

Course Syllabus

Course Information

HUAS 7360 – Contemporary Documentary Film

FALL 2017

Thursdays 1-3:45pm

JO 4.112

Professor Contact Information

Dr. Shilyh Warren

Office Phone: 972-883-6316

Office Location: JO 5.112

Office Hours: by appointment

Course Description

Documentaries are enjoying massive popularity around the globe and over a variety of media platforms. In this class, we focus on documentary films produced after the 1980s, including some of the most popular documentary projects of the 21st century. Our goal is to survey the range of themes, techniques, stories, and experiences offered by contemporary documentary films. In an age of fake-news and accepted media bias, what truths or forms of authenticity do documentary films produce? What do we do with the knowledge and emotional experiences we gain from documentaries? What forms of engagement and interactivity can we produce in response to contemporary documentaries?

Learning Outcomes

After taking this class students will be able to:

- Identify and describe major trends in contemporary documentary filmmaking, distribution, and exhibition
- Analyze and interpret the cinematic strategies in a range of documentary films
- Write analytical essays about documentary films, using the disciplinary approaches and the critical vocabulary of film studies
- Understand and synthesize academic scholarship about documentaries
- Understand and synthesize popular media about documentary film
- Use critical and creative approaches to respond to documentary themes and ideas

Required Textbook and Course Materials

All published course materials will be available on pdf through the UTD library e-reserves.

Most of the films are available at the UTD Library Media Center

Assignments and Grading Policy:

- **15 points: Participation**
 - You are expected to come fully prepared for each and every class. This means you will have completed all the reading and the screening assignments for the day.

- **15 points: 1 Audio-visual presentation on the assigned film**
 - Components:
 - **Introduce the film** (title, director, year, major actors, and how the film was received when it was released by critics and audiences)
 - **Present one clip from the film** (3 min or less). This clip should be a crucial scene that helps us understand the significance of the film. Please have the exact time code for your scene, which we will project from the DVD. Please set up the scene for us, remind us when it takes place in the film and why it is important.
 - **Provide a handout** that includes: your name, the name, director, and year of the film, and **3 discussion questions for the group** (thinking questions, not yes or no questions) about the film and how it relates to our main theme of the week.

- **45 points: 3 Film Analysis Papers (1250-1750 words) / 15 points each.** Using any film that you want and readings (3 minimum) from our syllabus write an analysis of a film. Your paper needs to have a clear and obvious main claim (which we also call a thesis or argument), use evidence from the films and readings, synthesize and analyze the materials at stake, and arrive at a viable conclusion. More details will be forthcoming. You have one paper due each month: September, October, and November. You choose the dates.

- **25 points: Final Paper (2250-2500 words).** Choose one of your 3 Short Analysis Papers and expand into a longer, more elaborate analysis.

Grading Scale:

A+ = Rare*	B+ = 86-89	C+ = 77-79	D+ = 67-69	F = Below 60
A = 95-100	B = 83-85	C = 73-76	D = 63-66	
A- = 90-94	B- = 80-82	C- = 70-72	D- = 60-62	

*A+ is reserved for the student who goes above and beyond the course expectations by contributing broadly and significantly to the entire learning experience of the community.

UT Dallas Syllabus Policies and Procedures

The information contained in the following link constitutes the University's policies and procedures segment of the course syllabus.

Please go to <http://go.utdallas.edu/syllabus-policies> for these policies.

Updated: August 18, 2017

Course Outline

Aug 24. Class 1. Introduction

Origin stories: Lumière, Vertov, Flaherty, Johnsons

Las Madres: The Mothers of Plaza de Mayo (Susana Munoz and Lourdes Portillo, 1985)

Aug 31. Class 2. Why We Watch

Queen of Versailles (Lauren Greenfield, 2012)

Bill Nichols, "How do documentaries differ from other types of film?" *Introduction to documentary* (Indiana University Press, 2001), 20-98.

Rose Lichter-Marck, "Money Changes Everything: An Interview with Lauren Greenfield," *Rookie*, May 23, 2013. <http://www.rookiemag.com/2013/05/money-changes-everything-an-interview-with-lauren-greenfield/>

Sept 7. Class 3. The New Documentary

The Thin Blue Line (Errol Morris, 1987)

Linda Williams, "Mirrors without Memories: Truth, History and the New Documentary," *Film Quarterly* 46.3 (Spring 1993): 9-21.

Errol Morris with Peter Bates, "Truth Not Guaranteed: An Interview with Errol Morris," (1989) *The Documentary Film Reader, History, Theory, Criticism* (Oxford UP, 2016): 807-809.

Sept 14. Class 4. Evidence & Justice

Virunga (Orlando von Einsiedel, 2014)

Sheila Curran Bernard, "Keep a Close Watch: Analyzing a Documentary's Strengths and Weaknesses," *Documentary Magazine*, May 17, 2016. <http://www.documentary.org/column/keep-close-watch-analyzing-documentarys-strengths-and-weaknesses>

Tom Waugh, "Why Documentary Makers Keep Trying to Change the World or Why People Changing the World Keep Making Documentaries," (1984) *The Right to Play Oneself: Looking Back on Documentary Film* (U of Minnesota P, 2011).

Annie Goldson, "Journalism Plus? The Resurgence of Creative Documentary," *Pacific Journalism Review* 21.1 (2015): 86-98.

Sept 21. Class 5. Documentaries are Political I

13th (Ava DuVernay, 2016)

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Michelle Alexander, "The New Jim Crow," *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2016): 178-220.

Michael T. Martin, Ava DuVernay, "Conversations with Ava DuVernay: 'A Call to Action': Organizing Principles of an Activist Cinematic Practice," *Black Camera* 6.1 (Fall 2014): 57-91.

Sept 28. Class 6. Documentaries are Political II

Risk (Laura Poitras, 2014)

Michael Renov, "Introduction: The Truth About Non-Fiction" and "Towards a Poetics of Documentary," *Theorizing Documentary* (1994): 1-36.

Daniel Holloway, "Docs Get Political in the Age of Trump," *Variety* 336.12 (June 2017): 25-26.

Oct 5. Class 7. Documentaries are Personal

Stories We Tell (Sarah Polley, 2012)

Alisa Lebow, "First Person Political," In *The Documentary Film Book*, ed. Brian Winston (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013): 257-265.

Leah Anderst, "Memory's Chorus: *Stories We Tell* and Sarah Polley's Theory of Autobiography," *Senses of Cinema* 69 (December 2013). <http://sensesofcinema.com/2013/feature-articles/memorys-chorus-stories-we-tell-and-sarah-polleys-theory-of-autobiography/>

Oct 12. Class 8: Crime & Justice

OJ: Made in America (Ezra Edelman, 2016)

Stella Bruzzi, "Making a genre: the case of the contemporary true crime documentary," *Law and Humanities* 10.2 (2006): 249-280.

A.O. Scott, Review: "'O.J.: Made in America,' an Unflinching Take on His Rise and Fall," *New York Times*, May 19, 2016. <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/20/movies/oj-made-in-america-review.html>

"Why Revisit O.J. Simpson?" Interview with Ezra Edelman at *Pure Nonfiction* podcast. <http://podbay.fm/show/1102957639/e/1465455642?autostart=1>

Oct 19. Class 9. Feminist Documentary

Divorce Iranian Style (Kim Longinotto, 2005)

Belinda Smaill, "Cinema Against the Age: Feminism and Contemporary Documentary," *Screening the Past* (2012).

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Patricia White, "Cinema Solidarity: The Documentary Practice of Kim Longinotto," *Cinema Journal* 2006 46.1 (2006): 120-128.

Oct 26. Class 10. Feminist Documentary II

Las Muertes Chiquitas (Mireia Sallares, 2009)

Nov 2. Class 11. New Forms

Close-up (Abbas Kiarostami, 1990)

Nico Baumbach, "Shareable Cinema: The Politics of Abbas Kiarostami," in *The Global Auteur: The Politics of Authorship in 21st Century Cinema* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016), 271-285.

Nov 9. Class 12. New Ends

Casting JonBenet (Kitty Green, 2017)

David Sims, "The Bizarre Spectacle of Casting JonBenét," *The Atlantic*, April 26, 2017.

Jill Godmilow, "Kill the Documentary as We Know It," *Journal of Film and Video* 54.2-3 (Summer/Fall 2002): 3-10.

Nov 16. Class 13. Mockumentary

Carnage (Simon Amstell, 2017)

Alisa Lebow, "Faking What? Making A Mockery of Documentary," *F is for Phony: Fake Documentary and Truth's Undoing* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 2006): 223-237.

Craig Hight, "The Mockumentary," *Contemporary Documentary*, eds. Daniel Marcus, Selmin Kara (London and NY: Routledge, 2016): 26-41.

**** Nov 23 – Thanksgiving ****

Dec 30 – Class 14. Last Class.

Experimental Documentary Delights.