

## Syllabus

Personal Narratives in Theater and Film (2 units)

Porter 23B, Summer 2016

Five Wednesdays, July 27-August 24

6-9 PM

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Some filmmakers and performers have the audacity to make public the personal details of their daily lives, aiding us in understanding both how the self is constructed and the possibilities for rendering the self in time-based art. The writers/directors/performers we will study all appear in their projects, and in doing so, actively claim the subjectivity of their medium. The monologue performers directly address the audience, breaking the fourth wall typical in multi-character plays, while the filmmakers' presence in their films subvert traditional documentaries in which a disembodied narrator tries to persuade from a particular but invisible point of view. In this class, we will look through the window the filmmaker or performer puts before us, examining the story of his or her life at the same time considering the active process of constituting identity. After taking a critical look at this process of representing the self, we will rely on class participants to create their own personal narratives, the final texts of the course.

In preparation for each meeting, you will typically watch one film outside of class and read related articles on eCommons. Your final project will take the form of a brief autobiographically-inspired personal narrative along with an artist's statement that makes clear your aims and strategies in creating your work, taking into account the course readings and films. Your grade will be based on attendance/participation, two films/readings quizzes, and the final project. While I would like you to come to all class meetings, I understand that illness, emergencies, etc. may preclude perfect attendance. If you are absent, I expect you to view the film we screened on your own. **If you miss more than one of our five classes, you won't earn any credit for the course** since so much of the substance of the course occurs during class meetings (i.e. you must attend four of the five classes in full). You don't need to have had any experience making theater or videos to do well in this class—your grade for your final project will be based primarily on the writing/subject of the piece, though additional credit can be earned for especially strong films or performance works.

### Course Requirements

- 1) Attend class weekly in order to screen the films and participate in discussions. Come to class on time—we will start promptly at 6 PM each Wednesday.
- 2) Watch the additional film that is assigned outside of class and prepare the assigned readings in time to discuss them in class.
- 3) Demonstrate your knowledge of assigned readings and your ability to apply the key ideas to films we have screened on two short exams (there will be no make-up exams if you are absent on one of the test days).
- 4) Complete the personal narrative assignment, a quarter-long project that you will ultimately present in class (live or on video) along with a written artist's statement that demonstrates how your

original work engages with themes raised by some of the films and readings. Participate in the required writing group review and revision via eCommons.

**Workload:** according to Academic Senate guidelines, summer school two-unit courses should require 8-12 hours/week of work, including time spent in the classroom. Since class meetings take 3 hours each week and the required film viewings outside of class usually require another 1.5 hours, reading and writing should average 3.5-7.5 hours/week. In my estimation, the assigned work falls at the low end of this range. In addition to class meetings and your independent viewings, your work for the course includes writing drafts of your personal narrative and participation in a virtual writing group (see the “Developing Your Personal Narrative” assignment).

#### **Grades:**

To receive credit for the course, you must attend a minimum of four full classes of our five (12 of 15 class hours). If you meet the attendance requirement, your grade will be determined as follows:

25% attendance/participation

40% quizzes on reading and films (15% first quiz, 25% second quiz. No make-up quizzes if absent.)

35% personal narrative project (including artist’s statement, drafts, and participation in virtual writing group through eCommons Discussion Forum)

**Accommodation Requests:** If you qualify for classroom accommodations because of a disability, please submit your Accommodation Authorization Letter from the Disability Resource Center (DRC) to me, preferably within the first week of the Summer Session. Contact DRC by phone at [831-459-2089](tel:831-459-2089) or [drc@ucsc.edu](mailto:drc@ucsc.edu) for more information.

**Plagiarism/Cheating/Respect:** Any student found plagiarizing or cheating will receive a failing grade for the course. Students and teacher agree to conduct themselves with respect in the classroom. This includes not talking while anyone else is talking, refraining from using electronic devices during film showings, etc. Students may be asked to leave the classroom (and considered absent for the class) if they disrupt class proceedings.

## **TEXTS**

### **1) Films/Videos**

We will watch more than half of the required film texts in class. You screen the remainder on your own, outside of class meeting times. While the “outside of class” videos are available in McHenry Media Center, know that only one copy of each is in their collection. It is highly recommended that you *subscribe to a DVD mail rental service and/or a suitable streaming service* for easy access to assigned films.

### **2) Readings on eCommons**

All of the readings for the course are available in the Resources section of the PRTR23B eCommons site ([ecommons.ucsc.edu](http://ecommons.ucsc.edu) or via [my.ucsc.edu](http://my.ucsc.edu)). Inside “Resources,” Readings are bundled under a heading by week—read all of the articles posted for each week. You can also find class assignments and other documents in the Resources section.

## Schedule

### WEEK 1

Wednesday, July 27

#### **I Am (Not) My Family, Part 1**

Screened in class:

*Red Diaper Baby* by Josh Kornbluth (2004, 1:35, DVD5966)

#### **The Personal is Political, Part 1**

On your own, screen *Swimming to Cambodia* by Spalding Gray (1987, 1:25, VT2756 or VID1064, Netflix DVD.)

Read Week 1 eCommons articles

### WEEK 2

Wednesday, August 3

#### **I Am (Not) My Family, Part 2**

Screened in class:

Theatrical personal narrative by Marga Gomez (only available in class)

#### **The Personal is Political, Part 2**

On your own, screen *I'm the One That I Want* by Margaret Cho (2000, 1:36, DVD 604 or VT7880, Netflix DVD)

Read Week 2 eCommons articles

#### Personal Narrative Assignment 1: A Story

Following the detailed instructions in “Developing Your Personal Narrative,” write your autobiographical story and upload it to your writing group’s Discussion Forum by **Friday, August 5 at 5 PM.**

#### Personal Narrative Assignment 2: Writing Group Feedback

Following the **guidelines for responses** in the assignment, write to both of your writing groupmates about their personal narratives using eCommons Discussion Forum. Due **Monday, August 8 at 5 PM.**

### WEEK 3

Wednesday, August 10

#### **Quiz #1: Assigned Readings and Films, Weeks 1-2**

#### **I Am (Not) My Family, Part 3**

Screened in class:

*51 Birch Street* by Doug Black (2005, 1:30, DVD5982)

On your own, screen *Wide Awake* by Alan Berliner (2006, 1:20, DVD7553, Netflix DVD, streaming on Amazon Prime.) NOTE: THERE ARE *SEVERAL DIFFERENT FILMS* WITH THIS TITLE. Make sure you watch the one by Alan Berliner.

Read Week 3 eCommons articles

#### Personal Narrative Assignment 3: Your Artist’s Statement and Revised Personal Narrative

Taking into account the feedback you received from your writing group, revise and finalize your personal narrative script by **Monday, August 15 at 5 PM.** It is essential that you also complete an artist’s statement, *as defined in the assignment.*

## **WEEK 4**

Wednesday, August 17

### **I Am (Not) My Family, Part 4**

Screened in class:

*Halving the Bones* by Ruth Ozeki-Lounsbury (1996, 1:10, DVD8455, VT5615)

### **Ruptures in the Documentary Contract?**

On your own, screen *Stories We Tell* by Sarah Polley (2012, 1:48, DVD9795, DVD or streaming on Netflix or Amazon Prime.)

Read Week 4 eCommons articles (Read “Family Viewing” Cineaste article *after* you’ve watched the film—spoilers.)

## **WEEK 5**

Wednesday, August 24

### **Personal Narrative Assignment 4: Present Your Personal Narrative**

Present your Personal Narrative in class (live or video). If you choose the video option, it must be uploaded before class—see Posting handout on eCommons.

### **Quiz #2: Assigned Readings and Films, Weeks 3-4**