INTERMEDIATE VIDEO: DOCUMENTARY PRACTICES
(FV 4333)

Meeting time and places:

Wednesday, 2:10 - 5:50 pm

VAPA Kinoteca, for critiques & screenings / VAPA POD, or D204 Production Studio, for tech workshops and exercises

Faculty: Mariam Ghani

Pronouns: she/her

Email: mariamghani@bennington.edu

Office hours: Tues 11 am – 12 pm or 6 pm – 7 pm, VAPA B207, by appointment

Or remote by appointment

Technical Instructor: John Crowe

Pronouns: he/him

Email: johncrowe@bennington.edu

Office hours: Wed 2-4 pm in VAPA P112 (The Cave)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Intermediate Video builds on the concepts and technical skills introduced in Intro to Video, and has a different theme each term. This semester of Intermediate Video will be focused on the following thematic, conceptual and formal questions. Documentary as a form or genre has expanded over the past century to encompass a wide range of practices, including direct cinema, agitprop, docufiction hybrids, narrative structures imposed on non-narrative material, auto-ethnography, found footage constructs, and essay films of many kinds - not to mention "unscripted" television formats. What comprises a documentary practice today? What has shifted over time and under market pressures, and which elements remain constant? Where is the line between document, documentary, and documentation? We will look at key historical and contemporary works and discuss how technical innovations have driven formal developments. Students will be expected to produce two assigned projects and one final project of their own design; projects can be discrete or form parts of a series. They will also work in groups to complete several in-class technical exercises.

prerequisite: Introduction to Video

4 credits; 1 semester; may be repeated with permission; maximum enrollment: 14

in-person only

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Across this term, students will:

- become more proficient in the use of cameras, lighting, sound equipment, and editing software, including more advanced cameras and more complex post-production workflows, through technical workshops, collaborative in-class exercises, and practical application;
- build their visual and aural composition skills and their understanding of form and structure;
- engage with ideas and works important to both historical and contemporary discourse around the medium;
- continue to develop the vocabulary to critique each other's work;
- create two assigned projects and one project of their own design, after meeting with the instructor to discuss their final project proposal.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Supplies - required

Notebook or note-taking app

64 GB SDHC card, available in the bookstore o r[online](#)

Supplies - recommended

64-128 GB USB flash drive

Personal headphones for editing (can also be borrowed through Cheqroom, but that requires advance planning)

a Mac or ExFAT formatted portable USB-C drive, 1TB+ (for more complex projects, ask about recommended brands if you are planning to purchase)

EQUIPMENT CHECKOUT & EDIT LAB ACCESS

Enrollment in this course grants you access to most of the equipment loaned out from the Cave (VAPA P112), once we have covered how to use that equipment in our technical workshops. If you miss a technical workshop, you will not be able to check out the relevant equipment until you schedule a make-up session or study the equivalent online materials. **Please review the online [Cave Hours and Policy](#), which also includes the form that you need to fill out EVERY TERM in order to use the Cheqroom equipment reservation system.**

Please check all equipment BEFORE leaving the Cave. If a piece of equipment is found damaged upon its return, the last renter is held responsible – which may be you, if you don't catch existing damage when you check it out.

Report any technical problems you may encounter with Cave equipment to John Crowe as soon as you encounter them, and bring malfunctioning equipment into the Cave to be fixed. The sooner you report problems, the sooner they are fixed! Also, please report any lost or stolen items from the kit to John Crowe as soon as they are lost or stolen. During hours when the Cave is open you can call in directly to report problems (802-440-4323.)

You will have 24/7 key access to the Video Studio (D204) and Video Annex Lab (outside of class hours) as soon as you are added to the Campus Security key list. You no longer need to reserve lab workstations in advance, but you do need to book the Video Studio in advance using Scheduler. **Please [read and bookmark the online Video and Animation Handbook](#), which will always contain links to the most current class schedule and the online Scheduler for reservations, as well as instructions on how to access both.** It also includes links to pre-recorded tech demos and written materials that can be helpful to review if you missed something during an in-class tech workshop. Monitored lab hours (across the POD and Annex, with monitors based in the POD) will be updated/posted soon - we generally aim to have them cover weekdays starting at 6 pm and weekends starting at 3 pm. If you need help while working or run into issues, you can ask lab monitors during those hours; help can also be found by going to the Cave during its operating hours, and John can also be reached via email.

If you are in temporary quarantine and have a project due, you can access lab computers remotely. This is not an ideal solution so please do not use this unless you really need to. If this comes up and you are not yet set up in Splashtop Remote, please let me/John/IT know.

You are required to buy your own SD card from the bookstore to minimize the chance of losing project material on a shared card. (Note that some of the more advanced cameras require higher-speed cards which will still be checked out with the cameras.) And a small flash drive is great to have just for backups of your Premiere projects, moving files from station to station, and final exports.

If you run into problems while using the lab, please report them to John immediately. Again, the sooner you report problems, the sooner they are fixed.

SHARED SPACES + SHARED COMPUTERS/MEMORY CARDS

Part of our Commitment to Shared Responsibility on campus is taking joint responsibility for maintaining the safety of the spaces we all use in common. The Kinoteca and the Edit Lab are both spaces that we all need to help out with, by **cleaning anything we use in the lab or projection booth before and after we touch it.** Cleaning supplies will be provided for this purpose. Please let John, Liza, me or a lab monitor know if the cleaning supplies are running low, so that they can be restocked as soon as possible.

You are responsible for backing up all your working and final files. Lost, corrupted, or overwritten files are not a valid excuse for late projects. Files are not guaranteed to remain on the networked server, the LaCie drives connected to lab computers, or on camera memory cards. The server and LaCies are wiped at the end of every semester and the cards are usually wiped by the next person to use them. **Always copy all your files off any shared memory card BEFORE handing it over.** (Again, buying your own card will help avoid this danger.) If you have an external drive, save to it early and often, and **be sure to back up your most important files, especially your Premiere project files** (save them in at least two places – they're tiny so you can just email them to yourself, or drop them in Google Drive, at the end of every session). If at all possible, keep ALL files for each project until after the end of the semester. You can, for example, use your Bennington Google Drive storage for this purpose – just make sure to keep your folder structures intact when you move/copy them.

TIP: Work directly from the local drive – use external drives and servers as backup and transfer only! This will speed up your work session considerably, while avoiding disastrous link glitches and total project meltdowns.

SYLLABUS, WEEKLY MATERIALS, WRITTEN RESPONSES

This syllabus is a [Google Doc](#) linked from the course page on Populi. **Please note that the course schedule is not completely fixed**. While the major milestones - assignment due dates and tech workshops - will not change, other elements of the course may be adjusted in response to the pace and dynamics of our interactions as a class. **Please check the syllabus every week for changes BEFORE you start your homework for the week, especially if you were not in class the previous week.**

Weekly materials - required or recommended reading, and required or recommended viewing links - are all linked from the syllabus. Please note that some reading/viewing links can only be opened on campus (for example ProQuest links, Docuseek links, or e-reserve library links) unless you log in with Bennington/Crossett credentials first.

Short written responses are required for some weekly materials. These should be submitted through the Populi Assignments tab, which lists the dates on which they are due. When I say short, I mean short - minimum 1 paragraph, absolute maximum 2 paragraphs. Find something in the weekly materials that sticks with you, and write about why it interests you, or why you disagree with it, or how it resonates with your own work or ideas. These written responses serve as a springboard for classroom discussion, so they are due before class, and are considered late if handed in after class. And even if a written response is not required that week, please do take notes on the weekly materials and come to class prepared for discussion.

However you generally track the news, please consider keeping a file of stories and images that catch your eye as being relevant to our class themes. We will occasionally start class by

discussing what we've seen and heard out in the world that week. You can also use Populi to share relevant items.

EXERCISES VS. PROJECTS

You will be required to complete several in-class technical exercises, some individually and some in small groups. You are also required to complete two short projects assigned by me, and one longer final project of your own design. Before starting work on your final project, you will submit a proposal for the project, which we will then discuss in an individual meeting.

Your projects are due for critique on the days indicated in the course schedule. **When a project is due for critique, it should be uploaded to the [class Google Drive folder](#) at least an hour before class start time on the due date and preferably by midnight the night before class.** Please make a folder within the class folder for all of your projects and exercises, named with your name, and also put your name in the filename of your video when you upload it (ex: MariamGhani_Proj1.mp4), double-check that it plays back from Google Drive, and bring a backup copy on a drive if possible. Preferred export setting in Premiere: H.264 high quality, same settings as sequence (unless your sequence is less than 1080p resolution for some specific reason). If you want to present an installation instead of a single-channel work, please give me a heads-up beforehand. **Technical exercises should be uploaded to your Google Drive folder within the class folder, and should be uploaded/linked by the due dates indicated in Populi.**

Please be clear: **Exercises are not projects and projects are not exercises.** As much as you may enjoy making an exercise with your group, it will be graded primarily on technical proficiency, and will not be critiqued. Exercises are a means for you to build your technical skills, and for me to track your technical progress – while also getting you used to the collaboration essential to film/video production. Please save your conceptual and critical energies for your projects. Projects are evaluated primarily based on concept and form, and presented for peer critique. You may revise your projects after critiques and replace the versions you previously uploaded to the Google Drive folder, but you are not required to do so. **The final versions of all your projects must be in the folder by December 20th** in order for me to review them before preparing final grades and evaluations.

Some of you may work or may have worked with cameraless and obsolete tech processes of video making in the past. To facilitate everyone in the class learning the full range of skills and equipment covered in this course, I am requiring that you work with the Cave cameras for your second and final projects. If you have an exceptional reason to work without a camera or on your own camera, please come to me with a proposal that includes what you want to do and what equipment you will use, and I will consider an exception. I cannot guarantee I'll grant the request.

ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION

Video is a demanding medium. Our equipment is also a shared resource, and has to be treated carefully. So, **if you miss a technical workshop during which equipment is introduced, you will not be able to check that equipment out until you review the recorded version and/or ask John Crowe for a make-up demo.** This is not punitive, but rather meant to ensure that everyone is able to use the equipment correctly, minimizing the chances of accidental damage to our shared resources.

This class is also a place where you can bring brand-new works, creative experiments, and as-yet-incomplete ideas to your peers, and develop them in a supportive environment. As such, it is largely dependent on your participation and generosity with each other to create that environment. If you don't show up for each other, and give each other honest but constructive critiques, you won't have the exchange of ideas that is fundamental to making projects better. All of which means: **please show up (on time) for critique days, even if your own work isn't finished** or you're not presenting that week. It's disrespectful to your peers to expect them to give your projects focused attention, if you don't show up for them. Missing a critique will substantially affect your participation grade.

However: I will not penalize anyone for situations where synchronous participation is made burdensome by factors out of their own control (including but not limited to illness, quarantine, and family emergencies). **All I ask is that you communicate the relevant details to me as soon as you can, and that you propose and fulfill a clear plan to demonstrate your engagement with the materials you missed.** While I will make every attempt to accommodate different learning styles and needs with a mix of screenings, readings, discussion, hands-on workshops, in-class exercises, individual meetings, and self-directed projects, we will be moving fairly quickly through some advanced techniques and complex ideas. Please make sure to reach out to me if you are unable to attend class, are feeling overwhelmed, and/or need to work through some materials more slowly.

What do I mean when I say critique? That's actually up to you.

Before the first critique of the semester we will talk together about what format(s) we would like critiques to follow in this course. Here are some resources to use when thinking about this question: a Judith Leeman text on forms and patterns of critique, Caroline Woolard's critique menu, the Room of Silence video made by RISD students.

ASSESSMENT & GRADING

In-class exercises	**12%**
Written responses	**8%**
Assignments 1-2	**30%**
Final project proposal	**2%**
Final project	**28%**
Class participation*	**20%**

*includes participation in discussions and tech workshops, contributions to group exercises, preparation for class and use of time in class, and effective balance of generosity of spirit, critical inquiry, and creative problem-solving in critiques; please see notes above re: equivalents for asynchronous participation

All of your work in this course will be assessed for the following criteria: quality of ideas, quality of work executed and ability to articulate and explain your thought processes; understanding of any historical and theoretical material presented, and ability to relate that material to an overall understanding of the medium and other aspects of your own practice; willingness to explore and take genuine risks in your work as an artist; and the amount of time, effort, and thought given to coursework.

Your projects and exercises will be evaluated along three axes: concept/content, form, and technique. Exercises will be evaluated with an emphasis on form and technique, while projects will be evaluated with an emphasis on concept and form. A project that displays excellence in all three areas should meet the following criteria:

1) The project has an original, clearly communicated concept or an innovative, effective approach to an assigned or appropriated idea.

2) The project has the form most suited to its concept and content and vice versa.

3) The project has a well-defined structure and unified formal strategies.

4) The artist demonstrates an understanding of the medium and mastery of the techniques and tools employed.

If you collaborate with another student in the course on a project, I will ask each of you to write a paragraph describing your own and your partner's contributions to the project, so that I can assess whether the work was equitably distributed. If you collaborate with a student from outside the course, I will ask you to submit a brief statement describing your role and your collaborator's roles in production and post-production.

I will not change any grades unless you hand in a substantially revised assignment. You can hand in a revised version of any assignment at any point, up to and including the final class of the semester. I am happy to meet with you to suggest revisions, but I will not, under any circumstances, argue with you about your grade.

GRADE	QUALITY	EXPLORATION	WORK	DISCUSSIONS	ATTENDANCE
A	**Outstanding**	Insightful, generous, energetic	Excellent form & content, consistently experimenting	Always prepared for class, makes intelligent & considered contributions	Always present (or equivalent), work in on time
B	**Good**	Inquisitive, engaged	Good form & content, takes some risks	Usually prepared for class, able to make interesting contributions	Always present (or equivalent), work in on time
C	**Average**	Just sufficient	Holds together, but unconvincing	Not always prepared, only able to make obligatory contributions	Misses some classes without making them up, work sometimes late
D	**Poor**	Limited, formulaic	Work thrown together just before class	Only makes very limited contributions	Excessive absences without equivalents, work late & incomplete
F	**Unsatisfactory**	Virtually none	Virtually none	Makes almost no contribution	Absent most of the time, no equivalents

COURSE POLICIES + PHILOSOPHY

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS + BASIC NEEDS

Bennington College provides reasonable accommodations to students with documented disabilities when such accommodations are requested and necessary to ensure equal access to College programs and facilities. If you believe you are entitled to an accommodation, speak with Diana Petschauer, Director of Student Accessibility Services, about any disability-related needs. If approved, you will receive a memo detailing your specific accommodations. Please share this memo with me, so we can set up a meeting to discuss how best to implement the accommodations. **Please note that I will not be aware of your needs if you do not share the memo with me.** The sooner we meet to discuss your needs, the better. If you are experiencing new and/or newly significant challenges, please talk to me, reach out to your faculty advisor, visit Academic Services, or connect with resources available through health and psychological services (440-4426 or 440-4451).

We also understand that basic needs (food, housing, and wellness) have a direct impact on the academic performance, health, development and success of our students. If you have a personal circumstance or need that will affect your learning or performance in this course, please let me or your faculty advisor know so that we can help find resources to support you during the term.

TECH NEEDS

If you are consistently experiencing technological barriers to accessing course content, please let me know so that I can work with you to find alternative solutions. **If you anticipate having specific tech needs for this class** – especially your final project -- that may be a particular challenge, **please reach out to me and John as soon as possible** so that we have some extra time to work with you to find creative ways to meet those challenges.

ETHICS + INCLUSIVITY

All students must adhere to college-wide policies regarding original work, academic integrity, and computer and network use. Academic and artistic integrity can be confusing in the age of appropriation, but please remember that if work is not your own, the source should be cited and documented appropriately. The general college policy can be found here: https://www.bennington.edu/faculty/faculty-handbook/academic-policies-and-procedures/academic-and-artistic-ethics-policy. We can have more in-depth discussions of fair use, appropriation, and the role/presentation of sources as part of our coursework.

Bennington College is committed to fostering the intellectual growth of all students, and to creating a learning environment where human cultural diversity is valued and respected. We are also looking at, thinking about, and making work that takes strong and sometimes provocative positions on difficult issues. For example, during the course of this semester we may look at artworks that include nudity, expressions of sexuality, strong language, violence, religious imagery, political controversy, contested histories, or other material that you may find personally difficult or offensive. This can be a difficult balancing act and if at any point you feel that the environment of the course has become less than respectful, welcoming and inclusive, please come to me to share your concerns. You can also reach out to the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion if you feel that you can't talk to me for any reason.

We may also look at some videos that include formal effects (for example, strobe effects), that can cause problems for people with photosensitivity or seizure disorders. **If you anticipate that any particular material will present a problem for you for any reason, please let me know** (in office hours, or by email) **at the beginning of the semester, and I will do my very best to notify you before such material is shown.** Every now and then something sneaks up on me too – if I haven't seen a film in several years, for example, and have forgotten that a particular scene or element was included. In that case, please feel free to leave class for as long as you need to, stop watching/participating until the film/discussion is over, or interrupt us if you feel it's important that we stop. **If you plan to present work of your own that may include difficult material, please let the class know beforehand** and give us some context for discussion. Try not to surprise us (even if you want a cold read).

Education is cooperation. In this classroom we are all responsible for each other, and all of us will be asked to both teach and learn from each other. In order to do that, we must respect each other's perspectives and contributions. You should feel free to bring your own thoughts and interests into the classroom, while understanding that others in the room may have very different thoughts and interests. Please think of this course as a flexible space that can adjust as we get to know each other's strengths and needs. And please remember that the space of the course is not static or closed: it should also be responsive to the urgencies and emergencies of the larger world.

The Raqs Media Collective wrote in "How to Be an Artist by Night" (2009) that being an artist is no different from learning to become an artist, because as artists we are constantly remaking ourselves and our horizons, rediscovering what we want to do, to think about, and to inscribe on the attention of the world. The most important thing you will learn in the video program is not how to use a specific camera, because those keep changing, or a specific piece of software, because those change too, but how to think through and with technologies that change constantly; how to think like an artist, as Raqs wrote, constantly preparing for the unknown.

COURSE SCHEDULE

*You need to check Populi/this document every week for the most up-to-date version of assignments and readings. If you are not in class, it is **your responsibility** to make sure you know whether changes have been made to the schedule.

WED 9/3 CLASS 1 - OBSERVATION KINOTECA

Due this week: Read the syllabus

Introductions and expectations

Review of [exposure/depth of field](#); how the [camera/lens you choose](#) and the practical cinematographic effects you employ produce different tones, effects, and affects

Screening/discussion: What is a documentary? "The creative treatment of actuality" per John Grierson, who coined the term. Some origin points: Robert Flaherty's _Nanook of the North_ (1922, 1 hr 18 min, screened 10 min excerpt), which has real people playing versions of themselves in real settings, but in scenes that are largely staged for the camera; Grierson's _Drifters_ (1929, 40 min, screened 5 min excerpt), which is observed closely from real life, but at a certain distance that positions the static camera as a non-participant in the scenes it observes; Robert Drew's _Primary_ (1960, 53 min, screened 10 min excerpt), the film that inspired the direct cinema movement, which uses a handheld (often shaky, indifferently focused) camera, close following shots, and longer takes to immerse the viewer in the action. Meanwhile in Venezuela, Margot Benacarref made _Araya_ (1959, 1 hr 22 min, screened 10 min excerpt), in which a more carefully composed but mobile, closely attentive camera and quick, rhythmic cuts are juxtaposed with poetic narration. A more recent example of observational doc cinematography: Kirsten Johnson, _Cameraperson_ (2016, 1 hr 42 min, screened 20 min excerpt) - a memoir-in-footage composed from "the images that haunted" a longtime documentary cinematographer, which makes use of many pieces of footage that would have been unusable in the films they were originally shot for, because they include the hands or voice of the cinematographer.

Tech workshop 1 (second half, in D204): GH4 cameras & prime lenses

In-class exercise: In pairs, work together to shoot the same subject with different lenses and depth of field settings - three shots at different F-stops, from the same distance, with each of the three lenses in your kit. **Footage can be uploaded directly from camera to Google Drive at the end of class, or compiled into a sequence and re-exported.**

Further exploration: ["The Present Moment: An Interview with Kirsten Johnson"](#) from World Records Journal #1 (2018); other [direct cinema / cinema verité films](#) (many of these are on DVD in Crossett); some recent observational films with great cinematography of different kinds: [*Faya Dayi*](#), [*All That Breathes*](#), [*Los Reyes*](#); lens [sweet spots](#) (for primes, roughly two full stops from your maximum aperture) and camera native ISO (the ISO at which your camera achieves its best signal-to-noise ratio, not to be confused with base ISO, the lowest possible ISO setting). Here's a detailed rundown of how to find your [lens sweet spot](#), and a very detailed [ISO explainer.](#) Also: more on how different lenses make different compositions possible, and produce different emotional effects. Shorter video on this with another cinematographer [here](#), longer and more detailed one with a lot of examples from different films [here](#) (the whole Shot List series is worth watching if you want to dig deeper into how the technical side of filmmaking plays into aesthetic choices). And here's a breakdown of how [camera sensors](#) interact with lens size and aperture.

WED 9/10   CLASS 2 - EXPOSITION   KINOTECA

Reading & response due: [Bill Nichols, "How Can We Define Documentary Film?"](#) from *Introduction to Documentary* **(3rd ed, 2017)**

Recommended reading: John Grierson, ["First Principles of Documentary"](#) (1932)[; Patricia Aufderheide,](#) *Documentary film: a very short introduction* (2007), p 1-25 and 44-55

SEPC elections

Review of prime lens exercise

Screening/discussion: the documentary as educational / investigative tool and the evolution of the historical and true-crime genres, plus more experimental versions of the biographic and forensic documentary; the art of the interview, and different approaches to it in the work of different filmmakers; changing fashions re: voiceover narration; the status of the film/video image as evidence and the purely indexical documentary; re-enactment, "empty re-enactments" and narrative structures within non-narrative film; evidentiary editing vs. continuity editing; *[The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter](#)* (Connie Field, 1980 - watched first 15 mins), Ric Burns,*[The Civil War](#)* (1990 - watched first 15 mins) vs. *[Asian Americans](#)* (Renee Tajima-Peña & Grace Lee, 2020) and *[Coded Bias](#)* trailer (Shalini Kantayya, 2020); *[Amazing Grace](#)* (Alan Elliott, Sydney Pollack, 2018, watched first 15 mins) and *[Apollo 11](#)* (Todd Douglas Miller, 2019, 10 min clip) vs *[Rewind & Play](#)* (Alain Gomis, 2022, watched first 12 mins); reenactments in *[Casting JonBenet](#)* (Kitty Green, 2017, watched 5 min excerpt) and *[The Thin Blue Line](#)* (Errol Morris, 1997, watched 5 min excerpts).

Further exploration: Expository docs - *In the Year of the Pig* (Emile de Antonio, 1968, on DVD in Crossett) and *Eyes on the Prize* (Henry Hampton/Blackside, 1987); compare*The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution* (Stanley Nelson, 2016) to *The Black Power Mixtape 1967-1975* (Goran Hugo Olsson, 2011) for different uses of similar archival footage; *Grizzly Man* (Werner Herzog, 2005) and archival that is withheld from the viewer; more experimental expository mode in Susan Schuppli films, excerpts from *Material Witness*, *Trace Evidence*, *Can the Sun Lie*, and *Ice Cores*; more experimental approaches to reenactment in *Frantz Fanon, Black Skin, White Mask* (Isaac Julien, 1996) and *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* (5 min clip, Trinh T. Minh-ha,1988); Tom Gunning, "Before Documentary: Early Non-Fiction Films and the View Aesthetic" (1997); Bill Nichols, "The Question of Evidence, the Power of Rhetoric, and the Documentary Film" (2008); Carl Plantinga, "'I'll Believe It When I Trust the Source': Documentary Images and Visual Evidence" (2013); Li, Dean, and Whyke, "The Story Behind the True Crime Doc" (2025); Forensic Architecture investigations; Situ Research; FA books *Investigative Aesthetics; Forensic Architecture: Violence at the Threshold of Detectability* (in Crossett)*;* and *Material Witness: Media, Forensics, Evidence;* Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Framer Framed: Film Scripts and Interviews* (2012) ebook via Crossett

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WED 9/17   CLASS 3 - SOUND WORLDS   KINOTECA

Reading/listening due (no response): Creative field recording, with audio samples, part 1 and part 2 (headphones recommended!)

Recommended reading: Bill Nichols, "What Gives Documentaries a Voice of Their Own?" from *Introduction to Documentary* (3rd ed, 2017); Louise Spence, Vinicius Navarro, Carl Lewis, "Sounds" from *Crafting Truth: Documentary Form and Meaning* (2011)

Discussion - the 4 Ps of field recording; the (rhetorical, poetic, or narrative) voice in/of documentary; points of audition and using sound effects and libraries ("atmos") to build convincing worlds; music and tone/emotion

Watched in class: Harry Watt & Basil Wright, *Night Mail* (1936, 22 min, watched first 8 and last 5 mins); Chantal Akerman, *News from Home* (1976, 1 hr 30 mins, watched first 14 mins)*;* John Akomfrah/BAFC, *Handsworth Songs* (1986, 1 hr, watched first 15 mins); poetic, sound-first film/videomaking in Sky Hopinka's *Mnemonics of Shape and Reason* and *Jaaji Approx*

Tech workshop 2 (second half, in D204): sound recorders & standard mics refresher / interview demo / field recording exercise

In-class exercise: In groups of three, work together to make a series of field recordings. First, actively make a sound - open and close a door, for example - and record it multiple times using different mics, pickup patterns, positions, timing, and modes of performance. Second, find a sound that you must passively record rather than actively make yourselves - for example, a lawn being mowed, a bird singing - and try to use the same techniques to obtain similarly varied recordings of that sound. **Files can be uploaded directly from recorders to Google Drive at the end of class, or compiled into a sequence and exported** - note that using the recorder's folder structure wisely will streamline this process.

Further exploration: Sam Green's *32 Sounds* (2023, 1 hr 37 min); Natalia Almada, *All Water Has a Perfect Memory* (2001, 19 min); Aura Satz, *Sound Seam* (2010); Sky Hopinka, *Kicking the Clouds* (2021); Tania Candiani, *The Sonorous Object* (2019) & *Lifeblood* (2023); *The Auditory Culture Reader* (2003) in Crossett; *Sweetgrass*, the Sensory Ethnography Lab and Sensate Journal; Olivia Landry, *A Decolonizing Ear: Documentary Film Disrupts the Archive* (2023) ebook via Crossett

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WED 9/24   CLASS 4 - REENACTMENT   D204

Viewing due: *Bisbee '17* (Robert Greene, 2018, 15 min clip); How (not) to light a set, with a gaffer, from Reverse Film School

Recommended reading: Julian Johannes Immanuel Koch, "The truth of reenactments: reliving, reconstructing, and contesting history in documentaries on genocide" (2023)

Recommended viewing: *The Act of Killing* (Joshua Oppenheimer, 2021); *The Eternal Frame, Commune*, Rithy Panh, Zoe Beloff, Myriam Charles, John Akomfrah

Tech workshop 3: Studio lighting / crew

In-class exercise: Two-person dialogue scene shot with classic coverage (3 cameras, lav & boom mics, key/fill/back/background lights). We'll reset at least 3 times and rotate roles each time. **Sign up for roles here beforehand. We will stage this as a true-crime style, two-part interrogation / reenactment scenario.**

Extra credit out-of-class exercise: Import the group footage from class into a new project, and follow this tutorial to create multicam clips with audio sync for each take from one of the two setups we filmed. Then experiment with cutting between the wide shot and closeups and the different takes until you have a full cut of the scene with a rhythm that feels natural. Note that it sometimes feels better to hold on the person listening, rather than constantly cut to the person speaking! Find your best audio source for each line, and disable the others. Add some room tone to smooth things out if you need to cut different sources together. If you really want to go nuts you can also experiment with mixing in additional ambient sound or Foley effects to build a more complete sound world. **Re-export as an mp4 and upload to Google Drive by 9/30. Your project should be prioritized over this exercise, but I do recommend looking at the footage before you shoot anything else - you can always learn something from whatever mistakes may have been made.**

Further exploration: Joram ten Brink & Joshua Oppenheimer, eds., *Killer Images: Documentary Film, Memory, and the Performance of Violence* (2012) ebook via Crossett; James Harvey, "Archival reenactments: decolonising a documentary convention" (2025)

WED 10/1   CLASS 5 - PROJECT #1 CRITS   KINO

Due for critique: Project #1: Look, Listen, Repeat (3-5 minutes)

Starting with a core of observational footage (with sync sound), build a piece that creates new meaning from the original footage, either by (1) non-continuity editing; (2) juxtaposing appropriated footage; (3) re-enacting something from the original footage; and/or (4) adding more sonic elements (voiceover narration, interview audio, non-diegetic music, sound effects, atmos).

Your video must be uploaded to the class/group Google Drive folder at least one hour before class starts, preferably by midnight the night before class. Please put your name in the filename!

WED 10/8   CLASS 6 - REFLEXIVITY   KINO

Reading & response due: Stella Bruzzi, "The Performing Filmmaker and the Acting Subject" (2013)

Recommended viewing/reading: Vladimir Rosas & Rubén Dittus, "The autobiographical documentary: archive and montage to represent the self" (2021)

Screening/discussion: examples of self-reflexive, performative, and auto-ethnographic documentaries; how does the camera movement & framing function w/r/t the apparatus of cinema and the hand/presence of the artist in these sub-genres? How does the filmmaker's first-person address the participants and audience? **Watched in class:** _Aileen: Life and Death of a Serial Killer_ (Nick Broomfield, 2003, watched first 20 mins - NB includes discussion of sexual assault and murder); _Blue Vinyl_ (Judith Helfand & Daniel Gold, 2004, watched first 18 mins).

To think about later: How do these film forms relate to contemporary reality TV conventions?

Tech workshop 4 (second half, D204): Camera supports, from stable-based supports (tripods, jibs), to body-based supports (Steadicam and shoulder mount), to mobile object-based supports (dollies, drones).

In class exercise: Working in groups, create a scene that incorporates three different kinds of camera movement. **Footage can be uploaded directly from camera to Google Drive at the end of class, or compiled into a sequence and re-exported.**

Further exploration: a breakdown of the different kinds of camera movement, with examples (Studio Binder, 26:40); Alisa Lebow, "First Person Political" (2019); Michael Moore, _Roger and Me_ (2003); Ross McElwee, _Bright Leaves_ (2003, 6 min trailer here); Agnès Varda, _The Gleaners and I_ (2002) and _Faces Places_ (2018), both on DVD in Crossett; Clio Barnard, _The Arbor_ (2010, clips here and here); Elan & Jonathan Bogarin, _306 Hollywood_ (2018, on Prime); a 2009 report on documentary ethics; a 2024 report on filmmaker-participant relationships

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WED 10/15   CLASS 7 - PERSUASION   KINO

Reading & response due: Hans Richter, "The Film Essay: A New Type of Documentary Film" (1940) and Paul Arthur, "Essay Questions" (2003)

Recommended reading/viewing: Kevin B. Lee, video essay on the essay film (2013)

Screening/discussion: The essay film and its use of archival material, narration, and text/sound/image relationships; Alain Resnais, *Night and Fog* (watched first 16 mins, 1955); Forugh Farrokhzad, *The House is Black* (1963, 22 min); Jean-Luc Godard & Jean-Pierre Gorin, *Letter to Jane* (watched first 15 mins, 1972); Chris Marker, *Sans Soleil* (1983, watched first 21 mins); Harun Farocki, *Images of the World and the Inscription of War* (1988, watched from 02:30 to 23:00); Marlon Riggs, *Affirmation* (10 mins, 1991); Brett Story, *The Prison in Twelve Landscapes* (2016, watched first 12 mins); Sara Cwynar, *Rose Gold* (9 mins, 2017)

Further exploration: a brief history of the form and its links to WW2 films from Sight & Sound; Nora Alter & Timothy Corrigan, eds., *Essays on the Essay Film* ebook via Crossett; Hito Steyerl, "A Sea of Data: Apophenia and Pattern (Mis)Recognition" (2016); Hito Steyerl, *November* (25 mins, 2004); Hito Steyerl's *A Sea of Data* exhibition at MMCA Seoul (2022) and *This is the future* exhibition at Lux (2021); Marlon Riggs, *Black Is, Black Ain't* (1995); Patricio Guzman, *Nostalgia for the Light* (2010); Deborah Stratman, *The Illinois Parables* (2016, 59 mins); Nguyen Trinh Tri, *How to Improve the World* (2021, 40 mins); *Did You Wonder Who Fired the Gun* (Travis Wilkerson, 2017) on Prime/Fandor; *I Am Not Your Negro* (Raoul Peck, 2016) on Kanopy; *Exterminate All The Brutes* (Raoul Peck, 4-episode series, 2021) on HBO Max; *The Century of the Self* (Adam Curtis, 2002); *Glass Life* (Sara Cwynar, 3 min excerpt, 2021); Camille Henrot, *Grosse Fatigue* (2013, 13 mins, NSFW); Orson Welles, *F for Fake* (1973) on DVD in Crossett; Werner Herzog, *Lessons of Darkness* (1992) and other docs on 7-disc set in Crossett; Stephanie Black, *Life and Debt* (2000) on DVD in Crossett

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WED 10/22   CLASS 8 - ANIMATION   POD

Reading due (no response): Andy Glynne, "Drawn From Life: The Animated Documentary" (2013)

Tech workshop 5/6: Intermediate/advanced editing, compositing, and color grading with Premiere; sound editing/mixing in Premiere & Audition; compositing with AfterEffects; AE/Premiere roundtrips

Further exploration: *Flee* (Jonas Pohler Rasmussen, 2021, 1 hour 29 mins); *Waltz with Bashir* (Ari Folman, 2008, 1 hr 30 mins)*;* Annabelle Honess Roe, "Evocative animated documentaries, imagination, and knowledge" (2021); Dominic Lees, "Deepfakes in documentary film production" (2024); AfterEffects tutorials; Jonathan Murray and Nea Ehrlich, eds., *Drawn From Life: Issues and Themes in Animated Documentary Cinema* (2019) ebook via Crossett

Mid-term SEPC discussion

Extra credit out-of-class exercise: Make a title sequence for a film that doesn't exist, using compositing techniques covered in class. Export as an mp4 and add to your folder in Drive. Don't spend more than a few hours on this if you do pursue it; prioritize your project.

WED 10/29   CLASS 9 - PROJECT #2 CRITS   KINO

Due for critique: Project #2: Essay (3-5 minutes)

Starting with a core of archival material (still images, silent footage, or footage with sync sound), build a piece that creates new meaning through either (1) non-continuity editing; (2) juxtaposing new footage that you shoot, e.g observational or a re-enactment of something in the archival material; (3) adding onscreen text (in any form); (4) animating the archival material; and/or (5) adding more sonic elements (voiceover narration, interview audio, non-diegetic music, sound effects, atmos). The resulting project should be identifiable as some form of essay film, in that it should present a distinct perspective on its material; this does not mean that it must include narration or text, but we should be able to understand the "argument" of the film by watching it.

Your video must be uploaded to the [class/group Google Drive folder](#) at least one hour before class starts, preferably by midnight the night before class. Please put your name in the filename!

10/29 - 11/1: OPTIONAL OUT-OF-CLASS EVENTS: [AN IMPOSSIBLE ADDRESS](#)

With artist/filmmaker Suneil Sanzgiri at EMPAC and the Sanctuary for Independent Media in Troy

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WED 11/5   NO CLASS - PLAN DAY

WED 11/12   CLASS 10 - INDIVIDUAL MEETINGS   VAPA B207

Due: Pre-production packet for final project: 1-paragraph proposal, plus 3-5 visual and/or audio references for your formal approach. Posted to Populi by Tuesday night.
This is your project to shape as you wish, open to any approach to film/video art. The only limits are that the duration not exceed 15 minutes, and that you submit a written project proposal to me that details the form, the content/concept, and why that form best expresses that content/concept. For narrative projects, I recommend submitting a longer narrative treatment with a story outline before our meeting, and planning to submit a full script and storyboard/shot list by November 28th. If there is a research component, a list of sources is helpful. You should also include audiovisual references (images, links) if those will help you explain the intended idea, form, or tone/mood. [FilmGrab](#) is a good free resource for film stills.

Individual meetings to discuss proposals, sign up for a slot via [Google Doc](#)

WED 11/19   CLASS 11 - SYMPHONY   KINO

Viewing & response due: Victor Kossakovsky, _Aquarela_ (2018, 1 hr 30 min)

Recommended reading: [Adam Diller, "More-than-human sonic engagements in documentary film and phonography"](#) (2021)

Screening/discussion: landscapes/cityscapes as materia prima; more-than-human subjects/perspectives and imagining other/entangled forms of existence; associative, abstract, and pattern-based editing; Paul Strand, _Manhatta_ (1921, 12 min); Walter Ruttman, _Berlin: Symphony of a Great City_ (1 h 13 min, 1927 - we watched all of Act 1, so first 15 min); Marie Menken, _Go, Go, Go_ (1962, 12 min - slightly better quality at this link, with a later score by John Zorn); Manfred Kirchheimer, _Stations of the Elevated_ (1981, 45 min *this is the corrected link!* - watched approx. first 12 min); Godfrey Reggio, _Koyanisqaatsi_ (1983, 7 min excerpt at this link; full film on DVD in Crossett; we watched from 16:49 - 37:47); Shaunak Sen, _All That Breathes_ (1 h 37 min, 2022 - we watched first 40 mins); Nikolaus Geyrhalter, _Matter Out of Place_ (2023, 1 h 45 min - we watched first 22 min)

Further exploration: [Interview with Victor Kossakovsky](#) about the technical process of making _Aquarela,_ and [another about the formal approach and ideas behind the film](#)_;_ James Benning; Masao Adachi; Huillet & Straub; Patrick Keiller; Verena Paravel & Lucien Castaing-Taylor, _Leviathan_ (2013, 1 h 26 min); Joshua Bonnetta & J.P. Sniadecki, _El Mar La Mar_ (2017); Ai Weiwei, _Human Flow_ (2 h 22 min, 2017); Victor Kossakovsky, _Gunda_ (2020); Ana Vaz, _It is Night in America_ (2022); Edward Burtynsky & Jennifer Baichwal, _Watermark_ & _Anthropocene: The Human Epoch_; [Feral Atlas](#); Mel Y. Chen, _Animacies;_ Jane Bennett, _Vibrant Matter;_ Anna L. Tsing, _The Mushroom at the End of the World;_ Timothy Morton, _Humankind;_ Donna Haraway, _Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene_ ([watch lecture](#))

WED 11/26   NO CLASS - THANKSGIVING

WED 12/3   CLASS 12 - FINAL PROJECT CRITS 1   KINO

Due this week for critique: final projects (rough cuts can also be presented for feedback)

Your video must be uploaded to the [class/group Google Drive folder](#) at least one hour before class starts, preferably by midnight the night before class. Please put your name in the filename!

WED 12/10   CLASS 13 - FINAL PROJECT CRITS 2   KINO

Due this week for critique: final projects

Your video must be uploaded to the [class/group Google Drive folder](#) at least one hour before class starts, preferably by midnight the night before class. Please put your name in the filename!