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All designs and plans are representations. Before designers and planners can intervene in urban space, they must learn the tools to observe and interpret urban dynamics and to create documentary evocations of existing conditions. This course focuses on developing qualitative tools of analysis and representation, informed by a deep dive into the history of mutual influence between documentary media and urban discourse over the past century.

Compelling narratives require recognizing and developing the specificity of your own perspective, your understanding of intended audience and context, and your politics. In this course, we will study a variety of documentary work produced in support of particular strategies of urban reform in the past century — especially films and videos, but also essays, oral and graphic presentations, and data visualizations — that have been conceived variously as art, journalism, marketing, or propaganda. And we will discuss student works-in-progress in a supportive workshop environment that will hone each student's voice and approach to narrative urbanism.

Working with data and material from work in studio, thesis research, or original research and documentation, each student will create a documentary project that explores some aspect of the relationship between the physical form and the social experience of cities and places and that focuses on conditions that cannot be captured by quantitative analysis or traditional data.

The first hour of each class will consist of a discussion of the previous week's reading and viewing in a seminar format. The second hour will consist of a workshop of fellow students' final projects in progress, with demonstrations and case study examples on particular techniques. Techniques, formats, and rhetorical strategies discussed will include: in-depth interviews, photography, videography and video editing, and the incorporation of text, graphics, and archival material. Each student is expected to take an active part in providing feedback on classmates' works-in-progress.

The primary medium and format we will be learning about is documentary film, but students are welcome to apply the lessons learned from the study of documentaries to other non-fiction formats, including but not limited to a non-linear video installation, illustrated essay, audio podcast, guided tour, or exhibition proposal. Potential topics for your project are wide open; please come to class with some ideas of what you might like to explore. Revising or expanding work from previous courses or studios is allowed, in consultation with the instructor (see Requirement #4). Original work conceived specifically for this course is encouraged; we will work collaboratively on defining the scope for final projects that can be realistically completed by the end of this course.