



INTEGRATED MEDIA ARTS

## **CODES & MODES: Producing Documentary Culture**

An Unconference sponsored by the Integrated Media Arts MFA Program and the Department of Film and Media Studies at Hunter College, CUNY

DATE: April 4<sup>th</sup> 7pm, & April 5<sup>th</sup> 9:30am – 9pm, 2014

LOCATION: Hunter College, 695 Park Ave, New York, NY 10065

<http://ima-mfa.hunter.cuny.edu/codesandmodes/>

**This documentary event will bring together documentary community with graduate students and faculty both locally and from afar to look at how documentary culture is created across academic programs, through media arts centers, festivals, funders, and other venues.**

Marginally embraced by museum culture and the art world, a stepchild of the film industry, documentary is making its own institutions, and growing in popularity. Whether it's the artist as curator, the maker as teacher, or the student working with a community, a burgeoning documentary culture finds its home in a variety of cultural spaces dedicated to documentary studies, production, distribution, and discussion. The main objective of the Codes and Modes Unconference is to promote critical dialogue around how documentary culture is taught, how it is reproduced and what assumptions and possibilities lie in this terrain.

### **Calls for Panels, Workshops and Presentations**

We are pleased to announce a call for presentations of work, of modes of production and distribution, of papers, panels and workshops on questions including, but not limited to, the topics listed below. We anticipate participants to include graduate students with a particular interest in documentary, faculty, and people in the media arts community who are interested in the future of documentary.

### **Documentary as Meta-Politics**

Documentary culture has a special position in relation to the linked global crises of global economies, and the institutions of representative democracy. In our current crises of representative politics, the philosophical issues of truth, witness and the subject and the nature of a possible politics is continually emerging on a meta-level in documentary practice globally.

Questions for consideration include:

- What are the deeper political implications of creating a culture of documentary? Who has agency? Who gets left out?
- In the vacuum of representative politics coupled with the increasingly overblown display of highly funded media generated representations, how do we foresee documentary culture maintaining certain standards? What do we mean by "standards"?
- If we decide the term "documentary" to be insufficient and outdated, what are some alternative ways to describe the work we do and the communities we are engendering?
- In considering teaching documentary, how can we include these new emerging "cultures" of documenting struggles such as social justice and human rights in relevant ways?

## **Documentary as Social Media**

More than other time-based media, documentary has seemed the appropriate modality for a variety of collective production approaches. In some ways this documentary 'brand' finds itself overshadowed or sidelined by new social media tools and practices offering interactivity, self-representation, and new distribution platforms. In other ways we see people using notions of documentary to define work on these new platforms.

Questions for consideration include:

- How is the meaning of the documentary form in these new contexts, ones where the social is both virtual and technologically malleable, altered, enhanced or otherwise formed?

## **The Documentarian as Ethical Celebrity**

Although the popularity of various documentary forms continues to grow with different factors at work, (such as the proliferation of DSLR technologies that lower the bar to high-production value in documentary settings) the promotion of the documentary filmmaker as a fighter for truth and justice is a real phenomenon. However, the culture surrounding this growth is often uncritical.

Questions for consideration include:

- Is the celebrity phenomenon surrounding documentary culture useful politically, or does it replicate a model of hierarchy that might encourage makers to find ways to subvert this tendency?
- How do funding mechanisms play into the current apparatus of documentary celebrity, and what are the ways we might foresee and forestall (or enhance) the implications of this tendency?

## **Documentary as Identity in the Age of "Flows"**

"Spatial transformation must be understood in the broader context of social transformation: space does not reflect society, it expresses it, it is a fundamental dimension of society, inseparable from the overall process of social organization and social change. Thus, the new urban world arises from within the process of formation of a new society, the network society, characteristic of the Information Age." - Manuel Castells

"The Network Society" as described by Castells is a 'space of flows,' a precarious moment in time and space in which societies are structured around a battle between the Net (networked communication) and Self (identities actualized). The current politics surrounding immigration, race, gender identity, land use, solidarity, etc., places the documentary form in the unique position of being used as a tool for exploring who we are and who we could become in a period of economic, social and political crisis.

Questions for consideration include:

- What role and power does documentary culture wield in the face of these new hyper migrating forms of capitalistic space?

- Our networked communication systems for media and social interaction provide an intricate, flexible and immediate map that enables new capitalism to flourish. Are these same routes as useful for keeping pace with local needs to retain and form community identity?
- Can documentary culture continue to provide alternative maps to rabbit holes in the capitalistic networks?
- How do we ensure learning environments to teach each other these mechanisms most efficiently?

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN PARTICIPATING please email us at [integrated.media.arts@hunter.cuny.edu](mailto:integrated.media.arts@hunter.cuny.edu)

We will invite you to join the unconference blogsite where you will be able to propose a panel, workshop, screening & discussion, or other participation.