

Course Syllabus

Course Information:

HUAS6312 | *Documentary: Aesthetics & Ethics*
Spring 2016 | Tuesday, 10-12:45pm | Location: JO 4.708

Professor Contact Information:

Dr. Shilyh Warren

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office hours: Tuesday 1:00-3:00pm and by appointment

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?

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
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Required Textbooks and Materials:

1. Scott Macdonald, *American Ethnographic Film and Personal Documentary: The Cambridge Turn* (U of California P, 2013)
2. Helen Hughes, *Green Documentary* (Bristol, UK: Intellect, 2014)

*All other materials will be on e-reserves.

The URL for this page is: <http://utdallas.docutec.com/eres/coursepage.aspx?cid=1969>

Password: **ethnographic**

Grading Policy:

Your final grade will be determined as follows:

- Participation & Preparedness = 15%
- Reflection Project 1: Ethics & Others = 25%
- Reflection Project 2: Ethics & Self = 25%
- Final paper (2000-2500 words) = 35%

Assignments & Academic Calendar

I. Ethics and Others.

1. Tuesday, Jan 12. What Ethical Issues? Part 1

Intro and in-class screening: *The Wolfpack* (Crystal Moselle, 2015)

2. Tuesday, Jan 19. What Ethical Issues? Part 2

Watch: *The Act of Killing* (Joshua Oppenheimer, 2012)

1. "[Honest Truths: Documentary Filmmakers on Ethical Challenges in Their Work](#)." The Center for Media & Social Impact at American University, 9 September 2009
2. Janet Hoskins, "Film Review: *The Act of Killing*," *Visual Anthropology* 28.3 (2015): 262-265.
3. Gerry van Klinken, "No, *The Act of Killing* Is Not Unethical," *Critical Asian Studies* 46.1 (2014): 176-178.
4. Galuh Wandita, "PREMAN NATION: Watching *The Act of Killing* in Indonesia," *Critical Asian Studies* 46.1 (2014): 167-170.

3. Tuesday, Jan 26. Encountering the Constructed Real.

Watch: *Nanook of the North* (Robert J. Flaherty, 1922: 80 min.) [UTD Kanopy streaming]

1. "Beginnings: The Americans and Popular Anthropology, 1922-1929," in *A New History of Documentary*, eds. Jack C. Ellis and Betsy A. McLane, (New York: Continuum): 12-26.
2. Robert Flaherty, "[How I filmed Nanook of the North](#)," *World's Work*, October 1922, 632-640.
3. Jay Ruby, "The Ethics of Image Making; or, "They're Going to Put Me in the Movies. They're Going to Make a Big Star Out of Me..." *New Challenges for Documentary*. 2nd ed., 209-219.

4. Tuesday, Feb 2. Getting the Picture.

Watch: *Dead Birds* (Robert Gardner, 1964: 83 min.) [UTD Kanopy streaming]

1. Scott MacDonald, "Chapter 2: Robert Gardner," *American Ethnographic Film and Personal Documentary: The Cambridge Turn* (U of California P, 2013).
2. Barbash & Taylor "Documentary Styles" in *Cross-Cultural Filmmaking: A Handbook for Making Documentary and Ethnographic Films and Videos* (U of California, P, 1997): 14-33.

5. Thursday, Feb 9. 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. 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.
2. Dean MacCannell, "Cannibal Tours," *Society for Visual Anthropology Review* 6.2 (September 1990): 14-24.

6. Tuesday, Feb 16 – Indigenous Filmmaking

Watch: *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance* (Alanis Obomsawin, 1993)

1. Faye Ginsburg, "The Parallax Effect: The Impact of Indigenous Media on Ethnographic Film" *Visual Anthropology Review* 11.2 (Fall 1995): 64-76.
2. David MacDougall, "Whose Story Is It?" *Visual Anthropology Review* 7.2 (1991): 2-10.

II. Ethics & Selves.

7. Tuesday, Feb 23. Reflexivity as Truth.

Watch: *Stories We Tell* (Sarah Polley, 2013) and *Delirium* (Mindy Faber, 1993)

In class: Excerpts from *Man with Movie Camera* (1929) and *Chronicle of a Summer* (1960)

1. Keith Beattie, Ch5 “The Truth of the Matter,” *Documentary Screens* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2002): 83-104.
2. Celia Lambert, “Sweet little lies: Truth and fiction in *Stories We Tell*,” *Screen Education* 73 (Mar 2014): 16-21.

8. Tuesday, Mar 1. Filmmaker as Subject.

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

In-class: *Joyce at 34* (Joyce Chopra, 1972)

Scott MacDonald, “Introduction” and “Chapter 6: Ross McElwee,” *American Ethnographic Film and Personal Documentary: The Cambridge Turn* (U of California P, 2013).

9. Tuesday, Mar 8. Self & Form.

Watch: *The Missing Picture* (Rithy Pahn, 2013)

1. Leshu Torchin, “Mediation And Remediation: La Parole Filmée In Rithy Panh's *The Missing Picture*,” *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 68, No. 1 (Fall 2014), pp. 32-41.
2. Jill Godmilow, “Kill the Documentary as We Know It,” *Journal of Film and Video* (2002); 3-10.
3. Jill Godmilow, “[Killing the Documentary: An Oscar-Nominated Filmmaker Takes Issue With The Act of Killing](#),” *Indiewire*, March 5, 2014.

Tuesday, March 15. Spring Break. No Class.

III. With and Beyond the Human Subject

10. Tuesday, Mar 22. Your World or Mine?

Watch: *Grizzly Man* (Werner Herzog, 2005)

1. Cary Wolfe, “Introduction” to *Animal Rites* (U of Chicago P, 2003): 1-18.
2. 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.

11. Tuesday, April 5. Under Siege.

Watch: *More Than Honey* (Markus Imhoof, 2012)

Helen Hughes, “Chapter 1: Introduction” & “Chapter 5: The Argumentative Response,” *Green Documentary* (Bristol, UK: Intellect, 2014): 1-20 & 115-135.

12. Tuesday, March 29 – Where we Meet.

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

Scott MacDonald, “Chapter 9: Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Sensory Ethnography,” *American Ethnographic Film and Personal Documentary: The Cambridge Turn* (U of California P, 2013).

13. Tuesday, Apr 12 – Earth as Place. Close and Far.

Watch: *Manufactured Landscapes* (Jennifer Baichwal, 2007)

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); *Silent Springs* (Erin Espelie, 2010).

Helen Hughes, “Chapter 2: The Institutional Context” & “Chapter 3: The Contemplative Response,” *Green Documentary* (Bristol, UK: Intellect, 2014): 21-40 & 41-82.

14. Tuesday, April 19 – Putting it all Together.

In-class screening: *Sans Soleil (Sunless)* (Chris Marker, 1983)

Trinh Minh-Ha, “Documentary is/not a Name,” *October 4* (1990): 76-98.

15. Tuesday, April 26 – Presentations.