

**Truth, Lies, and Videotape: Documentary Film and Issues of Morality**  
**U2 LinC Course: Interdisciplinary Studies 290**  
**Fall 2007, T/TH 12:45-3:15**

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**Instructor:** Krista (Steinke) Finch

**Office:** Art Office/ studio room 103

**Office Hours:** M, T, TH, W 11:30-12:30 or by appointment

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\*\*\*Please note that email is the best way to communicate with me

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

This course will explore issues of morality in documentary film as well provide a conceptual overview of the forms, strategies, structures and conventions of documentary film practice. Filmmaking is a universal language which has proven to be a powerful tool of communication for fostering understanding and change. For this course, students will study the history and theory of the documentary film and its relationship to topics and arguments about the social world. Students will be introduced to theoretical frameworks in ethics and media theory as a means to interpret and reflect upon issues presented in documentary film. Weekly screenings and readings will set the focus for debate and discussion on these specific issues. Students will also work in small groups to create short documentary films on particular subject of their own concern. Through hands on experience, students will learn the basics in planning, producing, and editing a documentary film while gaining an in depth insight into a particular issue through extensive research and exploration. The semester will culminate with a public presentation of the documentary films created during the course at the 2006 Student Film Festival in late April.

**GOALS: Students will:**

- understand the history of documentary film and be able to critically address media related arts in relationship to societal issues.
- gain a deeper understanding of how documentary films are made and the ethical choices that shape the medium.
- become aware of the complexity of moral issues as seen in documentary media and understand the need for informed moral decision-making.
- explore their own values and moral position taking through film analysis and production.
- develop an enhanced capacity for moral discernment, criticism and arguments in relation to various topics explored in documentary film.
- become familiar with the fundamental theories and concepts behind the language of moving imagery and sound.
- become familiar with the basic rhythms of the creative process in order to apply concepts of problem solving as it applies to the filmmaking medium.
- master organizational skills required in planning and making a documentary video production.

- learn the basic technical skills required in film production and be able to creatively apply them in their work.
- **REQUIREMENTS: Students will:**
  - Write a weekly journal/sketchbook entry as assigned (approx 12)
  - Complete all class readings
  - Complete one “video sketch”
  - Complete one 10-minute documentary film and meet preproduction, production, and post-production deadlines throughout semester
  - Attend a lecture, film screening, or art exhibit outside of class that pertains to course topics
  - Actively participate and contribute to class discussion and critique

**The following is an overview of weekly discussion topics:**

- How do we define documentary and documentary modes of representation?
- Primitive film and the origins of documentary
- Ethics and Point of View: How style and structure can affect documentary story.
- Filmmaking and Artist Responsibility: The Social Impact of Documentary Films and the Nazi Agenda
- Film maker as Martyr: Impact Fast food has had on the American Nation
- Film and Unsolved Mysteries: The Interrogating Reporter
- Staging Reality in Documentary Film: Fact or Fiction?
- Footage as evidence: Crime Scene Investigation
- Confrontation with Film: The Michael Moore Phenomenon
- Trials and Tribulations of Making a documentary Film: Choosing, Committing, and Making
- Film making and Social Justice: The Sympathetic Soldier
- A Documentary about making a Documentary: Searching for the Meaning of Life
- Reality Behind Reality TV
- Film as Historical Record: Found Footage as Documentary
- The Morality Play in Film: A Question of Priorities

**FILM PROJECTS:**

There will be two film projects in this class. The first will be a short exercise which will explore issues of identity. This project will help students become familiar with the tools and process of creating a video while opening up personal inquiry into moral issues and conflicts. The second project will be a 10-minute documentary film on an issue of your choice. This project will take up the majority of the semester. Grades will be given periodically for work in progress. Successful works will be screened at the Student Film Festival in April.

**HOME WORK:**

Homework will average 6-8 hours a week and will vary from reading material, writing assignments, film shooting, etc. The workload in this class comes in waves. Students should be prepared to spend a good deal of time outside of class due to editing or production demands.

**READING ASSIGNMENTS**

Outside weekly reading is an essential component to this course which gives students a critical, theoretical, and artistic context in which to develop their own work as well as provide a platform for class discussion on issues pertaining to art, media culture, and moral life. Students should always be prepared to discuss readings in class and students will be assigned to write a brief analytical response to readings in a class journal.

### **FILM SCREENINGS:**

We will be screening one film a week on average. At times, I will assign films to review for homework. Students will need to have a membership to a video rental venue. Along with in-class screenings and homework, we will also try to attend at least one film together as a class.

### **SKETCHBOOK/JOURNAL:**

Students are required to keep a sketchbook/journal. Students should strive to make at least 2 contributions a week which should include technical notes, vocabulary terms, ideas, collages, vocabulary, drawings, useful websites, anything that will enhance performance and work in the class. Students will also be required to write a weekly film review entry. Journals will be collected 2x during the semester.

### **PARTICIPATION:**

Students will be graded on participation in class critiques, discussions, debates, etc. I believe in setting up a classroom community that encourages a healthy, open exchange of ideas. Learning is a collaborative process and every student's input is a valuable contribution. Please note that participation will be counted as 20% of the grade.

### **TEXTS:**

#### **Main text for readings on documentary film to support discussion topics:**

Nichols, Bill. (2001). Introduction to Documentary.

Nichols, Bill Representing Reality, Issues and Concepts in Documentary

#### **Support text for making a documentary film**

Hampe, Barry, Making Documentary Films and Reality Videos : A Practical Guide to Planning, Filming, and Editing Documentaries of Real Events

**Students are encouraged to purchase at least one technical text on Final Cut Pro for personal reference. – Here are my suggestions...**

Diana Weynand, Final Cut Pro 4, Editing Professional Video

Apple Computer, Inc. Final Cut Pro User's Manual.

Lisa Brennells: Final Cut Pro Visual Quickstart

Richard Harrington and Abba Shapiro, Final Cut Pro 4: On the Spot

### **OTHER SUGGESTED RESOURCES:**

Please see attached bibliography and filmography

### **MATERIALS AND EQUIPMENT:**

***The school has six digital video cameras available for checkout.***

The most expensive item to purchase is an external hard drive. Video takes up a tremendous amount of space on a computer system. Because of limited space on the school's computers, we require students to purchase an external drive for video storage. This can run from \$50 up to \$300 depending on how much storage you choose.

- A notebook (can be your sketchbook) specifically for this class in which to take notes and write down assignments
- A folder specifically to hold reading handouts and technical information sheets
- Mini DV tapes – 2-3 60 minute Standard Play for digital camera
- DVDs for storage and Final Portfolio
- Headphones – long enough cord to plug into computer jack

### **OPTIONAL**

Tripod, lighting, microphones, and other “shooting” equipment (also available to checkout)

Flash Drive

### **ATTENDANCE:**

Attendance is mandatory. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of each session. Missing 2 classes (unexcused) automatically drops the grade one letter. Students grade will continue to drop a half a letter with every absence after three. More than 4 absences may result in an instructor withdrawal. Students who anticipate being absent or late due to illness or other legitimate reasons, please call, email, or talk to me in person. **If you are late or absent, it is your responsibility to find out what you missed.** Incompletes will only be allowed in the case of severe illness or emergency.

-Students arriving 5-15 minutes late for any class session is considered tardy. Three late arrivals will equal one unexcused absence.

-Students who are more than 15 minutes late will be marked absent.

-Students who do not return from break or leave more than 30 minutes early will be considered absent.

### **GRADING:**

Students’ progress will be assessed at several times during the semester where specific deadlines are set for preproduction, production, and post-production. Students will also be assessed through frequent critiques, classroom projects, homework assignments, and paper/presentation, film review sheets. Again, it is important to note that students will be graded on class participation, especially during critique sessions. Students will be made aware of the expectations for each assignment in terms of grading.

#### Video Projects

Both the **form** and the **content** of work will be evaluated on each project, as well as effort, originality, personal progress, and timely completion of assignment.

While competency in basic skills can be objectively determined, creativity and aesthetics is more subjective. The instructor reserves the right to apply qualitative judgments in determining grades.

#### **GRADING CRITERIA IN VIDEO:**

-MASTERY OF TECHNICAL SKILLS AND CRAFTSMANSHIP

-COMPOSITION AND DESIGN

-CONTENT/ SUBJECT MATTER/ CONCEPT/ IDEA/ CREATIVITY

-FULLFILLMENT AND UNDERSTANDING OF ASSIGNMENT CONCEPTS AND REQUIREMENTS

-EFFORT AND ENGAGEMENT

- "A": Excellent, outstanding achievement and mastery of skills

- "B": Good- average attainment – may need some minor improvements in certain areas
- "C": Adequate understanding of essentials – fulfills assignment but lacking in content, effort, and/or skill.
- "D": does not fulfill assignment and exhibits little skill, effort, and thought.
- "F": Failure, no credit
- "I" Incomplete

Documentary Film Project	40%
(includes an average of several grades for work in progress)	
Video Project 1	10%
Journal and Writing Assignments	30%
Class Participation	20%
<b>TOTAL POINTS</b>	<b>100</b>

### **LATE ASSIGNMENTS:**

I will mark down all late projects or unmet deadlines one letter grade for each class period they are late, unless you give me a satisfactory reason (in my estimation) for their lateness.

### **DISABILITY STATEMENT:**

If you believe that you need accommodations in this class, you are encouraged to contact the Learning Services Office as soon as possible to enhance the likelihood that such accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion.

### **ACADEMIC HONESTY POLICY:**

Please refer to the Moravian College policy in the Student Handbook.

### **CLASSROOM RULES AND EQUIPMENT:**

We will discuss lab rules and equipment checkout rules in class.

### **RESOURCES:**

*Be observant and critical of what you see in the media. Bring to class any interesting finds that pertain to course topics.*

**MAGAZINES/NEW PAPER/ TV-** The Art Department also has a selection of periodicals that you may browse through. Many of these feature articles on video art and film.

\*\*\*Check out: *Wired, Flash Art, Aperture, Art News, Art Forum, World Art, Communication Arts, Photoshop User, Art Review, Digital Photographer, Res*

**Internet-** The web is the newest venue for independent filmmakers and video artists. Go to Google or another search engine and search for various topics pertaining to documentary film. Check out video portal sites such as YouTube.

### **SUPPLEMENTAL READINGS AND/OR RECOMMENDED TITLES:**

## **ON DOCUMENTARY FILM AND MEDIA STUDIES:**

Andrejevic, Mark. Reality TV: The Work of Being Watched.  
Barnouw, Erik. Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film  
Barry Keith Grant and Jeannette Sloniowski (Eds.). Documenting the Documentary: Close Readings of Documentary Film and Video.  
Bullert, B. J. (1997) Public Television: Politics and the Battle over Documentary Film. Screening the Holocaust: Cinema's Images of the Unimaginable.  
Coles, Robert, Doing Documentary Work  
Corner, John. (1996). The Art of Record: Critical Introduction to the Documentary.  
Deutschman. (1991). Triumph of the Will: The Image of the Third Reich.  
Downing, John with T. Ford, G. Gil & L. Stein. (2001). Radical Media: Rebellious Communication and Social Movements.  
Druckery, Timothy, ed. (1996). Electronic Culture: Technology and Visual Representation.  
Gaines, James and Michael Renov, Collecting Visible Evidence  
Gitlin, Todd, Inside Primetime.  
Hall, Doug and Fifer, Sally Jo. eds. Illuminating Video: An Essential Guide to Video Art. New York: Aperture Foundation/BAVC, 1990.  
Hanhardt, John, Video Culture  
Heiferman, Marvin and Philips, Lisa, Image World: Art and Media Culture  
Hinton, David. (1991) The Films of Leni Riefenstahl.  
Kaplan, Ann, Rocking Around the Clock.  
Lev Manovich, The Language of New Media  
M. Renov (Ed.), Theorizing Documentary.  
Nichols, Bill. (1991). Representing Reality.  
Nichols, Bill. (1994) Blurred Boundaries: Questions of Meaning in Contemporary Culture,  
Peyton, Patricia. and Film Fund. (1979). Reel Change: A Guide to Social Issue in Films  
Postam, Neil, Amusing Ourselves to Death  
Rotha, Paul. (1968). Documentary Film: The Use of the Film Medium to Interpret Creatively and in Social Terms the Life of the People as It Exists in Reality.  
Schneider, Cynthia and Brian Wallis, Global TV  
Vaughan, Dai. (1999). For Documentary: Twelve Essays.  
Waldman, Diane, and Janet Walker. (1999). Feminism and Documentary.

## **ON FILM/VIDEO PRODUCTION:**

Bernard, Sheila Curran, Documentary Storytelling for Video and Filmmakers  
Dancyger, Ken. The Technique of Film and Video Editing, Theory and Practice.  
Des Lyver & Graham Swainson, Basics of Video Production  
Hampe, Barry, Making Documentary Films and Reality Videos: A Practical Guide to Planning, Filming, and Editing Documentaries of Real Events  
Robert B. Musburger, Single Camera Video Production  
Roth, Cliff. The Low Budget Video Bible.

## **ON MEDIA THEORY AND ANALYSIS:**

Controversies in Media Ethics, Gordon and Kitross  
Rhetorical Criticism, Exploration and Practice, Sonja K. Foss  
Communications Theory in Practice: An Introduction, Julia T. Wood  
Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think, George Lakoff

## Filmography:

*4 Little Girls*, 1997, Lee, Spike  
*911*, 2002, Naudet, Gedeon and Jules  
*Aileen Wuornos: The Selling of a Serial Killer, Nick Broomsfield*, 1992  
*Atomic Café*, 1982, Loader, Jane  
Biggie and Tupac  
Born into Brothels  
*Bowling for Columbine*, 2002, Moore, Michael  
*Breasts, A Documentary*, 1996, Spadola, Meema,  
*Capturing the Friedmans*, 2003, Jarecki, Andrew  
*Children Underground*  
*Control Room*  
Deadline, 2004  
*Fahrenheit 911*, 2004, Moore, Michael  
Farmingville, POV  
*Gates of Heaven*, 1978, Morris, Errol  
*Harlan County, USA* 1977  
Hearts and Minds  
Home Movie  
*Is it True What They Say About oreAnn*, 2004, Wright, Patrick  
*Koyaaqsatsi-Life out of Balance*, 1982, Reggio, Godfrey  
*Kurt and Courtney*, 1998, Broomsfield, Nick  
Last Days  
*Lumieres Brother's first films*  
*Man with the Movie Camera*, 1929, Vertov, Dziga  
*Manufacturing Consent – Noam Chomsky and the Media*, 1993, Archbar, Mark and Peter Wintonick,  
*Mr. Death, The Rise and Fall of Fred. A. Lechter*, 2000, Morris, Errol  
My Flesh and Blood  
*Nanook of the North*  
*Naqoyqatsi*, 2002, Reggio, Godfrey  
*One Day in September* 1999, MacDonald, Kevin  
Overnight, 2003  
*Paris is Burning*, 1991, Livingston, Jennie  
Party Monster, The Shockumentary  
Promises  
*Reality behind reality*  
*Roger and Me*, 1989, Moore, Michael  
*Sans Soleil*, 1982, Marker Chris  
*Sherman's March*, 1986, MCElwee, Ross  
*Shoah*, 1985, Lanzmann, Claude  
*Sound and Fury, 2005*  
*Startup.com*, 2001, Hegedus, Chris and Jehane Noujaim  
Stevie  
*Streetwise*, 1985, Bell, Martin  
*Super Size Me*, 2003, Issacs, Daryl  
*Synthetic Pleasures*, 1998, Lee, Iara  
*Tarnation*, 2005  
*The Architecture of Doom*, 1989, Cohen, Peter  
The Brandon Teena Story  
The Corporation  
*The Cutting Edge: The Magic of Movie Editing*  
*The Devil's Playground*, 2002, Walker, Lucy  
The Eyes of Tammy Faye  
*The Fog of War*, 2004, Morris, Errol  
*The Gleaners and I*, 2002, Varda, Agnes  
*The Journey*, 2001  
*The Olympiad*, 1940, Riefenstahl, Leni  
The Reality Behind Reality  
*The Thin Blue Line*, 1987, Morris, Errol  
*The True Meaning of Pictures: Shelby Lee Adams' Appalachia*  
The Weather Underground  
*The Witness: A Tribe of Heart Documentary*, 2000, Stein, Jenny  
*The Wonderful, Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl*, 1994, Riefenstahl, Leni  
*The Yes Men*  
*Triumph of the Will*, 1934, Riefenstahl, Leni  
*Wont Anybody Listen*

