FA 498: Special Topics in Culture and Arts: Documentary Cinema

Lecture/Discussion: Thursdays 10:00 – 12:50 @ Sociology Building Seminar Room (PSB-102)

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Office hours: By appointment only

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

“There is no such thing as documentary..........despite the very visible existence of a documentary tradition.”

“Reality is more fabulous, more maddening, more strangely manipulative than fiction.”

from “Documentary Is/Not a Name’” (1990) by Trinh T. Minh-ha

Since the mid-1800s, people have used still images (photography) and since the 1890s, moving images (first silent film, later sound film) to represent reality as they perceive and choose to represent it. The history of documentary cinema consists of a series of experimentations in the attempt to represent reality, taking its material from the historical world we live in. Since the very beginning, with these experimentations, debates about ethical, aesthetic, critical issues in filmic representation of reality have been unfolding.

This course offers a critical look at the historical development of documentary cinema in the world: non-fiction film forms and modes, theories, and criticism. We will examine how filmmakers as cultural media producers have chosen to represent reality; how changing technologies and sensibilities have affected the way reality is represented in documentaries; and how non-fiction films have been used for different purposes.

This a 400-level screening-reading-writing-intensive course, designed for upper level undergraduate and graduate students.

PROCEDURES & REQUIREMENTS:

Each week there will be extensive assigned readings and film screenings, followed by a lecture/discussion session and assigned response papers. In other words, every week students are expected to follow this sequence:

Reading -> Film Screening -> Lecture/Discussion -> Writing of Response Paper

Readings: You are required to do all the weekly readings as specified in the course schedule before the film screenings and the lecture/discussion session. These readings will be in the course reader or available online. The following is the text book for this course:


Film screenings: Each week students are required to view the films listed in the syllabus before they attend the lecture. For each film viewed, you will e-mail a discussion question before you come to the lecture.

Lecture/Discussion: We will meet once a week for a 3-hour lecture and discussion session. These sessions will include presentation of historical and theoretical material, short screenings, discussions of readings and films.
**Response Papers:** Each week you will submit a response paper (min. 500 words) to the assigned readings and films. Response papers are due each week at the beginning of the class [printed on paper and stapled together AND e-mailed]. Please note that no late response papers will be accepted. After receiving feedback, if you wish to re-write and re-submit, you are welcome to do that. You will have 1 week to do this.

**Final Paper:** Final assignment for FA498 will be a paper on a topic you will propose. The topic needs to be related to the content of the course. You will present your final work in three stages: (1) proposal, (2) bibliography/filmography, (3) paper. Feel free to consult with me at any stage during the process, ask questions, discuss your topic idea, get feedback, etc. I am here to help you and want to learn from your research/writing as well. (Paper length: for undergrads min. 4000 words, for MA students min. 6000 words, for PhD students min. 8000 words.)

**Presentation of Assignments:** All written assignments should be typed (maximum 10-point font) and printed on A4 paper. When necessary, proper footnotes and/or bibliography are required. All written assignments should be submitted on paper, as well as e-mailed to me by the due dates. The first page of your assignment should always contain this information:

- your name
- course code
- name of the assignment (e.g. response paper #10, paper proposal, etc.)
- date of submission
- title of your assignment (written work)

**Participation:** You are expected to attend all screenings and lectures, do all the assigned readings and assignments on time, and participate actively in the class discussions. Failure to do these will significantly diminish what we can learn in this class. Unexcused absences, tardiness, and late submission of assignments are not acceptable.

**Journal:** I strongly suggest that you keep a written journal throughout the semester. You can use this journal to write down notes/your reactions/thoughts during screenings and discussions, as well as to draw sketches and pictures. This journal will help you to think further about the works/readings/discussions and in developing your own projects.

**Office hours:** I will be available to you during my office hours by appointment only to discuss any matter related to this course. You can always reach me via e-mail.

**ASSESSMENT:**

**Important Note on Plagiarism:** Plagiarism is the use of another person’s work or ideas as if they were your own. When it is necessary or desirable to use other people’s material you should adequately acknowledge whose words or ideas they are and where you found them (giving the complete reference details, including page numbers). If you submit a written assignment where you make use of other people’s work (from books or articles, the Internet, DVD contents/covers, friends, etc.) without acknowledging it and attempting to pass it off as your own you will fail this course and you may also be subject to disciplinary action by the university.

**Grading:** Each student will receive a letter grade based on their performance calculated using this method:

- Participation (attendance & discussion) 15%
- Weekly Response Papers 45%
- Final Paper (assessed in 3 stages) 40% (proposal 5%, bibliography & outline 10%, writing 25%)

Total 100%
**COURSE SCHEDULE**: (13 weeks)
(This schedule and its contents are subject to modification as necessary during the semester.
Each week you will receive a weekly update via e-mail titled “This week in FA498”)

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**Week 1: Introduction to the course and a discussion of documentary cinema**

25 September 2014: Lecture/Discussion #1

**Week 2: Birth of Documentary Film, Definitions**

Reading:

- Bill Nichols: ‘How Can We Define Documentary Film?’ in *Introduction to Documentary*, pp. 1-41. (book)
- Carl Plantinga: ‘What is a Nonfiction Film?’ in *Rhetoric and Representation in Nonfiction Film*, pp. 7-25. (book)
- Bill Nichols: ‘How Did Documentary Filmmaking Get Started?’ in *Introduction to Documentary*, pp. 120-141. (book)

Films:

- *Nanook of the North* (USA, 1922, Robert Flaherty, 69 min.)
- *Grass: a Nation’s Battle for Life* (USA, 1925, Merian C. Cooper, Ernest B. Schoedsack, Marguerite Harrison, 71 min.)

2 October 2014: Lecture/Discussion #2 - Due: Response Paper #1

**Week 3: Documentary Modes, The Poetic Mode, The Avant Garde, The Soviets**

Reading:

- Jill Godmilow: ‘Kill the Documentary as We Know It’ in *Journal of Film & Video*, Summer/Fall 2002, Vol.54/2-3, pp. 3-10.

Films:

- *Manhatta* (USA, 1921, Paul Strand & Charles Sheeler, 10 min.)
- *Regen/Rain* (The Netherlands, 1929, Joris Ivens, 14 min.)
- *Berlin, die Symphonie der Großstadt/Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* (Germany, 1927, Walther Ruttmann, 62 min.)
- *The Man with a Movie Camera* (Soviet Union, 1929, Dziga Vertov, 68 min.)
- *A propos de Nice/About Nice* (France, 1930, Jean Vigo, 25 min.)
- *Kino Pravda Newsreel* (USSR, 1922, Dziga Vertov, 13 min.)

9 October 2014: No Lecture/Discussion due to strike/boycott

16 October 2014: Lecture/Discussion #3 - Due: Response Paper #2
Week 4: 1930s: The British Documentary Movement, Leni Riefenstahl in Germany

Reading:

- Susan Sontag: ‘Fascinating Fascism’ in Movies and Methods, Volume I, pp. 31-43.

Films:
- Drifters (Britain, 1929, John Grierson, 49 min.)
- Song of Ceylon (Britain, 1934, Basil Wright, 39 min.)
- Housing Problems (Britain, 1935, Arthur Elton & Edgar Anstey, 17 min.)
- Coal Face (Britain, 1935, Alberto Cavalcanti, 12 min.)
- Night Mail (Britain, 1936, Harry Watt & Basil Wright, 25 min.)
- Listen to Britain (Britain, 1942, Humphrey Jennings, 19 min)
- Triumph des Willens/Triumph of the Will (Germany, 1935, Leni Riefenstahl, 105 min.)

23 October 2014: Lecture/Discussion #4 - Due: Response Paper #3

Week 5: The Expository Mode, Luis Bunuel, World War-II & Beyond

Reading:

- Script for Land Without Bread

Films:
- March of Time Newsreels (1935 – 1951)
- Las Hurdes: Tierra sin pan/Las Hurdes:Land Without Bread (Spain, 1932, Luis Buñuel, 27 min.)
- The Plow that Broke the Plains (USA, 1936, Pare Lorentz, 25 min.)
- Prelude to War (Why We Fight Series, #1) (USA, 1943, Frank Capra, 53 min.)

30 October 2014: Lecture/Discussion #5 - Due: Response Paper #4
### Week 6: Post-WWII documentary, Free Cinema, Direct Cinema/The Observational Mode

**Reading:**
- Sandy Flitterman-Lewis: ‘Documenting the Ineffable: Terror and Memory in Alain Resnais’s *Night and Fog*’ in *Documenting the Documentary: Close Readings of Documentary Film and Video*, pp.204-222.

**Films:**
- *Le sang des bêtes/Blood of the Beasts* (France, 1949, Georges Franju, 22 min.)
- *Nuit et brouillard/Night & Fog* (France, 1955, Alain Resnais, 30 min.)
- *O Dreamland* (Britain, 1953, Lindsay Anderson, 12 min.)
- *Les Raquetteurs/The Snowshoers* (Canada, 1958, Michel Brault & Gilles Groulx, 15 min.)
- *Primary* (USA, 1960, Drew Associates, 53 min.)
- *Don’t Look Back* (USA, 1967, D.A. Pennebaker, 96’)

6 November 2014: Lecture/Discussion #6 - **Due: Response Paper #5**

### Week 7: The Participatory Mode – Cinéma Vérité

**Reading:**

**Films:**
- *Chronique d’un Été/Chronicle of a Summer* (France, 1960, Jean Rouch & Edgar Morin, 91 min.)
- *Le joli mai/The Lovely May* (France, 1962, Chris Marker & Pierre Lhomme, 124 min.)
- *Lonely Boy* (Canada, 1962, Roman Kroiter & Wolf Koenig, 27’)

13 November 2014: Lecture/Discussion #7 - **Due: Response Paper #6**
Week 8: Ethics & Documentary / Mockumentary

Reading:

• Bill Nichols: ‘Why are Ethical Issues Central to Documentary Filmmaking?’ in Introduction to Documentary, pp. 42-66.
• Calvin Pryluck: “Ultimately We’re All Outsiders: The Ethics of Documentary Filming” in New Challenges for Documentary, pp. 255-268.
• Barry Keith Grant: ‘Ethnography in the First Person: Frederick Wiseman’s Titicut Follies’ in Documenting the Documentary: Close Readings of Documentary Film and Video, pp. 238-253.
• Mockumentary: Reflexivity, satire and a call to play @ http://www.waikato.ac.nz/fass/mock-doc/
• Alisa Lebow: ‘Faking What?: Making a Mockery of Documentary’ in F is for Phony Edited by Alexandra Juhasz and Jesse Lerner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006)

Films:

• Titicut Follies (USA, 1967, Frederick Wiseman, 84 min.)
• David Holzman’s Diary (USA, 1967, Jim McBride, 74 min.)
• Être et avoir (France, 2002, Nicholas Philibert, 104 min.)

20 November 2014: Lecture/Discussion #8 - Due: Response Paper #7

Week 9: The Compilation Documentary, Post-Modern/Post-Colonial History

Reading:

• Gary Crowdus and Dan Georgakas: ‘History is the Theme of All My Films: an Interview with Emile de Antonio’ in Imagining Reality, The Faber Book of Documentary, pp. 291-298.
• Jane Loader: ‘Up Close and Personal’
• Jon Wiener: ‘The omniscient narrator and the unreliable narrator: the case of Atomic Café’ in Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies - Volume 37.1 (Spring 2007), pp. 73-76.

Films:

• In the Year of the Pig (USA, 1969, Emile de Antonio, 103 min.)
• The Atomic Café (USA, 1982, Kevin Rafferty, Jayne Loader, Pierce Rafferty, 92 min.)
• Sans Soleil/Sunless (France, 1982, Chris Marker, 103 min.)
• Lumumba: La mort du prophète/Death of a Prophet (France, Switzerland, Germany, 1992, Raoul Peck, 69’)

27 November 2014: Lecture/Discussion #9 - Due: Response Paper #8
**Week 10: Documentary as Advocacy**

**Reading:**

- Shilyh Warren: ‘By, For, and About: The ““Real”” Problem in the Feminist Film Movement’ in *Mediascape, UCLA’s Journal of Cinema and Media Studies*, Fall 2008. Available at [http://www.tft.ucla.edu/mediascape/Fall08_Warren.html](http://www.tft.ucla.edu/mediascape/Fall08_Warren.html)

**Films:**

- *Ama L’Uomo Tuo/Always Love Your Man* (USA, 1975, Cara Devito, 19 min.)
- *Harlan County, USA* (USA, 1976, Barbara Kopple, 104 min.)
- *Roger and Me* (USA, 1989, Michael Moore, 91 min.)
- *The Thin Blue Line* (USA, 1987, Errol Morris, 115 min.)

**4 December 2014: Lecture/Discussion #10 - Due: Response Paper #9**

**Week 11: The Reflexive Mode**

**Reading:**


**Films:**

- *Reassemblage* (USA, 1982, Trinh T. Minh-ha, 40 min.)
- *Far From Poland* (USA, 1984, Jill Godmilow, 106 min.)

**11 December 2014: Lecture/Discussion #11 - Due: Response Paper #10**
**Week 12: The Performative Mode, First Person Documentary**

**Reading:**
- Bill Nichols: ‘The Performative Mode’ in *Introduction to Documentary*, pp. 199-211.

**Films:**
- *Nobody’s Business* (USA, 1996, Alan Berliner, 60 min.)
- *Tongues Untied* (USA, 1989, Marlon Riggs, 55 min.)
- *Kroppin Min/My Body* (Norway, 2002, Margreth Olin, 26 min.)
- *The Gleaners and I* (France, 2000, Agnes Varda, 82 min.)

18 December 2014: Lecture/Discussion #12 - Due: Response Paper #11, Final Paper Proposal

**Week 13: Beyond the Modes, Documentary Futures**

**Reading:**
- Re-read: Jill Godmillow: ‘Kill the Documentary as We Know It’ (see Week#3 above)
- Additional readings TBD

**Films:**
- TBD
- TBD

TBD: Lecture/Discussion #13 - Due: Response Paper #12

**Finals Period**

26 December 2014: FINAL PAPER BIBLIOGRAPHY/FILMOGRAPHY DUE
2 January 2015: FINAL PAPER OUTLINE DUE
8 January 2015: FINAL PAPER DUE (Late papers WILL NOT be accepted.)
14 January 2015: SUBMISSION OF GRADES