Introduction to Documentary Filmmaking

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Aim of the course:

The course has a twofold purpose. Firstly, it will aim to provide students with skills and different approaches to „reading” documentary films that deal with social issues. After a brief theoretical introduction to documentary film theory, we will discuss and analyze selected documentaries treating issues of nationalism, racism, national identity, memory, and Central and Eastern European history. This part of the course will not exceed 20% of the course content.

The second and larger part of the course will focus on practical filmmaking training with the aim of introducing students to how to visually express social issues. Elements of the training will include interview techniques, observation exercises, learning story construction and narrative structure, synopsis, treatment and script writing, camera using, sound recording, log writing, and film editing.

After taking this course the students are expected to have familiarized themselves with the art of socially engaged storytelling through documentary film. Moreover, this module is an exercise in creative group work in the field of social sciences that seeks to equip the students with increasingly sought after skills of understanding, producing and using media in the digital age. The main questions guiding the theoretical component of the model are the following:

Which roles does documentary film assume in discourse formation and policy practices concerning issues of nationalism, citizenship and ethnicity? Which are the advantages and disadvantages of documentary film as the scholar’s and practitioner’s tool of communication and political action? Which ethical obligations, if any, do a filmmaker and a scholar have towards the audience of his/her work as well as the people that the work features?

The key issues that the class addresses are however: How does one make a compelling and critical documentary about issues of nationalism and ethnicity? How can academic knowledge can be utilized and integrated in filmic works? Which are the common difficulties that documentary filmmakers encounter and how can these best be resolved?

Course assessment:

The assessment will be based on the following requirements:

• A 1000 word film essay/critique on a selected documentary film of their choice. (20%)
• A Project Diary that tracks the work being done during the preparation and production of the film project. The Diary must include the synopsis, the photo essay (related to the “observation” assignment), treatment, shooting planning and diary, script/film logs. (20%) (group work)
• The final 5-10 minute long video project: 60% (group work)

The students will work in groups of three and will decide on how to divide the various tasks among themselves.

The Senior Tutor and her colleague are available to students outside the classroom to assist and comment on the different stages of student’s video projects.

The usual reading requirement is exchanged for the compulsory hours each student spends on practical work and editing their own project.

**Course elements:**

(1) 3 April:
Introduction: Exploring the concept of documentary film, situating documentary film in social sciences

(2) 4 April:
Social, political and historical issues to documentary film, examples - film analysis, coursework discussion. (Part 1)
Screening of the film “Rocking the Nation”.

(3) 8 April:
Social, political and historical issues to documentary film, examples - film analysis, coursework discussion. (Part 2)

(4) 10 April:

(5) 15 April:
Assessment of the observation homework (photo essay). Pitching: presentation of the film idea on the course.
All of the teams have to present their film ideas plus the photo essays.

(6) 17 April:
Interviewing: exercises, interview analysis.
Finalizing treatment, further pre-production activities: filming schedule, locations, characters, schedule, etc.

(7) 22 April

(8) 24 April
Technical preparation: editing, using Final Cut Pro. (workshop with Gloria Oh, Media Lab Manager)
Location: Media Lab (Nador 15)

(9-10) 29 April, 30 April
Post-production: transcript editing, preparing filmlogs, script editing, rough cutting, fine cutting
Rough Cut Roundtable.

(11-12) 6 May, 8 May
Common assessment of the video projects

**Recommended Readings:**

The chapters as follow:
- Approach. pp. 75-84.

The chapters as follow:
- Ethics in Making a Documentary. pp. 77-89.
- Steps in Producing a Documentary. pp. 93-118.

The chapters as follow:
- Ch. 4, Proposing and Pitching a Short Documentary. pp. 51-64.
- Ch. 17, Point of View and the Storyteller pp. 259-282
- Ch. 18, Dramatic Development, Time, and Story Structure pp. 283-317
- Ch. 19, Form, Control, and Style pp. 318-326
- Ch. 20, Reenactment, Reconstruction and Docudrama pp. 327-334
- Ch. 21, Advanced Research (Preproduction) pp. 339-350
- Ch. 22, Values, Ethics, and Choices pp. 351-360
- Ch. 23, Proposing an Advanced Documentary pp. 361-369
- Ch. 30, Conducting and Shooting Interviews pp. 462-482


