

Documentary Film 128 2016

Spring

Jeffrey
Skoller, jasko@berkeley.edu
& Thurs 12:30-2pm

Lectures: Tues

Office: 6218 Dwinelle
Hall
or Dwinelle 142

Screenings: Weds 7pm PFA

Office Hours: Tues 2:30-4, Weds 10-12pm or by appointment.

SYLLABUS

This course surveys the history, theory and practice of the genre called Documentary Film. We will attempt to explore what this amorphous and vague term means and examine the ways its forms and ethics have changed since the beginning of cinema. We examine the major modes of documentary filmmaking including cinema vérité, direct cinema, investigative documentary, ethnographic film, agit-prop and activist media, autobiography and the personal essay as well as recent post-modern forms that question relationships between fact and fiction such as the docudrama, the archival film, cine-recreations and "mockumentary." Through formal analysis, we will examine the "reality effects" of these works focusing on their narrative structures and the ways in which they make meaning. Through this, we explore some of the theoretical questions that constantly surround this most philosophical of film genres. We will ask: How do these films shape notions of truth, reality and point of view? What are the ethics and politics of representation and who speaks for whom when we watch a documentary? What do documentaries make visible or conceal? What, if anything, constitutes objectivity? And by the way, just what is a document anyway?

Screenings and lecture will be on Tuesday's and Thursdays. Evening screenings are on Weds at 7pm. 3 screenings in DW 142 and 9 at the PFA. There will be several visiting filmmakers during the course of the semester that may shift our lecture/screening schedule. You are expected and required to attend all of these sessions. More than two unexcused absences will result in lowered grades. If there is a reason you cannot attend an evening screening, please see me.

Your grade will be based on the quality of your efforts in class and in the following assignments:

- Class Participation and Attendance in lectures and screenings. **Persistent tardiness, and more than 2 unexcused absences will affect your final grade. There are 12 required Weds evening screenings at 7pm.**
- **Please Note:** You are also required to attend the Q&A after in person screenings. 10%
- 6-2 page response papers (typed) for any of the 9 PFA screenings of your choosing. These are due the following Tuesday after the screening. **All must write on *First Cousin, Once Removed*, 2/10, & *Inside Job*, 3/30** 25%
- 4 page paper. Subject to be given **Due 2/16** 5% 1
- Mid-Term Exam **March 10** 20%
- Final paper of 6-8 pages. **Due May 10**
- Or documentary film of 5-6 minutes. **Due May 10** 30%

Final paper should incorporate several of the films and readings from the course combined with supplemental research done on your own. The topic is entirely of your choosing, though possible topics will be suggested. A one-page single-spaced prospectus of two paragraphs with a list of outside reading will be **due April 7**. It should contain a thesis statement and a plan of argument. The final paper must be double space typed with proper footnote citations and bibliography. **Paper is due May 10.**

Documentary film: With my permission, and only if you have done well enough on other assignments, you can opt to make a short film but you must have the necessary technical experience with video cameras and digital editing to pull off a short edited project. THERE WILL BE NO TECHNICAL INSTRUCTION in this class and production equipment is quite limited. Making a well made short doc is usually more work than writing a viable paper, so make sure that you have a good and viable project and **present a detailed two page project proposal**

and production schedule from pre to post production by April 7. The Documentary must be Films will be screen in class **May 3 & 5** and final cut is due May 9 on a flash drive accompanied by a final two page paper linking it to themes discussed in class.**NOTE: If you already made a film in the Avant-Garde course, it is unlikely that you will be approved to make a film in this class.**

Plagiarism: Plagiarism on any assignment constitutes grounds for immediate failure of the course, and, in some cases, may result in disciplinary action by the university. Please see your instructors (or consult the ample material available on the UC Berkeley website concerning academic honesty) if you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism.

Difficult/Controversial Materials, Discussions and Trigger Warnings: Please note that some of the films studied in class explore difficult social and political subject matter and contain potentially upsetting language and imagery. This may include graphic images of violence and controversial or dated representations of race, gender or sexuality in historical films. These challenges are an intrinsic part of the genre we are studying, which by definition tackles important and difficult issues in our lives and society. I will try to warn the class if we are about to view something that could be upsetting, but different things are upsetting for different people. If you have concerns or questions about a particular film or don't want to see some of the materials in the syllabus, please come to talk with me about it beforehand.

REQUIRED TEXTS: Documenting the Documentary: Close Readings of Documentary Film and Video Barry Keith Grant ed., Wayne State UP; 1998 **[Grant]**

Introduction to Documentary, 2nd Edition by Bill Nichols Indiana UP; 2010 **[Nichols]**

RECOMMENDED TEXT: Documentary, A History of the Non-Fiction Film 2nd ed by Erik Barnouw Oxford UP; 1993

Recommended Texts for Further Research on Nonfiction Film:

Ilisa Barbash and Lucien Taylor (1997), *Cross-Cultural Filmmaking*

Richard Barsam (1992), *Nonfiction Film: A Critical History*

Thomas Benson and Carolyn Anderson (1989), *Reality Fictions: The Films of Frederick Wiseman*

Stella Bruzzi (2000), *New Documentary: A Critical Introduction*

Leslie Devereaux and Roger Hillman, Editors (1995), *Fields of Vision*

Seth Feld, Ed.(2003), *Cine-Ethnography: Jean Rouch*

Jane Gaines and Michael Renov, Editors (1999), *Collecting Visible Evidence*

Jonathan Kahana, *Intelligence Work: The Politics of American Documentary* (2008)

Phyllis R. Klotman ed., *Struggles for Representation: African American Documentary Film/Video*

Alexandra Juhasz, Jesse Lerner, *F Is for Phony: Fake Documentary and Truth's Undoing* (2006)

Joram Ten Brink ed. *Killer Images: Documentary Film, Memory and the Performance of Violence*

Kevin Macdonald and Mark Cousins, Editors (1996), *Imagining Reality: The Faber Book of Documentary*

David MacDougall (1998), *Transcultural Cinema*

Annette Michelson, ed.(1984), *Kino-Eye The Writings of Dziga Vertov*

Bill Nichols (1994), *Blurred Boundaries: Questions of Meaning in Contemporary Culture*

Bill Nichols (1991), *Representing Reality*

[Bill Nichols & Michael Renov, \(2011\) Cinema's Alchemist: The Films of Peter Forgacs \(Links to an external site.\)](#)

Carl Plantinga (1997), *Rhetoric and Representation in Nonfiction Film*

Paula Rabinowitz (1995), *They Must Be Represented*

Michael Renov, Editor (1993), *Theorizing Documentary*

Michael Renov, (2004) *The Subject of Documentary*

Fatimah Tobing Rony (1996), *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle*

Alan Rosenthal, Ed. (1988), *New Challenges for Documentary*

Jay Ruby (2000), *Picturing Culture: Explorations of Film & Anthropology*

Louise Spence, Vinicus Navarro (2011) *Crafting Truth: Documentary Form & Meaning*

Leshu Torchin, *Creating the Witness: Documenting Genocide on Film, Video, and the Internet*

Trinh T. Minh-ha (1992) *Framer Framed*

Øyvind Vågnes,(2012) *Zaprudered: The Kennedy Assassination Film in Visual Culture*

Diane Waldman and Janet Walker (1999), *Feminism and Documentary*

Brian Winston, ed. (2013) *The Documentary Film Book*

There are 12 required evening screenings 3 on Weds, at 7pm and 9 at PFA at 7pm

1. **Weds Jan 20, 142 Dwinelle, 7pm:** *Nanook of the North* (USA) Robert Flaherty 1922
2. **Weds Feb 3, 142 Dwinelle, 7pm** *Restrepo* Sebastian Junger, (USA)
3. **Weds Feb 10, at PFA, 7pm:** *First Cousin Once Removed* Alan Berliner in person!
4. **Weds Feb 17 at PFA, 7pm:** *Maidan* Sergei Loznitsa, (Ukraine) 2014
5. **Weds 2/24, At PFA: 7pm:** *One Cut, One Life* (USA) Ed Pincus, Lucia Small, 2014,
6. **Weds 3/2: At PFA: 7pm:** *Santo Forte* Eduardo Coutinho, (1998) 80")
7. **Weds 3/9, At PFA: 7pm:** *Primary* (USA) Drew, Pennebaker, Maysles 1960
8. **Weds 3/16 At PFA: 7pm:** *Pearl Button* (Chile) Patricio Guzman, 2015,
9. **Weds 3/30 At PFA: 7pm:** : *Inside Job* (USA) Charles Ferguson in person (2010)
10. **Weds 4/6, 142 Dwinelle, 7pm:** *Hearts & Minds* Peter Davis, (USA) 1974
11. **Weds 4/13, At PFA, 7pm:** *Suitcase of Love and Shame* (USA) Jane Gillooly, 2013
12. **Weds 4/20, At PFA, 7pm:** *Looking For Langston* Isaac Julien in Person!

WEEK #1 Jan. 19 & 21: Introduction to Class. Parameters, Requirements

FILMS: *Electrocuting an Elephant* Thomas Alva Edison 1903

What happened on Twenty-Third Street, NY City Edison 1901

At the Foot of the Flatiron [1903]

Selected Films by Auguste & Louis Lumiere (France) 1895

Avalanche Skier POV Helmet Cam Burial & Rescue in Haines, Alaska

READ For Thurs: "How Can We Define Documentary Film?" 1-42 [Nichols]

"The Kingdom of Shadows" Maxim Gorky **[b/course]**

"Embarrassing Evidence: The Detective Camera and the Documentary Impulse" Tom Gunning **[b/course]**

Screening Weds 1/20, 7pm Dwinelle 142) *Nanook of the North* Robert Flaherty 1922

WEEK #2 Jan 26 & 28: MAKING A WORLD

FILMS: *Kino Eye* Dziga Vertov (USSR) 1924

A Sixth Part of the World (1926) Dziga Vertov, USSR

READ: “Manifestos” Dziga Vertov **[b/course]**

“Robert Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North*” William Rothman **[Grant]**

“Vertov’s World” Nina Power **[b/course]**

“Visual Anthropology and the Ways of Knowing” David MacDougall **[b/course]**

WEEK #3 Feb 2 & 4: THE VOICE OF DOCUMENTARY

FILMS: *Battle of San Pietro* John Huston (USA) 1945

Las Hurdas (Land without Bread/Terra sin pan) Luis Buñuel Spain 1932

Eyes on the Prize Henry Hampton (USA) 1986 (excerpt)

READ: What Gives Documentary Films a Voice of Their Own? 67-94 [Nichols]

“Synthetic Vision: The Dialectical Imperative of Luis Buñuel’s *Las Hurdas*” Vivian Sobchack **[Grant]**

“Luis Buñuel Discusses *Las Hurdas*”? **[b/course]**

“Your Country, My Country: How Films About The Iraq War Construct Publics” Patricia Aufderheide **[b/course]**

Feb 3, 142 Dwinelle, 7pm Restrepo Sebastian Junger, (USA)

WEEK #4 Feb. 9 & 11: INTERVIEW/TESTIMONY/CONFESSION

FILMS: *California Election News #1 and #2* prod. By MGM

Love meetings Comizi d'amore Pier Paolo Pasolini (Italy) 1964 (excerpt)

The March Abraham Ravett (USA) 1999

Trick or Drink Vanalyn Green (USA) 1983

Shoah Claude Lanzmann (France) 1986 (Excerpts)

READ: “Q & A Poetics of the Documentary Film Interview” Leger Grindon **[b/course]**

“Testimony and the Limits of Representing History” Jeffrey Skoller **[b/course]**

“An Early History of the Interview Irina Leimbacher **[b/course]**

AT PFA, Feb 10, 7pm: *First Cousin Once Removed* Alan Berliner in person!

WEEK #5 Feb. 16 & 18: OBSERVATIONAL CINEMA (Paper #1 Due 2/16)

FILM: *Titicut Follies* Fred Wiseman (USA) 1967

An Image Harun Farocki (Germany) 1983, 25mins.

READ: “The Observational Mode” p172 [Nichols]

“The Documentary Film as Scientific Inscription” Brian Winston **[b/course]**

“Ethnography in the First Person: Frederick Wiseman’s *Titicut Follies*.” Barry Grant**[Grant]**

AT PFA, Feb 17, 7pm, *Maidan* Sergei Loznitsa, (Ukraine, Netherlands) 2014

WEEK #6 Feb. 23 & 25: CINEMA VERITE and the META-DOCUMENTARY

FILM: *Chronique d'ete* Jean Rouch/Edgar Moran (France) 1961

READ: “The Image Mirrored: Reflexivity and the Documentary Film” Jay Ruby **[b/course]**

“Chronicle of a Film” Edgar Moran **[b/course]**

“Two Short Interviews with Jean Rouch” G. Roy Leven & James Blue **[b/course]**

At PFA: Weds **2/24**, 7pm: *One Cut, One Life* (Ed Pincus, Lucia Small, (USA) 2014

WEEK #7 March 1 & 3: THE ETHNOGRAPHIC IMPULSE

FILMS: *Dead Birds* Robert Gardner (USA) 1964

The Bontoc Eulogy Marlon Fuentes (USA/Philippines) 1995

Charlie Pisuk Arnait Video Prods and Marie-Hélène Cousineau
(Canada) 2011

READ: "Why are Ethical Issues Central to Documentary Filmmaking?"
p42. [Nichols]

"Robert Gardner and Anthropological Cinema" Jay Ruby [b/course]

"The Quick And The Dead: Surrealism and the Found Ethnographic
Footage Films of *Bontoc Eulogy* and *Mother Dao*

Fatimah Tobing Rony, [b/course]

"Extracts from an Imaginary Interview: Questions and Answers
about *Bontoc Eulogy*" Marlon Fuentes [b/course]

At PFA: Weds 3/2, 7:00 p.m. *Santo Forte* Eduardo Coutinho, (Brazil) 1998

WEEK #8: March 8: TRUTH: NO GUARANTEES

FILM: *No Lies* Mitchell W. Block (USA) 1972.

READ: The Truth about *No Lies* (If You Can Believe It) Mitchell W.
Block [b/course]

March 10: **MID-TERM EXAM**

At PFA: 3/9, 7pm: *Primary* Robt. Drew, DA Pennebaker, Albert Maysles (USA)
1960

WEEK #9 Mar. 15 & 17: UNTOLD LIVES, The Personal as Political

FILMS: *Twelve disciples of Nelson Mandela* Thomas Allen Harris (USA) 2005

History and Memory: For Akiko and Takashige Rea Tajiri (USA) 1991

READ: "Domestic Ethnography & the Construction of the 'Other' Self"
M.Renov [b/course]

"The Site of Memory" Toni Morrison [b/course]

"Recalling the Exiled Foes of Apartheid" Felicia R. Lee [b/course]

"Interview with Filmmaker Thomas Allen Harris" PBS, 2006 &
2009 [b/course]

"Black Feminism and Queer Families: A Conversation with TA Harris" L.
A. Harris [b/course]

At PFA: 3/16, 7pm: *Pearl Button* Patricio Guzman, (Chile) 2015

WEEK #10 MAR 22-24: NO CLASS: SPRING BREAK

WEEK #11 March 29 & 31: ACTIVIST/MAKING YOUR OWN MEDIA

FILM: *Maquilapolis* Vicky Funari and Sergio De La Torre (US/Mexico) 2006

Filming Revolution an interactive data-based archive about documentary filmmaking in Egypt since the revolution. Alisa Lebow 2015

READ: "How Have Documentaries Addressed Social and Political Issues?" p212 [Nichols]

"Documentary Film and the 'Body' of Knowledge" Irina Leimbacher [b/course]

"From the Gulf War to the Battle of Seattle: Building an International Alternative Media Network" Jesse Drew [b/course]

At PFA: Weds 3/30, 7pm: *Inside Job* Charles Ferguson in person (USA) 2010

WEEK #12 April 5 & 7: AGIT-PROP [Paper Prospectus Due 4/7]

FILMS: *Triumph of the Will* Leni Reifenstahl, (Germany) 1935 Excerpts

READ: Nichols: What Makes Documentaries Engaging and Persuasive? p94

"Hearts and Minds: An American Film Trial" Saul Landau [b/course]

"The Mass Psychology of Fascist Cinema: Triumph of the Will" F. Tomasulo [Grant]

"Fascinating Fascism" Susan Sontag [b/course]

"Letter From Vietnam" Peter Davis [b/course]

"The Poetics of Propaganda" Jim Leach, [Grant]

Weds 4/6 In Dwinelle 142 7pm: *Hearts & Minds* Peter Davis, (USA) 1974

WEEK #13 April 12 & 14: RAIDING THE ARCHIVE

FILMS: Zapruder Film

Report Bruce Conner (USA) 1963-67

Eternal Frame by Ant Farm (USA) 1976

JFK (Excerpts) Oliver Stone (USA) 1991

READ: “The Event, Archive and Newsreel” Stella Bruzzi **[b/course]**

“On the Virtues of Preexisting Material: A Manifesto” Rick Prelinger **[b/course]**

“Free Culture” Lawrence Lessig **[b/course]**

Also see these websites for info on archival use:

Prelinger Archives: <http://www.archive.org/details/prelinger> (Links to an external site.)

Creative Commons: <http://creativecommons.org/> (Links to an external site.)

Recut, Reframe, Recycle: On Quoting Copyrighted Material in User-Generated

Video: http://www.centerforsocialmedia.org/files/pdf/CSM_Recut_Reframe_Recycle_report.pdf (Links to an external site.)

Documentary Filmmakers’ Statement of Best Practices in Fair Use: <http://centerforsocialmedia.org/rock/backgrounddocs/bestpractices.pdf> (Links to an external site.)

At PFA 4/13, 7pm: *Suitcase of Love and Shame* Jane Gillooly, (USA) 2013

WEEK #14 April 19 & 21: MAKING HISTORY

FILM: *The Maelstrom - A Family Chronicle* Peter Forgacs (Hungary) 1997

READ: “Historical Discourses of the Unimaginable: *The Maelstrom*” Michael Renov **[b/course]**

“The Absent One: The Avant-Garde and the Black Imaginary in *Looking for Langston*” by Manthia Diawara **[b/course]**

“De Margin De Center” by Isaac Julian & Kobena Mercer **[b/course]**

At PFA, 4/20, 7pm: *Looking for Langston* and short films (1988) **Isaac Julien in person!**

WEEK #15 April 26 & 28: THE PERSONAL ESSAY FILM

FILM: *The Missing Picture*, Rithy Panh (Cambodia/France, 2013)

READ: "Mediation and Remediation of La Parole Filmée..." Leshu Torchin, **[b/course]**

"Finding the Missing Picture: The Films of Rithy Panh" Deirdra Boyle **[b/course]**

"Interview with Rithy Panh" Deirdra Boyle **[b/course]**

Thurs May 3 & 5: STUDENT SCREENINGS (We will meet 5/2 if necessary)

May 10: Final Papers and films to be handed in