

UPDATED January 17, 2013

Course Syllabus
HUAS6312 | Documentary: Aesthetics & Ethics
Spring 2013 | Thursday, 1- 3:45pm | Location: JO 4.708

Professor: *Dr. Shilyh Warren*

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office hours: Tuesday 2-4pm and by appointment

**please contact me by email with any questions!*

Course Description:

In this course we set out to discover what political, ethical, and aesthetic questions distinguish documentary from fictional filmmaking. We're interested in the intertwined histories of cinema, anthropology, psychoanalysis, and tourism, particularly as these have defined the “worldview” of documentary film. The course is roughly divided into 3 parts: documentaries about others; documentaries about selves; and documentaries about nature and the environment. Throughout the semester, we're asking if, how, and why documentaries construct knowledge about the self, others, and the world we all share. Our work occurs at the intersection of art, history, and the broadest questions of the humanities, such as how we do relate to one another as humans and non-humans, how do we represent those relationships through visual and aural technologies, and what responsibilities do we have to each other and the forms of art we produce, consume, and experience?

Required Textbooks and Materials:

- Keith Beattie, *Documentary Screens: Nonfiction Film and Television* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).
- Catherine Belsey, *Post-structuralism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2002).
- Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Houghton Mifflin, [1962] (2002)).

*All other materials will be on e-reserves.

The URL for this page is: <http://utdallas.docutek.com/eres/coursepage.aspx?cid=1460>

*Members of the class are required to print out all reading assignments and/or bring hardcopies to each class.

Student Learning Objectives/Outcomes:

By the end of this course students should demonstrate:

- Broad knowledge of the field of documentary studies, including an understanding of the major scholarly debates surrounding aesthetic, political and ethical questions particular to documentary film, and
- An understanding of the research methods & writing conventions particular to the field of film studies

Grading Policy:

Your final grade will be determined as follows:

- 3 Reading/Screening Responses (1 for each section – 500 words) = 30%
- 1 Mid-term Creative Project = 35%
- 1 Final Paper (2000-2500 words) = 35%

*I will provide guidelines for each assignment.

Assignments & Academic Calendar

I. Ethics and Others.

1. Thursday, Jan 17. What Ethical Issues?

Intro and in-class screenings.

No Lies (Mitchell Block, 1979: 16 min.) and *The Queen of Versailles* (Lauren Greenfield, 2012: 100 min.)

2. Thursday, Jan 24. Encountering the Constructed Real.

Watch: *Nanook of the North* (Robert J. Flaherty, 1992: 80 min.)

1. Keith Beattie, Ch1 "Believe Me, I'm of the World" Documentary Representation," *Documentary Screens* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2002): 10-25.
2. Michael Renov, "Towards a Poetics of Documentary," *Theorizing Documentary* (Routledge, 1993): 12-36.
3. Vivian Sobchack, "No Lies: Direct Cinema as Rape," *Journal of the University Film Association*, Vol. 29, No. 4, *The Documentary Impulse: Current Issues* (Fall 1977): 13-18.

3. Thursday, Jan 31. Getting the Picture.

Watch: *Dead Birds* (Robert Gardner, 1964: 83 min.)

In class screening: *Las Hurdes, Land Without Bread* (Luis Buñuel, 1933: 30 min.)

1. Catherine Belsey, Ch1 in *Post-structuralism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2002): 1-22.
2. Keith Beattie, Ch2 "Men with Movie Cameras: Flaherty and Grierson," *Documentary Screens* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2002): 10-25.
3. Jay Ruby, "The Moral Burden of Authorship in Ethnographic Film," *Visual Anthropology Review* 11.2 (1995): 77-82.

4. Thursday, Feb 7. Complicating the Picture.

Watch: *Cannibal Tours* (Dennis O'Rourke, 1988: 68 min.) on youtube:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SQiDufdir_M

In-class screening: *Reassemblage* (Trinh Minh Ha, 1982: 40 min.)

1. Keith Beattie, Ch3 "Constructing and Contesting Otherness," *Documentary Screens* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2002): 44-62.
2. Nancy Christine Lutkehaus, Dennis O'Rourke, "Excuse Me, Everything is Not Alright. On Ethnography, and Representation: An Interview with Filmmaker Dennis O'Rourke," *Cultural Anthropology* 4.4 (1989): 422-437.
3. George E. Marcus, "The Modernist Sensibility in Recent Ethnographic Writing and the Cinematic Metaphor of Montage," in *Fields of Vision: Essays in Film Studies, Visual Anthropology, and Photography*, eds. Leslie Devereaux and Roger Hillman (U of California P, 1995): 35-55.

5. Thursday, Feb 14. Ethics in the War Zone.

Watch: *The Oath* (Laura Poitras, 2010, 90 min.)

1. Catherine Belsey, Ch4 in *Post-structuralism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2002): 69-88.
2. Susan Sontag, "The image-world," in *Visual Culture: The Reader* (Sage, 2001): 80-94.
3. Kate Nash, "Documentary for the Other: Relationships, Ethics and (Observational) Documentary," *Journal for Journal of Mass Media Ethics: Exploring Questions of Media Morality* 26.3 (2011): 224-239.

II. Ethics & Selves.

6. Thursday, Feb 21 –Reflexivity. Political & Historical.

Watch: *Chronicle of a Summer* (Rouch, Morin, 1960, 85 min.)

In class: *Man with a Movie Camera* (Dziga Vertov, 1929, 68 min.)

1. Keith Beattie, Ch5 “The Truth of the Matter,” *Documentary Screens* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2002): 83-104.
2. Catherine Belsey, Ch2 in *Post-structuralism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2002): 23-47.
3. Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” *Visual Culture: The Reader* (Sage, 2001): 317-323.

7. Thursday, Feb 28 - Filmmaker as Subject.

Watch: *Sherman's March* (Ross McElwee, 1986, 157 min.)

1. Jim Lane, “The Convergence of Autobiography and Documentary,” *The Autobiographical Documentary in America* (The University of Wisconsin Press, 2002): 11-32.
2. Keith Beattie, Ch 6 “The Camera I: Autobiographical Documentary,” *Documentary Screens* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2002): 105-124.
3. Lucy Fischer, “Documentary Film and the Discourse of Hysterical/Historical Narrative: Ross McElwee's *Sherman's March*,” in Barry Keith Grant and Jeanette Sloniowski, eds., *Documenting the Documentary: Close Readings of Documentary Film and Video*, ed. (Detroit, 1998), 333-343.

8. Thursday, Mar 7 – Self & History.

Watch: *El General* (Natalia Almada, 2009: 83 min.)

1. Michael Renov, “The Subject in History: The New Autobiography in Film and Video,” in *The Subject of Documentary* (U of Minnesota Press, 2004): 104-119.
2. Catherine Belsey, Ch5 in *Post-structuralism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2002): 89-107.

9. Thursday, Mar 14. Spring Break. *No Class Meeting this Day.*

10. Thursday, Mar 21 – Self & Form.

Watch: *Tarnation* (Jonathan Caouette, 2003) and [Measures of Distance](#) (Mona Hatoum, 1988, 16 min.)

1. Catherine Belsey, Ch3 in *Poststructuralism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2002): 48-68.
2. Orgeron and Orgeron: “Familial Pursuits, Editorial Acts: Documentaries after the Age of Home Video ” *The Velvet Light Trap* 60 (Fall 2007): 47-62.
3. Laura Marks, “Video Haptics and Erotics,” *Screen* 39.4 (Winter 1998): 331-348.

*****Mid-term Creative Project Due: A Study of Documentary Ethics in Two Parts*****

11. Thursday, Mar 28 – Self, Crisis, and Love

Watch: *Señorita Extraviada* (Lourdes Portillo, 2002: 54 min.) **and** *The Price of Sex* (Mimi Chakarova, 2011: 73 min.)

1. Bill Nichols, “Getting to Know You ...”: Knowledge, Power and the Body,” *Theorizing Documentary*, ed. Michael Renov (Routledge, 1993): 174-191.
2. Belinda Smaill, “Civic Love and Contemporary Dissent Documentary,” *The Documentary: Politics Emotion, Culture* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010): 114-138.
3. Sara Ahmed, “In the Name of Love,” *Borderlands* 2.3 (2003). Online at http://www.borderlands.net.au/vol2no3_2003/ahmed_love.htm

III. With and Beyond the Human Subject

12. Thursday, Apr 4 –Your World or Mine

Watch: *Grizzly Man* (Werner Herzog, 2005: 103 min.)

1. Marianne DeKoven, "Guest Column: Why Animals Now?" *PMLA*, 124.2 (Mar 2009): 361–369.
2. Cary Wolfe, "Introduction" to *Animal Rites* (U of Chicago P, 2003): 1-18.
3. David T Johnson, "You Must Never Listen to This": Lessons on Sound, Cinema, and Mortality from Herzog's *Grizzly Man*," *Film Criticism* 32.3 (Spring 2008): 68-82.

***Due: Proposal for Final Paper.**

13. Thursday, Apr 11 – Traditional Nature Documentaries.

Watch: *March of the Penguins* (Luc Jacquet, 2005, 80 min.)

1. Derek Bousé, "Are Wildlife Films Really 'Nature Documentaries'?" *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 15.2 (1998): 116-140.
2. Derek Bousé, "False Intimacy: Close-Ups and Viewer Involvement in Wildlife Films," *Visual Studies* 18, no. 2 (October 2003): 123-32.
3. Jennifer Ladino, "For the Love of Nature: Documenting Life, Death and Animality in *Grizzly Man* and *March of the Penguins*," *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and the Environment* 16.1 (Winter 2009): 53-90.

***Due: Draft 1.**

14. Thursday, Apr 25 – Where we Meet.

Watch: *Sweetgrass* (Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Ilisa Barbash, 2010: 100 min.)

1. Akira Mizuta Lippit, Introduction, "Remembering Animals" **and** Ch 6 "Animetaphors" from *The Electric Animal: Towards a Rhetoric of Wildlife* (U of Minnesota P, 2000).

15. Thursday, Apr 18 – Earth as Place. Close and Far.

Watch: *Our Daily Bread* (Nikolaus Geyrhalter, 2005: 92 min.)

In class screenings may include: *Mothlight* (Stan Brakhage, 1963, 3 min.); *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (Stan Brakhage, 1.5 min.); *Scene 32* (Shambhavi Kaul, 2009, 5 min.); *Petropolis: Aerial Perspectives on the Alberta Tar Sands* (Peter Mettler, 2009: 43 min.); *Silent Springs* (Erin Espelie, 2010).

1. Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* [1962] (2002).
2. Graeme Harper and Jonathan R. Rayner, "Introduction" and Ch 2 by Tom Gunning, "Landscape and the Fantasy of Moving Pictures," in *Cinema and Landscape: Film, Nation, and Cultural Geography* (Intellect, The U of Chicago P, 2010): 13-28; 29-70.

16. Thursday, May 2 – Putting it all Together.

In-class screening: *TBA*

1. Trinh Minh-Ha, "Documentary is/not a Name," *October* 4 (1990): 76-98.
2. Jill Godmilow, "Kill the Documentary as We Know It," *Journal of Film and Video* 54.2-3 (Summer/Fall 2002): 3-10.

***Due: Final Draft.**