13. Documentarist as . . . Guerrilla

Definition(s):
“Black films”: Post-WWII 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 readily available.

Key Documentarists/Film Types:
Many Eastern European practitioners of “Black Film”, e.g.:
Jerzy Bossak’s *Warsaw 56* (Poland, 1956; Polish only), 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; 10:00), near-satirical coverage of preparations for the annual May Day parade (bureaucracy again the target) (Makavejev also wrote and directed the very odd *WR: Mysteries of the Organism* (1971), a “response” to the teachings of radical psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich)

Films focusing of the Vietnam War—a continuing *information war* as well:
Roman Karmen’s *Vietnam* (Soviet Union, 1955)
U.S. Department of Defense’s *Why Vietnam?* (1965)—like “Why We Fight”…
Daily newscasts in the U.S. brought the war “into the home”
*Pilots in Pyjamas* (East Germany, 1967)—four 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)—Australian filmmaker follows three American “new” journalists
Joris Ivens’ and Marceline Loridan-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)

[Stan Brakhage’s The Act of Seeing with One’s Own Eyes (U.S., 1971)]

4/18