

FI339-15 Experimental Documentary Practices

20/21

Department

SCAPVC - Film & Television Studies

Level

Undergraduate Level 3

Module leader

Michael Pigott

Credit value

15

Module duration

9 weeks

Assessment

100% coursework

Study location

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

Description

Introductory description

In this module, we will explore the fertile ways in which the histories and aesthetics of experimental film and documentary film have overlapped. We will use this enquiry to inform a practical engagement with the techniques of documentary video and sound recording. The module will consist of a combination of screenings, seminars, practical workshops, and fieldwork.

Led by the module tutor, you will view, listen to and discuss a series of experimental documentary works, and engage with a series of key theoretical works. This seminar-based critical-theoretical work will fuel the practical experimentation undertaken as part of the workshops. These workshops will allow you to explore issues of technique, method, aesthetics and ethics through fieldwork and practical tasks.

You will gain sufficient skills in sound and video recording to allow you to develop inventive, critically informed practical approaches to the investigation of space and society using audio-visual technologies.

Module aims

The aim of this module is to explore the overlapping historical aesthetics of experimental film and

documentary, and to use this enquiry to inform a practical engagement with the techniques of documentary video and sound recording. Led by the module tutor, students will view and discuss a series of experimental documentary works, and engage with a series of key theoretical works. This seminar based critical-theoretical work will fuel the practical experimentation undertaken as part of the workshops. Students will gain sufficient skills in sound and video recording to allow them to develop inventive, critically informed practical approaches to the investigation of space and society using audio-visual technologies.

Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

Week 1: Sensory Ethnography

Viewing: Leviathan (Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Verena Paravel, 2012)

Listening: Materials Recovery Facility (Ernst Karel, 2012)

Workshop: Using 'action' cameras.

Week 2: Landscape

Film: El Valley Centro (James Benning, 2001), Hymns of Muscovy (Dimitri Venkov, 2017)

Workshop: Static video, framing, learning to film with a tripod.

Week 3: Time and Work

Viewing: Los (James Benning, 2001), Lunch Break (Sharon Lockhart, 2009)

Workshop: Static video, long duration.

Week 4: Soundscape and Field

Listening: Voices of the Rainforest (Steven Feld, 1991), Stepping into the Dark (Chris Watson, 1996).

Workshop: Basic sound recording, recording in the field, alternative techniques.

Week 4: Cartography

Viewing: C'était Une Rendezvous (Claude Lelouch, 1976).

Listening: peripheries (Katharina Klement, 2017).

Workshop: Sound maps and audio-walks

Week 6: Reading Week

Week 7: Architecture

Viewing: selection of short experimental film and video works including Side/Walk/Shuttle (Ernie Gehr, 1992), Shift (Toshio Matsumoto, 1982), A Tropical House (Karl-Heinz Klopff, 2015).

Workshop: proposing student projects, fieldwork

Week 8: The Invisible

Viewing: Night Without Distance (Lois Patino, 2002), Thames Film (William Raban, 1986)

Listening: Sensing Electromagnetics (Various Artists, 2016)

Workshop: developing student projects, fieldwork

Week 9: Studio time, developing student projects.

Week 10: Studio time, developing student projects.

Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- Students will develop both practical and theoretical approaches to documentary, through an engagement with a variety of examples of experimental documentary practice being used to investigate a range of environmental, political, and cultural issues. The practical work will help them to engage inventively with the theory, and the theoretical grounding will allow them to develop innovative and rigorously experimental practical work. At the end of the module students will undertake a practical project (negotiated with the module tutor) employing sound and/or video recording techniques. They will develop their own conceptually rationalised practical method for investigating an issue of their choice.

Indicative reading list

- Erika Balsom and Hila Peleg, *Documentary Across Disciplines* (London: MIT Press, 2016).
- Catherine Russell, *Experimental Ethnography: The Work of Film in the Age of Video*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999)
- Scott MacDonald, *Avant-Doc: Intersections Of Documentary And Avant-Garde Cinema* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).
- Julian Stallabrass, *Documentary* (London: Whitechapel, 2013).
- David MacDougall, *The Corporeal Image: Film, Ethnography and the Senses* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).
- T.J. Demos, *The Migrant Image: The Art and Politics of Documentary during Global Crisis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013)
- Helen Hughes, *Green Documentary: Environmental Documentary Film in the 21st Century* (Bristol: Intellect, 2014).
- Sarah Pink, *Doing Sensory Ethnography* (London: SAGE, 2009).
- Ilisa Barbash and Lucien Taylor, *Cross-Cultural Filmmaking: A Handbook for Making Documentary and Ethnographic Films and Videos* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).
- Michaela Schäuble, 'Mining Imagination: Ethnographic Approaches Beyond the Written Word' in *Anthrovision* Vol 4, No 2 (2016).
- Patrick Keiller, *The View from the Train: Cities and Other Landscapes* (London: Verso, 2014).
- R Murray Schafer, *Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (Rochester: Destiny Books, 1994).
- Angus Carlyle and Cathy Lane (eds.), *On Listening* (Axminster: Uniformbooks, 2013).
- Brandon LaBelle, *Acoustic Territories: Sound Culture and Everyday Life* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010).
- Michel Chion, *Sound: An Acouological Treatise* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).
- Torsten Wissmann, *Geographies of Urban Sound* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016).
- Patrick Tarrant, 'Reading the morphology of Ben Rivers's chemical landscapes' in *The Moving Image Review & Art Journal (MIRAJ)*, Volume 5, Numbers 1-2, 1 December 2016, pp. 58-68(11)
- Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1960).
- Marc Augé, *Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (London: Verso, 2009).
- Alberto Toscano and Jeff Kinkle, *Cartographies of the Absolute* (London: Zero Books, 2015).

Andrew Webber and Emma Wilson (eds.), *Cities In Transition: The Moving Image and the Modern Metropolis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

Research element

For the final student led project (80% of the final mark) each student develops a documentary project. During the term they submit a Project Proposal (20% of the final mark) in which they conceptualise the form and rationale for documentary project based on research into a chosen subject. In the final two weeks of the term they develop this project through supervised studio work.

Interdisciplinary

The module focuses on developing methodological approaches to investigating various cultural, political, economic and geographic phenomena using video and sound recording. As such the advanced practical documentary techniques learned on the module are applied within student led research projects that crossover into fields such as: ethnography; architecture; urban planning; geography, sociology, anthropology, political economics.

Subject specific skills

This module develops skills of audio-visual literacy, through close textual and/or contextual analysis in relation to the moving image and sound. It may also develop understandings of historical, theoretical and conceptual frameworks relevant to screen arts and cultures.

Transferable skills

- critical and analytical thinking
- independent research skills
- team work
- ability to 'pitch' a project
- practical skills: proficiency with professional video cameras, sound recorders and editing software, advanced skills in recording in the field
- clarity and effectiveness of communication in oral, written and audio-visual forms
- accurate, concise and persuasive writing
- audio-visual literacy

Study

Study time

Type	Required
Seminars	7 sessions of 2 hours (9%)
Total	150 hours

Type	Required
Practical classes	7 sessions of 2 hours (9%)
Supervised practical classes	2 sessions of 4 hours (5%)
Online learning (independent)	9 sessions of 1 hour 30 minutes (9%)
Private study	100 hours 30 minutes (67%)
Total	150 hours

Private study description

Viewing and reading, independent research around chosen documentary subject.

Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

Assessment

You do not need to pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Assessment group A1

	Weighting	Study time
Project proposal (1000 word)	20%	
Negotiated sound or video based project	80%	

Feedback on assessment

Use of standard departmental feedback form for written feedback on both written and practical work.

Availability

Courses

This module is Core optional for:

- Year 4 of UHPA-RP43 Undergraduate Hispanic Studies with Film Studies

This module is Optional for:

- Year 3 of UFIA-W620 Undergraduate Film Studies
- Year 4 of UFIA-W621 Undergraduate Film Studies (with Year Abroad)

- Year 4 of UFIA-QW25 Undergraduate Film and Literature
- Year 4 of UFIA-QW26 Undergraduate Film and Literature (with Study Abroad)

This module is Core option list A for:

- Year 4 of UGEA-RP33 Undergraduate German with Film Studies

This module is Option list A for:

- Year 3 of UFIA-QW25 Undergraduate Film and Literature
- Year 4 of UFRA-R1WA Undergraduate French with Film Studies