

Artist Statement
Daniel Rudin

I was raised in a blue-collar home by a father crippled at work. His union membership saved our family from destitution. My multi-modal art practice is a response to this formative experience. As mediator and through media, I traverse the fields of digital advocacy, industrial design, and hybrid documentary video seeking to address labor issues.

What is at stake in the documentary is power. The documentary is a tool that can empower the narrator, energize an audience, stage an informative event, facilitate discussion, and achieve real change. Yet it is a form fraught with contradictions that I poke, prod, and rearrange. My art practice seeks out new ways to problematize the documentary while at once presenting an object of utility to both subject and viewer.

My work attempts to make the subject in the midst of her “labor problem” articulate when the problem must be mediated somehow to a strange audience or an “other” of different circumstances. Yet the subject’s representation is sometimes at war with its ontology, revealing contradictory claims of empowerment and subjectivizing authorship. In Lyotard’s notion of “pragmatic utterances” the narrating subject can occupy the “space” of sender and the viewer that of addressee. This positioning can—theoretically—legitimize the subject’s message. But an alternative case arises where the subject is threatened into silence, as evidenced by the authorship of the documentary’s common “expository mode”.

Shared cinema is one historical answer to these political, epistemological, and artistic problems. Through a more intense engagement between author and subject, shared cinema aims not to “passively observe,” but to “provoke” life. My practice pairs this historical mode with emerging documentary forms couched in participatory web cultures. I follow Jenkins in recognizing the emergence of these cultures as a move from medium-specific content toward content traveling across multiple channels toward increasingly tangled relationships between top-down and bottom-up forces.

Traditional documentary will remain a form in its own right, reified. However, convergence culture is bringing about emerging forms that redistribute power within the relational matrix of viewer, author and subject. I want to push the genre to the very edge of this cliff, until just before it is subsumed in indistinguishably converged media that treats subjects and viewers as equals equally invested in a useful outcome.