The autobiographical documentary in the US
Since 1960s American filmmakers have been making films & videos about the events of their lives & presented them as examples of cultural experiences. Autobiographical documentaries have a level of trust & intimacy seldom matched.

Three influential characteristics make this type of documentary a very significant trend in recent years:

1. a site of autobiographical subjectivity (the opposite of verite)
2. the ‘self’ is in the work
3. rooted in literary autobiography & documentary, uses an array of formal possibilities that have changed the way we look at documentary.
Other key aspects

Two impulses collide in autobiographical documentaries

a. To objectively record a historical world ‘out there’

b. To subjectively record a private world ‘in here’

They capture events that are difficult to verify

Veracity, therefore, is contingent

Has the potential to link the everyday to the broader social order

Private individuals & history coalesce

Autobiographical documentaries record ‘unofficial history’

Are the equivalent of diaries, journals, small portraits
Origins of this style/genre

The autobiographical avant-garde films of the 1960s - inscribed the subject in the work

The desire to reject the realist conventions of direct cinema

Impact of international cinema of 1960s – uses subjectivity & comments on filmmaking e.g. French New Wave

Coincides with the politics of selfhood

Two trends - the ‘journal entry’ & the portrait
The ‘journal entry’ autobiography

Chronological development
Tracks effects of time on the subject
Based on a personal crisis narrative
Moment –to-moment episodes incorporated into coherent text

Ross McElwee  *Sherman’s March*  1986
Marco Williams  *In Search of Our Fathers*  1992
Tom Joslin & Peter Friedman  *Silverlake Life: The View from Here*  1993
The autobiographical portrait

Two types of portraits – family & self
Rely on interviews, archival materials and micronarratives

Family portraits
  Martin Scorsese  *Italianamericans*  1974
  Alan Berliner  *Intimate Stranger*  1991
    *Nobody’s Business*  1996
    *Wide Awake*  2006

Self-portraits
  Michael Moore  *Roger and Me*  1989
  Robb Moss  *The Tourist*  1992
The autobiographical and beyond

Some recent autobiographical documentaries go beyond the individual to portray a generation, or discuss politics.

Robb Moss  *The Same River Twice*  2004
Morgan Spurlock  *Super Size Me*  2004
Natalia Almada  *El General*  2009

The work of Michael Moore

Bibliography:
Jim Lane, *[The Autobiographical Documentary in America]*  (2002)