COM 321, Documentary Form in Film & Television
Notes from and about Barnouw’s *Documentary: A history of the non-fiction film*

13. Documentarist as . . . Guerrilla

Definition(s):
“Black films”: Post-war documentaries that showed a darker vision than the “rosy-hued booster-films that had predominated” in Eastern Europe. The term was first applied to certain Polish films that were socially critical during the time of de-Stalinization (mid-1950s) and quickly spread to other nations in the region; later, such films of dissent appeared in such locations as Japan, India, and Argentina (the “revolutionary cinema” of *The Hour of the Furnaces*, 1968)

Key Concepts & Issues:
Political Criticism: The important role of criticism of political systems is recognized; such criticism via film/television is especially threatening because of its power and reach (note the “global film struggles over Vietnam . . . an establishment can silence, muffle, discourage, deflect, isolate expressions it does not favor”).

Video: Introduced by the Catalyst Documentarists, video diffused further among Guerrillas; a single person could now be a production unit; by the 1980s, video cameras with built-in microphones were available.

Key Documentarists/Film Types:
Many Eastern European practitioners of “black film”, e.g.:
- Jerzy Bossak’s *Warsaw 56* (Poland, 1956), showing the two sides of post-war Warsaw
- Andras-Kovacs’ *Difficult People* (Hungary, 1964), highlighting the bureaucratic barriers to scientific innovation
- Kurt Goldberger’s *Children without Love* (Czechoslovakia, 1964), an expose on “creches,” cheap day nurseries
- Dusan Makavejev’s *Parade* (Yugoslavia, 1963), near-satirical coverage of preparations for the annual May Day parade (bureaucracy again the target)

Films focusing of the Vietnam War—a continuing information war as well:
- Roman Karmen’s *Vietnam* (Soviet Union, 1955)
- Daily newscasts in the U.S. brought the war “into the home”
- *Pilots in Pyjamas* (East Germany, 1967)—three cinema verite films based on long interviews with American airmen in the “Hanoi Hilton”
- Junichi Ushiyama’s *With a South Vietnamese Marine Battalion* (Japan, 1965)—among the first Vietnam films to document atrocities
- Michael Rubbo’s *Sad Song of Yellow Skin* (National Film Board of Canada, 1970)
- Joris Ivens’ *17th Parallel* (France, 1967)—a cinema verite portrait of the North Vietnamese at war
- Peter Davis’ *The Selling of the Pentagon* (U.S., CBS News, 1971)