

# Lecture 5

**Documentary, features, docudrama**

- Documentary is an important programme format that has roots in photography and painting.
- The most fundamental urge human beings have is to **record reality**.
- The objective is to record reality so that someone else can experience that moment either with us or without us at a later moment.

- The first attempts to make moving pictures were documentary. Dramatic story-telling uses of the medium came later.
- In reality, however, documentary format in film, video or television also narrates stories, but of a factual kind.

- Film quickly became a news medium, and television continued the use of moving image to convey reports of people, places and events.
- Recently, some documentary films have been distributed as theatrical feature films competing with fictional dramas and comedies.
- E.g. Bowling for Columbine.

# *Television and documentary*

- Television remains the main distributor of documentary programmes.
- Most documentary filmmakers look to television to commission or buy the broadcast rights of their work.

- With its inexhaustible appetite for documentary material that communicates information, explain ideas or to record history, television and cable have kept the tradition alive.
- E.g. of TV documentary channels: Discovery Channel, NGC.

# *What is documentary?*

- Root word = document or in Latin **documentum**. It means a teaching, an instruction or a warning in Latin.
- In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the meaning shifted to something that is written or inscribed that furnishes evidence; such as a deed or a contract.
- Hence, a document is a record of something that establishes a fact.

- Documentary contains the idea or intention that is evidence establishing a fact, that is telling the truth.
- The name of the genre suggests an action of documenting a factual story in moving and still pictures.
- It can be a story of a person, an historical period, an historical event, an animal species, a work of art or any other topic of investigation.

- The essence of the documentary form is that it attempts to tell or show the truth in its totality. The commitment to record reality can result in shocking or disturbing material.
- The power of images to show the truth makes visual media compelling and persuasive.
- A dramatised documentary of real people and real events and employing actors to portray what the writer imagines could have happened.

# How to construct a documentary

- Time representation of something rests on knowledge. Knowledge rests on research.
- Research takes on many forms. It can be picture research, location research, factual research, background research, and interviews with people or historical research.
- Documentaries fall broadly into types according to their point of view.

- Objective Documentary → to record of true observation, showing things as they are.
- Point of View Documentary → an examination of factual matter but from a point of view that is declared

# Scripted and unscripted approaches

- Most directors shoot unscripted documentaries.
- Documentaries can be divided into 2 broad categories:

- Highly researched and structured.
- i. Historical and biographical documentary tends to need scripting to establish a structure or narrative order.
- Those which are observational or a filmed record of things as they happen.
- i. Shots of opportunity often occur on location, and a good director knows when to impose or grab an unforeseen opportunity.

## *Research and formulating a theme*

- Factual background, location research and picture research are necessary when creating a documentary.
- Research is based on reading background, on interviews with experts, on life visits, and on archives of both still and moving pictures.
- From research, a writer can establish what material exists, find a theme, and choose a way of organising the narrative exposition.

## *Role of the writer*

- Their roles are different for different types of documentaries.
- Writing is largely restricted to the development phase for other types of media writing but is co-existent with production and post-production for documentary.

- In post-production the writer returns to write voice-over narration.
- Only dramatised documentary in which real events are reconstructed or historical characters are portrayed is fully scripted because you need setting, action and dialogues.

# The proposal

- The proposal or concept sets out the idea of the documentary, the potential and the promise.
- Distributor of television network buys the idea with a promise to make payment on delivery for a specific number of broadcasts in a specific territory over a specified time.

# *The treatment*

- The importance of the treatment is to organise the structure and the argument of the documentary and the intended sequence of visuals.
- The treatment could be a scene outline that would identify locations and interview subjects.