Cinema Studies 2230: The Reality Effect: Documentary Cinema
M/W 1 – 2:25pm, Smith Auditorium

**Mandatory Film screenings:** *Mondays at 6:00pm OR 8:30pm in Smith Auditorium*

Sarah Childress
Office: 208 Dudley Coe
Email: schildre@bowdoin.edu
Office Hours: Mon/Wed 2:35-4:00pm and by appointment

**Required texts** (@ bookstore or available for purchase online):
Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary* 2nd Edition (also available as a library e-book)
Other required readings will be placed on Blackboard

**General Notes About the Course:**

1. **Please note that this course requires you to view films outside of class time.** Film screenings are mandatory. You will be required to see films each week, but you will have two viewing options: *Mondays at 6:00pm OR 8:30pm in Smith Auditorium.*

2. **Readings should be prepared for the day they are listed on the course schedule.** Please bring the reading(s) to class on your iPads (readings may be downloaded from Blackboard and accessed via iBooks or the Adobe Reader app). *Come to class ready to discuss, present, and ask questions.*

3. **Take notes on every film you watch for this course.** You will need those notes for the required response papers and your long-form papers. As the film runs, jot down observations and ideas that occur to you and, after the film is over, note any questions or thoughts about the film(s), the theme(s) they consider, and how they relate to the readings specified for that week.

4. **Readings may be occasionally changed or swapped to accommodate course flow or speaker visits.** Should you miss class, it is your responsibility to find out from a colleague whether any changes were made to the syllabus that day.

5. **This is a Writing Project course.** You’ll have a chance to receive feedback on your (2) long-form papers from a peer Writing Assistant and to revise based on that conversation. Participation is required, since you will benefit from having a reader engage with your work during the writing and revising process.

**Course Description**

There’s a perception that documentaries teach us about the “real” world or the world as it really is by reporting facts and revealing truths. But even as early theorists and filmmakers defined documentary filmmaking as a distinct practice, they acknowledged that documentary films draw on and refer to the historical world and actual people, but represent them from a distinct perspective, thereby actively shaping viewers’ understanding of these subjects. These perspectives can tell us as much about the world and our understanding of it as the films’ subject matter – and they help to nuance and complicate our notion of what documentary is. The different practices of documentary filmmaking developed by filmmakers to explore the world also provide insights into how knowledge is constructed, maintained, and challenged. In this class, we’ll work together to answer questions like: What is documentary? Why does that question matter? How do individual films add to or challenge the conventions of documentary filmmaking? And how do these films reinforce or change our understanding of the world and the people who live within it (including ourselves)?

This class will introduce you to a variety of documentary forms that have evolved over time. We will examine how these forms variously attempt to represent the world – and how they comment on representation by using, parodying, or critiquing reality, authenticity, truth, fact, and objectivity. To do so, we will look at documentary cinema from its beginnings in the 1920s through the present day, concentrating primarily on U.S. filmmakers. This course will also help you further hone your critical thinking, written argumentation, and analytical skills – and your creativity! – through your analysis of the films and scholarship about them.
Assignments

Études (4)
As we move deeper into our discussions of core documentary issues, you'll work with a partner to explore particular issues and practices by creating :60 video “studies.” This is your chance to grapple with concepts and techniques by engaging with them yourself. What do they involve? How do they function? How do they contribute to process, meaning, understanding, and/or knowledge? How can they be creatively manipulated? And why might one want to manipulate them for more “truthful,” “accurate,” or “realistic” representations or deeper inquiries. You should derive these “studies” from our readings and films, and from your own life experiences. Paul Benham (in Academic Technology) and I will supply you with app-equipped iPads to facilitate your creation, but you can also use your smartphone or personal camera equipment. You will upload your études via Blackboard and you should come to class prepared to share them and talk about your experiences in making them.

Response Papers (4)
You'll be writing four 250-word essays that respond to the films we view for class. Please turn in your first two responses before spring break and the second two by May 4. Each essay should include a thesis proven through analysis grounded in the topic for that week and they are due in class on the Wednesday after the film screening. These are formal papers. Grades will be determined by the insightfulness of your thesis and how well you support it with analysis. Because these papers are so short, you’ll find it’s best to focus on ONE simple theme and analyze 1-2 exemplary scenes to develop that theme. Response papers may not be submitted via e-mail.

Quizzes
Quizzes will be unannounced and cannot be made up so please be sure to prepare for each class by completing and thinking about the reading and/or film(s) assigned for each week.

Film Culture Activities (4)
Please plan to attend four extracurricular film events and write a 250-word response that reflects upon your experience and discoveries at these events. Qualifying events include on-campus screenings and cinema-related lectures, Bowdoin Film Society screenings (1), screenings at the Eveningstar, Frontier, other theaters (in Maine or away), film festivals, etc. Films screened for a class in which you are currently enrolled do not qualify as film-culture activities. Film screenings should include a discussion component or filmmaker or scholar presentation. All film-culture responses due by May 11.

In-Class Presentations
Because this is a discussion-oriented course, you'll often have a chance to think through the readings by working with your peers in class to create informal presentations (using the Flowvella app on your assigned iPad) that summarize key ideas and illustrate them through relevant film clips.

Long-form Papers
You will also have the opportunity to write two long-form papers (3-5 pages) over the course of the semester.
Paper 1 will ask you to develop a formal analysis of one of the films we have viewed. You will make a claim about how the film puts forth and supports a specific argument about the subject matter represented and support your claim by indicating how its structure and style (mise-en-scene, cinematography, editing, and sound) work together to develop this argument. Paper 2 will invite you to develop your own answer to the question “What is documentary?” by drawing on your analysis of and reflection on assigned scholarship and individual films. You will be required to turn in a draft and a revised version of each essay.

Final Project: Essay documentary
For your final project, you'll draw on your analysis of scholarship and individual films to create an essay documentary of your own. Essay films take many shapes and forms, from Michael Moore's acerbic confrontations to Laurie Anderson's poetic reveries (e.g., Heart of a Dog). You are encouraged to be creative, and to clearly communicate your well-informed ideas about documentary: what it is, what it can do, and why it is a multi-faceted and powerful “genre.” More details to come!
Participation and Policies
I will take into account your in-class participation and attendance as well as your attendance at screenings. Also, participation is built into the quiz, étude, and response-paper grades. Which is why quizzes cannot be made up and response papers may not be submitted via e-mail. I do not accept late work except in the case of holidays or documented emergencies. For each 24 hours a paper is late, I deduct 1/3 of a letter grade. Paper extensions will only be granted 7 days in advance of the due date and only in the case of extreme extenuating circumstances.

Academic Honesty
Plagiarism seriously compromises the integrity of the classroom and your educational experience and will not be tolerated. Plagiarism is the presentation of another person’s thoughts, words, judgments, ideas, etc. as your own. Direct quotations must always be identified with full reference to their sources according to MLA guidelines. You can find details on proper citation practices at: http://www.bowdoin.edu/studentaffairs/academic-honesty/how-to-cite.shtml. You must also reference sources within your text if you paraphrase or summarize another person’s ideas or judgments and include a Works Cited reference. If you incorporate found footage or audio within one of your video projects or are assisted in your videomaking efforts by others, you must reference their contribution via end credits. Though you may refer to our assigned readings or others to contextualize your thesis or argument for any written analysis of films we view for class, I expect your analysis of the films to derive from your own original interpretation. Your analysis should not include references to scholarly resources (assigned or otherwise). Similarly, your film productions should exclusively involve footage of your own creation, unless the assignment calls for the use of found or appropriated footage.

A Note on the Films
Some of the assigned films and readings for this course may contain graphic images or statements that involve race, sexuality, profanity, crude behavior, nudity, violence, or frankly stated beliefs that may be offensive to some. Please engage with these materials in a spirit of investigation, dialogue, and critique.

Courtesy in the Classroom
Please be respectful of our time together by silencing and putting away your phone before class begins. Laptops may only be used with the permission of the instructor, and then only for the purpose of taking notes. Finally, please eat and visit the restroom before or after class, not during it.

Grade Breakdown
In-Class Presentations & Participation 10%
Quizzes and Film Culture Activities 10%
Paper 1 15%
Études 15%
Response Papers 15%
Paper 2 15%
Final Project 20%
THE ORIGINS OF DOCUMENTARY CINEMA

Week 1: Avant-doc
À propos de Nice (Jean Vigo & Boris Kaufman, France, 1930, 23 min)
Las Hurdes (Land Without Bread, Luis Buñuel, Spain, 1933, 30 min)
L’hippocampe (The Sea Horse, Jean Painlevé, France, 1933, 14 min)

January 25 Course introduction, choose teams & assign iPads, software orientation & a brief intro to film analysis

January 27 Nichols “How Can We Define Documentary Film?” and Jill Godmilow “Kill the Documentary as We Know It” (Blackboard): In-class: what is documentary cinema? Myths, methods, questions.

Recommended: Nichols “How Can We Write Effectively About Documentary Film?” (Ch 9)

Week 2: Ethnographic Narratives
Nanook of the North (Robert Flaherty, U.S./France, 1922, 79 min)
Kunuk Uncovered (Alex Buono and Rhys Thomas, US, 2015, 22 min)

Feb 1 Nichols “How did Documentary Filmmaking Get Started?” (Chapter 5) and Green “This Reality Which Is Not One: Flaherty, Buñuel and the Irrealism of Documentary Cinema” (Blackboard)

Feb 3 Ethnographic étude due. Discussion: the facts and fictions of film technique.

Film culture opportunity Feb 4!! A visit with Mya Taylor and screening of Tangerine (Sean Baker, US, 2015)!!

Week 3: National Documentaries
Program 1 (at 6pm)
Night Mail (Henry Watt and Basil Wright, UK, 1936, 25 min) & The River (Pare Lorentz, U.S., 1938, 31 min)

Program 2 (at 8:30pm)
Triumph of the Will (Leni Riefenstahl, Germany, 1935, 110 min)

Feb 8 Nichols, “What gives documentary films a voice of their own?” (Ch 3) & Chapter 6 on Expository and Poetic Modes; John Grierson “First Principles of Documentary” & Margaret Moore “The Ethics of Nationalism”

Feb 10 Discussion: cinematic tools of engagement and persuasion – and nation building

DOCUMENTARY ETHICS

Week 4: Informed Consent
Program 1: Titicut Follies (Frederick Wiseman, US, 1967, 84 min)
Program 2: I’m Still Here (Casey Affleck, US, 2010, 108 min)

Feb 15 Paper 1 draft due. Nichols, “Why are ethical issues central to documentary filmmaking?” (Ch 2); Ruby “Speaking For, Speaking About, Speaking With, or Speaking Alongside: An Anthropological and Documentary Dilemma” and Lebow “Faking What? Making a Mockery of Documentary” (Blackboard)

Feb 17 Ethics étude due. Discussion: ethics and responsibility – responsibility to whom and to what?
**Week 5: The Spectacle of Reality**
Program 1: Episodes from *The Real World*, Season 1
Program 2: Episodes from *Big Brother*, Season 15

**Feb 22** Mark Andrejevic “Between the New Medium and the Old” and “Access to the Real,” Annette Hill “Performance of the Self” (all on Blackboard)

**Feb 24** Discussion: the realities of artifice – and vice versa

**Week 6: Perspective & Access**
*Things of an Aimless Wanderer* (Kivu Ruhorahoza, Rwanda, 2015, 78 min)

***Please note: The film for this week will screen on Thursday 3/3 @ 7:30p in Kresge***

**Feb 29** Final Project Treatment draft due. David MacDougall “Meaning & Being,” short excerpt from Paul Stoller’s *The Taste of Ethnographic Things*, Rebecca Rovit “Witnessing History, Performing Trauma,” and Erik Knudsen “Transcendental Realism in Documentary” (all on Blackboard)

**Mar 2** Kivu Ruhorahoza visit!! Please come to class with three questions prepared for Mr. Ruhorahoza.

*Film culture opportunity!! Friday Mar 4 @ 1pm: Filmmaking master class with Kivu Ruhorahoza. Mr. Ruhorahoza’s debut film, Grey Matter, is also on reserve at the library if you’d like to view it.*

**Week 7: Author-ity**
Program 1: *Grizzly Man* (Werner Herzog, US, 2005, 103 min)
Program 2: *Exit Through the Gift Shop* (Banksy, 2010, 87 min)
Interactive documentary: *Hollow* ([https://vimeo.com/hollowdocumentary](https://vimeo.com/hollowdocumentary))

**Mar 7** Paper 1 due. Louise Spence & Vinicius Navarro “Authority,” excerpt from Stella Bruzzi “Introduction” to *Contemporary Documentary*, and Garnet Butchart “Camera as Sign: on the ethics of unconcealment in documentary film and video”

**Mar 9** Discussion: Authorship, Appropriation, and Authority

**************************Spring Break March 11-27**************************

**Knowing Me, Knowing You**

**Week 8: Who Am I?**
Program 1: *Sherman’s March* (Ross McElwee, US, 1985, 157 min)
Program 2: *Stories We Tell* (Sarah Polley, Canada, 2012, 108 min) & *Ritual in Transfigured Time* (Maya Deren, US, 1946, 15 min)

**Mar 28** Nichols “How Can We Describe the Observational, Participatory, Reflexive, and Performative Modes of Documentary Film?” (Ch 7), excerpt from Cecilia Sayad “Performance, Corporeality, and the Borders of the Film,” Jim Lane “The Convergence of Autobiography and Documentary: Historical Connections”

**Mar 30** Discussion: Self-narrativization through encounter
**Week 9: Who Are You? (Character Portraits)**
Program 1: *Grey Gardens* (Ellen Hovde & Albert Maysles, US, 1975, 94min) & *Sandy Passage* (Alex Buono and Rhys Thomas, US, 2015, 22 min)
Program 2: *Stray Dog* (Debra Granik, US, 2014, 98min)

**Apr 4 Paper 2 draft due.** Jonathan Vogels “Circumstantial Evidence: An Interview with David and Albert Maysles,” Michael Chanan “Filming the ‘Invisible’,” and Didier Aubert, “The doorstep portrait: intrusion and performance in mainstream American documentary photography”

**Apr 6** Discussion: Re-presenting others

**Week 10: Who Were They? (Found Footage)**
Program 1: *Amy* (Asif Kapadia, UK/US, 2015, 128 min)
Program 2: *Listen to Me Marlon* (Stevan Riley, UK, 2015, 103 min)


**Apr 13 Portrait étude due.** Discussion: Appropriated lives

**HISTORY & SOCIETY**

**Week 11: Making History**
Program 1: *Citizenfour* (Laura Poitras, US/Germany/UK, 2014, 114 min)
Program 2: *Point and Shoot* (Marshall Curry, US, 2014, 83 min)

**Apr 18 Paper 2 due.** John Durham Peters “Witnessing” & Martha Cutter “Witnessing, Testifying, and History”

**Apr 20** Discussion: Documenting documentaries

**Week 12: Re-membering History**
Program 1: *The Act of Killing* (Joshua Oppenheimer, Anonymous, & Christine Cynn, Denmark, 2012, 115 min)
Program 2: *Nostalgia for the Light* (Patricio Guzmán, Chile, 2010, 90 min)


**Apr 27** Discussion: Role of film(making) in processes of history & memory

**Week 13: Promoting Change**
Program 1: *Blackfish* (Gabriela Cowperthwaite, US, 2013, 83 min)
Program 2: *The Central Park Five* (Ken Burns, Sarah Burns & David McMahon, US, 2012, 119 min)

**May 2** Nichols “How Have Documentaries Addressed Social and Political Issues?” (Ch 8)

**May 4 Social issue étude due.** Discussion: Can documentaries make a difference?

**Final Project Rough Cut Presentations**
*May 9: All rough cuts due. Day 1 presentations*  
*May 11: Day 2 presentations Last day of class!*  
*FINAL PROJECTS DUE: MAY 17*