SHIFTING FOCUS II: Video Production and Community Organizing

OVERVIEW
The term "Video Activist" is a fairly late arrival to the lexicon of progressive struggle and political agitation, but community organizers and activists have been making and using film and video since the Film and Photo League of the 1920’s. The power of the moving image to galvanize public opinion and shape the course of history has not been lost on the generations of social and political activists that have picked up the camera or sat behind an editing machine in the hope that they will produce something that will make a difference. Never has this been more true than today, when rapid decreases in the cost of equipment, the creation of increasingly easy-to-use editing programs, and the ability to distribute video via the internet have inspired literally thousands of people to take up their cameras and begin to document the work and the events they see going on around them.

The course will explore the role of media as an advocacy and/or community organizing tool, by asking what the role of documentary is in social change movements and what types of media actually help to create change. What audiences are targeted by these films? What do we want the impact of the film on these audiences to be? We want to explore the use of varying styles of documentary to observe, document, inform, and impact audiences emotionally, intellectually and politically.

In this course we will put these theoretical questions to the practical test of actually producing, in collaboration with community organizers, short pieces of “tactical media” that the organizers can then use in the course of the ongoing work of social change.

There are, as I see it, five goals to this course:

1. To learn the basics of video production.

2. To better understand how public opinion is shaped and its importance within a pluralistic democratic society.

3. To develop an analysis of how commercial, or corporate, media functions in a democratic society, as well as media that is produced in opposition to these dominant media institutions.

4. To understand why, when and in what form video can and should be used by community activists to further their cause.
5. To take these lessons into the field, and collaboratively produce a short video piece, which can be used by a community activist organization to further their work.

**EXPECTATIONS AND GRADING**

In this class you will be asked to do a lot of work as a team, on your own time, and the final project will weigh heavily in the assessment of your final grade. However, there are things that you can do on your own that will give you some measure of control over your own destiny. Here’s how the grading works:

**Attendance and Participation- 30%**

*Come to class, on time, prepared, and participate:* The class meets only 13 times in a semester, so one absence is significant. Two is bad. Three is almost 25% of the class, which would be devastating. Three late arrivals (more than two minutes) will count as one absence. So, show up on time and prepared to participate.

**Assorted Short Assignments- 25%**

**Final Project-45%**

*Results matter, but so does process.* In the end, what winds up projected onto the screen on the final night is what will make you proud of yourselves, and that’s what matters more than any grade. But how you get there, the preparations you make and the process by which you make it all come together is something that I will pay attention to.

Finally, collaboration, collegiality and respect for one another are required. Students in one group may receive differing grades if it becomes clear that they are doing more or less work. I reserve the right to grade students separately from the rest of their group based on their contribution to the project.

**PLAGARISM WILL NOT BE TOLERATED**

More than three words in a row without citation is plagiarism and it will result in an automatic zero on the paper.

**FINAL PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND TIMELINE**

Over the course of two semesters, students will learn how video is and can be used by community based organizations in support of their work. There is, in this course, the very concrete goal of producing something that will be of use to a worthwhile cause; something appropriate to screen in public and broadcast over public access cable.

*Video Production:* Each team will be required to produce a video, or several videos, in collaboration with an organization. The content of this piece will be entirely up to the team and organization involved, but will be arrived at over the course of the school year with the input and advice of the instructor and fellow students. A public screening of the work will be scheduled for the end of the Spring semester, which will be an event open to the public.

*Community Organizing:* This is not a documentary film class. Although we will study the
documentary film tradition, and much of what students will produce will be rooted in that tradition, what is being produced for this class will be for the purpose of organizing people to take action of some kind or another. You are not independent filmmakers. What is made will be in collaboration with community organizers, for their use.

For the Spring semester teams will focus on (a) Continuing to gather footage and refine ideas for their video projects; (b) Learn the basics of post-production and (c) Complete their projects and (d) execute a coherent, tactical distribution plan and/or a plan to leave the organization with some skills or resources to enable them to move forward.

DEADLINES/CRITS

March 4th- Project work critique- Mid-Semester

March 18th - Distribution and/or Instructional Plan due/ Progress Report

April 15th – Rough Cut Critique

May 6th – Final Edits Due

May 9th- FINAL SCREENING EVENT

Schedule of Readings/Assignments (Provisional)

01/28 - Introductions and Overview
- Update on Progress, plans for semester
- Video Production Workshop With Letus Adapters

02/04- FCP Lesson 1
- Understanding the FCP Environment
- Go over video Remix assignment

02/11- FCP Lesson 2
- Final Cut Pro Lesson 2
  - Logging and Capturing
  - Project Management
  Due: Lesson #1 in Peach Pit Press Book/DVD
  - Find Ad or other short video to remix

02/18- President’s Day- NO CLASS

02/25- FCP Lesson 3
- Final Cut Pro Lesson 3

03/04- FCP Lesson 4/Video Remix Crits
- View and Crit Video Remix assignments
- Review of Distro/Instruction plans
Due: Lesson #3 in PPP book

03/11 - Project Work Crit and FCP practice
- View and critique project work of groups
- Work and instruction with Final Cut Pro
- Discussion of distribution/instruction plans
Due: Prepare for Full Crit

03/19 - SPRING BREAK

03/25 – Judith Helfand Guest Lecture

04/01 - Workday and Distro Discussion
- Work on Projects
- Review of Distro/Instruction plans
Due: Distribution and/or Instructional Plan

04/08 - Rough Cut Crit
- Full Crit of rough cuts

04/15 - Workday

04/22 - Web Encoding Workshop and Workday
- One Day workshop on basic web encoding
- Work on projects

04/29 - DVD Studio Pro Workshop

05/06 - Final Edit Critique

05/09 - FINAL SCREENING AT SIXTH STREET COMMUNITY CENTER

Texts Used
In the Blink of an Eye - Walter Murch
Making Media - Jan Roberts-Breslin
The Visual Story - Bruce Block
Documentary - Michael Rabinger