

English 496
·Cuentos y Testimonios:
Documenting and Re-Presenting Our Stories

(* Please note: This syllabus is subject to change. New readings will be added. All changes will be posted on D2L. Please be sure to check D2L prior to class.)

Fall 2008 / T/Th / 11:00 - 12:15 / ML 210

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Office Hours: Tuesday, 1:30 - 3:00; Wednesday, 9:00 - 10:00; and by appointment.

Course Description

What is the difference between being represented and representing ourselves? What stories would we tell – about ourselves, our communities, our histories, our lived experience, our families – if we could tell them ourselves? This course seeks to provide answers to these questions regarding representation and production, while also discussing questions of media access, community media, and documentary film.

This course offers students the opportunity to make meaningful connections between their academic experience and the world beyond the academy. You are encouraged to apply the insights and knowledge you have gained as an English major to the greater world in which you circulate. The seminar format for this course requires critical reflection and active, consistent, and informed discussion by all participants. It also requires that you make creative and critical connections between past knowledges and new knowledges. Allow yourself to be challenged.

The aims of this course are three-fold. First, we will explore distinctions between mainstream, community, and independent media in which we will consider questions of access and representation. Students will gain knowledge of the current conversations about community media, documentary films and filmmaking, including questions of definition regarding documentary film, and what constitutes the ethical treatment/representation of subjects and subject matter. We will think about the relationship between power and representation as we consider who represents whom. Like any story (including history), personal stories make truth claims based on perspective. We will consider how the stories we tell are related to the stories that are told to us, and about us.

In addition, there will be an emphasis on media literacy to include close readings, and critical thinking/writing/viewing skills related to

representations of the social world through audio-visual media. Finally, students will be introduced to video and editing techniques.

This course also provides an introductory overview of the strategies and structures of documentary film and video over time in a predominantly U.S. context. We will focus mainly on social justice documentaries and community media. We will consider texts and documentaries as rhetorical artifacts that construct arguments about the world (and the power relations at work across contexts), that aim to raise consciousness, and can be considered calls to action. Students will examine dominant, experimental and emergent media (including online production) and modes of representation; selected documentary films; and selected texts, rhetorical analyses, and close readings of documentary films.

In documentary work, imagination encounters and tries to come to terms with reality; and the way in which that is done, the outcome achieved, is as various as the individuals involved in the effort, the struggle.
-Robert Coles, 1997

Course Materials

*Menchu, Rigoberta. *I, Rigoberta Menchu An Indian Woman in Guatemala*. London: Verso, 1983.

*Required text is available at Antigone's Books, 411 N 4th Avenue. (520) 792.3715. (Should you be interested, Antigone's will buy books back at the end of the semester.)

** 2 Mini DV tapes (or more, as required) for filming.

** I recommend purchasing your tapes at ICS Audio-Video Supply & Equipment at 1518 E. Broadway Blvd., 520-882-3853 as I believe this is the most economical option locally.

Online materials available through D2L

Consent Forms posted online for use with any person (age 18+) filmed for purposes of this class.

Course Requirements

In addition to your written engagement with course content, you should be prepared to intelligently discuss the work(s) indicated in the syllabus on the day they are listed. Please note that readings will be added. Be sure to check D2L prior to each class period. Class discussions will routinely

revolve around course readings and viewings. I will assume preliminary efforts, on your part, to read, reflect on, and analyze the materials *before* class discussion. We will often begin the class with your responses to the day's reading, so come to class prepared with questions or comments that you have developed ahead of time. Please notice that unexcused absences, lack of preparation for and participation in class discussion, and/or lack of involvement in class activities will affect your final grade.

Please note: Students are responsible for watching all films in their entirety. If class time is insufficient for full viewing or if we experience technical difficulties, please be prepared to watch any remaining segments on your own time.

Course Assignments & Exams

Documentary Journal: Each student will keep a journal that critically discusses the course text and all 10 of the documentaries viewed in class. I am including the course text in this assignment. So 1 of your 10 entries will be about an entry on *I, Rigoberta Menchu An Indian Woman in Guatemala*. Journal entries should be 2 - 3 pages in length and include the title, director/author, and year of the documentary/publication. Journal entries include any of the following: a synopsis and critical analysis of the documentary (including but not limited to critical and personal reactions to the work), discussion of specific techniques (you may want to refer to our course video glossary) and modes of representation, ethical questions raised by the work, styles and strategies utilized to convey meaning, discussion of what the film is responding to, what questions it is answering and asking, and what call to action it may be making. For full credit reference to course readings and relevant discussions should be included. MLA citation style required. **200 points.**

Documentary Film Proposal: Students will write a 2-page proposal for the 4 - 6 minute documentary final project. Drafts are due for peer review and consideration on 2 October. Bring 3 copies of your proposal. The final proposal is due 9 October. It should persuade me that your project is viable and worthwhile. Where appropriate, reference to work we have considered should be made. **100 points.**

Mid-term: A midterm examination will be given in class that will address concepts and terms that have been introduced and discussed in class and course readings. **50 points.**

Documentary Film: As a final project, each student will produce a 4-6 minute documentary that will tell a story differently than it has been told

in mainstream media. Each documented story will attend to questions of self-identification, family, and/or community. Students can be the subjects of their personal documentaries, elders can be interviewed to tell a different version of lived history, and/or community events can be documented. Our stories, or cuentos, will emerge as testimonios to the importance of representation and its relationship to history as it is represented and reproduced. Films will be uploaded to a course website for in-class presentations, viewings and discussion. **200 points.**

Final: Each student will produce a 3 - 5 page critical reflection of her/his own film using learned concepts and analytic skills developed in this course. **50 points.**

Students are encouraged, throughout the course, to surf posted and related links. You should feel free to suggest further postings for class consideration.

Please note the several dates throughout the semester when we will meet in training labs for camera and editing training sessions [4 Sept., 7 Oct., 30 Oct., and 6 Nov.].

(Note: Assignment sheets will be posted on our D2L site in advance of due dates. Consent forms for 18+-year participants in your video projects are now posted.)

Course Policies

- **On incompletes:** I offer incompletes under emergency circumstances.
- **On accommodations:** If you determine that formal, disability-related accommodations are necessary, it is very important that you be registered with Disability Resources (621-3268; drc.arizona.edu) and that you notify me of your eligibility for reasonable accommodations. We can then plan how best to coordinate your accommodations.

Course Calendar

WEEK ONE – Introduction - Contextualizing the Conversations:

Relating Rhetoric, Community Media, & Documentary

- 26 August – Review syllabus / course design. Review documentaries. What have you seen and what do you want to see?
- 28 August – Contextualizing the Conversations: Relating Rhetoric, Community Media, & Documentary
DUE:

1. MacCann on Democracy's Public Relations - D2L
2. Rennie - Introduction & Ch. 2 - D2L

WEEK TWO – Media Access and Alternatives

- 2 September

DUE:

1. Rennie - Chapter 1 - D2L
2. Olson on “The History of Public Access Television” - D2L
3. Atton Introduction on Alternative Media - D2L
4. Surf Media Reform Information Website on Media Monopoly < <http://www.corporations.org/media/>>
5. Surf ACCESS Tucson Website
<<http://www.accesstucson.org/>>

Guest Speaker: Lisa Horner from ACCESS Tucson

Documentary work is closely connected to remembering, creating, and telling life stories and experiences. Most of us share a need to recall and reconsider local memory, to revisit and renew our connection to place. Out of shared telling and remembering grow identity, connection, and pride, binding people to a place and to one another...The documentary process, and sharing the results of that work, provides a way for us to acknowledge and shape community life as we advance our understanding of these connections and how they inform our work in the present.

–Tim Rankin, Directory of the Center for Documentary Studies, Duke University

- 4 September – 1st Camera Training -Students to **meet in the LTC Presentation Area**

DUE:

1. Power of the Media to Mis-Represent People of Color - D2L

*Suggestion: Start reading *I, Rigoberta Menchu An Indian Woman in Guatemala* (Note: Analysis Due 2 October)

WEEK THREE – Considering the Role of Documentary (From Flaherty to Morris)

- 9 September – Ethnography & Documentary

DUE:

1. Introduction to *Documenting the Documentary: Close Readings of Documentary Film & Video* - D2L
2. Plantinga on “Rhetoric, Representation, and Structure”

FILM:

Nanook of the North (1922 / 79 min) directed by Robert J. Flaherty

- 11 September

DUE:

1. On Nanook from Documenting the Documentary- D2L
2. On SOP & Errol Morris - D2L
3. Documentary Journal Entry

FILM: *Standard Operating Procedure* (2008 / 116 min)
directed by Philip Gourevitch and Errol Morris

WEEK FOUR –Non-Fiction Film & Questions of Representation

- 16 September

Due:

1. Documentary Journal Entry
2. Tuhiwai Smith's "25 Projects" from Decolonizing Methodologies - D2L

Discussion of previous 2 films and readings (including reading due today)

Supplemental Reading: *On Postmodern Approaches to Analysis* - D2L

- 18 September

DUE:

1. Plantinga on What is Non-Fiction Film - D2L
3. Warren on Intro to Non-fiction - D2L

FILM:

The Thin Blue Line (1988 / 103 min) directed by Errol Morris

WEEK FIVE – Non-fiction vs. Documentary

- 23 September

DUE:

1. Williams on "The Thin Blue Line" from Documenting the Documentary - D2L
2. Morris Technique: The Interrotron
3. Plantinga on Rhetoric, Rep, & Non-Fiction - D2L

Discussion of previous 2 films and readings (including reading due today)

- 25 September

DUE:

1. Documentary Journal Entry
2. Video Glossary – D2L (Under Course Materials)

WEEK SIX – Cuentos y Testimonios: The Power and Value of Storytelling

- 30 September – Identify Documentary Project (to be discussed in class)

DUE:

1. (Self) Researched Critique of Menchú's work
2. Torres on "The Construction of the Self in U.S. Latina Autobiographies" – D2L
3. The Latin American Subaltern Studies Group on Testimonios's Roots – D2L

Testimonio includes a diverse corpus of literature prompted by periods of intense social and political upheaval throughout Latin America... While the impulse to write testimonio has been triggered by an array of circumstances, most of the works share the following characteristics:

- ***They are based on traumatic historical and/or social episode(s);***
- ***They are told from an individual perspective;***
- ***The individual experience serves as an allegory for the communal experience as a whole;***
- ***The author has been oppressed or silenced in some capacity and the work contains political statement against the perceived oppressor or suffering caused by that oppression;***
- ***Literary elements such as dialogue, poetry and metaphors are infused throughout the writing;***
- ***There is a sense of orality; and***
- ***The author includes selections from other texts including newspaper clippings, quotes from leaders and popular mythology.***

<http://digitalunion.osu.edu/r2/summer06/herbert/testimoniosubaltern/latinamericasuba.html>

- 2 October

DUE:

1. Rennie Ch. 7 on Self-Representation – D2L (TO BE POSTED)
2. Documentary Journal with Menchú analysis included
3. 2-page documentary film persuasive proposal draft for peer review

WEEK SEVEN – Camera Practice Session

- 7 October – 2nd Camera Training / Practice Session
Students to **meet in CC311**

DUE:

1. Re-read Video Glossary

Supplemental Reading: Ch. 8 - *Decolonizing Methodologies* - D2L

- 9 October

DUE:

1. Plantinga on Voice & Authority - D2L
2. Final Copy - 2-page documentary proposal

FILM: *Granitos de Arena* (2004 / 60 min) directed by Jill Friedberg

WEEK EIGHT – Histories Reconsidered & Retold

- 14 October

Due:

Documentary Journal Entry

Film: *Harvest of Shame*

- 16 October

DUE:

1. Documentary Journal Entry
2. Leyva “There is Great Good in Returning” - D2L
3. Tuhiwai Smith, Chapter 1, “Imperialism, History, Writing and Theory” - D2L
4. Honeycutt, “Reimagining Rhetoric in a Cinematic World” - D2L

Discussion of previous 2 films and readings (including reading due today)

WEEK NINE – Midterm

- 21 October - MIDTERM

DUE:

1-2 Page “Status of Documentary Project”

- 23 October

Midterm Evaluations

FILM: *Hoop Dreams* (1994/170min) directed by Steve James

WEEK TEN – Reality ReImagined

- 28 October

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DUE:

1. Weinberger on the Camera People - D2L

FILM: *Hoop Dreams* (1994/170min) directed by Steve James

- 30 October - 1st Editing Training Session (MovieMaker) -
Students to **meet in CC311**
Due:
1. Documentary Journal Entry

WEEK ELEVEN - The Essay Documentary

- 4 November
DUE:
1. DtD - *Roger & Me* - D2L
2. Lopate, "In Search of the Centaur: The Essay Film" - D2L

FILM: *Roger & Me* (1989 / 91 min) directed by Michael Moore

- 6 November - 2nd Editing Training Session (MovieMaker)
Students to **meet in CC311**
DUE:
1. Documentary Journal Entry

WEEK TWELVE - Telling Stories Differently / Different Stories

- 11 November - Veterans Day. No class.

- 13 November
1. Hogarth - D2L
2. Bruzzi - D2L
3. Craine on "The Medium Has a Message..." - D2L

FILM: *Rights on the Line: Vigilantes at the Border* (2005 / 25 min) directed by Ray Ybarra and WITNESS

WEEK THIRTEEN -

- 18 November
Film: *The Two Towns of Jasper*
- 20 November
DUE:
1. Documentary Journal Entry

Discussion of previous 2 films and readings (including reading due today)

WEEK FOURTEEN – Telling Stories Differently / Different Stories

- 25 November
- 27 November – Thanksgiving. No class.

WEEK FIFTEEN – Presentations

- 2 December
- 4 December – In-class film presentations

WEEK SIXTEEN – Presentations

- 9 December – In-class film presentations
- Close Reading / Critical Analysis of your own film

WEEK SEVENTEEN – Final

Supplemental Course Readings:

On Visual Rhetoric – D2L

Trinh T. Min-ha, “Not You/Like You” – D2L

Plantinga on Rhetoric, Representation, & Structure – D2L

Online media-related links

Latina Feminist Group on Telling to Live: Latina Feminist Testimonios