MFAEDA 703  
Experimental and Documentary Arts: Telling Realism  
Spring 2014 Wednesdays 8:30-11:30 AM  
Center for Documentary Studies, CDS Bridges 113  
Instructors: Tom Rankin, Tim Lenoir, and Patrick Herron  

Course Description  
This course examines the conditions of possibility of politically and socially engaged documentary as a medium of truth. We will consider the historical and conceptual arch of the documentary arts across time, with special attention to the shifts in practice, audience, and approach that have expanded, revised, reshaped, and deepened documentary art. Documentarians occupy positions as artist practitioners and authoritative observers; in recent years, however, documentarians have questioned their privileged role and challenged it in the practice of their work. In this course we explore questions about objectivity, subjectivity, insider/outsider dynamics, politics, social values, power relations, self-representation, the reliability of memory and autobiography in the making and dissemination of documentary work. A central focus of our inquiry is on the role of technological media, particularly photography, film, and sound recording and the enabling or potentially disruptive effects of digital technologies and new social media on truth telling.

Schedule  
Week 1: Wed. January 15 Introduction: Experimental and Documentary: Telling Realism  
Introduction to our viewpoints on “documentary” and “experimental”; wrestling with the ideas of 'truth' and the real, of the 'actual' and the hyperreal in our contemporary situation.

Week 2: Wed. January 22 The Culture Industry  

Week 3: Wed. January 29 Near a Church: Agee and Evans  

Week 4: Wed. February 5 The Cruel Radiance of What Is  
This week’s presenters: Aaron Kutnick  

Week 5: Wed. February 12: First-Person Witness and Stark Literality  
This week’s presenters: Grant Yarolin and Aaron Canipe  
- S. G. Howe, Report to the Freedmen’s Inquiry Commission 1864: The Refugees from Slavery in Canada
Week 6: Wed. February 19: Observing, Intervening, Disrupting
This week’s presenters: Ava Lowrey and Tracy Fish
-Jane Addams, Twenty Years at Hull House (1910)
-Jacob A. Riis, How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York (1924) and The Making of an American (1901)
-Hortense Powdermaker, “Entrée into Indianola” from Stranger and Friend: The Way of an Anthropologist (1934)
- Paul Strand, “Photography” (Seven Arts, 1917) and “Realism: A Personal View” (Sight and Sound, 1949)
- Robert Flaherty, “Filming Real People” (Movie Makers, 1934)
- John Grierson, “Propaganda: A Problem for Educational Theory and for Cinema” (Sight and Sound, 1934) and “The Documentary Idea” (The Complete Photographer, 1941)

Week 7: Wed. February 26 Situations
This week’s presenters: Alina Taalman and Anna Kipervaser

Week 8 Wed. March 5: Documentary Turns a Little Personal
This week’s presenters: Mendal Polish and Windrose Stanback
-Robert Frank, John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship Application (1955), Statement (U.S. Camera Annual, 1958), Interview (Photography Within the Humanities, 1977)
-Albert Maysles, “Truthful Witness” (Interview by H. Namicy, Quarterly Review of Film Studies, 1981)
-Ed Pincus, Interview with G. Roy Levin (Documentary Explorations, 1971)
-Robert Adams, “Two Landscapes” from Why People Photograph: Selected Essays and Reviews (1988)
-Harry Crews, A Childhood: The Biography of a Place (1978)
-Nan Goldin, “If I Want to Take a Picture, I Take It No Matter What” (Interview with A. Mazur and P. Skirgailo-Krajewski, Foto Tapeta, 2003)
-Bill Burke, They Shall Cast Out Demons, Nexus Press, 1983.

SECOND BLOG POST ON WEEKS 6-8 DUE FRIDAY MARCH 7

Week 9: Wed. March 12 NO CLASS: SPRING BREAK

Week 10: Wed. March 19 Mediatization of the Subject in Postmodernity
This week’s presenters: Haodong Li and Matthew Cicanese
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZF8jej3j5vA
-Film: Moon, dir. Duncan Jones, 2009.
-Film: Blade Runner, dir. Ridley Scott, 1982 (Final Cut, 2007)
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d2t8haVEWGM

Week 11: Wed. March 26 The Camera is the Picture
-Roy Stryker, “Documentary Photography” (The Complete Photographer, 1942)
-Marion Post Wolcott, Letters between Post and Roy Stryker (Ms. papers, University of Louisville, 1938–1940)
-Louise Rosskam, Letter to Roy Stryker (Ms. papers, University of Louisville, 1944)
-Gordon Parks, Interview by Martin H. Bush (Wichita State University, 1983)
http://errolmorris.com/content/lecture/theantipost.html
-William Mitchell, The Reconfigured Eye, Chapter 1, pp.1-57; Chapter 9, pp. 190-223

THIRD BLOG POST ON WEEKS 10-11 DUE FRIDAY MARCH 28

Week 12: Wed. April 2 Gender, Consumption, Technics
This week’s presenter:
-Anne Balsamo, “On the Cutting Edge: Cosmetic Surgery and the Technological Production of the
https://vimeo.com/67017074
https://vimeo.com/66967753
-Film: Matthew Barney, The Cremaster Cycle:
  • Cremaster 3 (2002), part 1: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AtjyyQqm50
  • Cremaster 3 (2002), part 2: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bjxFCC0rgAY

Week 13 Wed. April 9: The Database Aesthetic
This week’s presenters: Nicholas Pilarski and Libi Streigl
-Film: Kino-Eye, dir. Dziga Vertov
-Dziga Vertov, Man with a Movie Camera (1929): http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ley9YIbra2U

Week 14: Wed. April 16 Surveillance Networks
http://www.ted.com/talks/kevin_slavin_how_algorithms_shape_our_world.html
-Julian Assange, Cypherpunks I &II, June 12, 2012:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XRxDUmT_1_w
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aitQ2XTaUVM
http://www.zeit.de/digital/datenschutz/2011-03/data-protection-malte-spitz and
http://www.zeit.de/datenschutz/malte-spitz-data-retention
-“Inside the Obama Campaign's Hard Drive,’’ Tim Murphy, Mother Jones, September/October 2012.
http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2012/10/harper-reed-obama-campaign-microtargeting


FOURTH BLOG POST ON WEEKS 12-14 DUE FRIDAY APRIL 18

Week 15: Wed. April 23 Truth, Authenticity, and the Resurgence of the Analog

More to come for Week 15

Week 16: Wed. April 30 FINAL PROJECTS DUE

Course Work

General Student Responsibilities
Your responsibility in the class is simple: do all the reading when assigned, attend all classes, ‘document’ your thoughts and engagement with the material (details on that below and to be discussed), and do a final project. We will look at and listen to a wide range of work in class and there is ABSOLUTELY no way to recreate exactly what goes on in class for someone who doesn’t attend.

Weekly Reading and Quarterly Blog Posts
Students are expected to read and be prepared to discuss the reading and media assignments for each week’s class. We also require that you use blogging tools over this semester as a personal sounding board for elaborating, deepening and further articulating your conceptual framework as an artist. It is hoped that you use the opportunity when reading and writing in this course to describe your current picture of yourself as an artist and how you imagine developing your work over the course of the next several months. Your written work in this class can be instrumental to your development of a thesis at the end of your two-year program of study.

At the beginning of the semester we ask you to create a new blog on whatever public forum you choose (e.g., WordPress, Tumblr, Blogger) dedicated to your work in the course. Each student is expected to write at four specified times during the semester that engages some substantive theme in the materials from the preceding weeks in terms of your own evolving work as an artist. We would like you to use the readings each week to incrementally and materially—textually—develop a vision of your work that
engages with the artistic movements and theory we will be examining that you can share with others. In each of these quarterly blog posts we encourage you to write as if you are preparing an artist's statement of purpose. While the notion of an "artist's statement" is fraught with complications both obvious and subtle, it is for work that pushes old boundaries or creates new ones that an artist statement can be an effective tool for communicating one's artistic vision to others. More importantly, artist statements routinely open doors to new friendships, artistic collaborations, shows, grants, and residencies. Each student is also invited to comment on blog posts of fellow students; it is assumed that all comments are civil, respectful, and constructive.

Your blog post need not be lengthy (5-10 paragraphs). In order to submit your quarterly blog posts, please email the class list with the URL to your specific blog post when it is complete.

**Presentations**
We want each student to collaborate with another student on one presentation. The presentation is to be organized around a specific week's materials. Each student is required to sign up for at least one presentation, teaming up with a partner to present on one week's readings. One partner should take responsibility for the media content of the presentation while the other partner should take responsibility for the narrative. The roles of media coordinator and narrative coordinator can overlap or be shared as needed.

The content of the presentations will vary, of course, depending on the readings and media under discussion for that session. We expect that the presentations will address central themes from that week's assignment related to issues of truth telling in documentary and media arts. Beyond that, it is up to you to determine the context for interpreting the week's assignments.

**Final Project**
Each student must submit a final project for the course. You should choose an experimental or documentary artist, someone whose work interests you, someone you'd like to explore and make work about, and complete a project about them. You make the choice: a known artist, a vernacular documentarian; someone you've met more casually out in the world or some artist you've learned about through more formal study. The possibilities are limitless. We are open to your final project taking about any form. You can write a traditional research paper, make a film or some other visual or aural piece, or make a web-based presentation. Just as the subject of your project is your choice, so is the final form. What you must do, however, is dig deeply and find a way to express what you've discovered and want to say in the most appropriate medium for both you and the content of your project. If you write a traditional paper it should be 15-20 pages double-spaced, with conventional citation of sources. Whatever you choose, we encourage you to use this as an opportunity to develop some component of the project or portfolio you are developing in connection with your overall MFA work. We will talk about this more in class, with opportunities to talk about your final project with us.

**Grading**
Grades for the class will be based on the following elements:

- Blog: 30% of grade
- Presentation: 30%
- Final Project: 40%