

Syllabus

for course at advanced level

Cultural Theory and the Documentary Film
Cultural Theory and the Documentary Film

**15.0 Higher Education
Credits**
15.0 ECTS credits

Course code:	FVS701
Valid from:	Summer 2009
Date of approval:	2009-05-20
Department	Department of Media Studies
Subject	Cinema History and Theory/Cinema Studies

Decision

The course outline was approved by the Faculty of Humanities on the 26th November 2008 and by the board of the Department of Cinema Studies on the 20th May 2009, and is valid from the summer semester of 2009.

Prerequisites and special admittance requirements

Course structure

Examination code	Name	Higher Education Credits
FVS7	Cultural Theory and the Documentary Film	15

Course content

Cultural Theory and the Documentary is a lecture course examining documentary cinema through the lens of cultural theory. The course is organized around three key topics: the documentary archive and the ethnographic gaze; national identity and documentary aesthetics; and experimental and postcolonial documentary practice. Cultural Theory and the Documentary offers students a broad introduction to cultural theory, drawing upon such theoretical frameworks as historiography, race, gender, social class, nation, ethnography, and postmodernism. Films screened in class will encompass the following genres: silent ethnographic film, Griersonian documentary, feminist documentary, direct cinema, auteurist documentary, postcolonial documentary, activist video, and popular Imax films. The course considers how these films circulate within and across historical, social, and cultural spaces and evoke discourses of "truth," "realism," and "authenticity" through their representational forms and cross-cultural readings. Reading response papers, a research paper, and presentations are required.

Learning outcomes

On completion of the course, students should:

- be able to apply cultural theory to a range of canonical and contemporary documentary films
- be able to think critically about the content, form, and intended audience of documentary film
- understand the origins of documentary film production and the political, social, and cultural forces that have shaped each era in documentary filmmaking
- have a solid grasp of the political economy of documentary filmmaking in the US and selected international case studies
- be able to analyze documentary film in relation to issues of gender, ethnicity, social class, and sexual orientation
- be able to assess the impact of the digital age on documentary film production, distribution, and exhibition
- be able to appreciate the ethical implications of producing and consuming documentary film

Education

Lectures and seminars are offered within budgetary constraints. The departmental board is responsible for the overall planning of the course and its mandatory components.

Forms of examination

a. The viewing of film, television and other media throughout the course is mandatory and will be assessed on par with course literature. The course is examined by means of written and/or oral assignments. Essays or theses should be word processed and students may be required to present them electronically. Genuine Text may be used to protect against plagiarism. Cases of suspected cheating, such as plagiarism, will be reported to the University's Disciplinary Committee by the departmental chair or director of studies.

b. Grades are given according to a criterion referenced seven-point scale:

A = Excellent
B = Very good
C = Good
D = Satisfactory
E = Poor
Fx = Inadequate
F = Unacceptable

c. The grading criteria for this course are to be distributed at the beginning of the course.

d. The final grade for the whole course must be at least E to pass.

e. In order to obtain at least a grade of E, a student who has received an F or Fx has the right to additional four tests provided the course is still offered. A student who has received a grade of E or higher may not take the test again in order to get a higher grade.

A student who has received the grade of Fx or F twice on a given test and by the same examiner can, on application, be granted a new examiner, unless there are specific reasons against it. The application should be addressed to the board of the department.

Interim

When the course is no longer offered or its contents have been essentially revised, the student has the right to be examined according to this course syllabus once per semester for a three-semester period. However, the restrictions above under Forms of examinations still hold.

Limitations

This course cannot be included in a Bachelor's or Masters degree together with courses taken nationally or internationally of which the contents overlap with the course.

Required reading

Reading List:

Two books are required for the course:

- Alison Griffiths, *Wondrous Difference: Cinema, Anthropology, and Turn-of-the-Century Visual Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002) (WD).
- Barry Keith Gumbart and Jeannette Sloniowski, eds., *Documenting the Documentary: Close Readings of Documentary Film and Video* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998) (DD).

Articles:

Catherine Russell, *Experimental Ethnography: The Work of Film in the Age of Video* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999) pp. 51-75.

Joel Katz, "From Archive to Archiveology," *Cinematograph* 4 (1991): 96-103.

Fatimah Tobing Rony, *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), pp. 45-73.

Tom Gunning, "Before Documentary: Early Nonfiction Films and the 'View' Aesthetic," in Daan Hertogs and Nico De Klerk, eds., *Uncharted Territory: Essays on Early Nonfiction Film* (Amsterdam: Nederlands Filmmuseum, 1997), pp. 9-24.

James Lastra, "Why is This Absurd Picture Here? Ethnology/Heterology/Bunuel," *October* 89 (Summer 1999): 51-68

Malcolm Turvey, "Can the Camera See? Mimesis in Man With a Movie Camera," *October* 89 (Summer 1999): 25-50.

Annette Michelson, "Introduction," in *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov* (London: Pluto Press, 1983), xv-lx.

Michael Renov, "Toward a Poetics of Documentary," in *Theorizing Documentary* (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 12-36.

John Grierson, "The Documentary Idea," in Richard Meran Bersam, ed., *Nonfiction Film Theory and Criticism* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1976), pp. 84-94.

Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), pp. 11-40.

David MacDougall, *Transcultural Cinema* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998) pp. 26-60.

Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1991) pp. 76-103.

Michelle Citron, "What's Wrong With This Picture?," in *Home Movies and Other Necessary Fictions* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), pp. 2-25.

Michael Renov, "Domestic Ethnography and the Construction of the 'Other' Self," in Jane M. Gaines and Michael Renov, eds. *Collecting Visible Evidence* (Minnesota: University of Minneapolis Press, 1999), pp. 140-55.

Alexandra Juhasz, "They Said They Were Trying to Show Reality -- All I Want to Show is My Video: The Politics of the Realist Feminist Documentary," in Jane M. Gaines and Michael Renov, eds. *Collecting Visible Evidence* (Minnesota: University of Minneapolis Press, 1999)pp. 190-215.

Alexandra Juhasz and Jess Lerner, *F is for Phony: Fake Documentary and Truth's Undoing* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2006),

Trinh T. Minh-ha, "The Totalizing Quest of Meaning," in Renov, *Theorizing Documentary* (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 90-107.

Michael Renov, *The Subject of Documentary* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), TBA

Linda Williams, "The Ethics of Intervention: Dennis O'Rourke's *The Good Woman of Bangkok*," in Jane M. Gaines and Michael Renov, eds. *Collecting Visible Evidence* (Minnesota: University of Minneapolis Press, 1999), pp. 176-189.