
DOCUMENTARY FORMS

CINE/ENGL 221 – Spring 2003

This course is about documentary work. Why do it? How can it be done? What are the stakes in doing it? We will consider both practical and theoretical issues surrounding documentary representation in various media, especially in documentary cinema. After establishing a conceptual framework for discussion, we will study a number of documentary cases and think about them from a variety of perspectives—structural, aesthetic, political, ethical, historical. Our inquiry will be guided by an interest in how each example frames the pursuit of ‘the real,’ and in how that pursuit changes according to time and place.

Readings, Materials, and Resources

Required Texts

- Robert Coles, *Doing Documentary Work*
- James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*
- Erik Barnouw, *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film*
- Barry Keith Grant and Jeannette Sloniowski, eds., *Documenting the Documentary: Close Readings of Documentary Film and Video* (DD)
- E-RESERVE readings, found at: <http://eres.cc.oberlin.edu> (E-RES) (access required and suggested readings using “cine221” password; please download and print required readings)

Recommended Texts (Documentary)

- Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*
- Alan Rosenthal, ed., *New Challenges for Documentary*
- Richard Meran Barsam, *Nonfiction Film: A Critical History*
- Mitchell Duneier, *Sidewalk*

Recommended Texts (Cinema Studies)

- David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*, 6th ed.
- Timothy Corrigan, *A Short Guide to Writing About Film* (4th edition)

Other Materials

- Light Pens (I recommend these for taking notes during screenings; available for purchase at the bookstore)

Library Resources

Whenever possible, please watch the films we study more than once. Copies of the films screened on Tuesday and Wednesday evenings will be available on reserve on the A-level of Mudd Library for the purposes of study and review. There is also a growing collection of films, in both DVD and VHS formats, available in the Audio-Visual department on the fourth floor of Mudd Library. These films can be found by searching in OBIS or by using the print catalogue at the AV desk, and you may watch them at one of eight viewing stations there.

Production Resources

Your short and long documentary projects are, in effect, media productions. Yet since this course is not officially considered a media production course, the technical resources available to assist you in your projects are limited. As you undertake your documentary projects, you may—according to your level of experience and the strength of your proposal—seek some technical support through the media lab. Please see me to consider this option.

Course Writing Assistant

Mearah Quinn-Brauner (smvq1961@oberlin.edu) is the course writing assistant. She will work with you individually and in groups; you will be required to meet with her during various stages of your papers and projects.

Graded Work

Attendance and Participation

In order to do well in this course, you must attend and actively participate in class and screening sessions. I expect you to engage—keep up with the reading, pay close attention to the films, and take part in discussions. Regardless of your reasons, if you miss classes or screening sessions, you cannot fully participate in the course. Attendance at class film screenings is required, and absences from either classes or screenings will hurt your final grade.

Films will be screened on Tuesday and Wednesday evenings so that we can begin to discuss them during Thursday's class (we may continue discussion of films in the following week's class). You must attend at least one of these scheduled screenings each week, and if there are required films not shown during the screening, you must see those on your own. Please arrive on time to screenings as a courtesy to your classmates. At mid-term and at semester's end I will ask you to submit a list of the screenings you attended.

Short Documentary Project

You will select a subject, use some medium to document that subject, then reflect on your own documentary work.

Short Essays

Over the semester you must submit four two-page (typed, double-spaced) essays, in which you respond critically to an assigned film or films in terms of issues you have encountered in readings and/or discussions. You will decide which films to discuss and when to write about them, but you must do two papers before the break and two after.

Long Documentary Project

Similar to the Short Documentary Project, this will involve several parts (treatment, rough cut) and will be carried out on a grander scale. You will also submit a longer, more substantive paper in which you reflect on your work.

Discussion Groups

Each of you will be part of a small discussion group (three to five students). Your discussion group will be your critical community; your peers will help you develop your thinking and will support and evaluate your projects and papers. Throughout the semester, you will meet once a week for at least one hour with this group to talk about assigned readings and films. Each week, your group will turn in a single sheet, signed by those who attended the discussion, that articulates a question, problem, or statement in response to coming week's readings and screenings. Your group must also post this question, problem, or statement on Blackboard in the "Discussion Board" area.

Screening Notebooks

I will ask you to keep a notebook in which you take notes on each film you see for class and on at least four documentaries selected from the supplementary viewing list or in consultation with me (you must see at least one of the outside films during the first module). You will hand in your notebook twice during the semester, in weeks seven and thirteen. I suggest that you make notes both during and after the screenings (the Light Pens will help). I promise that if you take notes during screenings, and write up those notes immediately after you see a film, you will get much more out of class discussions and your writing about the films will be more substantive.

Blackboard

This course has a Blackboard page that I encourage you to use as a forum for discussion with those who may teach you the most—your classmates. In addition to posting your discussion group's statements, on Blackboard you can respond to statements by other discussion groups, engage with other members of the class, or comment on readings and screenings. Try to post once a week. I will read but not comment on your postings. To locate our Blackboard page, log on, and read and submit written posts: (1) Direct your web browser to this URL: <http://Bb.oberlin.edu/> (2) Click on "Login." (3) Click on "Forgot your password?" (4) Fill out one of the two text fields with your identifying information and click on "submit." (5) Shortly, you will receive an email from Albert Borroni with a link to a site where you can set your own password, which you will use for logging on in the future. (6) Now login for real. (7) Under "My Courses" in the upper right of the ensuing screen, you should see "Documentary Forms." (8) Find "Discussion Board" on the list of button-words on the left side of the screen and click on it. (9) "Forum" simply means a discussion thread and you may either start a forum or take up a discussion already flowing on another.

Other Policies

Drafts and Submission Procedures

To discuss a draft of an assignment before it is due, see me in my office or email me the draft for comments (up until two days before the paper is due). You must submit all final assignments as hard copies on paper.

Late Work

Assignments turned in late will receive lesser grades.

The Honor Code

I expect you to live by the Honor Code. Please write and sign the honor pledge ("I affirm that I have adhered to the Honor Code in this assignment") on all of your assignments.

Disabilities

Inform me as soon as possible about any accommodations you may need for an assignment due to a disability.

Schedule

Readings and screenings should be completed by the class periods indicated.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY “DOCUMENTARY”?

Week 1	T Feb 4	Overview
	Th Feb 6	Nichols, “Why Are Ethical Issues Central to Documentary Filmmaking?” (E-RES) “How Do Documentaries Differ from Other Types of Film?” (E-RES)
	Screening:	<i>Nobody’s Business</i> [Berliner, 1996]

THE MEANINGS AND STAKES IN DOCUMENTARY WORK

Week 2	T Feb 11	Coles, <i>Doing Documentary Work</i> , 1-145
	Th Feb 13	
	Screening:	<i>42 Up</i> [Apted, 1998]

RENDERING OTHERS: A CASE IN DOCUMENTARY WORK

Week 3	T Feb 18	Agee and Evans, <i>Let Us Now Praise Famous Men</i>
	Th Feb 20	
	Screening:	<i>To Render A Life</i> [Spears, 1992]

DOCUMENTARY POSSIBILITIES

Week 4	M Feb 24	***Short Documentary Projects Due***
	T Feb 25	Nichols, “How Did Documentary Filmmaking Get Started?” (E-RES) “What Types of Documentary Are There?” (E-RES)
		Barnouw, <i>Documentary</i> , 1-51
	Th Feb 27	Rothman, “The Filmmaker as Hunter” (DD)
	Screening:	Early short films [Lumiere and Edison, 1895-1914] <i>Nanook of the North</i> [Flaherty, 1922] <i>Nanook Revisited</i> [Massot, 1994]

EXPERIMENTS IN DOCUMENTARY FORM

Week 5	T Mar 4	Barnouw, <i>Documentary</i> , 51-81
	Th Mar 6	Feldman, “Peace between Man and Machine” (DD) Sobchack, “Synthetic Vision” (DD)
		Screening: <i>The Man with a Movie Camera</i> [Vertov, 1929] <i>Land without Bread</i> [Buñuel, 1932]

DOCUMENTARY ADVOCACY

Week 6	T Mar 11	Barnouw, <i>Documentary</i> , 83-172 Nichols, “How Have Documentaries Addressed Social and Political Issues?” (part I: 139-152) (E-RES)
		Barsam, “Leni Riefenstahl: Artifice and Truth in a World Apart” (E-RES)
		Ivens, “Spain and <i>The Spanish Earth</i> ” (E-RES)
	Th Mar 13	Tomasulo, “The Mass Psychology of Fascist Cinema” (DD) Waugh, “Men Cannot Act before the Camera in the Presence of Death” (DD)
	Screening:	<i>Triumph of the Will</i> [Riefenstahl, 1935] <i>The Spanish Earth</i> [Ivens, 1937]

DOCUMENTARY’S LIMITS

Week 7	T Mar 18	Barnouw, <i>Documentary</i> , 172-182 Levi, from <i>Survival in Auschwitz</i> (E-RES) Spiegelman, from <i>Maus</i> (E-RES)
	Th Mar 20	Flitterman-Lewis, “Documenting the Ineffable” (DD) Avisar, “The Photographic Image and Cinematic Documentation” (E-RES)
	Screening:	<i>Night and Fog</i> [Resnais, 1955] from <i>Shoah</i> [Lanzmann, 1986]
	F Mar 21	***Screening Notebooks Due***
	T Mar 25 Th Mar 27	SPRING RECESS SPRING RECESS

NEW POSSIBILITIES FOR DOCUMENTARY

Week 8	T Apr 1	Barnouw, <i>Documentary</i> , 183-293
	Th Apr 3	Scheinman, "The 'Dialogic Imagination' of Jean Rouch" (DD) Hall, "'Don't You Ever Just Watch?'" (DD)
	Screening:	<i>Les maîtres fous</i> [Rouch, 1954] <i>Dont Look Back</i> [Pennebaker, 1967] <i>Harlan County, USA</i> [Kopple, 1976]
	F Apr 4	***Treatments for Long Documentary Projects Due***

ETHICS AND DOCUMENTARY

Week 9	T Apr 8	Pryluck, "Ultimately We Are All Outsiders: The Ethics of Documentary Filming" (E-RES)
	Th Apr 10	Bernstein, "Documentaphobia and Mixed Modes" (DD) Williams, "The Ethics of Intervention" (E-RES, Gaines and Renov) Sobchack, " <i>No Lies: Direct Cinema as Rape</i> " (E-RES/Rosenthal)
	Screening:	<i>Roger & Me</i> [Moore, 1989] <i>The Good Woman of Bangkok</i> [O'Rourke, 1991] <i>No Lies</i> [Block, 1973]

DOCUMENTARY AND HISTORY

Week 10	T Apr 15	Barnouw, <i>Documentary</i> , 319-329 Rosenstone et al., "Historians and Their Audience", "Telling the Story" (E-RES)
	Th Apr 17	Williams, "Mirrors without Memories" (DD)
	Screening:	<i>The Thin Blue Line</i> [Morris, 1987] <i>The Civil War</i> [Burns, 1990] <i>Human Remains</i> [Rosenblatt, 1998]

DOCUMENTARY AND OUTSIDERS

Week 11	T Apr 22	Nichols, "How Have Documentaries Addressed Social and Political Issues?" (part II: 152-167) (E-RES)
	Th Apr 24	Lesage, "Contested Territory" (DD)
	Screening:	<i>Finding Christa</i> [Hatch, 1991] <i>The Times of Harvey Milk</i> [Epstein, 1986]

DOCUMENTARY, AUTHORITY, THE SELF

Week 12	T Apr 29	Ruby, "The Image Mirrored: Reflexivity and the Documentary Film" (E-RES)
	Th May 1	Fischer, "Documentary Film and the Discourse of Hysterical/Historical Narrative" (DD)
	Screening:	<i>Sherman's March</i> [McElwee, 1985]

NEW FORMS, NEW MEDIA, DOCUMENTARY'S FUTURE

Week 13	T May 6	Eitzen, "When is a Documentary?" (E-RES) Trinh T. Minh-ha, "The Totalizing Quest of Meaning" (E-RES)
	Th May 8	Russell, "Subjectivity Lost and Found"
	Screening:	<i>I Do Not Know What It Is I Am Like</i> [Viola, 1986] Interactive websites Reality television
	F May 9	***Screening Notebooks Due***

Week 14	W May 14	***Long Documentary Projects Due***
----------------	----------	--