

Films for the Feminist Classroom

Volume 4, number 1 (Spring-Summer 2012)

Edited by Agatha Beins, Jillian Hernandez, and Deanna Utroske

Editorial Assistant: A.J. Barks

Editorial Intern: Vera Hinsey

DOCUMENTARY PRESENTATION:

Issues & Formal Analysis in Documentary Film Production

A lesson plan by Shara K. Lange

Introduction:

This assignment is designed to introduce you and your classmates to a broad range of ethical, representational, and formal issues in documentary filmmaking. You will work with a teammate to prepare a presentation about the group of documentaries assigned to your team.

Along with preparing your group's presentation, read the materials posted online that relate to films assigned to other groups. This will enable you to fully participate in each group's presentation and deepen your understanding of documentary film and film practices.

Assignment:

Watch the assigned group of long-form documentaries, read the associated articles, and prepare a group presentation using PowerPoint that includes the following:

- Synopsis of each film
- Short bio of the filmmaker(s)
- Story from the making of and/or excerpt of a review of a documentary
- Your review of the assigned documentaries
- Still image from a documentary or the making of (at least 1)
- Clips (approximately 3-8 minutes total)
- Address the discussion questions assigned to you. Add 2 questions of your own. Please document these responses in your PowerPoint and be prepared to facilitate discussion in class.

All materials listed below are on the class D2L site. You are encouraged to find other relevant and appropriate materials. These represent the minimum research you must do for this presentation.

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Uses of Archival Footage: War & Response

FILMS: *Night and Fog* (Alain Resnais), *Hearts & Minds* (Peter Davis), *White Light, Black Rain* (Steven Okazaki)

READINGS/ADDITIONAL SCREENINGS:

- Excerpts from *Documenting the Documentary* (Chapter 12)
- NPR story about re-release of *Hearts and Minds*
- Steven Okazaki's web site with links to interviews with the director

QUESTIONS:

- Discuss how each documentary uses archival footage differently and to what effect.
- Discuss the use of voice-over used by each documentary and to what effect.
- What do you believe the intention of each filmmaker is with the making of his film on this subject?

Issues of Representation: Race in America

FILMS: *Rize* (David LaChapelle), *The Farm: Life inside Angola Prison* (Jonathan Stack, Liz Garbus)

READINGS/ADDITIONAL SCREENINGS:

- Excerpts from *Prisons, Race and Masculinity*
- Interview with Liz Garbus (on *Charlie Rose Show*)
- Interview with David LaChapelle (on *Charlie Rose Show*)
- *Village Voice* review of *Rize*

QUESTIONS:

- What does Rabinowitz mean when she writes that documentary films are, “reinforcing dominant patterns of vision”?¹
- What problem does the author perceive with prison films that shape popular perception of incarceration?
- Using specific examples, discuss to what extent these two documentaries reinforce or break racial stereotypes.

The Truth Problem

FILMS: *F for Fake* (Orson Welles), *Exit through the Gift Shop* (Banksy), *Grizzly Man* (Werner Herzog)

¹ Paula Rabinowitz, “Wreckage upon Wreckage: History, Documentary, and the Ruins of Memory.” *History and Theory* 32.2 (1993), 119.

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READINGS/ADDITIONAL SCREENINGS:

- Nichols: "What to Do About Documentary Distortion?"
- "Banksy Was Here" (*New Yorker* article)
- Excerpt from Susan Sontag's, *On Photography*
- "The Ecstatic Truth" (*New Yorker* article)
- Excerpts from *Documentary Superstars*
- *The Documentary Blog*: "F for Fake Review"

QUESTIONS:

- How is Herzog's concept of ecstatic truth different from what Welles is doing in his documentary, *F for Fake*?
- Compare *F for Fake* with *Exit through the Gift Shop* based on what you know. How are the intentions of both documentaries made clear (or obfuscated)?
- How are these documentaries different from mockumentaries?

Gender & Authorship: Agnes Varda

FILMS: *La Pointe Corte*, *The Beaches of Agnes*

READINGS/ADDITIONAL SCREENINGS:

- Excerpts from *To Desire Differently*
- Excerpt from *Documentary Media*
- Interview with Agnes Varda (on *La Pointe Courte* DVD)

QUESTIONS:

- Discuss the issues of representation raised by Sandy Flitterman-Lewis in the introduction of *To Desire Differently*, and those of Laura Mulvey paraphrased by this author.
- How does Varda's work address these issues according to the author and according to you?
- Discuss Varda's use of documentary and narrative techniques. How does she use them and what is their effect?

Documentary Ethics & the Perils of Image Making

FILMS: *Stranger with a Camera* (Elizabeth Barret), *War Photographer* (Christian Frei)

READINGS/ADDITIONAL SCREENINGS:

- NPR interview with director, Elizabeth Barret
- Documentary Filmmakers on Ethical Challenges
- NPR Interview with Christian Frei

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QUESTIONS:

- Discuss some of the problems inherent in image making that are raised by these two documentaries.
- What do you think the responsibilities are of the image makers (photographers, filmmakers) in controlling the reception of their work?
- Discuss the way that power is held or controlled by the image makers versus the photographed subject(s)?
- Does James Nachtwey's work (the subject of *War Photographer*) glamorize violence? Why or why not?

Ethnographic Film

FILMS: *Phantom India* (Louis Malle), *Born into Brothels* (Ross Kauffman, Zana Briski)

READINGS/ADDITIONAL SCREENINGS:

- Excerpts from *Orientalism* (Edward Said)
- Excerpts from *Third World Filmmaking* (Roy Armes)
- Excerpts from *Documentary: A History of Non-Fiction Film* (Erik Barnouw)
- Charlie Rose interview with Zana Briski

QUESTIONS:

- How do considerations of colonial history, the influences of Western education, and economic considerations impact your interpretation of these two films?
- How can you apply Said's concept of orientalism and its construction to the reading of Malle's films about India?
- Is *Born into Brothels* an ethnographic film? Why or why not?