on paper and to start thinking the argument through to the end. You can then sit back, re-read it, and reflect on how you might make the argument clearer and which points need to be stressed and which left out. Sometimes it helps to discuss it with someone else - you may find that this helps you identify the main ideas as you try to explain it to them. Ensure that you write explicitly about what you think the significance and the limitations of your research are - it's easy to assume that it speaks for itself or that other people are as familiar with it as you. A final reading should check for presentational elements such as spelling, and accurate referencing.

To get a sense of what we are looking for when we mark your assessed essay, consider the following:

* Appropriateness of topic and method:
- Is your problem/issue/question/hypothesis an interesting one?

Have you tackled the issue in an appropriate way, methodologically and conceptually?

(eg. via a historical approach, in-depth case study to illustrate broader issues, analysis of industry procedures, technology, practitioner interviews, and/or textual analysis of a film or television programme)

* Your research

- What is the quality of your research, and your written presentation and discussion of it? How appropriate is your research to the chosen issue? Has it been done systematically and in enough depth? Have you presented your research findings clearly? Are they interesting? Do you engage with them in a critical way? Have you used your academic literature to help you analyse and think through the significance of them?

* Your understanding of relevant academic literature

- Have you outlined the arguments and ways of thinking used in literature which has already covered your topic or which feed into your topic? Have you shown how you have built on them or criticised them in order to make your own argument?

Remember that critical engagement does not necessarily mean criticising an reading so much as responding to it, commenting on it and evaluating its strengths, weaknesses or usefulness for your own work.

* Your Writing

- Have you written in a clear, accessible and enjoyable style? Have you used academic conventions - quotes, references, bibliography etc - in the course of your argument?

Remember to consider the following checklist as you are writing:

  = How effective is your introduction?
  = Have you identified the key issues clearly?
  = Have you answered your question directly?
  = Have you appraised your material critically?
  = Have you foregrounded your own ideas?
  = Is your argument presented coherently?
  = Is the material organised tightly?
  = Have you drawn on a wide range of sources?
  = Is your argument well supported by evidence?
  = Have you referenced your sources honestly and accurately?
Have you checked for spelling and sentence structure?

* You should also read the advice on tackling written work, referencing and criteria for marking in your Media Studies Handbook.

**Video project**

All members of a group will normally be awarded the same mark.

(* see further notes below)

Assessment of the video takes place at an examination event attended by the whole production group and two examiners (usually in early June, exact date to be confirmed). The examiners will watch the video with you. They will then discuss with you how the video was produced, how you confronted and solved problems, and how effectively you worked as a team.

The mark awarded for the video will reflect two things:

1: the quality of the finished product, judged in terms of the selection of a subject, and the imagination, creativity and technical skill displayed in presenting that subject.

2: the organisation and effectiveness of the collaboration that went into the process of production.

Members of the production group who do not attend the examination event will be graded at zero for the video and production critique element.

**Production critique**

You are required to write your own individually-authored production critique, Production critiques will be marked individually.

The production critique should focus primarily upon:

* A commentary upon how your production work was informed by insights from, and added to your understanding of, the theoretical-analytical strand of the course. (This will in effect be a retrospective critique, looking back on your video and its production having completed the course.)

* A frank and self-critical assessment of how successful you think the project was in achieving its aims; what mistakes were made? what did you contribute and learn in the process? In retrospect, were there aspects of the video which you would like to change now?
The production critique should also include:

* The title of your project and your name
* A list of all the members of the group
* A clear and concise summary of how and why the group decided on its project. (What recognised modes of documentary, and specific examples of the form, have influenced your own project?)
* Some indication of how different production tasks were allocated, with particular emphasis on your responsibilities
* A very brief indication of how the various phases and elements of the project were managed
* An account of the problems encountered collectively by the group and individually by you. How were these resolved (or not)?
* A summary of the skills you learned in the process -- not only technical skills, but also skills of planning and executing a project, and of working in a team.

**Group Video Production:**

**Working in groups:**

We know that people have understandable concerns about their own mark being brought down if one member of their group fails to contribute. There is also justifiable anxiety that someone who fails to contribute might be awarded the same mark as others who put a great deal of time and effort into the project. These problems should not arise if each member of your group is allocated a clearly specified role and set of tasks appropriate to their interests and skills. There are, however, sanctions available if needed. The procedure is as follows:

1: If a group collectively decides that one or more members are not contributing properly -- either not turning up to agreed meetings or failing to take an active part in the project -- then the group should immediately bring this to the attention of one of your tutors, and to the Media Subject Chair (Prof. Paul Smith, Essex House 144).

2: If tutors conclude that the complaint is justified, the offending student will be warned that their individual mark will be the group mark minus 30%.

3: If the student thereafter makes an outstanding contribution to the project, that sanction may be removed.

4: If they make a reasonable contribution, the reduced mark will be awarded.

5: If they fail to make a satisfactory contribution, they will be awarded a zero mark for the collective element of the assessment.

Remember:

* A zero mark cannot be retrieved. You cannot resit or resubmit a group project.
* Groups must act as soon as problems arise.

* Anyone who has to miss any part of the workshop must inform tutors and colleagues in advance and produce documentary evidence to justify their absence.

There is an art to being a successful member of a group. It can be quite a different process from the individual study which takes up most of your time at University. In Media Studies, the ability to work well as part of a team is essential.

* You need a team to produce video projects.

* Being a part of a team enables you to acquire inter-personal skills such as speaking and listening.

* It also helps you learn the team skills of leadership, managing a project, working with and motivating other students.

* These skills are important to prospective employers.

* You will learn more about your own strengths and weaknesses: arbitrating, being too dominant, being too reserved, etc.

To remind you of how to manage your group successfully, here again is some (hopefully) familiar advice:

1: Do you need ground rules?

* You should attend all meetings. Let someone else know if you cannot.
* The work should be shared fairly between team members.
* Members should encourage everyone to contribute.
* Individual tasks should be completed by the agreed deadline.
* Responsibility for chairing meetings and taking notes should be rotated.

2: Allocating tasks

Some groups may be resistant to the idea of identifying different functional roles and allocating them to specific people. However, your group is likely to be much more effective if you do so.

* Pre-production

Here the key tasks include selecting a subject. Your choice should be informed by a group discussion of individually generated ideas. After that, you can identify a number of tasks. Do you want to have a named producer and / or director? That may smack of hierarchy, but having someone who retains an overall vision
of the project, and thinks how to enable everyone to contribute most creatively, can be a great benefit. You will need researchers to scout out locations, to check on the logistics of the shoot in advance, to select suitable soundtrack music, etc. Will someone be preparing a shooting script at this stage, or story boarding possible sequences? If you can clear any necessary permissions at this stage, it will avoid difficulties later. You will need someone to prepare the schedule for your work.

* Production

Here the tasks are more obviously differentiated. Who will be camera operator? Who will be sound recordist? Who will be production manager? Who will be responsible for lighting? Who will be responsible for transport (if necessary)? Are you going to have a stills photographer (this can sometimes provide valuable cover if filming goes wrong)? Again, who will take the responsibility for overall direction?

* Post-production

Editing can often be the point of greatest friction with a group. Allowing everyone to have a go is fair, but it is not necessarily the most effective or productive way of working. How are you going to organise the process of transforming your footage into a finished 10-12 minute video? Do you have a shared vision of how it should look, and would it be most effective to have a small team of editors to achieve that? There are other important tasks: selecting music; preparing the credit sequences.

3: How effectively are you planning and reviewing your project?

Proper planning in advance is one of the major keys to success.

* Allocate responsibility for different tasks so that you do not waste time.

* Use your time effectively by making an overall timetable for the work, and planning how often the group will meet.

* Have a structured approach to meetings so that there is a sense of purpose, but maintain a degree of flexibility so that any 'matters arising' can be addressed.

* Before the end of each meeting, arrange the time and place of the next meeting.

4: Am I pulling my weight in the group?

Being part of a team makes you responsible to all the other members of the team. It will not work -- or it will not be as successful as it could be -- if some people fail to show the necessary effort and consideration. If you are going to
miss a meeting or if you are having difficulty completing your tasks because of other commitments, let the other people know. They will probably be quite understanding and find a way to work around your problem.

* Groups often experience problems. Some are practical or technical. Others involve the maintenance of the team. The problems may not be easy to identify or sort out, but they should be tackled rather than ignored. Ask for help if you need it, but remember that learning to solve the problems which inevitably arise is one of the major purposes of this type of work.

Task-based problems

Lack of clarity about goal
Lack of time
Lack of resources
Lack of skills for the task
Difficulty with organising meetings
Not reviewing the work
Problems in maintenance of the group
Members are too dominant
Members do not contribute
Members are excluded
Conflict between members
Members will not compromise

Production guides:


    A very useful but expensive book (£30).

Roger Crittenden (1993) Film and Video Editing Blueprint

Recommended viewing / reading:

Try to watch (and record, if possible) as many television and film documentaries and non-fiction TV shows as possible, and to think about them critically, making use of course reading. In addition to the set films and programmes listed in the weekly breakdown, various films and TV programmes are available on video for overnight loan from EH 145. Here are some films / programmes -- and commentaries -- worth a look:

The 'camcorder aesthetic':

(as pioneered in BBC2’s Video Diaries series, carrying associations of immediacy and authenticity, eg: in C4’s Undercover Britain)

* Corner, John (1996) The Art of Record: A Critical Introduction to Documentary
ch. 11: Documentary futures

* Corner, John (1994) "Mediating the ordinary: the 'access' idea and television form" in Aldridge and Hewitt (eds) Controlling Broadcasting
  Manchester UP

* Humm, Peter (1998) "Real TV; camcorders, access and authenticity" in Christine Geraghty and David Lusted (eds) The Television Studies Book
  Arnold

* Peter Keighron (1993) "Video Diaries: what's up doc?" Sight and Sound (NS) 3:10 (October)

Hoop Dreams (1994) (Steve James)


The Last Bolshevik (1993) (Chris Marker)


London (1993) (Patrick Keiller)


The Man With a Movie Camera (1929) (Dziga Vertov)


One Day in September (2000) (Kevin Macdonald)


Shoah (1985) (Claude Lanzmann)


* Williams, Linda (1993) "Mirrors without memories: truth, history and the new documentary", Film Quarterly 46:3 (Spring)
Sans Soleil (1982) (Chris Marker)

**GENERAL READING:**

Critical approaches to the theory and history of documentary in film and television:

Recommended:

  
  An important, up to date and rather polemical intervention in the field.

  
  Manages to be both accessible and theoretically sophisticated. Covers film and TV. A good place to start reading. See esp: ch. 1: Documentary theory; ch. 2: Action formats: drama documentary and verite; ch. 11: Documentary futures

  
  A very important and wide-ranging, if at times rather dense, book.


Other useful general approaches to documentary in film and television:


Although less sophisticated than Corner's book, this is a useful introduction to studying television documentary.
A eclectic mix of writing by practitioners, academics and journalists.


THE COURSE, WEEK BY WEEK:

(analytical strand in plain text; production strand in italics.)

week 1 (12 January)

3-minute unbroken take exercise;

Constructed cinema verite

Introduction:

What makes a 'good' television or film documentary? What makes 'good' factual television? You will be asked to identify and describe current or recent examples of excellence in non-fiction film and television programming, and to examine your criteria for making these judgements.

week 2 (19 January)

Still images; soundscape design;

editing in Marker-esque style;

unconventional documentary / narrative form

Theories and modes of documentary:
This week we examine the rhetorical foundations of screen documentary. In his book Claiming the Real (1995) Brian Winston points out that the 18th century adjective documentary derives from the noun document, that is -- a written source of evidence or information. Winston argues that this notion of evidence later provided the discursive frame into which photographic technology was inserted and so made sense of. * What, then, are the grounds for the "claims on the real" made by photography, and subsequently by documentary film and television?

We also consider distinctions drawn by critics and practitioners between four 'modes' of documentary, each of which has been seen to construct 'realism' according to certain formal conventions:

* expository mode;
* observational mode;
* interactive mode;
* reflexive mode.

We will discuss critiques of the respective truth claims made by each of these modes. In the process, we'll be scrutinising documentary's privileged relation to 'reality', its 'evidential' status, by examining the ways in which documentary practice is transformative of the 'actuality' it purports to record.

Set viewing: Paul Watson's documentary for Channel 4, The Factory (episode one)

* What instances of authorial and transformative interventions into 'reality' can you locate in The Factory? Can you think of other examples from other cases of the four traditional documentary modes?

Reading:

  ch. 1: Documentary theory, and ch 2: Action formats: drama-documentary and verite

Stuart Jeffries (1996) "You've been framed" The Guardian June 22 (in Resfac)

Richard Kilborn and John Izod (1997) An Introduction to Television Documentary:  
  ch 1: Mapping out the terrain, ch 2: How real can you get? and ch. 3: Shaping the real

  Bloomington: Indiana University Press, ch 2: Documentary modes of representation
* Bill Nichols (1994) Blurred Boundaries: Questions of Meaning in Contemporary Culture Bloomington: Indiana University Press, ch ...

* Brian Winston (1995) Claiming the Real: The Documentary Film Revisited London: British Film Institute, ch 3

week 3 (26 January)

Location / interview exercise;

presentation of storyboard

The 'performative documentary' (1):

Documentary has been labelled (by Bill Nichols) a 'discourse of sobriety' alongside 'nonfictional systems' such as science and politics. Like those other discourses, it is concerned not only with 'real-world events' but (simultaneously) with story-telling for an audience. In this session we examine in detail examples of 'performative documentary' (Nichols' term again), which -- to an extent -- could be seen to self-consciously deflect attention away from the 'real world' of their referents towards the expressive and affective dimension of film.

Set viewing:

Mr Death (1999) (Errol Morris)
The Thin Blue Line (1988) (Errol Morris)

* Look in particular for: each narrative’s stance towards the events and 'characters' portrayed; similarities with 'fictional' genres, or with any of the four traditional documentary modes; relative degrees of 'authority', 'objectivity' and reflexivity; mode of address to the audience.

* Are there any dangers inherent in the dramatic / stylistic treatment of a 'real life' event, -- in these examples, or in any others that you can think of? (This debate is extended in our consideration of dramatisation and reconstruction in week 5.)

Reading:

* Nichols, Bill (1994) Blurred Boundaries: Questions of Meaning in Contemporary Culture Bloomington: Indiana University Press, ch ...

* Williams, Linda (1993) "Mirrors without memories: truth, history and the new documentary", Film Quarterly 46:3 (Spring)

**week 4 (2 February)**

Group-specific exercises, depending on your project choices

The 'Performative Documentary' (2):

This week's two films can be thought of as 'performative' in a slightly different sense from that meant by Nichols. Each film appears to abandon any pretence at 'transparency', not so much in order to flaunt stylistic expression, but to reflexively scrutinise the film-making process, thus fulfilling Stella's Bruzzi's formulation that "a documentary is its own document". (Moore's Roger and Me has also been termed "investigative verite" by John Corner.) Bruzzi uses the term 'performative documentary' to draw attention to what she sees as a tradition neglected by theoretical writing, one which sees the 'truth' of documentary as located in the unpredictable moments of interaction between the camera crew and its subjects.

Set viewing:

The Leader, His Driver and The Driver's Wife (1991) (Nick Broomfield)
Roger and Me (1980) (Michael Moore)

Reading:


**week 5 (9 February)**

Group-specific exercises, depending on your project choices
Dramatisations and reconstructions

One way in which documentaries attempt to involve their viewers as well as to inform them, is via the often contentious means of reconstructing 'real life events' which may not have been captured 'adequately' on camera at the time.

Our case study focuses on two different televised accounts of the murder of Stephen Lawrence.

Why Stephen? (BBC2, February 1999)
The Murder of Stephen Lawrence (ITV, February 1999)

* In what ways does the case selected for portrayal lend itself to dramatisation and reconstruction? What are the key formal differences between each text?

Are there any dangers inherent in the dramatic / stylistic treatment of a 'real life' event, -- in this example, or in any others that you can think of?

Reading:

ch 2: Action formats: drama-documentary and verite

London: British Film Institute

Richard Kilborn and John Izod (1997) An Introduction to Television Documentary: 
ch 6: Making a drama out of a crisis

Bloomington: Indiana University Press, ch 4


Derek Paget (1998) No Other Way to Tell It: Dramadoc / Docudrama on Television Manchester University Press

Julian Petley (1996) "Fact plus fiction equals friction" Media, Culture and Society 18:1

week 6 (16 February)

Production week
Political uses and critiques of realism:

As Brian Winston, among others, has pointed out, theoretical attacks on 'realist' screen texts for their alleged complicity in bourgeois ideology have produced a "crisis of legitimation" for mimetic representations in general, and for the documentary in particular. A second critique draws on theorisations of the postmodern to argue that documentary's generic truth claims are futile and insupportable. This week we explore these two theoretical arguments.

Does audio-visual realism inevitably naturalise and confirm the status quo, or can it be mobilised for critical ends, and to empower disadvantaged groups?

If we can no longer distinguish between truth and fiction, what is documentary's purpose?

Reading:

* Read the anti-realist critiques summarised in Winston, Corner, Garnham, Juhasz (citing Kaplan), etc. How do they define realism? Do you agree with any of these critiques? Why (not)? How applicable are they to examples of documentary form? For what reasons are Corner, Winston and Juhasz sceptical of anti-realist critiques? Do you agree with their various counter-arguments?


* John Corner (1992) "Presumption as theory: 'realism' in television studies" Screen 33:1 (spring)

Nicholas Garnham (1977) "Tv documentary and ideology" in Screen Reader 1

Alexandra Juhasz (1994) "'They said we were trying to show reality - all I want to show is my video': The politics of the realist feminist documentary" Screen 35:2 (summer)


Christopher Williams, (1994) "After the classic, the classical and ideology: the differences of realism" Screen 35:3 (Autumn)


week 7 (23 February)
Production week

Group presentations: work in progress on video projects.

**Week 8 (2 March)**

Production week

Ethics and controversies in the field of documentary:

Explores the ethics of documentary film making, and considers controversies over 'consent', authenticity, manipulation, restaging, and 'audience deception'.

What ethical issues have you confronted in your own production work?

Set viewing:

On Air: The Truth About TV (episode 2)
Titicut Follies (1967) (Frederick Wiseman)

Reading:


Richard Kilborn and John Izod (1997) An Introduction to Television Documentary: Confronting Reality ch. 8: How do they do it?

* Bill Nichols (1991) Representing Reality: Issues and concepts in documentary ch. 3 "Axiographics"


* Brian Winston (1995) Claiming the Real: The Documentary Film Revisited chs. 34 and 35

week 9 (9 March)

Production week

'Reality TV':

This week we return to debates over borrowings from fiction and entertainment forms, this time in what has been called 'reality TV' or 'reality programming'.

In the increasingly de-regulated, fragmented and commercialised television landscape of the 1990s, 'infotainment' hybrids such as crime / rescue shows and 'docu-soaps' blur the boundaries between factual and fictional programming. Why have these formats come under (academic and journalistic) attack, and are such concerns justified?

Set viewing:

Crimewatch UK
Plus = Choose a docusoap from EH145 or from your own viewing

Reading:


Ib Bjondebjerg (1996) "Public discourse / private fascination: hybridization in 'true-life-story' genres" Media, Culture and Society 18:1


  ch. 2 (esp section on 'neo-verite') and ch. 11: Documentary futures

Kilborn and Izod (1997) An Introduction to Television Documentary ch. 6: Making a drama out of a crisis and ch 7: Just do it our way!


Julian Petley (1996) "Fact plus fiction equals friction" Media, Culture and Society 18:1
* C. Kay Weaver (199) "Crimewatch UK: Keeping women off the streets" in Carter, Branston and Allen (eds) News, Gender and Power London: Routledge


week 10 (16 March)

Production week

Individual tutorials to discuss your plans for the assessed essay.
You should begin researching and writing your essays in the Easter vacation.

Summer Term:

Post-production work: this will involve Cool Edit and Photoshop tuition.

No formal classes. You will be working to complete your assessed essay, supported by tutorial discussions.