

# Course Syllabus

MRTS 4550/5750 Cinema and Video Verite

Meeting in Room RTFP 184, RTVFP Building, 1172 Union Circle, Denton Campus

Class meeting time: Monday, 2-4:50pm

Prerequisite(s): MRTS major status and MRTS 3610 or MRTS 3615

Professor Eugene Martin

Office location: RTVF Building Rm 265 tel: 940-565-2537

Office Hours: Monday 1-2 p.m. and by appointment during the week

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**Course Description:** The course will explore the development of a major style in the documentary genre known as “cinema verite”, or “direct cinema”, from its introduction sixty years ago to its current impact on nonfiction film and television. We will examine the history, analyze current uses, and discuss potential implications for the future. We will also explore the influence the style has had on reality television, fiction films, non-fiction episodic series, and television dramas. The films have been selected to show the complexities of the form and to suggest the range of creative possibilities inherent in the approach. The titles will include individual films made for television, feature length films made for theatrical release, independently made documentaries and those that were created as a part of a series.

## **Course Objectives:**

1. To increase awareness of the history and evolution of the style and its impact on film and tv production and distribution today.
2. To acknowledge the influence of key filmmakers and examine in close detail their methods.
3. To draw conclusions regarding the methods and techniques of working in this mode.
4. To consider the possibilities of the techniques embodied in the style for one's future work.

**Assignments: (to be uploaded to Canvas)**

Essay 1, three  
pages

Midterm paper: five pages for MRTS 4550, seven pages for MRTS 5750

Final paper: ten pages MRTS 4550, fifteen pages for MRTS 5750

**Required readings:**

Required and recommended readings are located on the Canvas site.

**Communication Expectations:**

The Professor will use the Canvas site for updates and links to the readings, so make sure to check the Canvas modules weekly. Please use your UNT email account to contact the Professor. As your Professor, I try to respond to all email within 24 hours from Monday to Friday up to 5pm.

**Evaluation:**

Grading:

Essay 1	30 pts.
Final paper	100 pts.
Midterm paper	50 pts.
Participation/attendance:	20 pts.

<b>Total</b>	<b>200 pts.</b>
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**Grading Criteria:** You must have excellent attendance and participation to receive an "A" in the class. All of your papers must be in the top tier of your peer group. A final percentage of 90-100 pts is an "A".

A letter grade of “B” will show strong grades in your mid-term and final papers. It will also reflect a minimum level of effort on your part in terms of participation. A final percentage of 80-89 pts is a “B”.

A letter grade of “C” will show average grades across your projects and several missed classes due to unexcused absences. A final percentage of 70-79 is a “C”.

A final percentage of 60-69 pts is a “D”.

A final percentage of 0-59 pts is an “F”.

PLEASE NOTE: Two unexcused absences will equal one whole letter grade drop. Please enter class on time. There will be a roll sheet for you to sign.

Late Assignments: For every week an assignment is late, one letter grade will be deducted from the final grade for that assignment. There will be no incompletes for this course. Grades will be uploaded during the semester onto the Canvas site.

### **Fall 2025 Calendar:**

Aug 18th

Screening: *Seventeen* by Jeff Krienes and Joel DeMott

Readings: Hoover, Dwight W. “The Middletown Film Project: History and Reflections.” *Journal of Film and Video*, vol. 39, no. 2, 1987, pp. 52-65.

Micheli, Amanda. “Joel Demott and Jeff Kreines' 'Seventeen'.” *Documentary*, 15 Jun. 2009, <https://www.documentary.org/column/joel-demott-and-jeff-kreines-seventeen>Links to an external site.

Shawhan, Jason. “Too rough for PBS, legendary doc *Seventeen* remains one of the best movies ever made about American youth.” *Nashville Scene*, 21 Nov. 2013, [https://www.nashvillescene.com/arts\\_culture/film\\_tv/too-rough-for-pbs-legendary-doc-i-seventeen-i-remains-one-of-the-best-movies/article\\_5f1d1a26-3005-513f-8da2-066a8088f905.html](https://www.nashvillescene.com/arts_culture/film_tv/too-rough-for-pbs-legendary-doc-i-seventeen-i-remains-one-of-the-best-movies/article_5f1d1a26-3005-513f-8da2-066a8088f905.html)Links to an external site.

August 25th

Screening: *Harlan County, USA*, Barbara Kopple

Readings: Arthur, Paul. "Harlan County USA: No Neutrals There." *The Criterion Collection*, 22 May 2006

Kaplan, E. Ann. "Harlan County, USA: The documentary form." *Jump Cut*,

Sept. 8th

Screening: *Contemporary Color*, Ross Brothers

Readings: Bramesco, Charles. "In *Contemporary Color*, David Byrne and the Ross brothers joyfully fuse art and athleticism." *Vox*, 2 May 2017,

Ross, RaMell. "The Ross Brothers by RaMell Ross." *Bomb*, 11 Jan. 2021,

Ross, Turner. "Vibrating at a Different Rhythm: Excerpts from Turner Ross' *Contemporary Color* Production Journal." *Talkhouse*, 6 Mar. 2017.

Sept. 15th

Screening: *Fire at Sea*, Gianfranco Rossi

Readings: Diamond, Anna. "In *Fire at Sea*, Tragedy and Normalcy Live Side by Side." *The Atlantic*, 22 Feb. 2017

Potenza, Alessandra. "How Italy's Gianfranco Rosi Made the Stunning Oscar-Nominated Migrant Doc *Fire at Sea*." *The Verge*, 24 Jan. 2017

Scott, A.O. "'Fire at Sea' Is Not the Documentary You'd Expect About the Migrant Crisis. It's Better." *The New York Times*, 20 Oct. 2016

Sept. 22nd

Screening: *Daguerreotypes*, Agnes Varda

Readings: Allen, Julien. "Daguerreotypes." *Reverse Shot*, 3 Oct. 2016,

Cataldo, Jesse. "Review: *Daguerreotypes*." *Slant*, 8 Dec. 2011,

Ince, Kate. "Feminist Phenomenology and the Film World of Agnès Varda." *Hypatia*, vol. 28, no. 3, 2013, pp. 602-617.

Sept. 29th

Screening: *Gray Gardens*, by David and Albert Maysles  
Essay 1

Readings: Close, Cynthia. "Return to 'Grey Gardens': Criterion Collection Releases New Blu-Ray Edition." *Documentary*, 13 Jan. 2014,

Davidson, David. "Direct Cinema and Modernism: The Long Journey to *Grey Gardens*." *Journal of the University Film Association*, vol. 33, no. 1, 1981, pp. 3-13.

Kenigsberg, Ben. "Does Cinéma Vérité Exist? Watch These 2 Movies to Find Out." *The New York Times*, 25 Jun. 2020.

Oct. 6th

Screening: *The War Room*, by D.A. Pennebaker

Readings: Kohn, Eric. "'Weiner' Meets 'The War Room': The Directors of Two Essential Political Campaign Docs Share Notes On the Process – Consider This." *IndieWire*, 3 Jan. 2017

Menand, Louis. "*The War Room*: Being There." *The Criterion Collection*, 20 Mar. 2012,

Wilkins, Budd. "Review: Hegedus and Pennebaker's *The War Room* on Criterion Blu-ray." *Slant*, 20 Mar. 2012

Oct. 13th

Screening: *Senorita Extraviada* by Lourdes Portillo

Readings: Engel, Philipp. "Ciudad Juárez, hoy igual que ayer." *COOLT*, 2 Jun. 2021,

Lozano, Carrie. "IDA Career Achievement Award: Lourdes Portillo: Filmmaking as Desire." *Documentary*, 16 Nov. 2017,

Portillo, Lourdes. *Lourdes Portillo*. <https://www.lourdesportillo.com/Links to an external site..>

Oct. 20th

Screening: *Cameraperson* by Kirsten Johnson

Readings: Brody, Richard. "'Cameraperson' and the Conventions of Documentary Filmmaking." *The New Yorker*, 9 Sept. 2016,

Du Graf, Lauren. "Woman With a Movie Camera: The Art of Not Looking Away in Kirsten Johnson's 'Cameraperson.'" *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 29 Jun. 2016,

Koresky, Michael. "I Am a Camera." *Film Comment*, Sept. 2016,

Mid-term 5-page paper due.

Oct. 27th

Screening: *Italian American* by Martin Scorsese and *What Faroki Taught* by Jill Godmilow

Readings: Reichert, Jeff. "Italianamerican." *Reverse Shot*, 22 Sept. 2014,

Rowin, Michael Joshua. "How Martin Scorsese Seeks Revelation in Documentary." *Hyperallergic*, 6 Dec. 2019.

Nov. 3rd

Screening: *The Bombing of Osage Avenue* by Louis Massiah

Readings: Norward, Lindsey. "The day Philadelphia bombed its own people." *Vox*, 15 Aug. 2019.

Trippett, Frank. "It Looks Just Like a War Zone." *Time*, 24 Jun. 2001,

Nov. 10th

Screening: *Hale County: This Morning, This Evening*

Nov. 17th

Screening: *Boxing Gym*, Frederick Wiseman

Dec. 1st

Screening: *Made in L.A.*

Readings: Bahar, Robert. "'Made in L.A.,' Funded from All Over." *Documentary*, 13 Mar. 2009.

PBS. *P.O.V. Discussion Guide: Made in L.A.* 2007.

Dec. 8th Final papers due