

WRD 412: Intermediate Documentary

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Building on WRD 312 (Intro to Documentary, listed as a prerequisite but check with the very flexible instructor), this course is designed to study and create more experimental, even radical approaches to the form and to focus more intensively on student workshops and production.

We will focus on a few subgenres:

- essay: *Black Is, Black Ain't*, *Chronicle of a Summer Night*. These refuse to offer didactic binary arguments and instead insinuate in a much more nuanced fashion a new way of looking at the world.
- hallucinatory travelogue: *Nostalgia for the Light*; *San Soleil*; *Encounters at the End of the World*. These refuse to repeated the received wisdom of hegemony and power and instead juxtapose the "exotic" landscapes and rituals of "other" cultures against metaphysics and outright spirituality.
- historical deconstruction: *Night and Fog*, *Waltz Across Bashir*, *In the Realm of the Unreal*, *When the Levees Broke*. These refuse to reduce history to chronology and cause and effect, instead subverting conventional methods—recreations, archival materials, talking head interviews—to more radical and demystifying ends.
- portrait of the artist: *Don't Look Back*, *Let's Get Lost*, *Burden of Dreams*, *The Unknown Known*. These films refuse the extremes of airbrushed hagiography (all virtue) and tabloid patho-biography (all vice) and instead try to capture the human inside of the artist and vice versa.
- true crime: *Paradise Lost: the West Memphis Child Murders*; *Mommy Dead and Dearest*. These films refuse to indulge in *Cops/Dateline* style cheap voyeurism and instead utilize the circumstances of the crime, investigation, trial, and subsequent verdict to look at the contraadictions of both the criminal and the justice system.

These films run from animation to revelation to reckless speculation to perhaps the first mockumentary (if you don't count *Nanook of the North*) Bunuel's surrealist *Land Without Bread*.

And they can serve as models for your own work. Drawing from the possibilities in technique, tone, and tactics they provide, you will be asked to develop, draft, and revise two 6-8 minute documentaries of your own. The workshop section of the class will provide us with an audience, collaborators, and diligent but diplomatic critics for our work.

As with any good workshop, we will learn by going where we have to go.

Expect loads of content, lively discussion, much workshop time which will teach you how to be your own best critic, and the two short films.