

FA223 (Re)Imagine Realities: Experimental Documentary

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Office Hours: by appointment

Course Description

In this hands-on filmmaking course, we will explore experimental approaches to documentary film, challenging traditional notions of truth, representation, and storytelling.

At a time when the boundaries between fact, fiction, and fabrication grow increasingly unstable, this course invites you to consider experimental documentary as a mode of inquiry, a practice that unsettles fixed meanings and reorients how we see, feel, and make sense of the world. How do we represent what was never recorded? How can documentation give form to the intangible: a feeling, a memory, a haunting? In the absence of evidence, can speculation become a form of truth-telling? Through engagement with both original and found materials, i.e. archival footage, photographs, text, and sound, we will explore how experimental practices can embrace subjectivity, respond to absence, and challenge the illusion of objectivity, expanding not only what is true, but how truth can be felt and formed.

A mix of short production assignments, in-class exercises, readings and screenings—featuring a dynamic range of works by both established and emerging filmmakers—will support you in developing your own artistic voice as filmmakers and deepen your understanding of documentary's power to shape perception and meaning. While prior filming and editing knowledge is useful, no prior in-depth experience with audiovisual production is necessary, only a willingness to experiment, to question, and to (re)imagine.

Requirements

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the highest standards of academic integrity and expects students to adhere to these standards at all times. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

Accommodations

Bard College Berlin is committed to inclusion and providing equal access to all students; we uphold and maintain all aspects of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and Section 3 of the German Disability Equality Act of April 27, 2002 (Federal Law Gazette I p. 1468). If you have a disability, or think you may have a disability, please contact the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, Atticus Kleen, (accommodations@berlin.bard.edu) to request an official accommodation. Requests for accommodations should be made as early as possible to ensure adequate time for coordination and planning. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and may require advance notice to implement. If you have already been approved for accommodations with the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, please arrange to meet with me outside of class so that we can develop an implementation plan. Students may face extenuating circumstances related to various personal or external factors, which impact their academic performance. While these circumstances often do not fall within the legal framework of Disability Accommodations, Bard College Berlin is committed to supporting students experiencing such circumstances. A student needing a short extension or a replacement assignment because of an extenuating circumstance is encouraged to make arrangements directly with instructors if possible. If further support is needed, please visit the Bard College Berlin Accessibility page. Questions about this process can be directed to James Harker (j.harker@berlin.bard.edu) or Maria Anderson-Long (m.andersonlong@berlin.bard.edu).

Attendance

- Attendance of ALL classes is expected.
- More than one unexcused absence (that is, absence from one three-hour session) will significantly affect the participation grade for the course.
- Arriving more than 15 min after the start of the class will be considered an absence.
- Arriving late will be noted and after two late arrivals, the participation grade will be affected.

Please note that Bard College Berlin may not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences, whether excused or unexcused. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

Policy on Late Submission of Assignments / Presentations

Assignments that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (Example: B+ becomes C+). The instructor is not obliged to accept assignments that are more than 24 hours late. Where the instructor agrees to accept a late assignment, it should be submitted by the new deadline agreed upon by both parties. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Students receive end-of-semester grades for their seminar work. Students are also entitled and encouraged to make an appointment with the instructor to receive individual feedback on seminar participation and work, or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

Assessment

Your attendance & participation are key components of this course. This includes showing up on time, coming prepared with notes on the week's readings or viewings, and being ready to take part in class discussions and hands-on exercises. You will be assessed on your overall engagement, how you contribute to conversations, complete assignments on time, show responsibility in group or independent work, and communicate clearly with both classmates and your instructor.

Assignments

10% Recording Experiment: "Seeing & Hearing Differently"

Choose a single subject (a person, place, object, moment, etc.) and document it using deliberate camera and sound choices that reveal a subjective "truth," not a neutral record. Let your formal choices (framing, distance, movement, lens, mic type, ambient vs. isolated sound) shape how the subject is perceived. Guiding questions:

- What does this choice of camera/mic include, and what does it leave out?
- Does changing your distance change your relationship to the subject? The viewer's?
- Can two recordings of the same event both be "true" if they feel completely different?

Deliverable:

- ☐ Video (1–2 min), due 2 pm, Tuesday, September 22

20% Midterm Project: "Documenting the Invisible"

Create a roughly 3 minute piece exploring something intangible: a memory, rumor, feeling, haunting, or absence. Use found, live, or staged footage, abstract visuals, soundscapes, voiceover, or any method that challenges documentary norms.

Deliverables:

- ☐ Video (approx. 3 min) plus a 200-word written reflection on your concept and techniques, due 2 pm, Tuesday, October 13
- ☐ Short in-class presentation (max. 3 min) on your creative/experimental choices, plus 2–3 questions to guide class feedback

30% Final Project: "Reimagine Documentary"

Synthesize course themes by creating a work that challenges or expands the documentary genre. Develop a 3 to maximum 10 minute piece that investigates a subject of your choice through an experimental lens. You are encouraged to mix formats: live or archival footage, personal recordings, interviews, text, sound design, reenactments, or abstract elements, to explore ideas of fact, fiction, memory, or speculation. Consider the boundaries between truth and fabrication, presence and absence, and how form shapes meaning.

Deliverables:

- ☐ Proposal Pitch (idea, materials, methods), due 2 pm, Tuesday, November 10
- ☐ Final Film, due 2 pm, Tuesday, December 01
- ☐ Revised Final Cut (incorporating feedback), due 2 pm, Tuesday, December 08

Grade Breakdown

40%	Attendance & Participation
10%	Recording Experiment
20%	Midterm Project
30%	Final Project

Schedule

Week 1: September 02

- Introduction
- Course overview, objectives and expectations
- “(Re)imagining”

Homework:

- ☐ Read: Steyerl, Hito. "Art or Life? Documentary Jargons of Authenticity." In Truth, Dare or Promise. 2013. Pages 1–9. (find it on Google Classroom in the Materials Section)

Week 2: September 09

- “The Camera Eye”: D. Vertov, J. Ivens, L. Castaing-Taylor & V. Paravel
- Camera workshop

Homework:

- ☐ Start your recording experiment
- ☐ Read & Watch: Sarah Polley (find it on Google Classroom in the Materials Section)

Week 3: September 16

- “Cinematic Listening”: H. Jennings & S. McAllister, C. Marker, L. Martel
- Sound recording workshop

Homework:

- ☐ **Upload your recording experiment (1-2 min video) by 2 pm, Tuesday, September 22**
- ☐ Read & Watch: Sarah Polley (find it on Google Classroom in the Materials Section)

Week 4: September 23

- Present your recording exercises (5 minutes per student)
- “Revealing The Invisible”: S. Polley, Y. Hameiri
- Lighting & staging workshop preparation

Homework:

- ☐ Read & Watch: Yuval Hameiri (find it on Google Classroom in the Materials Section)
- ☐ Bring props, clothes, etc. for lighting & staging workshop next week

Week 5: September 30

- “Revealing The Invisible”: S. Polley, Y. Hameiri
- Lighting & staging workshop (shoot and edit a short, staged “one-minute-memory”)

Homework:

- ☐ Start your midterm project

Week 6: October 07

- “Intangible Realities”: Engberg, Mia, dir. *Belleville Baby*. 2013. 75 min. Screening in class.
- Midterm preparation

Homework:

- ☐ **Upload your midterm project (video & written reflection) by 2 pm, Tuesday, Oct. 13**
- ☐ Prepare a short introduction (max. 3 minutes) to present your video to the class. Focus on the creative, experimental choices you made regarding content, camera work, sound, and editing. Think about what kind of feedback you’d like to receive, and bring 2–3 questions to guide the group’s response.

Week 7: October 14

- Midterm projects presentation and feedback

Week 8: October 21

- Fall break, no classes

Week 9: October 28

- “Hidden In The Archives”: K.P. Rosenthal, K. Aljafari, P. Tscherkassky, C. Dunye

Homework:

- ☐ Start researching for your final project

Week 10: November 04

- “The Other Portrait”: C. Akerman, B. Baillie, J. Mekas, S. Liu, Y. Kabir

Homework:

- ☐ **Prepare a proposal pitch for your final project** (max. 10 minutes). You may use the template provided in class or create your own presentation, either digital or analog. Your pitch should include:
 - ☐ A written component describing your idea and the experimental methods you plan to use, drawing connections to the texts, themes and subjects explored in this course
 - ☐ Visual elements, such as a story- or moodboard, test shots, archival footage, etc.
 - ☐ 1-2 questions you'd like feedback on

Week 11: November 11

- Final project proposal pitch presentations (10 minutes per student)
- Workshopping conceptual, logistical & technical questions

Homework:

☐ **Start shooting!**

Week 12: November 18

- Guest Speaker

Homework:

☐ **Shooting & Editing!**

Week 13: November 25

- Working on your final projects

Homework:

☐ **Upload final project to Google Classroom by 2 pm, Tuesday, December 01**

☐ Prepare a brief introduction (max. 3 minutes) to present your final project to the class. Focus on the core concept you're aiming to convey and explain the creative, experimental methods you used to explore it. Think about what kind of feedback would be most helpful and come prepared with 2–3 specific questions to guide the group's response.

Week 14: December 02

- Final project presentation and feedback

Homework:

- ☐ **Choose either your midterm or final project to incorporate feedback & upload your finetuned version to Google Classroom by 2 pm, Tuesday, December 08**

Week 15: December 09

- Group reflection & evaluations
- Selecting if/what you would like to share at Open Studios
- Setting up our final screening/exhibition

Week 16: December 16

- Completion Week

**The syllabus/ schedule may change. The most recent version will be available on Google Classroom.*

Policy on the use of facilities:

1. The Factory (Eichenstrasse 43) and Monopol (Provinzstr 40-44) at BCB offer space and facilities to BCB art students. Chip access is from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. every day, including the weekends during the semester. The buildings cannot be used outside these hours.
2. Fire exits and lanes must be kept clear of any obstructions.
3. Students agree only to use the designated class spaces or communal workshops.
Respecting the building and its facilities is crucial, as they are shared resources that need to be preserved for the benefit of all.
4. For your safety and the safety of others, smoking and drinking alcohol are strictly prohibited anywhere inside the building.
5. Unauthorized events and/or parties are not permitted. Projects using open flames (such as candles, torches, lanterns, fireworks, etc.) are not permitted inside the building.
6. Spray painting and handling any hazardous (chemical or combustible) material is not permitted inside the building.
7. All work surfaces (indoor and outdoor) must be adequately protected with the workshop's drop cloth before spray painting or working with plaster.
8. During completion week, any space used by a student must be emptied, with clean walls and floors. All garbage must be adequately disposed of. Final grades may be affected or withheld if any item remains by the inspection deadline.
9. When leaving the building, students must ensure all lights are turned off, all electrical items must be unplugged, and doors must be closed.
10. Contact the Studio art manager directly with any questions: j.park@berlin.bard.edu

Emergency phone numbers:

Police (calling from a German landline or cellphone): 110

Fire (calling from a German landline or cellphone): 112

Ambulance and Paramedics (calling from a German landline or cellphone): 112

Out-of-Hours Medical Care (calling from a German landline or cellphone) : 116 117