

CMST 4312: Critical Media Theory & Practice

Documentary Film & Video

Fall 2017, TTH 12:00-1:20, 202 Coates

Dr. Trish Suchy: psuchy@lsu.edu; 225-578-4172

Office: 129 Coates. Hours: TTH 3:00-4:00 or by appointment

Description

Through readings, screenings, and discussion, we will become acquainted with various approaches to documentary film and video in theory and practice. Our focus will be on the ethical, rhetorical, and creative choices that form conventions and modes documentary filmmakers have developed in their practice and critics have used to describe and analyze how documentaries communicate. We will experiment with some of these choices and possibilities by working on our own short documentary projects. No prior filmmaking experience is necessary; the point of the projects is to learn about the choices available to documentarists and the significance of these in the active mode—to make the theory “go.”

Text (ordered at campus B&N; also available at Amazon.com in print and Kindle editions... AND.... Electronic version FREE from the LSU library. There should be a link on your Moodle desktop.)

Spence, Louise & Vinicius Navarro. *Crafting Truth*. Rutgers UP, 2011.

There will be additional materials posted to Moodle, including essays for Grad students.

You will also need an external hard or flash drive with enough storage space for your projects, and a memory card if the camera you use requires one.

Equipment

You will need access to a digital video camera, a computer, and editing software for this class. Students may use the above from Studio 151 (151 Coates). You are welcome to use your own stuff. Cameras in Studio 151 include several Canons that write to MiniDV tape and some that write to flash memory. There are also GoPros and HD Flip cameras, which write to cards. The Studio has microphones and digital audio recorders. If you borrow Studio 151 equipment or my own equipment directly from me, you are responsible for adhering to loaning policies.

For editing, any basic program will do—iMovie or the like, or you may use more advanced software like Premiere or Final Cut; all are available on the Studio 151 computers. If editing software is new to you, you should consult Studio 151 and/or visit Lynda.com (available free through MyLSU) for tutorials on your own time. The Studio has a server with data storage space. Keep your footage there and it will be available from any computer in the lab (but not off-site). Some students make the mistake of keeping their data on one computer in the lab, and then count on it being unoccupied when you visit. That’s silly! Use the server! If you don’t know how, just ask a peer mentor or other member of Studio 151 staff. If you want to work on your projects outside of the Studio or move back and forth from there to another location, I recommend you BYO external hard drive. Check for compatibility first. If you are moving large files, you may need to reformat the hard drive in advance of using it.

Before you start any project, think through your workflow. Make sure you have the means to capture your data, transfer it to store and work on it, software that will accept the file type and/or software to convert your file type (I recommend the *FREE* and wonderful MPEG Streamclip, easily located through Googling), adequate space on something to write the processed data to, and cables to connect everything. Never assume batteries for anything are charged up when you check out Studio equipment, especially during high demand times. When you borrow something from Studio 151, double check that *you know how to use it* and *that you know what you need to connect it*. Studio 151 cannot read your mind, and staff does not automatically offer advice—you have to ask for it. Just say nicely, “I have not used this camera before; can you help me figure out how to use it for my project?” Or, “How do I set things up so that my data will go on the server?”—etc.

Assignments and evaluation

Researched film presentation with accompanying essay	200 points
Quizzes	200 points
3 video exercises	300 points (100 each)
Synthesis video project (including pitch and short essay)	300 points

Grading scale: 967-1000 = A+; 933-966 = A; 900-932 = A-; 867-899 = B+; 833-866 = B; 800-832 = B-; 767-799 = C+; 733-766 = C; 700-732 = C-; 667-699 = D+; 633-666 = D; 600-632 = D- 599 = F

Graduate students

Graduate students enrolled in this course have the same assignments except for the researched film presentation; they will do a more substantive research project that may include several films, a longer essay, and a longer presentation to the class. To prepare for these they will be assigned additional readings and meetings with the instructor to discuss those. Grad students should contact me in the first week of class to discuss details.

Researched film presentation

Each student will be assigned to make a presentation that gives the class a critical introduction to and perspectives on an assigned documentary film. For these presentations, you should watch the film, research and read about it, and pull together a 15-20 minute presentation (time may vary depending on enrollments) that includes clips you select. You'll be expected to demonstrate fluency with relevant readings and concepts from the course and texts. You should submit a 7-8 page critical essay about your film, including appropriate citation and referencing, on the day you make your presentation. There are some due dates for steps in the process of this project that you must meet in advance of your presentation. You will receive more detailed instructions in class.

Quizzes

While there is no midterm or final exam in this class, you will take several *unannounced quizzes* during the semester. These cover the reading, screening, and course concepts discussed and presented in class. To do well on the quizzes, you will need to attend regularly and attentively, keep up with the reading, and take notes during presentations and discussions. *I do expect you to read the book. You will not have the material fed to you in lecture.* Rather, you will be expected to use the ideas in the reading to discuss films we screen and study, and to make choices in your own video work.

Video exercises

These are short projects designed to acquaint you with technological skills, conventions, and modes of documentary without the pressure of making a full film. You will make, submit, and present to the class three of these during the course of the semester. Typically these are 2-3 minute pieces. Generally you'll work in teams. Depending on class size and other factors, the assignments may be individual, but your teammates should assist you, and in turn, you should assist them. Part of your grade for these assignments will be based on your teamwork, including how you support others when the assignments are individual. Figuring out how to work together is up to you, but everyone must do her or his share. Filmmaking is rarely a solo activity; figuring out workable team dynamics, which may vary considerably from team to team and project to project, is always *part of your assignment*.

Synthesis project

At the culmination of the course, you will synthesize concepts from the video exercises and films and concepts we have studied to produce a documentary, length and many parameters TBA. We'll see where enrollment numbers are and how you are working together when it's time to make the assignment, but one plan is that each student will work concurrently on 2-3 projects: her/his own (as producer, director, and editor), and 1-2 other projects directed by classmates, for which each of you

will serve as writer, cinematographer, sound person, performer, etc. If the class remains small, we may just divide into groups. Stay tuned. Whatever the case, you will be evaluated for your support of or leadership in peer projects by your peers, and these evaluations will figure into your project grade.

This project requires preliminary approval via a pitch. Not all pitches will be green lit. Short (2-3 page) papers that describe your methods for making the video, along with peer evaluations, will also be due when projects are submitted. All steps in the process, including the pitch and paper, figure into your grade.

Attendance and citizenship; late work policies

This is a 4000 level class that emphasizes discussion and participation in activities. It is not a class you can attend sporadically, sit in the back, and coast. If that's what you want, please drop this class and give the slot to someone who wants to be here.

Students are expected to be engaged good citizens in this class: attend regularly and come on time prepared with the day's assignment, participate in discussions, listen and be responsive to your classmates and instructor, pay attention in class, refrain from texting and using social media while in class, pull your weight in any group work, follow Studio 151 policies including use of the space and its technologies, support one another as a community of students learning together. It has been my experience that the students who put forth effort in as much of the above as possible also achieve the most success and tend to earn higher grades.

Outside of any considerations for illness, late work will be docked a full letter grade for each day it is late, including weekends and days when we don't have class. Presentations and quizzes cannot be made up. In order for any of your work to be screened in class, you must be present. If you miss a screening day, we will not screen your work, and the assignment will be counted as late or not submitted (i.e., a zero). If you know you have to miss a class, it's far better to get out ahead of it and discuss it with your instructor, and to turn in any assignments early.

Accommodation

If you have a disability that may have some impact upon your work in this class and for which you may require accommodations, please see a Coordinator in the Office for Disability Affairs so that such accommodations may be arranged. After you receive your accommodation letters, please meet with me during the first two weeks of class to discuss the provisions of those accommodations.

Schedule *Subject to change*

T 8/22	Introductions; screen selections from <i>Shooting the Past</i>
TH 8/24	Definitions; begin screening <i>Silverlake Life</i>
T 8/29	Chapter 1, Authenticity; continue <i>Silverlake Life</i>
TH 8/31	Video exercise 1 assigned; Chapter 2, Evidence; begin screening <i>Thin Blue Line</i>
T 9/5	Continue <i>Thin Blue Line</i>
Th 9/7	Chapter 3, Authority; Conclude <i>Thin Blue Line</i> and discuss Research presentation selections due (see list at end of syllabus)
T 9/12	Video Exercise 1 due; screen and discuss; Video Exercise 2 assigned
Th 9/14	Chapter 4, Responsibility; begin screening <i>Chronicle of a Summer</i>
T 9/19	Continue <i>Chronicle of a Summer</i> ; discuss
Th 9/21	Chapter 5, Argument; screen <i>Why We Fight: Prelude to War</i>

T 9/26	Continue Argument
Th 9/28	Video Exercise 2 due; screen and discuss; Video Exercise 3 assigned
T 10/3	Chapter 6, Dramatic Stories, Poetic and Essay Documentaries; screen excerpts from <i>Cave of Forgotten Dreams & Rain</i>
Th 10/5	Screen <i>Fast Cheap & Out of Control</i>
T 10/10	Chapter 7, Editing; Begin screening excerpts from <i>Cinema Verite</i>
Th 10/12	Continue <i>Cinema Verite</i> ; excerpts from <i>Titicut Follies</i>
T 10/17	Chapter 8, Camerawork; screen <i>The Gleaners & I</i>
Th 10/19	Fall holiday
T 10/24	Video Exercise 3 due: screen and discuss
Th 10/26	Chapter 9, The Profilmic. To prepare, watch Joshua Oppenheimer's <i>The Act of Killing</i> , available for rental on Amazon Prime and YouTube (\$3 or \$4). I will also hold a free screening of the DVD outside of class, time and place TBA.
T 10/31	Project pitches due
Th 11/2	Chapter 10, Sounds; Screen and discuss <i>Night Mail</i>
T 11/7	Research presentations
Th 11/9	Research presentations
<i>From this point forward in the class, we will hear your research presentations (that you have been working on since early in the semester) and you need to attend to doing and watching these, but most of your out of class time for this course should be spent working on your projects.</i>	
T 11/14	Research presentations
Th 11/16	Work on projects
T 11/21	Research presentations
Th 11/23	Thanksgiving holiday
T 11/28	Research presentations
Th 11/30	Wrap up

W 12/6 5:30 – 7:30 PM Final Exam: Project screenings

Films we will screen in class, in whole or in part (we may clip others)

Shooting the Past/Stephen Poliakoff/1999/182" (this is a fiction film—we will watch only 1 or 2 scenes)
Silverlake Life/Peter Friedman and Tom Joslin/1993/99"
The Thin Blue Line/Errol Morris/1988/103"
Chronicle of a Summer/Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin/1961/85"
Why We Fight: Prelude to War/Frank Capra/1942/52"
Rain/Joris Ivens/1929/12"
Cave of Forgotten Dreams/Werner Herzog/2010/90"
Fast Cheap & Out of Control/Errol Morris/1997/80"
Cinema Verité: Defining the Moment/Peter Wintonick/2000/193"
Titicut Follies/Frederick Wiseman/1967/84"
The Gleaners & I/Agnes Varda/2000/82"
The Act of Killing/Joshua Oppenheimer/2012/115"
Night Mail/Harry Watt and Basil Wright/1936/25"

Presentation films

Start looking these up; you will be asked for your top 3 choices a few weeks into the semester. If you can't choose, I will choose for you. If you are burning to present something that isn't on this list, let me know and you will have the opportunity to make a case for it.

4 Little Girls/Spike Lee/1997/102"
American Movie/Chris Smith/1999/107"
Amy/Asuf Kapadia/2015/128"
Bear 71/ Leanne Allison and Jeremy Mendes/2012/interactive web documentary, <http://bear71.nfb.ca/#/bear71>
Bowling for Columbine/Michael Moore/2002/120"
Burden of Dreams/Les Blanc/1982/95"
Bus 174/Felipe Lacerda and Jose Padilha/2002/122"
Call Me Kuchu/Katherine Fairfax Wright and Malika Zouhali-Worrall/2012/87"
Capturing the Friedmans/Andrew Jarecki/2003/107"
Close-Up/Abba Kiarostami/1990/98"
Control Room/Jehane Noujaim/2004/84"
The Cove/Louie Psihoyos and Fisher Stevens/2009/92"
Don't Look Back/D. A. Pennebaker/1967/96"
Encounters at the End of the World/Werner Herzog/2007/99"
Exit through the Gift Shop/Banksy/2010/87"
Fahrenheit 9/11/Michael Moore/2004/122"
Grey Gardens/Albert Maysles and David Maysles/1975/100"
Grizzly Man/Werner Herzog/2005/103"
Harlan County, USA/Barbara Kopple/1976/103"
Hearts and Minds/Peter Davis/1974/112"
Hoop Dreams/Steve James/1994/170"

Koyaanisqatsi/Godfrey Reggio/1982/86"
The Look of Silence/Joshua Oppenheimer/2015/103"
Louisiana Story/Robert Flaherty/1948/78"
Man on Wire/James Marsh/2008/94"
Man with a Movie Camera/Dziga Vertov/1929/68"
Nanook of the North/Robert Flaherty/1922/79"
Night & Fog/Alain Resnais/1955/32"
Paris is Burning/Jennie Livingston/1990/71"
Primary/Robert Drew/1960/60"
Reassemblage/Trinh T. Minh-ha/1983/40"
Restrepo/Tim Hetherington and Sebastian Junger/2010/93"
Roger & Me/Michael Moore/1989/91"
Room 237/Rodney Ascher/2012/142"
Salesman/Albert Maysles and David Maysles/1968/85"
Sans Soleil/Chris Marker/1983/100"
Sherman's March/Ross McElwee/1985/157"
Standard Operating Procedure/Errol Morris/2008/116"
Super Size Me/Morgan Spurlock/2004/100"
Tabloid/Errol Morris/2010/87"
Tarnation/Jonathan Caouette/2003/88"
The Times of Harvey Milk/Rob Epstein/1984/90"
Tongues Untied/Marlon Riggs/1989/55"
Triumph of the Will/Leni Riefenstahl/1935/110"
The War Game/Peter Watkins/1965/48"