

Documentary Cinema
ENGL 245, Sections 1 and 2

Professor Rashna Richards

Office: 307 Palmer

Office Hours: T 12:15-2:15 and R 12:15-1:15

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Semester: Spring 2015

Section 1: MWF 10:00-10:50; Section 2: MWF 11:00-11:50

Room: 206 Palmer

Screening: W 7:00-9:30

Room: FJ-B

Course Description



Drawing on a variety of analytical perspectives, this course provides a comprehensive introduction to documentary film and video. Unlike the various genres of fiction film (comedy, science fiction, thriller, horror, romance, and so on), documentaries address *the* world as it exists rather than *a* world created by the filmmaker. Still, documentaries are not mere records of reality. From questions of ethics, ideology, politics, and power to concerns over gender, race, sexuality, and representation, we will explore the nature of documentary films, focusing on production as well as reception, on formal strategies as well as aesthetic pleasures. While we will investigate the documentary form's relation to reality, we will also try to destabilize the assumed boundaries between fact and fiction by considering such recent transformations as mockumentaries and self-reflexive docu-diaries. Overall, our goal will be to assess the ways in which non-fiction films reveal multiple, contingent truths rather than a unitary, unproblematic Truth.

Course Policies

Note 1: These policies will be applied without exceptions. In the interest of fairness to fellow students, please don't expect or ask for special accommodations or exemptions.

Note 2: Failure to remember or follow any of these policies will result in severe penalties to your professionalism grade.

Attendance: You are required to attend all classes. Do not email me about your absences. If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to get information and/or handouts from a classmate. You are allowed three class absences and one screening absence over the course of the semester, no questions asked. Save these absences for athletics, extracurricular activities, or medical/personal emergencies. After the fourth absence, each subsequent absence will result in a deduction of 20 points from your final course grade. After six absences, you will fail the course.

Tardiness: You are required to be on time. Habitual tardiness, even if it's only a couple of minutes, will hurt your participation/professionalism grade.

Late Work: I do not accept late work. Paper copies of all assignments are due at the beginning of class on the deadline. Computer glitches or printing problems are not legitimate excuses for late work. If you do not plan on being here when an assignment is due, it must be in my mailbox before the deadline. You will receive a zero on an assignment if it is not turned in when it is due. Please note that you are required to complete all assignments in order to receive a passing grade.

Class Participation: You are required to come to class prepared with the assigned reading for that day. I expect constructive verbal contribution to each class meeting. Fair warning: if you do not volunteer, you will be called on to contribute to class discussions. A student who disrupts class or in any way creates a hostile environment will be subject to disciplinary action. A student who reads or does homework for another class, chats with a neighbor, leaves the classroom, or simply dozes off should expect a very low participation grade. I will likely say nothing at the time of the incident, but disruptive behavior will adversely affect your professionalism grade; you may also be marked absent for that day.

Screenings: We will view a wide variety of films in class. You may find these films intellectually challenging or troubling. Learning how to watch and analyze them critically will be an important part of our discussions and assignments.

Electronic Devices: The use of all electronic devices is forbidden in this class. You should turn off all electronic devices, including laptops, before class begins. If you are observed texting, you will be marked absent for that day.

Food or Drink: I don't mind if you bring something to drink, but please avoid bringing any food into the classroom.

Consultation: I'll be happy to talk with you about any questions or concerns you have about the class. You don't need to make an appointment to stop by during my office hours. If those times

don't work, see me before or after class so we can set up another time that is mutually convenient. Appointments cannot be made by email.

Email: It is always preferable to meet in person to discuss any questions or concerns, since the impersonal medium of electronic communication is a poor substitute for a genuine face-to-face conversation. Email should only be reserved for emergencies, when your question cannot wait to be answered until the next time we meet. Please regard email correspondence as formal communication and abide by rules of professional etiquette. Email is absolutely not the medium for negotiating special requests, addressing grade concerns, or discussing ideas for assignments; those issues must be handled in person.

Format of Assignments: All written assignments need to be typed and double spaced, in 12 pt. font, using Times New Roman, with one-inch margins on all sides. The format and citations must conform to MLA specifications, or the assignment may not be accepted. You do not need a title page; instead, include your name, my name, course name/number, and date in the top left corner of the first page. Be sure to number and staple your pages; also, proofread your work before printing up the final draft. I do not accept any assignments via email.

Intellectual Honesty: All work is assumed to be the student's own and produced exclusively for the course in which it is submitted. Papers written for one course, even if revised, are not to be submitted in another without prior approval. Borrowing of ideas or language from other sources (including published material, other student papers, google or other electronic resources, etc.) must be carefully documented. You are advised against posting your work on the internet, since doing so may lead to suspicion of plagiarism. You are also advised to save drafts of your work to verify its originality. Cases of suspected plagiarism will be referred to the Honor Council, and, if convicted, the student will receive an F in the course in addition to sanctions assigned by the Council. Carelessness in documenting sources, even if not technically plagiarism, will be penalized as appropriate. If you are uncertain about how or whether to document sources, please consult me.

Disability Issues: Students with documented disabilities may be entitled to specific accommodations. Please contact the office of Student Disability Services for more information. In every case, it is your responsibility to provide me with an official letter from SDS.

Course Evaluation

Grade Distribution

Participation/Professionalism	20%	200 points
Essay #1	20%	200 points
Essay #2	20%	200 points
Essay #3	40%	400 points
Total	100%	1000 points

Assignments (Additional guidelines will be provided when each assignment is introduced.)

Participation/Professionalism: You are required to contribute comments and questions that further class discussion. Simply agreeing or disagreeing with your classmates and/or the readings is not enough. You are expected to add thoughtful ideas to the debate by engaging with the texts in a sophisticated manner. Participation will be evaluated in terms of quantity and quality. Active engagement will be rewarded, and disengaged behavior will be penalized. From time to time, you will be quizzed or asked to respond to specific short-answer questions on the week's film or reading. Quizzes are always unannounced, and they cannot be made up. Failure to follow any course policies or guidelines will hurt your professionalism grade.

Essay #1 (4-5 pages): For the first essay, you will analyze a specific scene from a documentary film by discussing how its technical elements contribute to the creation of meaning. No research is expected for this paper.

Essay #2 (4-5 pages): For the second essay, you will trace an idea, theme, or motif as it develops over the course of a documentary film. Your paper will make an argument about the film and analyze isolated passages to show how they illustrate your thesis. No research is expected for this paper.

Essay #3 (10-12 pages): For the final project, you will write a research paper on some aspect of documentary cinema. You will be given several general prompts to help you arrive at your thesis. Your paper will be evaluated on the originality of your argument, the rigor of your analysis, and the quality of your research.

Grading Guidelines

A = 100-94; **A-** = 93-90

B+ = 89-87; **B** = 86-84; **B-** = 83-80

C+ = 79-77; **C** = 76-74; **C-** = 73-70

D+ = 69-67; **D** = 66-64; **D-** = 63-60

F < 60

A range (100-90): Excellent work; exemplary in argument and organization; professionally presented; free of mechanical errors.

B range (89-80): Good, solid work; substantive in argument and organization; meets all requirements, but needs some revisions; no more than five mechanical errors.

C range (79-70): Satisfactory work; addresses the assignment adequately, but requires some significant revisions of content and/or mechanics.

D range (69-60): Below average work; misses one or more central aspects of the assignment; inadequate focus and/or development; awkwardly written; requires extensive rewriting.

F range (< 60): Unacceptable work; fails to meet the requirements of the assignment; incomplete or irrelevant material; lack of focus or development.

Course Materials

- Nichols, Bill. *Introduction to Documentary*. 2nd ed. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2010. (ID)
- Grant, Barry Keith and Jeanette Sloniowski, eds. *Documenting the Documentary: Close Readings of Documentary Film and Video*. New and expanded ed. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2014. (DD)

Course Schedule (subject to change)

Week 1: Introductions

- Wed., Jan. 14** Introduction to the course
- Screening** Herzog, *Grizzly Man* (2005)
- Fri., Jan. 16** Johnson, "You Must Never Listen to This" (DD 507-21)

Week 2: What Is Documentary Cinema?

- Mon., Jan. 19** No Classes: MLK Jr. Day Recess
- Wed., Jan. 21** Nichols, "How Can We Define Documentary Film?" (ID 1-19)
Clips: De Sica, *Bicycle Thieves* (1948); Lee, *Do the Right Thing* (1989);
CNN News Report
- Screening** Marsh, *Man on Wire* (2008)
- Fri., Jan. 23** Nichols, "How Can We Define Documentary Film?" (ID 19-41)
Clips: Capra, *Why We Fight* (1943-45); Jarecki, *Why We Fight* (2005)

Week 3: Modes of Documentary Cinema

- Mon., Jan. 26** Nichols, "How Can We Differentiate among Documentaries?" (ID 142-71)
Clips: Buñuel, *L'Age d'Or* (1930); Brakhage, *Black Ice* (1994); Gordon, *King of Kong* (2007)
- Wed., Jan. 28** Nichols, "How Can We Describe the Observational, Participatory, Reflexive, and Performative Modes of Documentary Film?" (ID 172-211)
Clips: Marker, *Sans Soleil* (1983); Moore, *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004)
- Screening** Moreh, *The Gatekeepers* (2012)—in Blount auditorium
- Fri., Jan. 30** Discussion

Week 4: Documentary Aesthetic: Realism vs. Poetic Experimentation

- Mon., Feb. 2** Nichols, "How Did Documentary Filmmaking Get Started?" (ID 120-41)
Clips: Lumière, *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory* (1895);
Lumière, *The Sprinkler Sprinkled* (1895)
- Wed., Feb. 4** Contd.
- Screening** Flaherty, *Nanook of the North* (1922)
- Fri., Feb. 6** Rothman, "The Filmmaker as Hunter" (DD 1-18)
Clips: Weber, *Reindeer Wrangling* (2013)
Introduction to Essay #1

Week 5: Documentary Aesthetic contd.

- Mon., Feb. 9** Feldman, "Peace between Man and Machine" (DD 19-34)
Clips: Vertov, *The Man with a Movie Camera* (1929)
- Wed., Feb. 11** Guynn, "The Art of National Projection" (DD 64-80)
Clips: Lang, *Metropolis* (1927); Wright, *Song of Ceylon* (1934)
- Screening**
Fri., Feb. 13 Marker, *Le Joli Mai* (1963)—in Blount auditorium
Discussion
Clips: Ruttman, *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* (1927)

Week 6: Propaganda

- Mon., Feb. 16** Workshop for Essay #1
- Wed., Feb. 18** Nichols, "Why Are Ethical Issues Central to Documentary Filmmaking?" (ID 42-66)
Clips: Buñuel, *Land without Bread* (1933)
- Screening**
Fri., Feb. 20 Riefenstahl, *Triumph of the Will* (1935)
Tomasulo, "The Mass Psychology of Fascist Cinema" (DD 81-102)
Clips: Welles, *Citizen Kane* (1941)

Week 7: Ethics

- Mon., Feb. 23** Sloniowski, "It Was an Atrocious Film" (DD 159-77)
Clips: Buñuel, *Un Chien Andalou* (1929); Franju, *Blood of the Beasts* (1949)
- Wed., Feb. 25** Flitterman-Lewis, "Documenting the Ineffable" (DD 196-216)
Clips: Resnais, *Night and Fog* (1955)
- No Screening**
Fri., Feb. 27 **Essay #1 due**

Week 8: Vérité

- Mon., March 2** Hall, "Don't You Ever Just Watch?" (DD 237-52)
Clips: Pennebaker, *Dont Look Back* (1967); Scorsese, *No Direction Home* (2005)
- Wed., March 4** Contd.
- Screening**
Fri., March 6 Wiseman, *Titicut Follies* (1967)
Grant, "Ethnography in the First Person" (DD 253-70)
Clips: Hitchcock, *Psycho* (1960); Forman, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975)

Week 9: Spring Break**Week 10: Reality**

- Mon., March 16** Testa, "Seeing with Experimental Eyes" (DD 287-304)
Clips: Brakhage, *The Act of Seeing with One's Own Eyes* (1971); Al-Dabagh, *I See Dead People* (2008)
- Wed., March 18** Ruoff, "A Bastard Union of Several Forms" (DD 305-21)
Clips: PBS, *An American Family* (1973)
- Screening**
Berman and Pulcini, *Cinema Verite* (2011)

- Fri., March 20** Introduction to Essay #2
- Week 11: History**
- Mon., March 23** Fischer, "Documentary Film and the Discourse of Hysterical/Historical Narrative" (DD 356-67)
Clips: McElwee, *Sherman's March* (1985)
- Wed., March 25** Contd.
- Screening** Morris, *The Thin Blue Line* (1988)
- Fri., March 27** Williams, "Mirrors without Memories" (DD 385-403)
Clips: Stone, *JFK* (1991)
- Week 12: Politics**
- Mon., March 30** Nichols, "How Have Documentaries Addressed Social and Political Issues?" (ID 212-52)
Clips: Epstein, *The Times of Harvey Milk* (1984)
- Wed., April 1** Workshop for Essay #2
- No Screening**
- Fri., April 3** No Classes: Easter Recess
- Week 13: Playing with Modes**
- Mon., April 6** Bernstein, "Documentaphobia and Mixed Modes" (DD 404-23)
Clips: Moore, *Roger & Me* (1989)
- Wed., April 8** **Essay #2 due**
Introduction to Essay #3
- Screening** Reiner, *This Is Spinal Tap* (1984)
- Fri., April 10** Plantinga, "Gender, Power, and a Cucumber" (DD 339-55)
Clips: Allen, *Zelig* (1983)
- Week 14: Sincerity**
- Mon., April 13** Nichols, "What Makes Documentaries Engaging and Persuasive?" (ID 94-119)
Clips: Davis, *A Girl like Me* (2007)
- Wed., April 15** Workshop for Essay #3
- Screening** Riggs, *Tongues Untied* (1989)
- Fri., April 17** Petty, "Silence and Its Opposite" (DD 424-37)
- Week 15: Mockery**
- Mon., April 20** No Class: Research Day
- Wed., April 22** Flinn, "Containing Fire" (DD 438-55)
Clips: Livingston, *Paris Is Burning* (1990)
- Screening** Charles, *Borat* (2006)
- Fri., April 24** Torchin, "Cultural Learnings of *Borat* for Make Benefit Glorious Study of Documentary" (DD 522-41)

Week 16: Conclusions

Mon., April 27 Workshop for Essay #3

Wed., April 29 No Class: Optional Conferences

No Screening

Fri., May 1 **Essay #3 due by noon (leave in box on office door—307 Palmer)**