

English 380, Fall 2011, Ms. von Schmidt
Tues. & Thurs. Stirn Aud. (Mead 114)
Film showings: Mon. & Wed. 4 & 7:30
Mon: Merrill 3 Wed: Merrill 4
Office Hours: Tues. 2-3:30 or by appt.
542-3248 or 413-475-3779

NON-FICTION FILM

TEXTS *Documenting the Documentary*, Grant and Sloniowski
Introduction to Documentary, Nichols
Documentary Film Classics, Rothman
Available at Amherst Books

Additional reading: If you are a first time film student, you should buy or read on reserve, Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art*, paying careful attention to the sections on “the shot” and editing, in order to familiarize yourself with film language. (Any edition will do.)

LAB FEE: \$40 to cover cost of copying and projection

WORK OF THE COURSE:

Two film showings per week: attendance required. If you cannot attend the regular showings, DO NOT TAKE THIS COURSE.

Film journal: To include written responses to each of the required films; you may also include responses to any of the “Recommended Films” that you see as well as any relevant films you see elsewhere. More specific instructions for the journal will be posted on the class web page. Journals will be collected, read, commented on and evaluated, at intervals during the semester. The first time will be the last class before October break. **The journals will be a significant part of your grade.** You should find it useful to read Nichols’ Chapter 9, on writing about documentary. (Keep in mind the particular guidelines for the journal assignment - your entries are not meant to be fully formed essays.)

This is a viewing course more than a reading course. (Having said that, I should make clear that I will hold you responsible for doing the assigned reading.) The field of non-fiction film is very large - both in range and depth. I’ve listed “Recommended” films to allow you to pursue your own particular interest. My sense is that the more films, and the wider variety of films, you see, the better. You’ll find that Nichols refers to a number of films unfamiliar to you. I’ve attached his filmography, marking those films that are available at Frost should you wish to see them.

FINAL PAPER: A final essay of 12-15 pp. on a topic of your choice, to be selected in consultation with me.

GRADING: Will be based on your journals, your final essay, and on class participation (that obviously includes attendance). I expect work in on time; all work in the course must be completed in order to receive a grade.

VIDEO STREAMING: All films will be available on streaming video, the day following the assigned date, including most “Recommended films.”

SCHEDULE

PART I THE BEGINNINGS

Reading: during this week: Nichols, “How Can We Define Documentary Film,” pp. 1-41

Tues. 9/6 Introduction to course. Showing of *Man With a Movie Camera*, Dziga Vertov, USSR. 1929 68 min.

Reading: In G & S, Feldman, “Dziga Vertov’s *The Man with a Movie Camera*”

Wed. 9/7 *Nanook of the North*, Robt. Flaherty, USA, 1922 79 min.
Nanook Revisited, Claude Massot, Canada, 1988 55 min.

Reading: in Rothman, “*Nanook of the North*,” Pp. 1-20

Thurs. 9/8 Discussion **The Ethical Issues Emerge**

Reading: Nichols, Ch. 2, “Why Are Ethical Issues Central to Documentary Filmmaking?” Pp. 42-66

Mon. 9/12 *Stranger With a Camera*, Elizabeth Barrett, USA 2000 61 min.
The True Meaning of Pictures, Jennifer Baichwal, Canada, 71 min. 2002

Reading: Pryluck, “Ultimately, We are all Outsiders”
Linton, “The Moral Dimension of Documentary”

Tues. 9/13 Discussion

PART TWO American and British documentary of the 30s and 40s

Reading: In Nichols, Ch. 5 “How Did Documentary Film Get Started?” Pp.120-141

Wed. 9/14 *The Plow that Broke the Plains*, USA, Pare Lorentz, 1936 27 min.
The River, Pare Lorentz, USA, 1937 32 min.
Diary for Timothy Humphrey Jennings, Gt. Brit. 1943 39 min.

Reading: In G & S: Charlie Keil, “American Documentary Finds its Voice” 119-135
“ ” Jim Leach, “The Poetics of Propaganda” 154-170

Recommended: *Power and the Land*, Joris Ivens, USA 1940, 38 min.
Listen to Britain, Jennings, 1942 18 min.

Thurs. 9/15 Discussion

PART 3 DIRECT CINEMA/CINEMA VERITE/OBSERVATIONAL CINEMA

Reading: In Nichols, Ch. 6 “How Can We Differentiate among Documentaries?
Categories, Models, and the Expository and Poetic Modes of
Documentary Film,” Pp. 142-171

Mon. 9/19 *Grey Gardens*, Maysles Bros. USA 1975 94 min.

Reading: In G & S, “Don’t You Ever Just Watch,” pp.23-237

Rothman, “Cinema Verite in America, (1) *A Happy Mother’s Day* pp.109-143

**Recommended: *Don’t Look Back*, DA Pennebaker, USA, 96 min. 1967 Dylan on tour
in**

Gt. Britain

Gimme Shelter, Maysles Bros, USA 1970 ,91 min. Rolling Stones
tour that ended at Altamont.

Primary, Robert Drew, USA, The Wisconsin Presidential primary
between JFK and Hubert Humphrey

Tues. 9/20 Discussion.

Showing: *Happy Mother’s Day*, Leacock and Chopra, USA, 1963 26 min.

PART 4: THE WORLD OF WORK

Reading: In Nichols, Ch. 7, “How Can We Describe the Observational, Participatory,
Reflexive, and Performative Modes of Documentary Film” 172-211

Wed. 9/21 *Meat*, Frederick Wiseman, USA 113 min. 1976

Reading: In G & S, “Ethnography in the First Person,” pp. 238-253

Thurs. 9/22 Discussion.

Showing: *Les Sang de Betes*, Georges Granju, France 22 min. 1949

Reading: In G & S, “It Was an Atrocious Film,” pp. 171-187

Mon. 9/26 *American Dream*, Barbara Kopple, USA, 102 min. 1990

Recommended: Kopple, *Harlan County USA* 105 min. 1976

PART 5 ETHNOGRAPHIC FILM

VIEWING: Watch *The Ax Fight* on streaming video. (Asch/Chagnon, 30 min)
before you see the films that follow.

Reading: In Nichols, Ch. 3, “What Gives Documentary Films a Voice of Their Own”
Pp. 67-93

Wed 9.28 *Deep Hearts*, Robt. Gardner, USA 1979 58 min.

Herdsmen of the Sun, Werner Herzog, Germany 52 min. 1988

Thurs. Discussion

Mon. 10/3 10/3 *First Contact*, Connolly/Anderson, Australia 54 min. 1983
Cannibal Tours, Dennis O'Rourke, Australia 667 min. 1987
Watch on streaming video: *Land Without Bread*, Luis Bunuel, Spain, 30 min.
1933
Reading: In Rothman, "*Land Without Bread*," pp. 21-38

Tues. 10/4 Discussion

Wed. 10/5 *The Things I Cannot Change*, Tanya Tree Ballantyne, Canada, 1967 55min.
Courage to Change, Ballantyne, 1986 55 min.

Thurs. 1/06 Discussion

OCTOBER BREAK
JOURNALS DUE BEFORE YOU LEAVE FOR BREAK

Wed. 10/12 *42 Up*, Michael Apted, Gt. Brit. 1998 134 min.

Thurs. 10/13 Discussion

PART 6: HISTORY

Reading: In Nichols, Ch. 8, "How Have Documentaries Addressed Social and Political Issues?"
Pp. 212-252

Mon. 10/17 *The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter*, Connie Field, USA, 1980 65 min.
History and Memory, Ria Tajiri, USA, 32 min.

Tues. 10/18 Discussion

Wed. 10/19 *Happy Birthday, Mr. Mograbi*, Avi Mograbi, Israel, 1993 77 min.
Recommended: Mograbi, *How I Learned to Overcome My Fear and Love Arik*,
61 min.

Mon. 10/24 Excerpts from *Shoah*, Claude Lanzmann, France, Approx. 2 hrs.

Tues. Discussion

Wed. 10/26 *Lessons in Darkness*, Werner Herzog, Germany, 55 min. 1992
Night and Fog, Alain Resnais, France, 1955, 31 min.

Recommended: *Standard Operating Procedure*, Morris
Ghosts of Abu Ghraib, Poitras Both about Abu Ghraib

**Sunday, October 30 *The Sorrow and the Pity*, Marcel Ophuls, France, 1969, 251 min.

Tues. Nov. 1 Discussion

PART 7 AUTOBIOGRAPHY IN FILM

Reading: In Nichols, Ch. "What Makes Documentaries Engaging and Persuasive"
Pp. 94-119

Wed. 11/2 *Intimate Stranger*, Alan Berliner, 1991, 60 min.
Nobody's Business, Berliner, 1996 60 min.
Recommended: *Family Album*, Berliner

Thurs. Discussion

Mon. Nov. 7 *Time Indefinite*, Ross McElwee, USA, 1993, 117 min.
Recommended: *Backyard*, McElwee, 1984, 40 min.
Charlene, McElwee, 1978, 59 min.
Sherman's March, McElwee, 1986 161 min.

Reading: In G & S: "Documentary Film and the Discourse of Hysterical/Historical
Narrative," pp. 333-343
McElwee's own home page

PART 8 THE ESSAY FILM

Wed. Nov. 9 *Gates of Heaven*, Erroll Morris, USA, 1978 83 min.
Recommended: *Vernon, Florida* Morris 1982 56 min.
The Thin Blue Line, Morris, 1988 102 min.

Reading: in G & S: "Mirrors Without Memories: Truth, History and the
Thin Blue Line," pp. 379-396
Consult Erroll Morris's own home page (Watch out: addictive)

Mon. Nov. 14 *The Gleaners and I*, Agnes Varda, France, 2000 82 min.
Tues. Discussion

Wed. Nov. 16 *Underground Orchestra*, Heddy Honigmann, Netherlands, 1997 111 min.
Thurs. Discussion

THANKSGIVING BREAK JOURNALS DUE BEFORE YOU LEAVE FOR BREAK

Mon. Nov. 28 *Sans Soleil*, Chris Marker, France, 1983 103 min.

PART 9 IDENTITY

Wed. Nov. 30 *Trembling Before God*, Sandy Dubowski, USA 2001 84 min.
Tongues Untied, Marlon Riggs, USA 1989 55 min.

Reading: In G & S: "Silence and Its Opposites: Expressions of Race in
Tongues Untied, 416-428

Thurs. Discussion

Mon. Dec. 5 *Silverlake Life*, Tom Joslin/Peter Friedman

Wed. Dec. 7 *Waltz With Bashir*, Ari Folman, Israel, 2008 90 min.

PART 10 CLOSING THOUGHTS6

Mon. Dec 12 *Every Day Except Christmas*, Lindsay Anderson, Gt. Brit. 1957 39 min.

Story From the Corner of a Park, Tran Van Thuy, Vietnam, 1996 45 min.

Tues. Discussion

Showing: *A Well Spent Life*, Les Blank, 1971 39 min.

FINAL ESSAYS DUE NO LATER THAN 5 P.M.

December 22nd