

## **Documentary Cinema in the Digital Century**

Budapest, June 24 – July 5, 2013

The set of courses within this summer school aims at creating an innovative interdisciplinary forum for debating the issues of visual representation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The summer school considers the role(s) of documentary in addressing the issues of human rights violations, visual representations of social conflicts, new political online activism; processing historical traumas, gender roles, conventions, and conflicts, and a changing role of documentary in the landscape of new media. It brings together a group of film and media scholars and filmmakers also active as teachers to bridge the distance between academic and non-academic milieus and to provide the summer school participants with state-of-the art debates on teaching visual literacy and the use of audio-visual material in the classroom. Our goal is to move beyond the use of visual footage as illustration towards a reflexive examination of the foundations of image-based research and teaching. The course targets advanced graduate students, junior and post-doctoral researchers, and early career scholars in film and media studies, social sciences, gender studies, history, and human rights. It combines viewing sessions and discussions with practical assignments and curriculum development.

The summer school is research-oriented and interdisciplinary. It seeks to extend the presence of visual material in CEU curricula by providing an experimental ground for introducing documentary cinema in teaching across established disciplines. It also aims at further extending the use of visual material at OSA in teaching as well as to promote cross-disciplinary courses with the use of audio-visual materials.

### **Special feature of the summer school**

The summer school includes cross-disciplinary research courses, bringing together a variety of approaches to visual material, taking films as non-transparent narratives embedded in the economic, political, and cultural contexts of production and circulation. Along with the theoretical workshops, the summer school offers a variety of film screenings and special ‘hands-on’ workshops with prominent documentary filmmakers. Its screenings are powered by a rich collection of the Open Society Archive which is open to participants’ individual research. The summer school aims at further enhancing the use of the collection by both CEU faculty and scholars from other institutions.

During the course of the summer school, the participants will take part in group exercises, which aim at bringing together practice and through creating and developing their own scenarios. The course faculty will provide story examples, but students are free to identify and shape their own narratives and their own techniques of unfolding impactful stories drawing on the perspectives and ideas gleaned from the course program. The assignment allows to apply and develop some of the theoretical background of the seminars and workshops, creates an interactive environment in which the participants will get to know each other better, and establishes grounds for self-evaluation as well as faculty evaluation of students’ grasp of issues from the course. Group projects would be presented during the closing discussion.

### **Summer school structure**

Individual courses, workshops, and masterclasses range from the academic to workshops with filmmakers. Additional screenings with supplementary debates and individual consultations are planned for the evenings. The workshops are designed as discussion-oriented sessions. The readings offered to the participants come from the fields of history, cultural studies, film and media studies and provide both methodological and factual information about the problems discussed during the summer school.

### **COURSES**

#### **Bill Nichols (San Francisco State University) Documentary: Is That a Pipe or Not?**

Magritte's famous painting captioned, "Ceci n'est pas une pipe," confirms and subverts the basic assumption that we label our messages in terms of what kind of message the message is, truthfully. "I am not lying," for example, attests to the truthfulness of what is being said. Or does it? Can any message step beyond itself to identify the very frame that is and is not part of it? And if this can only be done by means of a paradoxical gesture of being and referring to being a message, or text, the question arises: How do we decide what kind of message a given message, or documentary, is and, even further, what is the experiential affect of engaging with forms of communication that deliberately confuse, mislead, reframe, mock, subvert or otherwise confound our usual assumptions and expectations? As digital cinemas converge upon us, this question takes new forms but the underlying issues wander back to the ancient Greece and Zen Buddhism. This course will examine works that call into question their status as texts and, by extension, the status of documentary as a distinct form of cinema. How do we experience them; what challenges do they pose; how well do they speak to a reality that is not as empirically certain as we may wish to believe?

#### **Michael Renov, University of Southern California The Documentary Avant-Garde**

These series of three lectures would provide a theoretical and historical framework for assessing contemporary innovations in documentary practice.

Session 1 The avant-garde as species of documentary practice; the documentary gaze

Session 2 Home movies as avant-garde practice

Session 3 First person filmmaking; the animated documentary

**Oksana Sarkisova (CEU/OSA)**

**Frames Of The Past and the Future: Cinema As Document, History As Fiction**

The course discusses documentary films as agents of historical and anthropological inquiry. Drawing from the rich holdings of OSA Archivum it surveys a variety of cinematographic narratives of the contested issues in the recent past. Ranging from analysis of the ideological uses of documentary to the examination of cultures of remembrance, the three sessions focus on the modalities of presenting and editing the textual and visual “evidence” in (re)creating the image of the past, and on the variety of ways to construct “authenticity” on the screen. The workshop addresses the issues of contingency and control which blur the borderline between fiction and non-fiction, questioning their sharp conceptual division. The discussions will further address the appropriation and redefinition of visual imagery in different contexts and practices of remembrance.

**1 Creating the Past**

The session centers on a variety of visual strategies used for conferring historical credibility or challenge conventional historical accounts, particularly emphasizing the non-conventional uses of archival footage and first-person accounts in constructing historical narratives.

**2 Mediatized Event: Filmmaker as historian.**

The session problematizes a variety of roles the filmmakers assume in the process of constructing historical narratives – from a first-person storyteller to an invisible outside observer.

**3 Away from the Linear: Web-based documentaries and the Digital Age**

The session explores the transformations of the documentary formats in the context of changing production and distribution platforms. We will look at a variety of web-based documentaries and consider the changes in the narrative construction and audience involvement in these projects.

**Vlad Naumescu (CEU)**

**Documenting Social Reality**

**1. Imaginations of the everyday**

While ‘human actuality’ has always been at the center of documentary work, new media seems to attend to the immediacy and intimacy of human experience in an unparalleled manner. This session discusses how conceptions of the ‘social’ are shaped by new media technologies and traces the sociological imagination behind such attempts to document everyday life.

**2. Participatory cultures, authorship and the global mediascape**

What does ‘participation’ mean when talking about such collective projects as participatory video or crowd-sourced documentaries? Who is the ‘you’ in YouTube and what kind of agency can we attribute to this new group of media users-producers? Such questions are a starting point for an exploration of the ways in which new media has changed the documentary landscape and made us rethink our concepts and methods.

**Peter Almond (Beacon Pictures, US)**

### **“Saying the Same Thing Over and Over:” From éclair to Iphone**

The course is based on the question, how does a film tell its story. The workshop explores the documentary across cultures, technologies, time – and genre. How do the classic issues of narrative – character and conflict – become modified in this process? Selections from a number of documentaries are seen in juxtaposition and comparison across these perspectives. As basis for further discussion narrative film will be shown to compare ways narrative fiction filmmakers make their points compared to documentary film. The workshop presents contemporary documentaries that represent these phenomena, and also offers a comparative look at some earlier generation documentaries to consider means and impact of these dramatic non-fiction accounts of social and economic conditions across cultures and technologies. In doing this we look across disciplines, across cultures, across medias and technologies to test and attempt to understand documentary impact then, now and in the foreseeable future. As an additional challenge to discussion of the documentary genre, the course considers several theatrical dramatic films that are known for their “documentary” style of shooting or of topic and narrative.

#### **1. Cinema of Confrontation**

Does the immediacy and ease of production create more meaning in mobilization, in political, ethnic and social conflict? Facts and fiction, then and now. “Occupy,” and the Middle East conflict come under the documentary lens in this first session. Excerpts from a Nigerian Niger Delta case and two classic narrative fiction pieces about cultural-political conflict are seen in brief excerpts to prompt further comparative discussion.

#### **2. Cinema of Identity and Justice**

Do documentaries today get inside the dilemmas of social integration/disintegration more effectively than before the digital revolution in video and filmmaking? How do they achieve their observations? Is access and efficiency of production significant in the current, digital technology? What strategies are engaged by the filmmakers to show the mood and social/cultural condition of their characters?

#### **3. Cinema of International Relations: Two related Cases**

Does the real footage mean more than dramatized? Or does the acting make us feel as if we are in the room where decisions of war and peace are made? Screening the films

produced by workshop leader Peter Almond. **Virtual JFK: Vietnam if Kennedy Had Lived**, directed by Koji Masutani; **Thirteen Days**, directed by Roger Donaldson.

**Leo de Boer (Utrecht School of the Arts)  
Guerrilla Filmmaking**

How technique and style influence content. The old adagio 'form follows content' seems no longer valid. Content seems to follow form in present day documentary filmmaking. I will use material from my own films, made in the 1990s and later: *The Train to Grozny*, about travelling undercover on a train from Moscow to Grozny, and *Under Moscow*, about a group calling themselves the Diggers, who are active in the tunnels of the Moscow Metro and were involved in the release of the hostages during the siege of the Nord-Ost Theatre in Moscow in which 170 people died. The underlying question here is: has the medium completely become the message? Or is there room for objectivity? Has the old journalistic adagio of a dialectical approach (always show the two sides) been enriched with a new approach: that could be described as 'emotional journalism'? In this context I will show material from *Armadillo*, the war-documentary on Afghanistan that shocked Denmark and the Netherlands that also has troops stationed in Afghanistan. The film was hailed and condemned at the same time for interesting reasons that illustrate the above questions. I will also show material from my documentary *Closing in on Tanja*, about the young Dutch woman Tanja Nijmeijer who voluntarily joined the FARC-guerrilla in Colombia. The film was made from a highly personal point of view and yet had a great journalistic impact.

**Alexandru Solomon (National University of Arts, Bucharest)  
Working with the Past – reinventing recent history into pictures and sounds**

Making documentaries is – often, if not by all means - a form of digging into the past and an exercise of reconstructing memory. This is even more obvious when one has to reanimate events, characters or places. How does one deal with the tension between the present-day filming and the reconstruction of the past? Where do the witnesses stand in this equation? What is the place of archives into all this? And how can one reinvent reality with documentary means when absence is stronger than the present?