

Example

Nonfiction Media from Film to VR

Instructor: Jake Bohrod

Email: --

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Description: Digital new media has increasingly complicated our relationship with established forms of social and intellectual engagement as well as the concept of “reality” itself. The shapeshifting subject of nonfiction film, what some call the “first new media,” has become a litmus test for such changes. For both theorists and practitioners, documentary remains a battleground. Increasingly, as questions of representation, ethics, and social action are digitally reconfigured by documentarists and nonfiction artists, the contested practice of nonfiction media mirrors its scholarly discourse. Academics must be prepared to address the complex forms of nonfiction through more than just text – sound, image, and interactivity are now tools with which we might better theorize its social, political, and cultural contexts as they reflect our current day. This is a practice-theory course designed to instruct students in the key themes and concerns of nonfiction spanning from film to VR. We will use documentary as a case study in film/media history and theory, using its transition to the digital as an entryway into the main theorizations of documentary and cinema alike.

Course questions: As the course progresses, it will be vital that we keep some core questions in mind:

- How do the respective histories and theories of nonfiction film, video, and new media intersect in revealing ways?
- How do textual, image-based, and interactive approaches to documentary studies differ, and how do they overlap? What might that relationship mean when it comes to understanding the importance of nonfiction media in today's media landscape?
- How does an ethical engagement with nonfiction media shift between formats, between historical moments? If so, how so? If not, why not?
- How can we as students, creators, and consumers put into action our theoretical ideas?

Required texts:

- All readings will be posted on course site.

Required materials:

- 16 GB Flash Drive/Hard Drive or larger (**32 GB or larger recommended**): students provide their own external drive for multimedia footage and project
- Readings and other extra material will be provided on course site

Assignments:

- Weekly reading, participation (15%)
- Journal (15%)
- Short film essay (20%)
- Multimedia presentation w/self-assessment (20%)
- Keyword Documentary and Peer Review w/written analysis (30%)

Reading, Participation, Peer Review

Students are expected to have read course material and be properly prepared for each class. There will be an added degree of importance placed on peer review sessions, during which students will be asked to share critically informed, constructive commentary with one another. This practice will simultaneously hone critical thinking/expression skills and build a collaborative environment where students are encouraged to workshop their ideas. Disrespectful and unproductive feedback will not be tolerated. Laptops and other internet-capable devices are allowed, even encouraged, but **MUST ONLY BE USED FOR CLASS PURPOSES**.

EXAMPLE

Schedule:

Unit One: Nonfiction Film

WEEK 1: What *was* Nonfiction film?

Screening: *Man with a Movie Camera* (Dziga Vertov, 1929)

Reading: “How Can We Define Documentary Film?” (Bill Nichols, from *Introduction to Documentary*); “Prologue: Vertov’s Dataset” (Lev Manovich, from *The Language of New Media*)

WEEK 2: The Griersonian tradition and documentary usefulness part I

Screening: *Night Mail* (Harry Watt and Basil Wright, 1936), *Housing Problems* (Edgar Anstey and Arthur Elton, 1935)

Reading: “The Tradition of the Victim in Griersonian Documentary” (Brian Winston, from *New Challenges in Documentary*)

WEEK 3: Nonfiction education, the student film, and documentary usefulness part II

Screening: *Bunker Hill* (Kent MacKenzie, 1956), *And Ten Thousand More!* (Algernon Walker and Gene Petersen, 1951)

Reading: “UNESCO, Film, and Education: Mediating Postward Paradigms of Communication” (Zoe Druick, from *Useful Cinema*)

WEEK 4: Documentary mediation and ethnographic reportage

Screening: *Chronicles of a Summer* (Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin, 1961)

Reading: “Re-thinking Documentary: Toward a Taxonomy of Mediation” (Michael Renov, *Wide Angle*)

Unit Two: Documentary in Transition - Video and Computer Nonfiction

WEEK 5: Video nonfiction and self-reflexivity

Screening: *The Gleaners and I* (Agnes Varda, 2000)

Reading: “The Subject in History: the New Autobiography in Film and Video” (Michael Renov, from *The Subject of Documentary*)

WEEK 6: New experimental documentary and exploring (the digital) difference

Screening: *The Fourth Dimension* (Trinh Minh-ha, 2001)

Reading: “Japan: Alterity and the Image Effect” (Trinh Minh-ha, from *The Digital Film Event*)

WEEK 7: Nonfiction visuality in the era of computers - simulating historical truths

Screening: *Level 5* (Chris Marker, 1997)

Reading: “Subjunctive Documentary: Computer Imaging and Simulation” (Mark J. P. Wolf, from *Collecting Visible Evidence*)

WEEK 8: Ethics and the rhetoric of empathy in digital documentary

Screening: *Cameraperson* (Kirsten Johnson, 2016)

Reading: “Inscribing Ethical Space: Ten Propositions on Death, Representation, and Documentary” (Vivian Sobchack, from *Carnal Thoughts*)

Unit Three: Interactive, Immersive, and Virtual Reality Nonfiction

WEEK 9: Virtual nonfiction and documentary usefulness part III

Screening: *Serious Games I-IV* (Harun Farocki, 2010)

Reading: “Virtual Battlegrounds: the multiple realisms of Harun Farocki’s *Immersion*” (Daniel Grinberg, *Jump Cut*), “Virtual Healing: Militarizing the Psyche in Virtual Reality Exposure Therapy” (Sasha Crawford-Holland, *Television & New Media*)

WEEK 10: Playing the real - proceduralism, history, genocide

Screening: *JFK Reloaded* (Traffic Games, 2004), *Darfur is Dying* (Susana Ruiz, 2004)

Reading: “From Michael Moore to *JFK Reloaded*: Towards a Working Model of Interactive Documentary” (Dayna Galloway et. al., *Journal of Media Practice*); “An Interactive Documentary Manifesto” (Andre Almeida and Heitor Alvelos, *Interactive Storytelling*); “iWitness and CitizenTube: Focus on Darfur” (Leshu Torchin, from *Creating the Witness: Documenting Genocide on Film, Video, and the Internet*)

WEEK 11: Witnessing Nonfiction Virtual Reality

Screening: *Zero Point* (Condition One, 2014), *The Displaced* (Ismail Imraan and Ben Soloman, 2015), *Clouds Over Sidra* (Gabo Arora and Chris Milk, 2015)

Reading: “Virtual reality witness: exploring the ethics of mediated presence” (Kate Nash, *Studies in Documentary Film*)

WEEK 12: A/visual nonfiction, and, What is Nonfiction film?

Screening: *Notes on Blindness* (Peter Middleton and James Spinney, 2016) and *Notes on Blindness* (Amaury La Burthe, Arnaud Colinart, James Spinney, and Peter Middleton, 2016)

Reading: “Modes of Avisibility: Psychoanalysis--X-ray--Cinema” (Akira Mizuta Lippit, from *Atomic Light [Shadow Optics]*)

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