



# *Crime and the Camera:*

*Making Prison Documentaries: The Work of Rex Bloomstein*

## Rex Bloomstein

Institute of Criminology Public Seminar Series

Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> November 2012, 5.30pm

Seminar Room B3, Institute of Criminology,  
Sidgwick Avenue, Cambridge, CB3 9DA

*A drinks reception in the basement foyer will follow this seminar for attendees*

Rex Bloomstein began his career as a documentary director with the BBC and has taken a particular interest in imprisonment in this country, questioning its impact on the people sent there and revealing prison life as never seen before. His pioneering documentaries include *The Sentence*, *Release*, a trilogy on *Prisoners Wives*, *Parole Parts One* and *Two*, his British Academy-award winning series *Strangeways*, and *Lifer*, made in the 1980s. In recent years he has returned to the subject with *Strangeways Revisited* (2001) *Lifer*, *Living with Murder* (2003), and *Kids Behind Bars* (2005). He has also produced and directed a number of historical studies for television, such as *Auschwitz and the Allies* and most recently, *An Independent Mind*, on freedom of expression and *This Prison where I Live*, a campaigning film about the imprisonment of Zarganar, Burma's greatest comedian.

Documentaries have been a staple and distinctive form of British television for sixty years, but the climate in which they are now being made, marketed and received is changing. In the era of infotainment and the various forms of reality TV, what does "authentic representation" mean? Considerable debate now takes place on the legitimacy or otherwise of reconstructed scenes, the deliberate faking of meanings and incidents, undercover exposes using hidden surveillance cameras and covert operatives. In this lecture, Rex Bloomstein uses excerpts from his prison films to reveal the technical and moral challenges he faced in attempting to capturing reality in penal settings. He asks, did we change anything for the better, or help improve conditions? Did we increase public awareness when the prison population, the largest in Europe, has doubled? When the tabloids still remain powerfully against prison reform. When as a society still seem as firmly hooked on punishment as ever.

This seminar is free, and is open to all interested in attending, with no ticket required.

If you wish to be added to the seminar mailing list, please contact: Joanne Garner, on: [jf225@cam.ac.uk](mailto:jf225@cam.ac.uk)

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