

Carleton University
Fall 2021
ENGL 5610G/CLMD 6104F
Documentary and Crisis
Tuesday: 11:35-2:25
Format: Online and Synchronous
Instructor: Franny Nudelman
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Office Hours: Weds. 1-2 and by appointment

This course considers crisis documentary from 1945 to the present. We will study documentary filmmakers, photographers, and writers who respond to the unanticipated and often incomprehensible crises of their age and, in the process, create new forms of documentary expression. Taking an expansive view of the field, we will consider documentary texts that deal with war, forced migration, climate emergency, poverty, gendered violence. We will ask: How do documentarians represent what they cannot yet fully understand? What role does literary and visual culture play in making disruptive change real? How have documentarians helped to define an ethics of witnessing? How are the methods and aims of documentarians transformed by new technologies and alternative forms of collectivity? Throughout, we will explore the power of documentary to respond to catastrophic events and uncharted social conditions as they unfold.

The format of this class will be synchronous, and we will meet each week on Zoom. **Please note that in order to take this course you will need to be available to meet during the scheduled time.**

BOOKS

Jessica Bruder, *Nomadland: Surviving America in the Twenty-First Century*

John Hersey, *Hiroshima*

Ben Lerner, *10:04*

Maggie Nelson, *The Red Parts: Autobiography of a Trial*

Books for the course will be available from *Haven Books*. Other materials for the course (film, videos, readings, images) will be available on ARES and/or Brightspace.

ASSIGNMENTS AND EVALUATION

Class Participation

This seminar will be a workshop where we will hammer out ideas with an emphasis on collaboration and collective inquiry. Please come to class prepared to share your responses, thoughts, and questions about the week's readings. Each of you will on occasion be responsible for developing discussion questions and leading class discussion.

Documentary Journal

To help prepare for discussion and keep a record of your ideas as they evolve over the course of the term, you will write a journal in which you respond to our weekly readings

and viewings; reflect on our class discussions; collect relevant materials that you come across in your daily life. This journal gives you a space to explore and experiment; it may incorporate images, video, sound and other media. In this course on documentary and crisis, you may want to consider journaling as a form of documentary-making. Your journal may feed into your research project (though this is not required) and you may be asked to share entries with the rest of the class on occasion.

Research Essay/Project

This 12-15-page (or equivalent) essay/project will grow from texts and issues we work on in class and should be developed in consultation with me. You may take one of two approaches to the essay:

- 1) Conduct research that follows from the materials on one of the weeks on our syllabus. For example, you might want to consider the two essays that we read by Joan Didion in the context of her decades-long career as a journalist; or, build a research paper out of the sources discussed at the roundtable, “How to Write About a Pandemic”; or, following from *Citizenfour*, consider the representation of surveillance in recent documentary films. I could go on. At the end of each class, we will devote 15 minutes to brainstorming research projects that might grow from that week’s discussion.
- 2) Build on a theme/idea/problem that has emerged in your journal and holds special interest for you. Your journal writing will serve as early work, then, on an essay that combines a number of texts that we have worked with and expands beyond the syllabus to bring additional texts to bear on your subject. This essay might focus on a particular kind of crisis (gendered violence, poverty, forced migration, climate emergency); or, on a type of documentary practice (immersive, experimental, performative, self-reflexive); or an issue—like memory or vulnerability—that recurs in our work over the course of the term. This will be the more challenging of the two options as it requires you to develop an analysis that can clearly and precisely synthesize a range of examples and instances.

Evaluation

Your final grade will be based on class participation (35%); journal (30%); research project (35%).

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Plagiarism

The University Senate defines plagiarism as “presenting, whether intentionally or not, the ideas, expression of ideas or work of others as one’s own.” According to the Department examples of plagiarism include the following:

- any submission prepared in whole or in part, by someone else;
- reproducing or paraphrasing portions of someone else’s published or unpublished material, regardless of the source, and presenting these as one’s own without proper citation or reference to the original source;
- using ideas or direct, verbatim quotations, or paraphrased material, concepts or ideas without appropriate acknowledgment in any academic assignment;

- using another's data or research findings;
- failing to acknowledge sources through the use of proper citations when using another's works and/or failing to use quotation marks;
- handing in substantially the same piece of work for academic credit more than once without prior written permission of the course instructor in which the submission occurs.

Plagiarism is a form of intellectual theft. It is a serious offence that cannot be resolved directly with the course's instructor. The Associate Deans of the Faculty conduct a rigorous investigation, including an interview with the student, when an instructor suspects a piece of work has been plagiarized. Penalties are not trivial. They can include failure of the assignment, failure of the entire course, or suspension from a program. For more information please go to: <https://carleton.ca/registrar/academic-integrity/>

Dean's Statement on Grades and Standing

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by the instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean.

Requests for Academic Accommodation

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. For an accommodation request, the processes are as follows:

Pregnancy obligation: write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details click [here](#).

Religious obligation: write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details click [here](#).

Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: The Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) provides services to students with Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/mental health disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), chronic medical conditions, and impairments in mobility, hearing, and vision. If you have a disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact PMC at 613-520- 6608 or pmc@carleton.ca for a formal evaluation. If you are already registered with the PMC, contact your PMC coordinator to send me your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term, and no later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (if applicable). After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with me to ensure accommodation arrangements are made. Please consult the PMC website for the deadline to request accommodations for the formally-scheduled exam (if applicable).

Survivors of Sexual Violence

As a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated, and where survivors are

supported through academic accommodations as per Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy. For more information about the services available at the university and to obtain information about sexual violence and/or support, visit: <https://carleton.ca/equity/sexual-assault-support-services>

Accommodation for Student Activities

Carleton University recognizes the substantial benefits, both to the individual student and for the university, that result from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom experience. Reasonable accommodation must be provided to students who compete or perform at the national or international level. Write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. <https://carleton.ca/senate/wp-content/uploads/Accommodation-for-Student-Activities-1.pdf>

Special Information Regarding Fall 2021 Pandemic Measures

All members of the Carleton community are required to follow COVID-19 prevention measures and all mandatory public health requirements (e.g. wearing a mask, physical distancing, hand hygiene, respiratory and cough etiquette) and [mandatory self-screening](#) prior to coming to campus daily.

If you feel ill or exhibit COVID-19 symptoms while on campus or in class, please leave campus immediately, self-isolate, and complete the mandatory [symptom reporting tool](#). For purposes of contact tracing, attendance will be recorded in all classes and labs. Participants can check in using posted QR codes through the cuScreen platform where provided. Students who do not have a smartphone will be required to complete a paper process as indicated on the [COVID-19 website](#).

All members of the Carleton community are required to follow guidelines regarding safe movement and seating on campus (e.g. directional arrows, designated entrances and exits, designated seats that maintain physical distancing). In order to avoid congestion, allow all previous occupants to fully vacate a classroom before entering. No food or drinks are permitted in any classrooms or labs.

For the most recent information about Carleton's COVID-19 response and required measures, please see the [University's COVID-19 webpage](#) and review the [Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQs\)](#). Should you have additional questions after reviewing, please contact covidinfo@carleton.ca

Please note that failure to comply with University policies and mandatory public health requirements, and endangering the safety of others are considered misconduct under the [Student Rights and Responsibilities Policy](#). Failure to comply with Carleton's COVID-19 procedures may lead to supplementary action involving Campus Safety and/or Student Affairs

Weekly Schedule

SEPTEMBER

14

Introduction

21

John Hersey, *Hiroshima* (1946)

Dwight Macdonald, "Hersey's 'Hiroshima'" in *politics* (1946)

Mary McCarthy, "Hiroshima *New Yorker*" in *politics* (1946)

Paul Saint-Amour, "Bombing and the Symptom Traumatic Earliness and the Nuclear Uncanny," *Diacritics* 30.4 (2000), 59-82

28

Albert and David Maysles, "Yoko Ono's 'Cut Piece'" (1966)

<https://vimeo.com/106706806>

Julia Bryan-Wilson, "Remembering Yoko Ono's 'Cut Piece,'" *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (2003)

Joan Didion, "The White Album" from *The White Album* (1979) and "Pacific Distances" from *After Henry* (1992)

Barrett Swanson, "Disaster City" from *Lost in Summerland* (2021)

OCTOBER

5

Maggie Nelson, *The Red Parts* (Paperback edition, 2016; originally published, 2007)

Daniel Worden, "True Crime," from *Neoliberal Non-Fictions: The Documentary Aesthetic from Joan Didion to Jay-Z* (2020)

12

Jamila Wignot, "Ailey" (2021)

Danh Võ, sources TBD

Joshua Chambers-Letson, "Danh Võ's Mother" from *After the Party: A Manifesto for Queer of Color Life* (2018)

Gregg Bordowitz, Pamela Sneed, Sur Rodney, Lynne Tillman, "Roundtable: How to Write About a Pandemic," in *Frieze*, March 23, 2021

19

Catherine Venable Moore, "The Book of the Dead" (2016)

<https://main.oxfordamerican.org/magazine/item/1049-the-book-of-the-dead>

Janelle Monae, "Hell You Talmbout" (2015)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D8kFSTzXyew>

FALL BREAK

NOVEMBER

2

Jessica Bruder, *Nomadland* (2018)

Christopher Wilson, "Immersion Journalism and the Second-Order Narrative" from *The Routledge Companion to American Literary Journalism* (2020)

Lee Miller and David Scherman, "In Hitler's Bathtub" (photo series, April 1945)

9

Tim Hetherington

--"Sleeping Soldiers" (2008)

<https://www.magnumphotos.com/newsroom/conflict/sleeping-soldiers-tim-hetherington/>

--"By Any Means Necessary" (2008)

<https://www.foto8.com/live/by-any-means-necessary/>

--"Diary" (2010)

<https://vimeo.com/18497543>

Franny Nudelman, "The Document," from *Wiley Blackwell Companion to Visual Culture*, eds. Aubrey Anable, Joan Saab, Catherine Zuromskis (2020)

16

Laura Poitras, *Citizenfour*

Edward Snowden, Chs. 16, 25, 26 ("Tokyo," "The Boy," "Hong Kong") from *Permanent Record* (2019)

23

Ben Lerner, *10:04*

Rob Nixon, Introduction to *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011)

30

Finish *10:04*

Richard Mosse

--"Incoming" (2017) <http://www.richardmosse.com/projects/incoming#home>

--"Incoming" Artist's Statement" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y1YSbBMBE-s>

--"Transmigration of Souls" in *Incoming* (2017)

DECEMBER

7

Spike Lee, "When the Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Parts" (2006)