

documentary film

Course #: FILM 125
Instructor: adam wadenius
Email: adam@apwadenius.com
Website: www.apwadenius.com

Office Hours: By email or appointment
Semester: Spring 2013
Day & Time: M, 9:00 am - 11:50 am
Building: Bldg. #800, Room #838

course description

The goal of this course is to familiarize students with documentary history, theory, criticism, and practice. The course is designed to challenge you to develop a critical eye, and to deepen your appreciation of the many different modes of documentary film and video. We will consider the documentary as an art form, a cultural artifact, a mode for social change, and as a means for representing cultures. In-class screenings will explore a variety of films that will survey the range of documentary expression, from the classic texts, to the independent and experimental forms, and everything in-between.

student learning outcomes

- ~ Think critically about documentary film as reflections of popular culture.
- ~ Identify the dominant modes/characteristics of documentary filmmaking.
- ~ Recall the history and evolution of documentary film.

course requirements

Lectures & Screenings: You are responsible for attending the class lectures every week. There is no talking/discussion during the films or clips. I will dismiss you from the course if you become a disruption during the film screenings. If at any time you decide that you do not wish to continue with the course, it is your responsibility to drop, as I do not take it upon myself to drop anyone from the roster at any time.

I encourage you to use your personal computer, iPad, or other learning tool during class time if you are using it appropriately (viewing class slides, in-class research, taking notes). Be sure to turn off any noisemaking functions on these tools, as well as any other electronic devices such as cell phones, iPods, etc. Please keep the brightness levels on all LED screens at low intensity.

Readings: It is incumbent upon you to be prepared, and you should come to class each week having read the reading assignment posted on the schedule. We will be spending as much time discussing the readings as the films, and a firm understanding of them will benefit your overall understanding/interpretation of the film texts. All readings are located on the course website.

Quizzes: There will be three reading quizzes given at the beginning of class on selected dates throughout the semester. All quizzes will cover the reading materials assigned up until the date of the quiz, and there will be no opportunity for making-up any missed quizzes.

Essay Guidelines: You are required to write three, 4-5 page essays this semester. There are four assigned essays overall, and you only need complete three of them to receive credit. All papers are due on the designated due dates without exception, and no late papers will be accepted. I do not accept physical papers, so please email all of your assignments to me through the Turnitin application (discussed in further detail in the *Example Essay* on the website). All emergency situations leading to late papers will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. There will be no opportunity for re-writes after grading, as good writing skills are a must in this course. Each of the essay questions, as well as an example of an *A* paper are located on the course website. It is required that you visit the website to view the example paper, as there are additional guidelines for writing successfully in this course.

**** NOTE ** ~ Plagiarism and other issues concerning academic integrity will not be tolerated, and are grounds for an automatic failure in the course. Acknowledge all reading and research sources with appropriate footnotes and bibliography.** Keep all copies of your essays, exams, and notes until you have received a final grade for this class. ~

Discussion: You are encouraged to be actively involved in the class discussions, as your participation is key to your success in this course. My goal is to aid in the development of your analytical/critical skills, and I expect everyone to maintain an open mind, and take a creative approach to the material. Be respectful of your fellow classmates when addressing and critiquing conflicting viewpoints.

Film Notes: To compliment any notes you may be taking on the lectures and discussions, you will be required to keep a separate notebook with your notes on each of the films. This is a good habit to practice when watching and analyzing films, as it will help you to remember important narrative and stylistic elements to be used as supportive examples in your writing. This notebook will be checked on the final week of the semester (May 15th).

assessments

Film Notes	20%
Three Reading Quizzes	30%
Three 4-5 pg. Essays	50%

texts & materials

1. Bill Nichols, Intro to Documentary. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 2001, 99-138.
2. Course reader posted on the course website @ www.apwadenius.com.
3. All materials posted on the course website @ www.apwadenius.com.
4. All films screened in class, as well as any excerpt screened during the lectures.

Please remember that if you have any questions about the films, readings, or any of the course materials, that I am readily available to help answer them. I can be reached through the email address above, or by placing a note for me in my box in the department office.

schedule

week #1 ~ (Jan. 23rd) ~ introduction to documentary

Lecture: Introduction to documentary film

Screening: *Paradise Lost: The Child Murders at Robin Hood Hills*, dirs. Joe Berlinger & Bruce Sinofsky (1996)

week #2 ~ (Jan. 30th) ~ documentary ethics

Reading: Intro to Documentary, "Introduction," and "Chapter One – Why Are Ethical Issues Central to documentary Filmmaking?"

Documenting the Documentary, "Synthetic Vision" by Vivian Sobchak.

Screening: *Las Hurdes*, dir. Luis Buñuel (1932)

La sang des bêtes, dir. George Franju (1949)

Vernon, Florida, dir. Errol Morris (1982)

week #3 ~ (Feb. 6th) ~ documentary voice

Reading: Intro to Documentary, "Chapter Three – What Gives Documentary Films a Voice of Their Own?"

Documenting the Documentary, "Mirrors Without Memories," by Linda Williams.

Screening: *The Thin Blue Line*, dir. Errol Morris (1988)

week #4 ~ (Feb. 13th) ~ the poetic mode of representation

Reading: Intro to Documentary, pgs. 99-105

Documentary: A History, "Chapter Two – Painter"

Screening: *Regen*, Joris Ivens (1929)

Listen to Britain, dir. Humphrey Jennings (1942)

Sans Soleil, dir. Chris Marker (1983)

**** Essay # 1 due ****

week #5 ~ (Feb. 20th) ~ social and political issues in documentary

Reading: Intro to Documentary, "Chapter Seven – How Have Documentaries Addressed Social and Political Issues?"

Documentary: A History, "Chapter Three – Advocate"

Screening: *Coal Face*, dir. Alberto Cavalcanti (1936)

The Plow That Broke the Plains, dir. Pare Lorentz (1936)

The River, dir. Pare Lorentz (1938)

Sol' dyla Svanetii, dir. Mikhail Kalatozov (1930)

**** First reading quiz ****

week #6 ~ (Feb. 27th) ~ the expository mode of representation

Reading: Intro to Documentary, pgs. 105-109

Documentary: A History, "Chapter Three – Bugler"

Screening: *Why We Fight: The Nazi's Strike*, dir. Frank Capra (1943)

Triumph des willens, dir. Leni Riefenstahl (1935)

week #7 ~ (Mar. 6th) ~ representing difference in culture

Reading: Intro to Documentary, "Chapter Two – How Do Documentaries Differ From Other Types of Films?"

Documentary: A History, "Chapter Two – Explorer"

Screening: *Nanook of the North*, dir. Robert Flaherty (1922)

Always For Pleasure, dir. Les Blank (1978)

week #8 ~ (Mar. 13th) ~ the observational mode of representation

Reading: Intro to Documentary, pgs. 109-115

Documenting the Documentary, "Ethnography in the First Person: Frederick Wiseman's *Titicut Follies*," by Barry Keith Grant.

Documentary: A History, "Chapter Five – Observer"

Screening: *Primary*, dirs. Drew & Associates (1960)

Titicut Follies, dir. Frederick Wiseman (1967)

week #9 ~ (Mar. 20th) ~ the participatory mode of representation

Reading: Intro to Documentary, pgs. 115-124
Documentary: A History, "Chapter Five – Catalyst"
Documentary: A History, "Chapter Five – Guerilla"

Screening: *Roger & Me*, dir. Michael Moore (1989)

**** Essay #2 due ****

week #10 ~ (Mar. 24th to Mar. 29th) ~ no class

**** Spring break ****

week #11 ~ (Apr. 3rd) ~ argument, rhetoric, and persuasion

Reading: Intro to Documentary, "Chapter Four – What Are Documentaries About?"
Screening: *Far From Poland*, dir. Jill Godmilow (1984)

**** Second reading quiz ****

week #12 ~ (Apr. 10th) ~ the reflexive mode of representation

Reading: Intro to Documentary, pgs. 125-130
Documenting the Documentary, "Peace Between Man and Machine: Dziga Vertov's *The Man With a Movie Camera*," Seth Feldman.
Documentary: A History, "Chapter Two – Reporter"
Screening: *No Lies...*, dir. Mitchell Block (1974)
Chelovek s kinoapparatom, dir. Dziga Vertov (1929)

week #13 ~ (Apr. 17th) ~ the performative mode of representation

Reading: Intro to Documentary, pgs. 130-137
Documenting the Documentary, "Silence and Its Opposite: of Race in *Tongues Untied*," by Sheila Petty.
Documentary: A History, "Chapter Six – Movement"
Screening: *Tongues Untied*, dir. Marlon Riggs (1989)
Night and Fog, dir. Alain Resnais (1955)

week #14 ~ (Apr. 24th) ~ experimental documentary

Reading: Documenting the Documentary, "Seeing with Experimental Eyes: Stan Brakhage's *The Act of Seeing with One's Own Eyes*," Bart Testa.
Screening: *Human Remains*, dir. Jay Rosenblatt (1998)
The Act of Seeing with One's Own Eyes, dir. Stan Brakhage (1971)

**** Essay #3 due ****

week #15 ~ (May 1st) ~ mockumentary films

Reading: Documenting the Documentary, "Gender, Power and a Cucumber: Satirizing Masculinity in *This Is Spinal Tap*," Carl Plantinga.

Screening: *This Is Spinal Tap*, dir. Rob Reiner (1984)

week #16 ~ (May 8th) ~ a new perspective

Reading: Andy Opel, "Paradise Lost I & II: Documentary, Gothic, and the Monster of Justice," Jump Cut. No. 47, winter 2005.

Screening: *Paradise Lost 2: Revelations*, dirs. Joe Berlinger & Bruce Sinofsky (2000)

week #17 ~ (May 15th) ~ final class session

**** *Third reading quiz* ****

**** *Essay #4 due* ****

**** *Film notes due* ****

**** *Please note that the final class session will be held on May 29th at the usual time and location.* ****