

Autobiography/Personal Filmmaking/or the Diary Film



In the early 1940s, Maya Deren chose 16mm film as a format for artistic expression, inspired by poetry, dance, myth, and ritual. She is considered the “Mother of the Avant-Garde” in the U.S., producing films and creating a milieu for experimental film funding, exhibition and distribution. In an essay for *Film Culture* entitled ‘Amateur Versus Professional,’

Deren fully embraced the root meaning of the word amateur, pursuing an activity (making films) for love rather than for material gain. Her films were personal and autobiographical in the ways in which they traced an interior journey of the psyche, of the spirit, using the visual language of dreams.

Others followed in her footsteps. Jonas Mekas, a Lithuanian immigrant became an advocate for the avant-garde after Deren’s early death in 1961. He developed his own unique style of filmmaking, using his camera to record daily life and personal impressions. *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania* (1972) documents gatherings of fellow “displaced persons” (driven out of Lithuania by war and repression), street scenes from his new home in NYC, and 100 glimpses of Lithuania taken on a trip to see his mother after 25 years. These “glimpses” were created with short bursts of the camera, conveying a sense of images grabbed and processed through memory. Mekas made a series of diary films and championed the home movie aesthetic. He promoted and wrote about all forms of experimental and underground film, and founded the Anthology Film Archives in 1970, a museum dedicated to the study, preservation and exhibition of avant-garde cinema.

Stan Brakhage was another film practitioner who developed a unique visual style, inspired by Deren and others in the experimental film movement. He developed his personal filmmaking aesthetic through a prolific body of work, 23 of more than 400 short films now collected on a DVD entitled *By Brakhage, An Anthology*, Criterion Collection 2003. He explored vision through both through the camera and through cameraless filmmaking, scratching and painting on film to represent his sense of what he called “closed-eye” vision, the images that one sees when closing the eyes. In a recent interview he spoke about vision:

Seeing includes open-eye, peripheral and hypnagogic vision, along with moving visual thinking, dream vision and memory feedback -- in short, whatever affects the eyes, the brain and the nervous system. I believe that all these have a right to be called seeing since they enable us to inherit the spectrum of on optic and nervous system. (<http://www.smoc.net/mymindseye/naples/song.html>)

Brakhage worked with personal imagery, filming the people and places around him, his wife giving birth in *Window Water Baby Moving*, a walk with his dog in the snow in *Dog Star Man*. These are also examples of personal, autobiographical film.

P. Adams Sitney wrote about the American Avant-Garde in *Visionary Film*, originally published in 1972 and reprinted in 2002. In addressing the diary film, Sitney notes that the diary film does not choose a fictive vantage point to reflect upon the past. Instead, it represents a series of discontinuous presents. This is one approach to the diary film.

MEDIAWORKS – WINTER QUARTER ASSIGNMENTS

involving Autobiography/Personal Filmmaking/or the Diary Film

- 1. Research Paper and**
- 2. Diary Film**

RESEARCH PAPER

Length: 6 – 8 pages, double spaced, 10 – 12 pt. Fonts (Ariel, Times...)

Style: Use MLA style, citing your sources; include bibliography

Outline and Research Journal due week 8. What is a RESEARCH JOURNAL? It is a list of sources you have consulted or plan to consult (a preliminary bibliography and film/videography on your subject) ANNOTATED with notes on what kind of information you have gotten or plan to get from that source. If you already have taken complete research notes for some or all of those sources, you may include them. If you are at the outline stage, however preliminary, please include that as well.

Final Paper due week 9, Tuesday

You will be required to do some research into a filmmaker of your choice who has worked with personal filmmaking, autobiographical documentary, or the diary film. You should investigate the film/video maker's body of work and see as much of it as possible. Your research paper should include references to other writers' analyses of the filmmaker's work, along with your own analysis of their work.

Your research must include books, periodicals (academic journal citations) and internet sources. If no books are available, you must include at least 3 academic journal sources in addition to internet citations. Please see the reference librarians for help. Use paper references in addition to electronic forms. Consult The Film Literature Index (volumes in the Reference Area) which includes cross references by film titles, directors, and subject headings. Go to the following website <http://www.albany.edu/sisp/fatdoc/journallist.htm> to see what journals are indexed (i.e., CAMERA OBSCURA, CINEASTE, JUMP CUT, MILLENNIUM FILM JOURNAL, SCREEN, SIGHT AND SOUND, WIDE ANGLE, etc.)

DIARY FILM or 24 hours = 100 feet



Production Format: 16mm film

Exhibition Format: edited or unedited, silent or with sound, film or DV transfer

Equipment: Bolex 16mm camera

Film Stock: PLUS-X REVERSAL or TRI-X REVERSAL

Length: 2-5 minutes (final cut)

Production Materials: Storyboards, camera logs, due at critique

Production Schedule: This film is due at the end of the quarter. Please pay attention to the syllabus for restricted shooting days: Group B shoots week 7, Group A shoots week 8.

Each person will shoot 1 – 2 rolls of film. Develop a concept and storyboard before shooting. This is your conceptual plan – the actual footage may evolve with attention to seeing, to spontaneous events and documentary impulses.

Stay with the camera for 24 hours. Each person will work with a production assistant who may help you shoot or may simply be a camera assistant, keeping the camera log, checking exposure, etc.

Post-Production: This film may be shown unedited if you developed a coherent conceptual framework that is followed successfully during shooting. You may also shoot with cutting in mind. You may edit on film or schedule a transfer to DV and edit with FCP. You may want to get a small group together to organize a professional transfer (half-hour minimum) but remember, the schedule is TIGHT! You may want to transfer using the Evergreen telecine (quality not guaranteed). Film cutting is also a fun option. The final cut may be silent or include sound. (NOTE: You must DOUBLE SPLICE for screening on a projector and for transfers.)