CMST 4312: Critical Media Theory & Practice
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Office: 129 Coates (I moved)

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. 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 documentarians and the significance of these in the active mode—to make the theory “go.”

Text (ordered at Union; also available in online and in Kindle edition):
There will be additional reading material posted to Moodle.
You will also need an external hard or flash drive with enough storage space for your projects. If you plan to use tape or memory card based cameras, you may also need blank media for these.

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 Canon Vixia HDs that write to tape and some that write to flash memory. There are also many HD Flip cameras. The Studio has microphones and digital audio recorders. If you borrow Studio 151 equipment, 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 Final Cut; both 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. 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 (for instance, the Flips make MP4s, which Final Cut doesn’t like; you can convert them, but you need to allow time for that), adequate space on something to write the processed data to, and the right cables to connect everything. Never assume batteries for anything are charged up when you check out Studio equipment, especially during high demand times.

Assignments and evaluation:
- Researched film presentation with accompanying essay: 20%
- Quizzes: 20%
- 3 video exercises: 30% (10% each)
- Synthesis video project: 30%

Grading scale: 90-100% = A; 80-89% = B; 70-79% = C; 60-69% = D; 59% or below = F

Graduate students:
Graduate students enrolled in this course have the same assignments except for the researched film presentation; instead of this, they will do a more substantive research project that includes several films, a longer essay, and a longer presentation to the class; to prepare for these they will be assigned additional readings and meetings to discuss those. Grad students should schedule an appointment with me at the beginning of the semester to discuss details.
Researched film presentation: Each of you will be assigned to make a presentation that gives the class a critical introduction to an assigned documentary film. For these presentations, you should watch the film, research and read about it, and pull together a 15-minute presentation 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 5-page critical essay about your film, with appropriate citation and referencing, on the day you make 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.

Video exercises: These are short projects designed to acquaint you with the conventions and modes of documentary (both how to use their power, and how to break with them powerfully). You will make, submit, and present to the class three of these during the course of the semester. Typically these are 1-3 minute pieces. You'll work in teams of 2 or 3 on these. The assignments are 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 assistance of other team members.

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 7 to 10-minute documentary. Each student will work concurrently on three projects: her/his own (as producer, director, and editor), and 2 other projects directed by 2 classmates, for which each of you will serve as writer, cinematographer, sound person, performer, etc. It will be up to each director to assemble her/his team. 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, which will be evaluated as part of your grade for the project. 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 paper, figure into your grade.

Attendance and citizenship; late work policies: 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. If you know you have to miss a class, it's far better to get out ahead of it and discuss it with me, and/or to turn in any assignments early.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schedule</th>
<th>Subject to change</th>
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<tr>
<td>M 8/26</td>
<td>Introductions; screen selections from <em>Shooting the Past</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>W 8/28</td>
<td>Definitions; begin screening <em>Silverlake Life</em></td>
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<td>M 9/2</td>
<td>Labor Day Holiday</td>
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<tr>
<td>W 9/4</td>
<td>Continue <em>Silverlake Life</em>; Chapter 1, Authenticity</td>
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<td>M 9/9</td>
<td>Chapter 2, Evidence; begin screening <em>Thin Blue Line</em></td>
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<td>W 9/11</td>
<td>Chapter 3, Authority; Continue <em>Thin Blue Line</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>M 9/16</td>
<td>Conclude <em>Thin Blue Line</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>W 9/18</td>
<td>Video Exercise 1 due</td>
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<td>M 9/23</td>
<td>Begin screening <em>Chronicle of a Summer</em>; Chapter 4, Responsibility</td>
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<td>W 9/25</td>
<td>Continue <em>Chronicle of a Summer</em></td>
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<td>M 9/30</td>
<td>Chapter 5, Argument; Screen <em>Why We Fight: Prelude to War</em></td>
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<td>W 10/2</td>
<td>Video Exercise 2 due</td>
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<td>M 10/7</td>
<td>Screen <em>The Gleaners &amp; I</em>; Chapter 6, Dramatic Stories, Poetic and Essay Documentaries</td>
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<td>W 10/9</td>
<td>Continue <em>Gleaners</em></td>
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<td>M 10/14</td>
<td>Chapter 7, Editing</td>
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<td>W 10/16</td>
<td>Begin screening from <em>Cinema Verite</em>; Chapter 8, Camerawork</td>
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<td>M 10/21</td>
<td>Continue <em>Cinema Verite</em>; from <em>Titicut Follies</em>; Chapter 9, The Profilmic</td>
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<td>W 10/23</td>
<td>Video Exercise 3 due</td>
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<td>M 10/28</td>
<td>Screen <em>Night Mail</em>; Chapter 10, Sounds</td>
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<td>W 10/30</td>
<td>Pitch due</td>
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<td>M 11/4</td>
<td>Presentations</td>
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<td>W 11/6</td>
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<td>M 11/11</td>
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<td>W 11/27</td>
<td>Thanksgiving holiday</td>
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<td>M 12/2</td>
<td>Synthesis project screenings</td>
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<tr>
<td>W 12/4</td>
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Films we will screen in class, in whole or in part (NB, we will probably clip others)

Shooting the Past/Stephen Poliakoff/1999/182"
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"
The Gleaners & I/Agnès Varda/2000/82"
Cinema Verité: Defining the Moment/Peter Wintonick/2000/193"
Titicut Follies/Frederick Wiseman/1967/84"
Night Mail/Harry Watt and Basil Wright/1936/25"

Presentation films
Start looking these up; you will be asked for your choices in a few weeks.

4 Little Girls/Spike Lee/1997/102"
Bowling for Columbine/Michael Moore/2002/120"
Bus 174/Felipe Lacerda and Jose Padilha/2002/122"
Capturing the Friedmans/Andrew Jarecki/2003/107
Cave of Forgotten Dreams/Werner Herzog/2010/90"
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"
Fast Cheap & Out of Control/Errol Morris/1997/80"
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"
The Life & Times of Rosie the Riveter/Connie Field/1960/65"
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"
The River/Pare Lorentz/1938/31"
Roger & Me/Michael Moore/1989/91"
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"
Tabloid/Errol Morris/2010/87"
Tarnation/Jonathan Caouette/2003/88"
Tongues Untied/Marlon Riggs/1989/55"
Triumph of the Will/Leni Reifenstahl/1935/110"
The War Game/Peter Watkins/1965/48"