

Thursday March 12, 2009

4:36 p.m. – 6 p.m.

Session 4: Filmic engagements

“I Just Need Some Help: Surviving Extreme Poverty in Miami-Dade” (video, ca. 12min)

Karen M. Mahar, MA

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Preconceived notions about poor and marginalized populations infuse and inform the public discourse about society’s responsibility for addressing the problem of poverty. The implementation of neo-liberal policies in the United States has included massive welfare reforms, privatization of health care, and defunding of community services, against a backdrop of widespread calls for the lowest-income persons to assume more personal responsibility for their lives. In Miami-Dade County, Florida, 14% of the population lives in poverty and 7% in extreme poverty, crossing racial and ethnic boundaries. *I Just Need Some Help* employs ethnographic photography and digital audio interviews to explore how public policies impact the daily lives of persons living in extreme poverty in Miami. Fifteen individuals and families from a cross-section of Miami collaborated with the researcher, choosing which photographic subjects would document those aspects of their lives most influenced by public policies, and discussed the meaning of each photo in taped interviews. The resulting audio visual images are compiled into a 12-minute video that explores life on the margins through the eyes of those living it. Declining subsidies, food insecurity, evaporating employment opportunities, dismal public transportation systems, aging low-income housing stock, dangerous neighborhoods, increasing fuel costs and bureaucratic benefits systems are explored in the context of those who must negotiate their impact every day. The project also finds that the realities of life in extreme poverty are often contrary to the discourse perpetuated in the media, and that some public benefits programs are working far better than public opinion recognizes.

“Last Summer in Berlin Mitte” (video, ca. 20min.)

Alessandro Busà

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"Last Summer in Berlin Mitte" tells the struggles of marginalized residents of an old tenement house in former East Berlin, in the midst of the gentrification boom in the surrounding area. Through the characters of Annika (cabaret artist), Manfred (former GDR employee), Caspar (vaudeville theatre owner) and Benjamin (drop out junkie), issues of gender, class and social exclusion are explored. The film describes the reactions of marginalized residents in face of extensive urban transformations in post-unification Berlin. But despite their disadvantages position in face of redevelopment, the film portrays them as a savvy, imaginative, joyful and creative community.