What is a documentary film? How does it represent people and facts? How does it negotiate the cross-currents of ideology, propaganda, pedagogy, and actual events? In the age of “fake news,” these questions are more important than ever. This course explores them through the lens of documentaries that concern some of the most tumultuous periods in German history: the Weimar Republic, the Nazi era, and the 1960s. Like today, these periods are characterized by the difficulty of separating fact from fiction; they are also the subject of numerous documentaries that strive to understand what “really” happened. By watching these films, students will develop a firm basis in the fundamentals of documentary film theory and aesthetics. Students will also have the opportunity to make their own documentary films.

**Basic Information**

Professor: Daniel Schwartz (daniel.scwhartz2@mcgill.ca)
Office Hours: Thursday, 17:30 – 19:30, or by appointment.

**Required Reading**
All Readings will be made available on My Courses.
Students must have read the readings before class meets / as necessary to complete assignments.

**REQUIRED FILMS**

Film for this class are available on various streaming platforms including Kanopy, YouTube, and Amazon. McGill has a subscription to Kanopy that is available to all students. Login at [https://mcgill.kanopy.com](https://mcgill.kanopy.com).

Unfortunately, McGill does not have online access to every film I wish to show for this course. It is thus likely that you will have to pay to stream some of them. The cost to stream these films, however, should be less than buying books for other courses – around $5 per film.

Links to films will be provided in the course schedule below.

**OTHER RESOURCES**

Cinema Cartography:
[https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCL5kBJmBUvFLYBDiSiK1VDw](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCL5kBJmBUvFLYBDiSiK1VDw)

Cinema Cartography is a YouTube channel specializing in film essays. These essays are delivered over a selection of clips that illustrate the writer’s point. Some of the films for this class have been covered by Cinema Cartography. I encourage you to watch them. I also suggest watching these film essays as examples for how you might structure your own paper.

**REMOTE DELIVERY**

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, classes for this course will be delivered remotely. Below you will find a description of the course structure and schedule. I also encourage you all to consult McGill’s remote learning resources: [https://www.mcgill.ca/tls/students/remote-learning-resources](https://www.mcgill.ca/tls/students/remote-learning-resources). If you have any question, please don’t hesitate to email me.

**COURSE STRUCTURE**

Instead of a traditional bi-weekly lecture, this class will consist of one individual or group assignment per week and one recorded Zoom session per week. The individual or group assignment will always be due on Tuesday at 17:00 EST. Our Zoom meeting will take place every Thursday at 11:35 AM – 12:55 PM EST. A link will be posted on My Courses.

**ZOOM**

*Zoom video and audio discussions will be recorded. By participating you consent to being recorded. Zoom sessions are mandatory and attendance will be taken.* That said, I understand that not all students may be able to participate in Zoom
discussions due to limitations on bandwidth or the fact that they may live in distant time zones. For this reason, students can arrange an alternative mode of participation. This can be done at any time during the course. The alternative mode of participation will take the form of a weekly discussion entry. The student will have to summarize a scene from the week’s film and explain how it relates to the reading. Please email me if you feel this mode of participation better suits your needs. Keep in mind, however, that I have the right to reject requests for alternative modes of participation if I feel the student is capable of participating on Zoom. I will not grant requests after the fact – e.g. after the student has already missed multiple Zoom sessions.

**Technical Requirements**

Zoom discussion sessions require an Internet connection and a microphone (the one built into your computer is fine). Students are not obliged to turn their cameras on; they may respond to the instructor’s question in chat.

For those new to Zoom, please read this article on [getting started](https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/201362033-Getting-Started-on-Windows-and-Mac). If the link does not work, go to: [https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/201362033-Getting-Started-on-Windows-and-Mac](https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/201362033-Getting-Started-on-Windows-and-Mac)

**Note on Technical Support / Learning Online**

I will do what I can to help you with your technical issues. However, please try to resolve your issues by asking Google or McGill’s technical support staff before asking me.

**Zoom Etiquette (From Daniel Pratt’s RUSS 223 Syllabus)**

- Only use your official Zoom name
- All Zoom sessions are recorded. Individual breakout room sessions, however, **will not** be recorded.
- You are not required to use your camera, but this is helpful for getting to know people.
- Please turn your microphone off when you are not speaking.
- Please use the wave hand signal or the chat to alert me that you have a question or want to make a comment. I will call on you.
- If you do not have a microphone, feel free to use the chat function to engage with the Zoom conversation. I will happily include chats into the broader discussion.

**Late Work**

I do not accept excuses for late work after the deadline has already passed. It is your responsibility to inform me if you think your work will be late.

**Academic Integrity**

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see [www.mcgill.ca/integrity](http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity) for more
information). The professor reserves the right to use software to examine any case of suspected plagiarism.

**SUBMISSION IN FRENCH**

*In accord with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.*

**Grading**

**Participation**

- Active Zoom class attendance (speaking, posing questions)
- Students that choose not to attend Zoom classes will have the option of completing alternative, written assignments for classes missed.
- Students may have two unexcused absences.

**Virtual Round Table**

- Each week a pre-selected group of students will be chosen for a round-table style discussion with the professor.
- The discussion will take place during our Zoom course and last approximately 20 minutes.
- Discussants must prepare their questions in advance.
- They may also be required to lead breakout room discussions.
- Students will be evaluated on the basis of their preparation and ability to lead class discussion.
- Students who cannot lead discussions due to connectivity issues will be given an alternative, written assignment.

**Individual or Group Assignments**

- Assignments are evenly distributed throughout the semester (see course schedule)
- Assignments include (but are not limited to) shot-by-shot analyses, scene summaries, alternative scripts, reading reflections, etc.
- Length of each assignment is specified in the course schedule.
- Assignments are due on the day for which they are assigned in the course schedule unless otherwise noted.
- We will experiment with group assignments, but if this does not work, we will switch entirely to individual assignments.
- Assignments are always due Tuesday by 17:00.

**Final Paper**

- Your final paper should be about one and only one film. No comparison papers. This does not mean that you cannot draw comparisons with other films; only that the main
focus of your paper should be a single film.

- 4-6 Pages, double-spaced, Times New Roman font. Word document or PDF only. Do not submit using Pages.
- You should quote from at least two readings we did for class. The readings do not have to come from the same week as the film.
- Your paper must have a thesis.
- The thesis and your paper should strive to answer two questions: what is the film trying to say/express and how does the film say/express it?
- You should answer these questions through a discussion of the film’s use of camera angles, camera movement, lighting, color, editing rhythm, sound, etc.
- You do not have to focus on all these elements, just the ones that you think are working together to construct whatever the film is trying express.
- Do not focus solely on characters or plot, and do not write a paper where you simply pass judgment on the characters. Be charitable.
- More details and a grading rubric will be provided in course lectures and discussions.
- Guides and sample papers will also be provided in Timothy Corrigan’s *A Short Guide to Writing About Film*.

**EXTRA CREDIT**

- Students have the option of making an independent film in the style of one of the directors covered in this class.
- Maximum group size: 3 people
- Maximum film length: 5 minutes (hard maximum, including credits!)
- If enough students select this option, we will have a film festival on the last day of class.
- Student can use material they filmed themselves or found footage from online sources. If materials are found, their creators must be cited in the films credits.

**PASS /FAIL**

As always, students have the option of taking this class pass/fail. That said, please consult me before making this decision. Many students have mistakenly taken my classes P/F even when they would have received a perfectly reasonable grade.

**CONTENT ADVISORY**

Many of the films screened in this class contain graphic episodes of violence and cruelty to animals, as well as frank and/or at times celebratory depictions of racism and sexism. Because they are documentary films, many of the events they depict are real – they involve real people and animals, though the events themselves may be staged for the camera. There are enough such episodes to make giving trigger warnings for every single film impossible. If these types of depictions make you uncomfortable, please do not take this course.
**CLASS SCHEDULE**

**Week One: Introduction**
- Plan of the course
- Student Introductions
- Lumière Shorts
- Travel Films
- *Nanook of the North* (Robert Flaherty, 1922)
  - Eric Barnouw, *A History of the Non-Fiction Film*, “Glimpse of Wonder” (My Courses, 1-31)

**Week Two: Storytelling; The Creative Treatment of Actuality**
- Films (Required Viewing)
  - *Nanook of the North* (Robert Flaherty, 1922)
  - *Land Without Bread* (Luis Buñuel, 1932, 30 min)
    - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vUmmfYagWDA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vUmmfYagWDA)
- Recommended Viewing
  - *Moana* (Robert Flaherty, 1926, 77 min)
    - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xs0FNCp6aRM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xs0FNCp6aRM)
- Required Reading
  - John Grierson, “First Principle of Documentary” (My Courses)
  - Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, “How Can We Define Documentary Film?” (1-29)
  - Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, “How Can We Differentiate among Documentary Models and Modes (104-132)

**Week Three: Avant-Garde, The City Symphony**
- Films
  - *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* (Walter Ruttmann, 1927, 74 min) Available on
- Recommended:
  - *Man with a Movie Camera* (Dziga Vertov, 1929, 68 min) Available on Kanopy
  - *Rain* (Joris Ivens, *Rain*, 14 min)
    - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cN17knvh8o&t=184s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cN17knvh8o&t=184s)
  - Kanopy
- **Assignment One**: Short reflection. What is documentary? How would you distinguish it from other forms of filmmaking? Maximum 500 words.
- Required Reading
  - Eric Barnouw, *A History of the Non-Fiction Film*, “Reporter” and “Painter” (My Courses, 51-82)
  - Bill Nichols, *Speaking Truths with Film*, “Documentary Film and the Modernist Avant-Garde”
  - Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, “How Did Documentary Filmmaking Get Started” (89-104)
Week Four: Propaganda, Nationalism, War

- **Films (Required Viewing)**
  - *The Spanish Earth* (Joris Ivens, 1937, 52 min) 
    [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MT8q6VAyTi8&t=470s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MT8q6VAyTi8&t=470s)
  - *Triumph of the Will* (Leni Riefenstahl, 1936, first 50 min) 
    [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X7eOUzjn7pM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X7eOUzjn7pM)

- **Recommended:**
  - *Why We Fight* (Frank Capra, 1943)

- **Assignment Two:** Short Reflection: What is propaganda? What methods or modes of propaganda do Ivens’s and Riefenstahl’s films employ? How are they similar and how are they different?

- **Reading**
  - Bill Nichols, *Speaking Truths with Film* “Documentary Film and the Coming of Sound” and “To See the World Anew: Revisiting the Voice of Documentary” (61-90)
    - Article considers the theoretical and historical origins of the term “propaganda.” Does not directly engage Eisenstein’s film.
  - Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, “How Can We Write Effectively about Documentary” (194-209)

Week Five: Aftermath, Trauma, Evidence

- **Films**
  - *Night and Fog* (Alain Resnais, 1955, 32 min) **Watch on Kanopy not on YouTube**
  - *Shoah* (Claude Lanzmann, 1985, 9h 26 min): Watch at least 120 min. 
    [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uni1kybTAn0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uni1kybTAn0)

- **Recommended**
  - *Death Mills* (Sidney Bernstein and Alfred Hitchcock, 1945) 
    [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zG8fcjLvid8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zG8fcjLvid8); deemed to controversial to screen in 1945)
  - *Night Will Fall* (Andre Singer, 2014; Documentary about Death Mills)
  - *Nürnberg* (Pare Lorentz, 1947)

- **Assignment Three:** Create a shot-by-shot analysis of a scene from *Night and Fog* (1955) using the Yale Film Analysis guide (see below). In your analysis, focus on how the documentary presents its evidence. What makes this presentation successful?

- **Reading**
  - [https://filmanalysis.yale.edu/](https://filmanalysis.yale.edu/)
  - Susan Sontag, “Photographing the Pain of Others”
  - Erik Barnouw, *A History of the Non-Fiction Film* “Prosecutor” (172-182)
Bill Nichols Speaking Truths with Film “The Question of Evidence: The Power of Rhetoric and the Documentary Film” (99-111)

- **Recommended Reading**
  - J. Hoberman “Shoah: The Being of Nothingness” (My Courses)
  - Claud Lanzmann “Site and Speech: An Interview with Claude Lanzmann about Shoah”
  - Emma Wilson, “Material Remains: Night and Fog” (My Courses)

**Week Six: Cinema Verité**

- **Films**
  - **Titicut Follies** (Frederick Wiseman, 1967)
    https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NA46247srW4

- **Recommended**
  - *Chronique d’un été* (Edgar Morin and Jean Rouch, 1961)
  - *Primary* (Robert Drew, 1960)
  - *Le joli Mai* (Chris Marker, 1963)
    https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_5K06qwnOvE
  - *Salesman* (Albert Maysles et. al., 1968)
  - *Highschool* (Frederick Wiseman, 1968)
  - *Hospital* (Frederick Wiseman, 1970)
  - *Land of Silences and Darkness* (Werner Herzog, 1971)

- **Assignment Four**: Group project. Two weeks. Due on Tuesday of Week Seven.
  - Write a proposal for a documentary film. Use the following as a guide:
    https://www.masterclass.com/articles/how-to-write-a-documentary-proposal-for-film-fundraising#9-parts-of-a-documentary-proposal. Include steps 1-6 and 9. In the “style and approach section” consider in which mode you will make your documentary.

- **Reading**
  - Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, “How Can We Describe the Observational, Participatory, and Performative Modes of Documentary Film” (132-159)
  - Edgar Morin, “Chronicle of a Film” (1962, My Courses)
  - Frederick Wiseman, “You Start Off with a Bromide” (1974, My Courses)

**Week Seven: Radical Voices**

- **Films**
  - *Hour of the Furnaces* (Part I)
    https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jQOXKoMHOE0

- **Assignment Four due on Tuesday.**

- **Reading**
  - Erik Barnouw, *A History of the Non-Fiction Film*, “Guerrilla” (262-287)
  - Bill Nichols “How Have Documentaries Addressed Social and Political Issues” (159-193)
  - Robert Stam, “Hour of the Furnaces and the Two Avant-Gardes” (My Courses)

**Week Eight: Feminist Documentaries**
Films
- *I am Somebody* (Madeline Anderson, 1970, 31 min)
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pddW5zDoV_w
- *Joyce at 34* (Joyce Chopra, 1972)

Recommended
- *Three Lives* (1971)
- *Joyce at 34* (Joyce Chopra, 1972)
- *Union Maids* (1978)
- *Harlan County, USA* (Barbara Kopple, 1976)
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fLT16LP4ACQ

**Assignment Five:** Describe a scene from the perspective of the camera. Make sure to place the camera in the subject position of the majority of your sentences – e.g. the camera sees…, the camera focuses on…, the camera pans…, the camera lurches…, the camera zooms. How do the actions of the camera represent the positions and points of view of the film’s subjects?

Reading
- E. Ann Kaplan, “Theories and Strategies of the Feminist Documentary” (My Courses)
- Julia Lesage, “The Political Aesthetic of the Feminist Documentary Film” (My Courses)
- Bill Nichols, *Speaking Truths with Film*, “Politics and the Documentary Film”

Week Nine: Experimental Forms, Poetic and Ironic
- **Films**
  - *Fata Morgana* (Werner Herzog, 1971, 80 min) for Rent:
    https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3NYdtXNXIYk

- **Recommended:**
  - *Grizzly Man* (Werner Herzog, 2005)

**Assignment Break: No Assignment**

- **Reading**
  - Eric Ames, “Herzog, Landscape, and Documentary” (My Courses)
  - “European Art Cinema, Affect, and Postcolonialism: Herzog, Denis, and the Dardenne Brothers” (My Courses)
  - Werner Herzog, “Like a Powerful Dream” (My Courses)
  - Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, “Why are Ethical Issues Central to Documentary Filmmaking” (29-48)

Week Ten: Experimental Forms, The Essay Film
- **Films**
  - *Sans Soleil* (Chris Marker, 1983, 100 min) on Kanopy

- **Recommended**
  - *News from Home* (Chantal Akerman, 1977)
  - *Le joli Mai* (Chris Marker, 1963)
  - *Letter from Siberia* (Chris Marker, 1958)
Assignment Six: Write a Voice Over in the Style of Chris Marker’s Sans Soleil.

Reading
- André Bazin, “Bazin on Marker,” Essays on the Essay Film (My Courses)
- Harun Farocki, “The ABCs of the Essay Film,” Essays on the Essay Film (My Courses)
- Timothy Corrigan, “From Montaigne to Marker” The Essay Film (My Courses)
- Nora M. Alter, “The Political Im/perceivable in the Essay Film: Farocki’s Images of the World and the Inscription of War,” Essays on the Essay Film (My Courses)

Week Eleven: Documentary Truth

Films
- The Thin Blue Line (Errol Morris, 1988, 100 min) for rent: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oEb_2mj1V8w

Recommended
- Capturing the Friedmans (Andrew Jarecki, 2003)

Reading
- Bill Nichols, Speaking Truths with Film, “Irony, Paradox, and the Documentary: Double Meanings and Double Binds” and “Letter to Errol Morris: Feelings of Revulsion and the Limits of Academic Discourse” (154-81)
- Trihn T. Minh-Ha, “Mechanical Eye, Electronic Ear, and the Lure of Authenticity” (My Courses)
- Errol Morris with Peter Bates, “Truth Not Guaranteed: An Interview with Errol Morris” (My Courses)
- Linda Williams, “Mirrors Without Memories: Truth, History, and the New Documentary”

Week Twelve: Performing Trauma

Films
- The Act of Killing (Joshua Oppenheimer, 2012, 117 min) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=532zmnpkajk

Assignment Seven: Compose an outline of your final paper. Include a thesis that answers the following questions: What is documentary X trying to say? How (using what devices and modes) is it trying to say it?

Reading
- Vivian Sobchack, “Inscribing Ethical Space: 10 Propositions on Death, Representation, and Documentary” (My Courses)
- Poojan Rangan, Immediations, “Introduction”
- Bill Nichols, Speaking Truths with Film, “Perpetrators, Trauma, Film” (191-197)

Week Thirteen: Reality TV and Fake News

TV
- Episode of Big Brother
- Episode of Donald Trump’s The Apprentice

Tuesday 4/9
- Susan Murray, “I Think We Need a New Name for It: The meeting of Documentary and Reality TV” (My Courses)

Thursday 4/11
○ No Readings