

Table of contents and Abstracts – Spring 2014

Table of contents and Abstracts – Spring 2014

- [About us](#)
- [Articles in English](#)
- [Archive](#)
- [Current Issue](#)

Table of contents – Spring 2014

DOCUMENTARY AND PROPAGANDA

[Ervin Török: Documentary and Propaganda \(Introduction\)](#)

Questions of ethics and aesthetics in documentaries

[Dai Vaughan: The Aesthetics of Ambiguity](#)

[David MacDougall: When Less is Less: The Long Take in Documentary](#)

[Linda Williams: Truth, History and the New Documentary](#)

Propaganda through film

[Jonathan Auerbach and Russ Castronovo: Thirteen Propositions about Propaganda](#)

[Magí Crussels: Cinema as a political propaganda during the Spanish civil war: ESPAÑA 1936](#)

[András Lénárt: Censorship, propaganda and feature films in the Spanish dictatorship](#)

[Zsolt Győri: On the cultural and aesthetic ideology of the Hollywood war genre](#)

Documentation and persuasion in contemporary documentaries

[Zsolt Zsombor Kapás: Biased objectivity? Documentarism and propaganda in Michael Moore's films](#)

Student's Workshop

Balázs Kellner: The act of (re)construction in documentarist fiction: Case study on Joshua Oppenheimer's *The Act of Killing*

Budapest School – Interviews

Pál Czirják: “We make films during the process of filmmaking” – Interview with Györgyi Szalai, director

Pál Czirják: “This is a wonderfully free genre” – Interview about the Budapest School with Ferenc Pap, cameraman

ABSTRACTS

Ervin Török: Documentary and Propaganda (Introduction)

The introductory study to the present issue of Apertúra provides an overview of the conceptual field within which socially relevant documentaries may be discussed. Documentaries differ from the actuality of early films in one way, and they differ from unedited recordings called in this study verité in another way. The most important difference separating documentaries from the latter forms is the fact that documentaries are works meant to be shown publicly, and they not only register phenomena, but rather present them as facts, within an interpretive context. The context into which documentaries arrive (termed as documentaries) in 1920s is characterized by a tension between factors such as the spectacular news, “production of agreement” (Walter Lippmann) in mass society, ethnological and anthropological interest, and the rapidly forming language of the new medium. The study argues that the dividing line between propaganda, understood as the conciliation of social conflicts and documentaries, is dynamic and constantly shifting. Since the modern understanding of propaganda supposes that propaganda explains and reveals the meaning of an act that is regarded as necessary, it is impossible to interpret the documentaries' striving for truth as a result of presenting facts, but rather as asking questions, supposing that these questions are not merely rhetorical.

Dai Vaughan: The Aesthetics of Ambiguity

According to Dai Vaughan's study, a documentary is perceived by the spectator as something pre-filmic. With this idea used as a starting point, all films can be read as documentaries, since a “documentary” is a way of making a film. However, since selection processes are not explicit in a film, it is impossible to compare the film with the pre-filmic. In order to fulfill the ethical responsibility connected to documentaries (i.e. insisting on the pre-filmic), the director needs to

organize the recorded material as a coherent act of communication. Using dilemmas characterizing shooting and cutting, the article explores the way in which an ethical question becomes an aesthetic question of arranging the film. Documentaries fulfill the states of film as shot material and film as language at the same time. The tension between these two results in what he calls the “ambiguity” of the film, which also defines the relation of the director and the audience to a documentary. The conclusion of the essay is that documentaries resemble poetry from several respects, since poetic language attempts to free words from the rules of syntax and semantics, while documentaries also confront symbolic reduction, in order to preserve, in their images, a pre-filmic density and saturation.

David MacDougall: When Less is Less: The Long Take in Documentary

David MacDougall examines the causes and consequences of the new status of long camera takes which were the norm in the early days of cinema but are no longer used in the documentary practice. First, the author gives an outline of the history of approaches to long takes, then focuses on the difficulty of defining the term. MacDougall discusses the process of viewing film images in the context of viewing practices in general, and he emphasizes that film-viewing conventions are culturally determined. He explores the ambivalent relation between the rushes and the final form of the film, and the lost qualities of the edited film. He argues that takes cut short reduce the viewers’ opportunities for creating meaning. Finally, he concentrates on the prospects of long take in new communicative structures.

Linda Williams: Truth, History and the New Documentary

The study analyses examples of documentaries from the late 1980s, films that were popular and that used explicitly methods of fiction, placing the author in the foreground: *The Thin Blue Line* (Errol Morris, 1987) and *Shoah* (Claude Lanzmann, 1985). The argument shows that the crisis of the postmodern episteme and the shattering of the historical consciousness do not necessarily entail the complete disappearance of “reference” and the bracketing of reality, but rather lead to a more differentiated understanding of the notion of truth.

Jonathan Auerbach and Russ Castronovo: Thirteen Propositions about Propaganda

The text is an excerpt from the introductory study of *The Oxford Handbook of Propaganda Studies*, and contains the first and larger part of the original, in which the authors summarize the basic principles of their proposed approach to propaganda studies, and offer an outline of the history of the related concepts and social contexts (the second part of the introduction that is not published here deals with the structure of the volume and the logic connecting the individual text). In order to propose new approaches to propaganda studies, the authors formulate thirteen theses, and define propaganda as something that is connected to mass persuasion, as something that has unique historical roots, which precede its modern bad reputation. The propositions deal with the affective and moral dimension of propaganda, with the relationship between propaganda and communal institutions, between propaganda and other forms of informing the public, such as

advertisement, education and religion, and offer a functionalist and pragmatic approach to propaganda studies, focusing on the way information passes through diverse media networks – rather than dealing with content analysis. The author's regard the audience of mass persuasion not in the conventional way as unintelligent receivers of the message, but rather as active consumers, who play a crucial role in formulating past, present and future propagandistic meanings and effects, both in totalitarian and in more democratic societies.

Magí Crussels: Cinema as a political propaganda during the Spanish civil war: *ESPAÑA 1936*

The documentary film *España 1936* has passed into history for its strictly cinematic values (being one of the first examples of a cinematic montage of war) and for the degree of participation that Luis Buñuel, one of the most famous Spanish film-makers, had in the documentary. A work that, even today, continues to provoke various hypotheses.

András Lénárt: Censorship, propaganda and feature films in the Spanish dictatorship

The aim of this paper is to outline the main features of the film policy of Franco's regime (1939-1975) from the aspects of the prevailing ideology, propaganda and censorship. Among dictatorships of the 20th century, the Spanish regime was the one that made a particular use of motion pictures in order to assist the basic principles of domestic and foreign policy, and to manipulate members of the society. A well-planned legal and institutional background paved the way for the successful Francoist film propaganda.

Zsolt Gyóri: On the cultural and aesthetic ideology of the Hollywood war genre

My paper examines the cultural representation of war with special emphasis on discursive practices that aim to rationalize it through binary oppositions. The empowerment and strengthening of individual and collective identities is a key feature of the identity politics inscribed into the war-rhetoric. At the focus of my paper is the us/them antagonism which I regard to be a widely used cultural narrative offering points of positive identification for the "us" side, while depriving the values and norms associated with civilized and cultured communities and beings from the "them" side. In the second part of my paper (1) I examine selected titles from the classic Hollywood war genre as outspoken examples of how the us/them dichotomy promotes and necessitate the embracing of normative values, and (2) analyse two films by Stanley Kubrick where the discourse of such antagonisms is contested and criticised.

Zsolt Zsombor Kapás: Biased objectivity? Documentarism and propaganda in Michael Moore's films

The political documentaries of Michael Moore raise questions about the relations between propaganda and documentarism. Reconsidering the relation of these concepts may be a significant aspect in the interpretations of his movies. This essay intends to analyze this aspect through the historically diverse documentary traditions. From the various documentary strategies of the past and present, Moore appreciably draws from the so-called "engaged cinema" tradition

as well as documentary tendencies where the filmmaker becomes – more or less – the “main character” of his/her work. It is possible to analyze Moore’s attitude as a filmmaker through these traditions and documentary forms, and to specify the variegation of his image, while focusing on the attributes of his moviemaking techniques and political tone, which he uses to persuade and mobilize his audience.

Balázs Kellner: The act of (re)construction in documentarist fiction: Case study on Joshua Oppenheimer’s *The Act of Killing*

Joshua Oppenheimer’s *The Act of Killing* (2012) is a documentary about the genocide that happened in Indonesia nearly fifty years ago. It is not possible to reveal the full event from the point of view of former victims and their families, so the director chose to combine documentarist elements with conventions of fictional genres. He gives a camera to his protagonist, a former mass murderer, who can thus dramatize his own past, and the sequences recorded are later used by the director. The result is a multi-layered hybrid work, which can be described by the term *documentarist fiction*. The paper examines the relationship between these two registers, diverse documentarist conventions, the narrative structure of diegesis, as well as the characteristics of the medium, while looking for an answer to the question whether this unconventional work, with its double identity, is able to report about the historical trauma that has been distorted by people presently in power.

Pál Czirják: “We make films during the process of filmmaking” – Interview with Györgyi Szalai, director

Györgyi Szalai, a director and screenwriter of several documentarist fictions, is one of the emblematic authors of the Budapest School. The interview spans through several decades, from the starting of her career at the turn of the sixties and seventies until the fall of the regime, and discusses methodological problems of documentarist fiction, the questions connected with the selection and instruction of amateur actors – a signature feature of the school – as well as the preparations, shooting and permission procedures of crucial films, sometimes revealing whole stories from the initial idea to realization, and even to critical reception. A particular emphasis is given to the opening film of the series *Jutalomutazás* (Prize Trap, 1974), but other films are discussed as well, such as *Filmregény* (Film Novel, 1977), *Harcmodor* (Army Tactics, 1979), *Dédelgetett kedvenceink* (Cherished Favourites, 1980) and *Átváltozás* (Transformation, 1983). College years, the entrance exam and the structure of studies are mentioned, as well as the role of Balázs Béla Studio and *Nevelésügyi sorozat* (Pedagogical Series, 1973-74).

Pál Czirják: “This is a wonderfully free genre” – Interview about the Budapest School with Ferenc Pap, cameraman

From among the diverse oeuvre of Ferenc Pap, this interview focuses on documentarist feature film. The artists played an important role in this genre, and it is his name that appears most frequently in the credits of related works done by the Budapest School. He talks in detail about the

basic works of the genre, including *Jutalomutazás* (The Prize Trap, Dárday István, 1974), *Filmregény* (Film Novel, Dárday István, 1977), *Családi tűzfészek* (Family Nest, Tarr Béla, 1977) and *Adj király katonát!* (The Princess, Erdőss Pál, 1982), sharing interesting details about the production and the methodology of works from his unique perspective of the cameraman. The college years as the early stage of his career are also recalled in the interview.

© Apertúra, 2014. tavasz | www.apertura.hu

webcím: <https://www.apertura.hu/2014/tavasz/table-of-contents-and-abstracts-spring-2014/>

