

Component 2

Global filmmaking perspectives

Section B: *Documentary Film*

3. Filmmakers' Theories

Introduction (from the specification)

The documentary film will be explored in relation to **key filmmakers** from the genre.

The documentary film studied may either **directly embody aspects of these theories** or work in a way that **strongly challenges** these theories. In either case, the theories will provide a means of **exploring different approaches** to documentary film and filmmaking.

Two of the following filmmakers' theories must be chosen for study:

Peter Watkins

Watkins established his reputation with two docu-dramas from the 1960s, *Culloden* and *The War Game*. Both document events from the past using actors and reconstruction. In asking questions of conventional documentary, Watkins reflects his deep concern with mainstream media, which he has called the 'monoform'.

Nick Broomfield

Broomfield, like Michael Moore, has developed a participatory, performative mode of documentary filmmaking. Broomfield is an investigative documentarist with a distinctive interview technique which he uses to expose people's real views. Like Watson, he keeps the filmmaking presence to a minimum, normally with a crew of no more than three. He describes his films as 'like a rollercoaster ride. They're like a diary into the future.'

Kim Longinotto

Longinotto has said 'I don't think of films as documents or records of things. I try to make them as like the experience of watching a fiction film as possible, though, of course, nothing is ever set up.' Her work is about finding characters that the audience will identify with – 'you can make this jump into someone else's experience'. Unlike Moore and Broomfield, Longinotto is invisible, with very little use of voice-over, formal interviews, captions or incidental music. As the 'eyes' of her audience, she doesn't like to zoom or pan. She says she doesn't want her films to have conclusions but to raise questions.

Michael Moore

Moore, like Broomfield, is a very visible presence in his documentaries, which can thus be described as participatory and performative. His work is highly committed – overtly polemical in taking up a clear point of view, what might be called agit-prop documentary. He justifies his practice in terms of providing 'balance' for mainstream media that, in his view, provides false information. Part of Moore's approach is to use humour, sometimes to lampoon the subject of his work and sometimes to recognise that documentaries need to entertain and hold an audience.

1. Initial approaches

Teachers are encouraged to look at **two** of these filmmakers in relation to their own chosen text. The expectation is that two of these filmmaker's ideas will be debated alongside the specific study. These might be reinforced in relation to the film as a whole or to individual sequences however it might also be, that these ideas may well be contested also. Using the ideas behind the work of Kim Longinotto, Peter Watkins, Nick Broomfield and Michael Moore it is hoped will enlighten the study of one of the following chosen documentary films:

- ***Sisters in Law* (Ayisi and Longinotto, Cameroon and UK, 2005)**
- ***The Arbor* (Barnard, UK, 2010)**
- ***Stories We Tell* (Polley, Canada, 2012)**
- ***20,000 Days on Earth* (Forsyth and Pollard, UK 2014)**
- ***Amy* (Kapadia, UK, 2005)**

A good starting point might be to look at a brief biographical synopsis of each filmmaker and some online resource links

Kim Longinotto



Kim Longinotto (born 1952) is a British documentary filmmaker, well known for making films that highlight the plight of female victims of oppression or discrimination. Longinotto studied camera and directing at the National Film and Television School in Beaconsfield, England, where she now tutors occasionally.

Longinotto was born to an Italian father and a Welsh mother; her father was a photographer who later went bankrupt. At the age of 10 she was sent to a draconian all-girls boarding school, where she found it hard to make friends due to the mistress forbidding anyone to talk to her for a term after she became lost during a school trip. After a period of homelessness, Longinotto went on to Essex University to study English and European literature and later followed friend and future filmmaker, Nick Broomfield to the National Film and Television School. While studying, she made a documentary about her boarding school that was shown at the London Film Festival, since when she has continued to be a prolific documentary filmmaker.

Longinotto is an observational filmmaker. Observational cinema, also known as direct cinema, free cinema or cinema verite, usually excludes certain documentary techniques such as advanced planning, scripting, staging, narration, lighting, re-enactment and interviewing. Longinotto's unobtrusiveness, which is an important part of observational documentary, gives the women on camera a certain voice and presence that may not have emerged with another documentary genre.

(from Women Make Movies <http://www.wmm.com/filmcatalog/makers/fm44.shtml>)

- a. Watch these short films where Longinotto discusses her filmmaking style.
What are the main features of how she makes films?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7mbhDKNqE9Y>

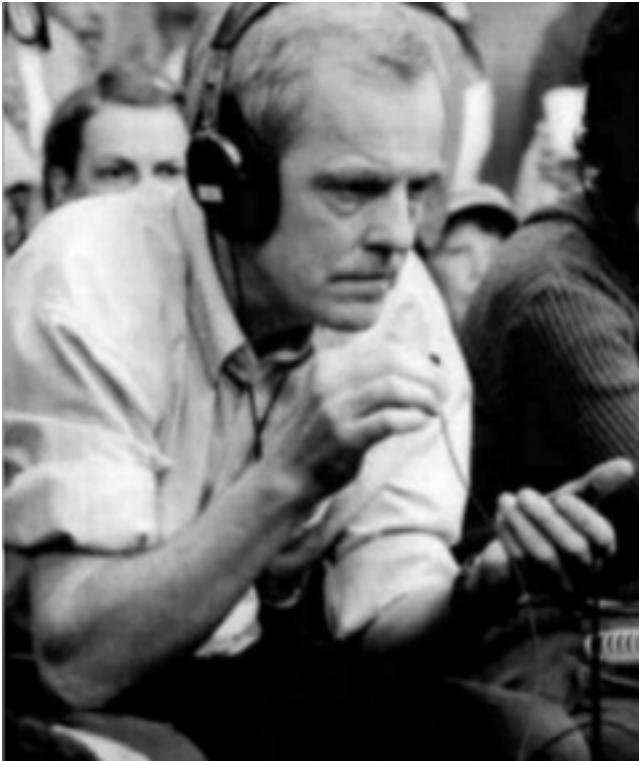
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B7v2Pz_Bjoi

- b. Look at the opening five minutes of Longinotto's film *Divorce Iranian Style* (1999).
How far are her ideas about filmmaking (from these two short films) reflected here?

On screen short summary of Kim Longinotto's work

- **A British director who works in observational documentary**
- **Her subject matter has a primary focus on women's lives**
- **She favours long takes and she tries to capture the extraordinary in the lives of the subjects that she observes**
- **The stories that she brings to the screen are often uniquely personal, mainly focusing on society's outsiders**
- **Her films shot in a calm, unobtrusive style, often centre on victims of discrimination and oppression and tell the stories of strong female characters fighting for change and justice**
- **She has worked in a number of different countries around the world for example Iran, Cameroon, Japan and the US**
- **Her key films *Dreamcatcher* (2015), *Rough Aunties* (2008) and *Divorce Iranian Style* (1998) all expose the raw immediacy in her films**
- **It could be argued that her perspective on the range of different cultures she encounters in her films gives a real sense of herself as an 'outsider' filmmaker**

Peter Watkins



Watkins' **experimental, provocative, controversial and polemical cinema** and his own forthright, abrasive personality have led to a frustrating, if not entirely unsurprising, marginalisation of both the director and his work. Watkins' pioneering 'docudrama' style – a bold and vivid collage of newsreel type footage, voice-over narration, roving hand-held camerawork, fourth-wall-breaking sequences and frequent use of amateur actors – has blurred the lines between fact and fiction in pseudo-documentary films that cast a critical eye over past, present and near-future political issues.

More influential than many might realise, elements of Watkins' groundbreaking filmmaking technique have had a noticeable impact on televisual docudramas, the documentary form itself, big-screen 'mockumentaries', the Dogme 95 directors and the films of [Peter Greenaway](#) and [Michael Winterbottom](#) among many others.

It is the accessibility of the films themselves, however, which could be a stumbling block for potential new viewers. These stylistically and thematically intense works demand emotional and intellectual engagement, constructed, as they are, to question, probe and prod at official versions of history, prevailing socio-political thinking and the role of mass media in controlling mediums and messages. Watkins' stark and socially conscious cinema has tackled nuclear destruction, political oppression, police brutality, teenage suicide and workers' rights, alongside other similarly highly charged topics. Unsettling, barbed and at times draining they may be, but Watkins' films deserve a place in any cinephile's viewing schedule.

For the uninitiated, the best place to dive in is with the two striking anti-war films the then young director made for the BBC in the mid-1960s: [Culloden](#) (1964) and [The War Game](#) (1965). Perfect primers for Watkins' fearlessly distinctive style, the former is a revisionist reconstruction of the unforgivably mishandled 1746 battle of Culloden, which amounted to a one-sided slaughter of the Scottish forces, and the latter a terrifying worst-case scenario vision of nuclear war. Both films broke new ground in terms of the on-screen representation of fact and fiction by the use of filmmaking techniques not readily associated with the respective subject matters at hand.

In the harrowing *Culloden*, which placed a focus on the rank and file combatants rather than the elite decision-makers, Watkins' employment of documentary filmmaking traits in an impossible scenario drew attention to form and style. This radical, and successful, conceit – a

contemporary camera crew being present in the midst of a historical event – added a vital immediacy to the director’s unvarnished retelling of one of Britain’s bloodiest battles.

The following year, *The War Game*, a 48-minute entry for the BBC’s Wednesday Play strand, proved to be a bittersweet work for its director. A hellish vision of a nuclear attack on Britain by the Soviet Union, Watkins’ employers and/or the British government balked at the terrifying imagery and damning politics on display and the film was withdrawn from being broadcast.

Eventually screened publicly, it won the 1966 Academy Award for best documentary feature, its masterful blending of reportage, interviews and voiceover narration into a faux ‘news magazine’ docudrama gaining the plaudits it richly deserved. Watkins’ most (in) famous film – in terms of international recognition and the cowardly original decision to suppress it – remains a shocking but vital viewing experience to this day.

Watkins worked in America and Sweden (where he lived for a number of years after quitting the UK) on a string of films that saw the director continually developing his style as well as using colour for the first time.

While 1967’s critically mauled *Privilege* – a quasi-biopic of a pop star manipulated by the state to help control the masses – is an intriguing but hit and miss affair, Watkins returned to politically scathing form with *The Gladiators* (1969) and *Punishment Park* (1971). The subjugation of the masses continued to be a theme in both films. Violent, corporate sponsored televised ‘peace games’ is a focus of *The Gladiator*, while *Punishment Park* saw the state sanctioned hunting of perceived radicals, political dissidents and anti-war protesters. In each case, Watkins presciently anticipates and condemns mindless mass entertainment, class prejudice, abuses of power and the politics of fear in openly confrontational fashion.

The savage *Punishment Park*, made and released during the Vietnam War and the climate of student protests in America at the time, did not go down well across the Atlantic, but its subsequent place as a Masters of Cinema release points to its importance stylistically and thematically.

After three years of negotiations with Norwegian and Swedish state television, Watkins secured the funding to make what he himself has called his most personal film, *Edvard Munch* (1974). Covering a 30-year period of the Norwegian Expressionist artist’s life, Watkins’ stunning film, perhaps his finest, delves deep into the shaping of an artistic life, the creative process and the prevailing philosophies and politics of the time. That he achieved such impressive results using a non-professional cast, improvisation and anachronistic dialogue is a testament to Watkins’ own, by then fully formed, artistic talents. Called “a work of genius” by *Ingmar Bergman*, *Edvard Munch* showcases a filmmaker very much in control of his chosen medium and the intellectual concerns he explored through it.

Watkins’ later films are best left until last, not because of quality but because of length. Launching oneself into Watkins’ distinctive oeuvre with the 14½ hour film *The Journey* (1987), a global study of the social, economic and political implications of life lived in the nuclear age, produced by the Swedish Peace and Arbitration Society, would be a test even for the hardest of cineastes. Engrossing viewing though it is, *The Journey* is one to save and digest in bite-sized chunks after the majority of Watkins’ other films have been viewed.

Shorter than *The Journey*, but still running at four and a half hours, is *The Freethinker* (1994), made in collaboration with the students of the Nordens Folk High School outside of Stockholm. Focusing on the life of volatile dramatist August Strindberg, complex in structure and noticeably a student-led project in terms of production values, *The Freethinker* is perhaps for completists only. It does, nonetheless, brim with the intellectual and experimental vitality that runs throughout Watkins' films.

Though an essential part of Watkins' output, the five and three-quarter hour long, *La Commune (Paris, 1871)* may also prove to be too daunting as an entry point into his work. An ambitious, Brechtian retelling of the formation and subsequent collapse of the revolutionary socialist government that briefly held power in the French capital, *La Commune (Paris, 1871)* was shot in black and white over just 13 days in a disused factory and features more than 200 non-professionals on screen. Criminally underappreciated and as formally daring as anything on the director's impressive CV, it's a richly rewarding experience to keep in reserve until Watkins' more accessible films are under your belt.

(from the bfi)

<http://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/news-bfi/features/fast-track-fandom-where-begin-peter-watkins>

c. Watch these short clips from Watkins' best known films *Culloden* and *The War Game*.

Culloden

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f_wE-j2gMO4

The War Game

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nzd_VE-bfhA&list=PLXE1pLvfhDyBpUKqyxqHhAxxRi9RW0Bdc&index=2

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VWr7omWJHyo&index=3&list=PLXE1pLvfhDyBpUKqyxqHhAxxRi9RW0Bdc>

What are the main stylistic features used here and examine their overall effect?

d. Look closely at the film critic Danny Leigh's interpretation of Peter Watkins' work (00.00-6.36)

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02xbpx9>

Pinpoint what you think are Leigh's most useful ideas on the key features of Watkins work on *Culloden* and *The War Game*.

Compare and contrast how his reading of Watkin's work tallies with your own from (c).

Onscreen short summary of Peter Watkins' work

- A British director whose best known and most highly regarded work was made in the 1960s.
- His early work *Diary of an Unknown Soldier* (1959) and *The Forgotten Faces* (1960) started his experimentation with film form in terms of using a mock 'newsreel' style, developing his work in relation to a media constructed version of reality.
- These ideas were taken further in his best known works *Culloden* (1964) and *The War Game* (1966) which exhibit his hallmark techniques – hand-held camera, direct-to-camera address, the near-surreal reportage of a historical event (*Culloden*) and a pre-constructed event (*The War Game*).
- He used largely amateur actors in the reconstructions in the films to add a naturalism to the proceedings.
- He utilised a number of devices in *The War Game* to recreate the type of television programme which may have reported this event (and in turn offer a critique of this sort of representation) – juxtaposition of interview, graphics, titles and the collision of dry data with images of shocking horror, use of tele-photo, sudden zooms and an strong immediacy unique for the time.
- Although *The War Game* won a best documentary Oscar, the film was banned by the BBC for 25 years as its content and no doubt its presentation was too shocking
- Watkins has pursued his ideas on how the media represents reality (monoform), but his film output over the past 50 years has been outside of the UK and has been limited for such a visionary director.

Nick Broomfield



Nick Broomfield was born in London in 1948. He made his first film, *Who Cares?* (1971), with financial aid from the British Film Institute while studying politics and law at Essex University. Its subject is a close-knit but threatened working class community in Liverpool, and the influence of Willmott and Young's classic study *Family and Kinship in East London* is clear, but even in this early work Broomfield's characteristic sense of personal involvement is already apparent; as he himself put it: "everything at university was at a very conceptual, analytical level, and I felt a need to look at things in a more immediate way."

After Essex, Broomfield joined the National Film School at Beaconsfield, where he made *Proud to Be British* (1973), in which the town's inhabitants speak their minds on what it means to be British (or, rather, English). The already mischievous Broomfield obviously revelled in the opportunity to record such open displays of Blimpishness, and clearly annoyed the *Buckinghamshire Advertiser*, which disapprovingly noted that "it was difficult to avoid the conclusion that this was a film about private schooling, the Church and the Conservative party made by a left-wing, pro-comprehensive atheist." While there he also made the Grierson Award-winning *Behind the Rent Strike* (1974), which features some of the people from *Who Cares?* As Broomfield points out: "it was an answer to the views of Britain expressed in the previous film, and the two are meant to be played together."

In 1976, Broomfield made the first of several films with the American filmmaker Joan Churchill, whom he'd met at the National Film School and who had already made a name for herself in the US with documentaries such as *The American Family* (1973). Their films are less overtly confrontational than Broomfield's solo works, belonging more to the tradition of direct or observational cinema in the Frederick Wiseman mode.

Of these, one of the most interesting, and certainly the most controversial, is the BFI-funded *Juvenile Liaison* (1975), which had its roots in *Behind the Rent Strike*. This follows two Lancashire police officers in their dealings with young people in trouble with the law. An extremely disturbing picture of harsh and oppressive police treatment of children accused of minor offences, it became a censorship cause celebre when the BFI, pressured by the police, withdrew it from distribution and refused to allow it to be shown on television, thus causing its Production Board to resign en masse. Broomfield later revisited the subject, without the accompanying controversy, in *Juvenile Liaison 2* (1990).

Partly because they found Britain "such a hypocritical and repressive country in terms of media freedom", Broomfield and Churchill made a number of films in the US until their relationship, both working and personal, broke up in the mid-1980s, although they were later to work together again. After this watershed, Broomfield developed a less observational, more **up-front style, not so much fly on the wall as fly in the soup**, which can first be seen to great effect in *Driving Me Crazy* (1988), a film about the making of a film of a black stage musical. This is really the first of his works which illustrates, hilariously, his dictum that:

If you're making a film, it's more honest to make your presence felt than to hang back furtively on the other side of the room, because no-one really benefits from that. That approach really is, to use the dread word, voyeuristic. You're there with all your equipment, but pretending you're not there.

The reason why he uses a more **participatory approach**, he has explained, is because "what's important is the interaction between the filmmakers and those being filmed, and that the audience is aware of that interaction so they can make decisions of their own."

Daringly, Broomfield also used the same technique in his film on the South African neo-Nazi leader Eugene Terreblanche, *The Leader, His Driver and the Driver's Wife* (1991). One of his finest works, it demonstrates how effective **his apparently chaotic and eccentric shooting methods** can be; by concentrating on what appear to be the inessentials, approaching his subject obliquely and, apparently, missing it altogether, the *faux-naif* Broomfield strikes to the heart of the matter - in this case Neanderthal attitudes towards race.

Following this he tried the same technique with Lady Thatcher in *Tracking down Maggie* (1994); needless to say, he does no such thing, and the film is thus less successful than its predecessor. Nonetheless, by repeatedly showing the remarkable extent to which Thatcher was sealed off from both the public and 'unauthorised' media by her creepy entourage of minders, Broomfield effectively evoked the aura of unaccountability, and delusions of regal grandeur, which increasingly enveloped the lady.

In 1989 Broomfield made his first, and so far only, fictional feature film, *Diamond Skulls*. In spite of a promisingly acerbic storyline (based on the disappearance of Lord Lucan), it somehow fails to deliver the damning portrait of aristocratic sleaze, thuggery and hypocrisy that one might have expected from Broomfield. Returning to documentary mode and his now trademark (if increasingly imitated) in-your-face style, Broomfield concentrated mainly on American subjects (although he also put it to use in a number of advertisements for Volkswagen). In particular he began to focus on 'celebrities' and on the media circus that surrounds and indeed constructs them.

This is particularly the case in *Aileen Wuornos: The Selling of a Serial Killer* (1992), but it's also there in *Heidi Fleiss - Hollywood Madam* (1995), *Biggie and Tupac* (2002), and *Kurt and Courtney* (1998). This last also raises the question of censorship once again, via Courtney Love and her lawyers' increasingly determined efforts to stop the film in its tracks. These give rise to one of the film's most characteristic moments, in which Broomfield interrupts an award-giving ceremony for Love hosted by the American Civil Liberties Union, which champions free speech, in order to protest at her efforts to silence him and others. He is rapidly evicted.

Like the work of Molly Dineen and Jon Ronson, Broomfield's later films are fascinating examples of what Stella Bruzzi calls the '**performative documentary**'. This, by openly acknowledging that the intrusion of the filmmaker into the situation being filmed inevitably affects and alters that situation, underlines the fact that the documentary is itself a mode of representation as opposed to unmediated reality and thus foregrounds the construction and artificiality of even the non-fiction film. This is not to imply that such documentaries are not concerned with getting at 'the truth', but, rather, that the truth emerges from the encounter between the film-makers, subjects and spectators.

(from <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/people/id/501784/>)

- e. This is a very long and interesting interview with Nick Broomfield from the Sheffield Documentary Festival in 2011. Watch the first 10-15 minutes of this interview. Identify what you think might be the key elements of Nick Broomfield's style of filmmaking.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=muH9PdnuFsE&list=PLjrSMn-kGsKi43zslgWBp5coqIZvrBUbP&index=7>

- f. Analyse closely this extended sequence from Nick Broomfield's film *Tracking Down Maggie* (1994) (2.44-11.20)

What are the key documentary techniques employed in this sequence by the filmmaker?

How far do the use of these techniques equate with his own viewpoints on his work from the interview looked at earlier.

<http://www.channel4.com/programmes/tracking-down-maggie/on-demand/19187-001>

Onscreen short summary of Nick Broomfield's work

- Nick Broomfield has made a number of interesting documentaries, much of his work focuses on the bizarre and/or darker side of life. Often he is attracted to interesting and difficult people and subject matter as challenging material. He has made a very diverse range of films from his portrait of the South African neo-Nazi Eugene Terreblanche (*The Leader, The Driver and The Driver's Wife* 1991), his film on the Hollywood prostitute Heidi Fleiss (*Heidi Fleiss: Hollywood Madam* 1996) and his investigation into the deaths of two well-known rap stars (*Biggie and Tupac*, 2002).
- He also has tended to focus in on the notion of celebrity whether that is in terms of political figures such as Margaret Thatcher (*Tracking Down Maggie*, 1994) or Sarah Palin (*You Betcha!* 2011) or tragic figures from popular culture: Kurt Cobain (*Kurt and Courtney*, 1998) and Whitney Houston (*Can I Be Me*, 2017)
- He appears in his films and we can often see the sound boom in the frame and we are also very aware of the camera.
- What is interesting about Broomfield is the persona that he presents in his films. His films are completely told from a subjective point of view and you feel that you are forced to adopt a position in order to fully understand what he is trying to say or achieve in his films. Broomfield doesn't seem to mind treading on peoples toes or upsetting his subjects.
- He can appear to be really disorganised and haphazard in his approach to his work and this works well on two levels.
- It establishes a link between Broomfield and the audience in a clear way. It is felt that the audience will like him as they will relate to his uncovering of the facts in the same way that they are trying to make meaning from what he is presenting them with.
- The subjects that Broomfield talks to on-camera are often as disarmed by his seemingly easy-going, relaxed persona as we are and as a result often they are willing to give a great deal of really interesting facts.
- In terms of film style a great deal of this is often down to the money (or lack of a secure budget). He often works with a small crew in one long take and his interview work is unscripted. The effect of the long takes attempts to create the feeling of spontaneity. His obvious fascination with his subjects is always apparent and his self-reflexive style means that he tends to intervene and question his subjects on the issues that he is curious about as well as addressing the audience directly.
- He also uses devices such as voice-over and establishing shots to foreground his point of view.

Michael Moore



Michael Moore, American filmmaker, [author](#), and political activist, who was best known for a series of [documentaries](#)—often controversial—that addressed major political and social issues in the United States.

Following his graduation from [high school](#), Moore, as an 18-year-old member of the Flint school board, began his [populist](#) assault on what he viewed as the injustices of American [capitalism](#). In 1976, after having attended but not graduated from the [University of Michigan](#) at [Flint](#), Moore started a radical weekly [newspaper](#), the *Flint Voice* (later *Michigan Voice*), which he edited for 10 years. He was later hired to edit the [San Francisco](#)-based left-wing [magazine](#) *Mother Jones* but was fired after a few months (he later accepted an out-of-court settlement for a wrongful-dismissal suit).

Returning to Flint, Moore filmed his first documentary, *Roger & Me* (1989), which chronicles the effects of [unemployment](#) in Flint due to the closing of two [General Motors](#) (GM) [factories](#) and the company's longer-term policy of downsizing. At the centre of the [film](#) were Moore's "in-your-face" efforts to gain an audience with GM's chairman, Roger Smith. Mixing [humour](#) and poignancy with indignation, *Roger & Me* was a hit with critics and at the box office. Moore subsequently moved to [New York City](#) and established Dog Eat Dog Films. He also created an organization to finance social-action groups and other filmmakers.

After producing three [television](#) series and other limited-release films—including the [comedy](#) *Canadian Bacon* (1995), in which a U.S. [president](#) starts a cold war with [Canada](#) in order to boost his approval ratings—Moore achieved major success with *Bowling for Columbine* (2002). The film, which profiles gun violence in the [United States](#), won the [Academy Award](#) for best [documentary](#). In his next documentary, *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004), Moore criticized U.S. Pres. [George W. Bush](#)'s handling of the [September 11 attacks](#) and the administration's decision to start the [Iraq War](#). Although highly controversial, it won the Golden Palm at the [Cannes film festival](#) and earned more than \$222 million worldwide to become the highest-grossing documentary.

In 2007 Moore released *Sicko*, an examination of the health care industry in the United States. For his next documentary, *Capitalism: A Love Story* (2009), Moore took a critical look at the U.S. economy, including the [subprime mortgage](#) crisis of 2007–08 and the subsequent bailout of [banks](#). *Where to Invade Next* (2015) unfavourably compared various aspects of daily life in other countries—such as educational practices and the balance between work and leisure—with those in the United States.

(from Britannica.com)

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Michael-Moore>

g. Looking at these two short interviews with Michael Moore, identify the key aspects of his work from what he says here.

An NPR interview on propaganda in Michael Moore's work focusing largely on *Sicko* (2007)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NHCSOdkrgSw>

This is a German interview on Moore's film *Bowling for Columbine* (2002)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7kNXg7XJris>

h. These are the trailers for three of Michael Moore's films;

Bowling for Columbine (2002)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hH0mSAjp_Jw#t=121.6597845

Fahrenheit 9/11 (2004)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yg-be2r7ouc>

Where to Invade Next (2016)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1KeAZho8TKo>

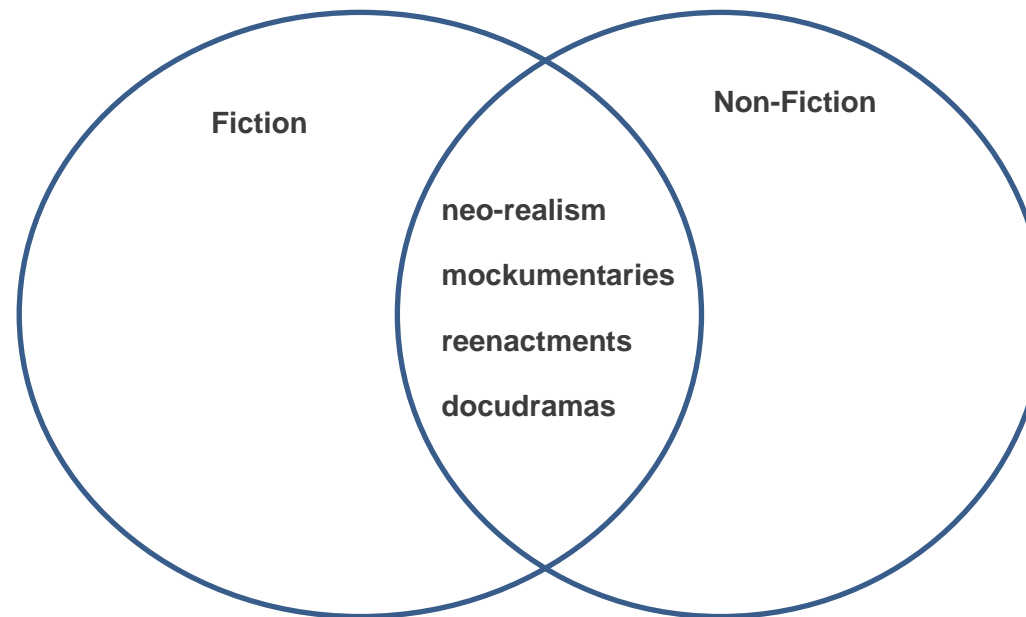
What are the common traits that these films share in terms of both style and subject matter?

Onscreen short summary of Michael Moore's work

- **Michael Moore is one of the best known filmmakers working in documentary today**
- **His first film *Roger and Me* (1989) dealt with the closure of the General Motors factories in his hometown of Flint in Michigan with a huge lay-off involving over 30000 workers. The film was driven by his own personal anger about how and why this was done.**
- **That said at the core of Moore's work is the use of comedy and dark satire which he uses to attack the institutions that he has targeted. He is also central to the films in terms of seeing him interviewing people and his everyman persona disarms and encourages a range of interesting responses. This is also underscored by his physical appearance.**
- **He wears casual clothes, a baseball cap and is overweight. However this seemingly, laidback persona does hide a sharp and incisive line of questioning which he uses to good effect.**
- **Although his work is polemical and can be seen as rather subjective, the way that comedy is employed whether by using clever expositional devices or by Moore's interviews themselves.**
- **A key part of Moore's approach is to concentrate on a particular agenda whether it be for example gun control (*Bowling for Columbine* (2002), the invasion of Iraq (*Fahrenheit 911*, 2004) or the American health care system (*Sicko*, 2007) and expand on a set of arguments around his perspective on these issues.**
- **Certainly he can be considered to be a voice of sorts for the American left and some of his films – especially *Columbine* and *Fahrenheit 911* were surprising successes at the global box office as well as winning major awards.**
- **His most recent work *Where to Invade Next* (2016) directly compares the US to a range of other countries across the world in terms of issues like equality, health and education provision.**

1. Making connections, exploring differences – Using Bill Nichols

An interesting way of drawing together some of the filmmaker's ideas/theories/approaches and your chosen film is to consider the work of Bill Nichols, a leading American film academic who wrote a seminal text on documentary form, *Introduction To Documentary* (Indiana University Press, 2nd edition, 2010)



(a) Using the table above on the relation of Fiction to Nonfiction in filmmaking from Bill Nicholls book *Introduction To Documentary* (Indiana University Press, 2nd edition, 2010):

- (i) Assess how your chosen film fits any aspect of this model
- (ii) How any of the filmmakers theories/ideas/approaches may fit this model
- (iii) Is there any overlap or not?

(b) Nichols identified what he termed as six modes of documentary. These were distinct cinematic modes which utilise a range of different filmic techniques. These modes help define the shape and feel of the documentary film and do serve to distinguish different types of documentary from each other.

(iv) Research Bill Nichols six modes of documentary and offer a brief definition of each:

(Answers hidden with *some* of the definitions taken directly from *Introduction to Documentary*)

Students should be able to match or even better some of these definitions.

Expository

Speak directly to the viewer with voice-over. These films use explicitly **rhetorical techniques** in order to explore points of **actuality**. They use voice-over and have a straightforward show and tell structure (with graphics/interviews/footage) where the viewer is **guided through the material**. Often television documentary falls into this category.

Poetic

Poetic mode shares a common terrain with the modernist avant-garde. This mode sacrifices the conventions of continuity editing and sense of place of a specific location in time and place. These films are allusive and often surprise and challenge students in what they think documentary are. They use 'associative' editing in order to create a mood or tone without making an explicit argument about a subject.

Observational

In this mode, the camera looks on as the participants in the film go on with their lives as though the camera wasn't present. The film-maker steps back from the material he/she is shooting taking a 'neutral' stance from the subject matter. Of course this may well (and should) open up debates about selection of material, lack of voiceover and editing devices.

Participatory

The filmmaker interacts with his or her participants. The relationship between the filmmaker and the person being filmed becomes more direct and complex. He or she directly participates in shaping what happens before the camera, especially in terms of conducting interviews.

Reflexive

This mode calls attention to the conventions of documentary filmmaking in terms of a direct acknowledgment of the filmmaking process.

Performative

This mode emphasizes the expressive quality of the filmmaker's engagement with the subject of the film and addresses the audience in a vivid way. This is where the filmmaker is not aloof from the subject matter but who **actively engages** with the material, where they are a seen participant.

(v) Firstly looking at the film that you are studying, which of the Nicholls modes does it fit?

(vi) If this is a not straight-forward fit what problems does this suggest about Nicholls' approach to defining documentary?

Possible answers for (vi)

- Some of these documentaries touch on a series of different modes through their narratives.
- There is some overlap between the modes, especially the last three participatory, reflexive and performative.
- Many of the documentary techniques may lend themselves to a particular mode than others.
- Clearly some films easy to define. *Sisters-in-Law* is observational. *The Arbor* and *20000 Days* have some elements of the expository also they could be said to be reflexive in revealing the mechanics of documentary filmmaking. *Stories We Tell* certainly it could be argued is both participatory and reflexive. *Amy* has a number of key elements at work which feed into the reflexive, expository and at times the poetic. Key arguments about the films mode according to Nicholls should reveal some key debates about approaches to documentary form.

- (vii) Using your chosen two filmmakers firstly establish where they might fit into Nicholls modes.
- (viii) How does this compare and contrast from your chosen documentary film?

1. Filmmakers quotes quiz

Use the digital resource to match the quotes to the filmmaker. Each time the activity is used one quote per film maker will be generated from a bank of four quotes each.

4. Grid approach

Identify the key comparisons and contrasts between two of the filmmakers' theories and your chosen film

Your chosen documentary film	Longinotto	Watkins	Broomfield	Moore
Comparisons				
Contrasts				

Independent learning exercises

It is advisable to have access to at least one of the films by these filmmakers on a college e-stream/YouTube/ learning resource centre. Films by Broomfield and Moore are currently available on Netflix and Amazon Prime.

- Watch a complete film by each of your chosen filmmakers.
- Do the films reaffirm what has been said previously about their work?
- How do these films impact on your experience of viewing your own film?