AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL FILMMAKING

FILM 171F • SPRING 2009

GENERAL INFORMATION

Class Meetings M / W 9:30 AM – 12:00 PM, Communications 113 (Studio D)
Lab W 12:00 – 1:30 PM, Communications 130 (Studio A)

Instructor Irene Lusztig
Communications 111
459.2181
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Spring Office Hours:
W 3:00 – 5:00 PM

Prerequisite Admission to Film 171F is by application only. Preference is given to students who have already been admitted to the production concentration. Applicants must have previously completed Film 170B.

COURSE OVERVIEW

Students will explore autobiography as a filmmaking genre and practice, including experimental, fictionalized, and documentary forms, and emphasizing hybrid forms incorporating combinations of the above approaches. Readings and screenings of work by a range of filmmakers will provide a theoretical context for production work. As a point of departure, the course investigates strategies of (self) representation, reenactment, performance, portraiture, memoir, confession, and diaristic film.

This course will be conducted in a workshop / seminar format, and combines both critical studies and production. All students enrolled in this course will be expected to contribute actively to both theoretical and creative aspects of the course, participating in discussions of readings and screenings as well as in critique of student work. Students will complete two short video projects and a final project, as well as keep an ongoing video diary and written blog. This is an intermediate / advanced course, and as such there is no formal technical instruction in this course. It is expected that students are already comfortable with basic shooting using DV camcorders and nonlinear editing with Final Cut Pro. While technical tutorials may be available outside of class on request, the course assumes basic knowledge of production and postproduction technologies.
Course Materials

You are responsible for providing your own hard drive and miniDV tape stock.

Useful Links

COURSE WEBSITE: http://people.ucsc.edu/~ilusztig/171F
SLUGFILM: http://slugfilm.ucsc.edu/
FILM AND DIGITAL MEDIA WIKI: http://slugfilm.ucsc.edu/wiki/index.php/Main_Page

EXPECTATIONS AND COURSE POLICIES

• Attendance and participation in class is essential. Regular, punctual attendance is non-negotiable. Two unexcused absences will result in a 1/3-grade markdown on the final course grade. Arriving to class more than 15 minutes late is marked as a 1/2 absence. Excused absences should be cleared with me before class. Three unexcused absences will constitute a no pass in the course.

• Thoughtful, articulate, and constructive critique is at the heart of this course. Students are expected to participate actively in in-class critique of their peers’ work.

• Students will be scheduled to show work according to a class calendar. Although different students may be scheduled to bring in work on different days, the calendar dates when you are assigned to screen in class should be regarded as firm deadlines.

• Reading assignments should be completed before class meetings.

• Please do not use laptops and cell phones in class. If you have a disability requiring the use of a laptop for taking notes, please discuss your needs with me in person.

• Equipment and facilities should be treated carefully and conscientiously.

• Students must check their UCSC email and the course website regularly to keep up with course-related announcements and correspondence.

• All creative work must be your own original work made specifically for this course. Plagiarism is an extremely serious offense and is not tolerated.

Required Reading

PDF articles are available for download on course website
PROJECTS

Due dates for short projects will be assigned on an individual basis at the beginning of the semester, such that several people will have work to screen at each class meeting. It is your responsibility to pace yourself with the short pieces to ensure that they are ready to screen on the due dates assigned to you. The short projects are to be thought of as sketches or explorations that are made relatively quickly, in 1-2 weeks.

Short Projects

Short Project 1: Absent Protagonist
Create a self-portrait in which no images of you appear. As a point of departure, the portrait could include spaces, objects, text, found footage, voiceover, or other people. Think about how you define portraiture.

Short Project 2: Memory Times Three
Create three versions of one memory. What remains the same and what diverges? Is one version definitive? What happens when you juxtapose a range of visual strategies for representing memory? This exercise asks you to think about re-enactments, the act of performing memory, and possible meanings of staging in autobiography.

Ongoing / weekly projects

1. **Video Diary**
   Students are asked to keep an ongoing video diary over the course of the quarter. Video diary entries can be filmed using any camera available to you (cell phone camera, cheap video camera, school camera, webcam). Be creative, think about what sort of form your video diary takes, and use it, among other things, to respond to the issues and modes of filmmaking that come up in class. The entries can be as short or as long as you want, but please make sure they are thoughtful and visual (don’t just talk to the camera at the last minute). Think of this exercise as a space to contemplate, sketch, and generate a mode of using video as part of a daily / regular practice – whatever that means to you. You will be asked to present your video diary in class once, as well as to make weekly video posts that are embedded into the class blog. You may use third party flash video host sites like youtube, vimeo.com or blip.tv, to host your videos. **Video diary entries are due every Sunday night by 6 PM.**

2. **Weekly Written Response**
   Students are also asked to post a 1-2 page personal written response to class to the blog on a weekly basis. This is not formal academic writing;
the form can be personal and informal – again think of this as a space for reflection / conversation about the ideas explored in class; you are expected to articulate a thoughtful response to each week’s class, including class screenings, readings, and discussions. Written blog entries are due every Tuesday night by 6 PM.

Final Project

You will be expected to begin developing and refining a proposal for a 5-10 minute final autobiographical project early in the semester. During the second half of the semester, the focus will shift to working in stages through a more complex final project of your devising. You must screen work-in-progress in class at regular intervals as designated on the course calendar. The final project is very open, both in terms of genre (documentary, fiction, experimental or hybrid forms are all welcome) and format (single channel video, new media / web-based project, installation, etc. are all options).

A 1-2 page written proposal and oral proposal presentation are required prior to embarking on the final project. While it is understood (and expected) that projects will change and evolve over the course of shooting and editing, your proposal should address a starting point for considering the following: the form of the piece (what are the formal elements and how might they be combined? Are there any films / artists that have inspired your approach?), content (what is about?), style, structure, methodology and processes to be used (how will it be executed?), exhibition format (how will it ideally be shown?), constraints and parameters, and any materials needed to execute the piece. Sketches are required for all multi-channel or multimedia proposals.

A brief (1-2 pages) written artist’s statement should accompany your finished final project. Both the finished project and written statement are due at the last class meeting. A final screening and critique will be scheduled during exam week; attendance at this final screening and critique is mandatory.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

Your final evaluation and grade in the class will be based on the following:

- Attendance and Participation (includes reading group) ……………………………………15%
- Short Projects …………………………………………………………………………………………………30% (15% each)
- Video Diary ………………………………………………………………………………………………………15%
- Written Blog Posts ……………………………………………………………………………………………15%
- Project proposal and artist statement ……………………………………………………………………5%
- Final Project ……………………………………………………………………………………………………20%
Grading for creative assignments is assessed based on the following criteria: originality, craftsmanship / technical proficiency, aesthetics, structure, whether or not the assignment follows project guidelines, and individual progress over the course of the quarter.

Standards of Evaluation

- **A**: reserved for the rare student who unites a superior sense of craft with an inspiring, imaginative, creative solution to the problems given. Concepts present within the work are original and complex and coupled with similarly challenging and developed themes. Clear style and voice is present in the work.
- **B**: Imaginative grasp on the medium coupled with an above average grasp of craft. Subject is of interest and is largely well rendered but with one or more elements that need greater development. The presence of an assured and original voice is intermittent, though some facet might be derivative or clichéd.
- **C**: Denotes average accomplishment. The assignment has been followed, but needs major development or re-imagining in one or more critical areas. The subject and its treatment may be bland, tired, or strain credibility. Work in a minor way does not follow the guidelines of the assignment. Technical errors, either because of their quantity or kind, are distracting.
- **D**: Work is partially incomplete, incorrect, and/or demonstrates a significant misunderstanding of the concepts underlying the assignment. Technical errors may obscure the content of the work.
- **F**: Work is incomplete, incoherent and/or plagiarized.

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**SPECIAL NEEDS**

If you qualify for classroom accommodations because of a disability, please get an Accommodation Authorization from the Disability Resource Center (DRC) and submit it to me in person outside of class (e.g., office hours) within the first two weeks of the quarter. Contact DRC at 459-2089 or http://drc.ucsc.edu for more information on the requirements and/or process.
SCHEDULE

1  The Autobiographical Impulse

M  March 30
One-minute self-portraits, course overview, introduction; Forming production / reading
groups, assigning project deadlines

Screening:
David Holzman’s Diary (Jim McBride)

W  April 1
Guest instructor, mystery screening

Reading due:
“Autobiographical Subjects” (Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson)
“A Credit to Her Mother” (Annette Kuhn, from Family Secrets)
Excerpt from The Two Kinds of Decay (Sarah Manguso)
“The Shadow” (Sophie Calle)

2  Autobiography and the Avant-garde

M  April 6
Screenings:
Fuses (Carolee Schneemann, 1965, 16mm projection)
Walden: Notes, Diaries, and Sketches (Jonas Mekas 1969 - excerpt)

Reading due:
“The Diary Film” (Jonas Mekas)
“Carolee Schneemann” (interview from A Critical Cinema, Scott MacDonald)

W  April 8
Operations Orientation
Discuss preliminary final project ideas
Discussion of reading, viewing of autobiographical acts

Screenings:
Sung and Tomas (Nina Yuen)
Jollies (Sadie Benning)
Papapapa (Alex Rivera)
Trick or Drink (Vanalyne Green)
The Phantom Limb (Jay Rosenblatt, 2005)
Reading due:

“The End of Autobiography or New Beginnings? (or, Everything You Never Knew You Would Know about Someone You Will Probably Never Meet)” (Michael Renov)


DUE:
- First regular video diary entry due, Sunday April 5th, 6 PM
- First written blog entry due, Tuesday April 7th, 6 PM
- Plus research and select one autobiographical act on the internet; post URL to class blog by Tuesday at 6 PM

3 Responding to Cinema Verité: The Rise of Personal Documentary

M April 13
Screenings:
- Time Indefinite (Ross McElwee, 1993)
- Diary 1973-1983, excerpt (David Perlov)

Reading due:
- “The Convergence of Autobiography and Documentary” (Jim Lane)
- “Ross McElwee” (interview from A Critical Cinema, Scott MacDonald)

W April 15
Begin screening and critique of short projects

4 Home Movies: Remapping Family Space

M April 20
Screenings:
- Oma Rhee (Rosylyn Rhee, 1999)
- Obsessive Becoming (Daniel Reeves, 1995)

Reading due:
- “Domestic Ethnography and the Construction of the ‘Other’ Self” (Michael Renov)
- “Home Movies: What’s Wrong With This Picture?” (Michelle Citron, from Home Movies and Other Necessary Fictions)
- “She’ll Always Be Your Little Girl” (Annette Kuhn, from Family Secrets)

W April 22
Continue screening and critique of short projects, presentation of final project ideas
DUE: Written proposal for final video project, posted to the blog Tuesday 6 PM

5  Private Confessions: Video Diary and Voyeurism

M  April 27
Screenings:
  Love Tapes, Series 18 - excerpt (Wendy Clarke, 1981)
  Electronic Diary: Binge (Lynn Hershman Leeson 1986-1989)
  Gina Kim’s Video Diary - excerpt (Gina Kim, 2002)

Reading due:
  “Video Confessions” (Michael Renov)
  “Scientia Sexualis” (Michel Foucault, from The History of Sexuality)

W  April 29
Screening and critique of video diary excerpts

6  Reinscribing History: The Personal as Political

M  May 4
Screenings:
  History and Memory (Rea Tajiri, 1992)
  November (Hito Steyerl, 2004)

Reading due:
  “From Home to Nation” (Annette Kuhn, from Family Secrets)

W  May 6
Final screening of short projects

7  Performing Memory

M  May 11
Screenings:
  Home Avenue (Jennifer Montgomery, 1989)
  The Audition Tapes (Kerry Tribe, 1998)
  Daughter Rite (Michelle Citron, 1980)

Reading due:
  “Speaking the Unspeakable: How We Talk When Words Fail” (Michelle Citron)
“True Stories” and “Strip Tease” (Sophie Calle)

W May 13
Shooting of final projects is underway; in-class screening and critique of rushes begins

8 Visualizing Identity: Writing from the Margins
M May 18
Screening:
   Tongues Untied (Marlon Riggs, 1990)

Reading due:
   “Notes of a Signifyin’ Snap! Queen” (Marlon Riggs)
   “Marlon Riggs: The Subjective Position of Documentary Video” (Phillip Brian Harper)

W May 20
Screening of in-progress final projects

9 M May 25 – MEMORIAL DAY / NO CLASS

W May 27
Screening of in-progress final projects

10 M June 1
Screening and critique of final project rough cuts

W June 3 – LAST CLASS MEETING
Screening and critique of final project rough cuts contd.

FINAL SCREENING DATE TBA