

## CTAN 499 Special Topics: DOCUMENTARY ANIMATION PRODUCTION

TUES 1pm-3:50pm 2 units

Faculty: Sheila M. Sofian

Email: [ssofian@cinema.usc.edu](mailto:ssofian@cinema.usc.edu)

Office Hours: Wed 1pm-4pm

### COURSE DESCRIPTION:

The course is designed to examine the history, techniques, and methods of documentary animation production. Students will gain an understanding of the scope and issues concerning documentary animation production. In-depth critical discussion of the merits, flaws, and limits of documentary animation films will provide further understanding of this new genre. During the second half of the semester students will collaborate on a short 2-4 minute film project utilizing documentary animation techniques in the medium and format of the students' choosing.

### ONGOING ASSIGNMENT:

#### *Observational Notebook.*

Each student should keep a note or sketchbook at all times, for notes and images/sketches of interesting ideas that could be developed into an animated documentary. Observations can include the following:

- Characters: People found interesting or complex
- Situations: Interesting or provocative circumstances or incidents
- Themes: Beliefs, ideas and values which could be developed into a film

Throughout the semester we will be sharing the observational notebooks with the class.

### GRADING CRITERIA:

Written Paper	10%
Class Participation:	20%
Participation in class discussions, including film analysis, discussion of reading assignments, and discussions of observational notebooks.	
Observational Notebook	25%
Collaborative Project	45%
-Creative Contribution	
-Production Contribution	
-Successful communication of idea	

### CLASS BREAKDOWN:

Class 1 History of Animated Documentary. Educational/ Propaganda. Early documentary Animation.  
View Examples of Educational and propaganda films, *Sinking of the Lusitania* by Windsor McKay, *Victory Through Air Power* (Disney), *Private Snafu* (WB), *Windy Day* by John and Faith Hubley, *Frank Film* and *Coney* by Frank Morris, *Conversation Pieces* by Aardmen Animation

Assignment: Read *J.R. Bray—Documentarian?* By Noell Wolfgram Evans  
<http://www.fpsmagazine.com/mag/200503.php>

Class 2 Documentary Animation: Historical  
Lecture/ Discussion: Portrayal of events, dilemmas concerning historical information.  
View from selection: *Black Soul/Âme noire* by Chartrand, Martine, *McLaren's Negatives* by Marie-Josée Saint-Pierre, *Velvet Tigress* by Jen Sachs, *Sunrise*

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over *Tiananmen Square* by Shui-Bo Wang. *The Kid Says in the Picture*, *Patience of the Memory* by Vuk Jevremovic, *A Conversation with Haris* by Sheila M. Sofian

Assignment: Read *The Truth in Pictures*, fps Magazine March 2005

<http://www.fpsmagazine.com/mag/200503.php>

Class 3 Documentary Animation: First Person  
Variety of topics/techniques illustrating first person perspective.  
Lecture/ Discussion: Animation techniques, scope of story  
View from selection: *Silence* by Orly Yadin, *The Darra Dogs* by Dennis Tupicoff, *I Think I Was an Alcoholic* by John Callahan, *A Little Routine* by George Griffin

Assignment: Read *But Is It Documentary?* by Orly Yadin, July 2003

[http://www.yadinproductions.com/but\\_is\\_it\\_documentary.htm](http://www.yadinproductions.com/but_is_it_documentary.htm)

Class 4 Documentary Animation: Portraits of people / Autobiography  
Lecture/discussion: Interviewing techniques. Strategies.  
View from selection: *Backseat Bingo* by Liz Blazer, *The Moon and the Son* by John Canemaker, *Ryan, A is for Autism* by Tim Webb, *Field of Green* by Sky David, *Drawn From Memory* by Paul Fierlinger

Assignment: Read *How Swede It Is* by Gunnar Strøm

<http://www.fpsmagazine.com/mag/200503.php>

Class 5 Documentary Animation: Recounting Experiences/Events Controversy.  
Lecture/ Discussion: Manipulation, use of title cards, interviewing techniques, "balance". Use of voiceover/ interviewer's voice.  
View from selection: *His Mother's Voice* by Dennis Tupicoff, *An Overnight Stay* by Daniela Sherer, *Aotearoa/New Zealand* by Corrie Francis, *Survivors* by Sheila M. Sofian, *Abductees* by Paul Vestor

Assignment: Review USC Documentary Animation Research site:

[http://128.125.183.2/research/2\\_documentary/](http://128.125.183.2/research/2_documentary/)

Class 6 Documentary Animation: Combining animation and live action: effective?  
Pros and cons  
View: *Cyanosis* by Rokhsareh Ghaemmaghami, Excerpt from *Truth Has Fallen* by Sheila M. Sofian

**ASSIGNMENT:** Write a two-page paper on a documentary animation you find effective. Explain why you think it is successful. What strategies did the filmmaker use? Are there any methods you may want to adopt?  
OR write a paper on a documentary animation you feel failed in some way. How could it be improved? What lessons do you take from this film?  
Due in two weeks.

Class 7 Review documentary animation ideas.  
Feature Films: Examining *Persopolis*, *Waltz With Bashir*, *Chicago 10*,  
Distribution/ Audience.

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- Class 8      Written paper DUE.  
Sound/Image relationship. What image allows the audience to listen carefully to the soundtrack? Blurring the line between fiction/non-fiction.  
View: *Pro and Con* by Joanna Priestly and Joan Gratz
- ASSIGNMENT:** observational notebook: Come up with two ideas for an animated documentary in one of the categories discussed in class. To be discussed next class.
- Class 9      Planning collaborative project  
Step 1: Review notebooks. The class will decide on topic.  
Step 2: Plan schedule  
Step 3: Determine responsibilities. Students will volunteer for specific responsibilities according to skills (eg. Writing student may plan interview questions, Production or Animation student may record sound, Animation students work on animation.) Details to be determined in class according to the individual project. The faculty will act as “producer” and assign responsibilities.  
Step 4: Set up Interviews.  
Step 5: Plan questions.  
**Submit notebooks for grading.**
- Class 10      Collaborative project: Gather interviews
- Class 11      Listen to interviews/ structure film. Storyboard.
- Class 12      Collaborative project: Animation. Break into groups. Each group animates a separate section.
- Class 13      Collaborative project: Continue Animation  
Critique work-in-progress
- Class 14      Collaborative project: Continue Animation  
Critique work-in-progress
- Class 15      Collaborative project: Editing/post  
Critique work-in-progress
- Class 16      Study Week- no class.
- Class 17      Finals week: Final project due. Class critique

**STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:** Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure that the letter is delivered to the Professor as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

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MISSING AN EXAM, INCOMPLETES: The only acceptable excuses for missing an exam or taking an incomplete in the course are personal illness or a family emergency. Students must inform the professor before the exam and present verifiable evidence in order for a make-up to be scheduled. Students who wish to take incompletes must also present documentation of the problem to the instructor or teaching assistant before final grades are due. Incompletes are only possible after the 12th week Withdrawal deadline.

STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC INTEGRITY: USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. *Scampus*, the Student Guidebook, contains the Student Conduct Code in Section 11.00, while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A: <http://www.usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS/gov/>. Students will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards for further review, should there be any suspicion of academic dishonesty. The Review process can be found at: <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/>.