FILMSTUD 50Q: The Video Essay: Writing with Video about Media and Culture

Seminar:
Mon/Wed 11:30am-12:50pm
Room: McMurtry 011C
(Experimental Media Art Lab)

Prof. Shane Denson
Pronouns: he/him
Office: McMurtry 318
Office Hours: TBD
shane.denson@stanford.edu

Course Development Assistant:
Rowan Ings
Pronouns: she/her
rings@stanford.edu

Course Description:

In this seminar, we will explore what it means to "write with video," and we will learn to make effective and engaging video essays. Specifically, we will examine formal, aesthetic, and rhetorical strategies for communicating through video, and we will conduct hands-on exercises using digital video editing software to construct arguments, analyses, and interpretations of film, television, video games, online media, art, and culture.

Compared with traditional text-based arguments, the video essay offers a remarkably direct mode of communicating critical and analytical ideas. Video essayists can directly show their viewers what they want them to see. This does not mean, however, that it is any easier than an essay composed with ink and paper. Like the written essay, the new technology introduces its own challenges and choices, including decisions about the organization of space and time, audiovisual materials, onscreen text, voiceover commentary, and visual effects.

By taking a hands-on approach, we will develop our skills with editing software such as Adobe Premiere Pro and Apple's Final Cut Pro while also cultivating our awareness of the formal and narrative techniques employed in cinema and other moving-image media. Through weekly assignments and group critique sessions, we will learn to express ourselves more effectively and creatively in audiovisual media. As a culmination of our efforts, we will assemble a group exhibition of our best video essays for public display on campus.

Please make sure you are registered for the class on Canvas. Handouts and additional course material will be posted there.

Textbooks, Software, Tutorials:

Required readings will be provided electronically. Some additional resources that might be useful to consult include:

[in]Transition: Journal of Videographic Film & Moving Image Studies "Resources" page: http://mediacommons.org/intransition/resources

"Visual Studies" handouts ("Writing about Film," "Writing about Comics and Graphic Novels," etc.) from Duke University's Writing Studio: https://twp.duke.edu/twp-writing-studio/resources-students/specific-disciplines

Keathley, Christian, Jason Mittell, and Catherine Grant. *The Videographic Essay: Practice and Pedagogy*. Open-access ebook: Scalar, 2019: http://videographicessay.org/works/videographic-essay/contents

Corrigan, Timothy. *A Short Guide to Writing about Film*. 9th ed. Boston: Pearson, 2014.

Van den Berg, Thomas, and Miklós Kiss. *Film Studies in Motion: From Audiovisual Essay to Academic Research Video*. Open-access ebook: Scalar, 2016: http://scalar.usc.edu/works/film-studies-in-motion/index

The Audiovisual Essay: Practice and Theory of Videographic Film and Moving Image Studies. Falmer: REFRAME. Online: http://reframe.sussex.ac.uk/audiovisualessay/

Students will also need access to nonlinear video editing software, such as Adobe Premiere Pro or Apple's Final Cut Pro X. We will mainly work with Premiere Pro, as it is installed on the computers in our classroom and in the Group Edit room (which you can sign up to use outside of class meetings). If you would like to install Adobe Creative Cloud on your own computer, it is available on a subscription basis, and a student discount is available through Stanford IT.

Finally, students are directed to the software tutorials available on LinkedIn Learning, formerly Lynda.com (free access for Stanford students with your SUID). You are encouraged to complete the tutorials for Premiere Pro at your earliest convenience. Recommended milestones for completion are indicated in the course schedule.

Course Requirements:

1. Regular attendance and preparation for class. Readings, tutorials, and viewings are to be completed by the date listed on the syllabus.

2. Short written and/or videographic assignments each week. Questions or prompts will be announced in class the week prior. Please be prepared to present your text or video response in class.

3. Midterm videographic assignment – draft version due Week 3, final version due week 5

4. Final videographic assignment – **due by Friday, December 16, 2022, 11:30am (electronic submission)**.

Grading:

Your final grade for the course will be calculated as follows:

20% Class participation and preparation

25% Weekly assignments

25% Midterm project

30% Final project

Access and Accommodations

Stanford is committed to providing equal educational opportunities for disabled students. Disabled students are a valued and essential part of the Stanford community. We welcome you to our class.

If you experience disability, please register with the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). Professional staff will evaluate your needs, support appropriate and reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Academic Accommodation Letter for faculty. To get started, or to re-initiate services, please visit oae.stanford.edu.

If you already have an Academic Accommodation Letter, we invite you to share your letter with us. Academic Accommodation Letters should be shared at the earliest possible opportunity so we may partner with you and OAE to identify any barriers to access and inclusion that might be encountered in your experience of this course.

Course Schedule:

Week 1

09.26.   Introduction: What Is a Video Essay?/Writing with Video
TEXTS: John Bresland, "On the Origin of the Video Essay" –
https://blackbird.vcu.edu/v9n1/gallery/ve-bresland_j/ve-origin_page.shtml

09.28.   Video vs. Text?
TEXTS: Raymond Bellour, "The Unattainable Text" (PDF on Canvas)

Erika Balsom, "Naming the Nebulous: An Excerpt from *Ten Skies*" –
https://mubi.com/notebook/posts/naming-the-nebulous-an-excerpt-from-ten-skies

Week 2

TUTORIALS: Lynda.com Premiere Pro 2020 Essential Training: Introduction; Lesson 2 (Getting to Know Adobe Premiere); Lesson 3 (Setting Up and Organizing Your Media); Lesson 4 (Basic Editing)

10.03.   Database Logics
ASSIGNMENT DUE: Video Introductions

TEXTS: Allison de Fren, "The Critical Supercut: A Scholarly Approach to a Fannish Practice" –
http://www.thecine-files.com/the-critical-supercut-a-scholarly-approach-to-a-fannish-practice/

VIDEOS: Allison de Fren, *Fembot in a Red Dress* (2015, 13 min.) –
http://mediacommons.org/intransition/fembot-red-dress

10.05.   Digital Media and Cultures

TEXTS: Lev Manovich, "Principles of New Media" (excerpt from *The Language of New Media*, 27-48) (PDF on Canvas)

VIDEOS: Max Tohline, *A Supercut of Supercuts: Aesthetics | Histories | Databases* (2021, 2hr. 11min.) – https://openscreensjournal.com/articles/10.16995/os.45/

Week 3

TUTORIALS: Lynda.com Premiere Pro 2020 Essential Training: Lesson 5 (Refining the Edit: Using Trim Tools); Lesson 7 (Basic Audio Editing); Lesson 12 (Working with Titles); Lesson 13 (Finishing and Exporting)

10.10.   Life Online & Troublesome Topics

VIDEOS: James J. Hodge, C. A. Davis, and John Bresland, *Touch* (2018, 20 min.) –
https://www.triquarterly.org/node/303191

10.12.   Critique Session
ASSIGNMENT DUE: Video (2-3 min. draft) reflecting on how computers and digital media change moving-image media and/or our relations to them

Week 4

10.17.   More Troublesome Topics & Desktop Video

TEXTS: Shane Denson, "The Horror of Discorrelation: Mediating Unease in Post-Cinematic Screens and Networks" (PDF on Canvas)

VIDEOS: *Unfriended* (Levan Gabriadze, dir., 2014)

10.19.   Desktop Documentary

ASSIGNMENT DUE: Letter (1 page) detailing a troublesome topic

VIDEOS: Desktop Documentaries Tutorial with Kevin B. Lee – https://vimeo.com/500495238

Chloé Galibert-Laîné, *Watching the Pain of Others* (2019, 31 min.) – http://mediacommons.org/intransition/watching-pain-others

Week 5

TUTORIALS: Lynda.com Premiere Pro 2020 Essential Training: Lesson 6 (Additional Editing and Organizational Techniques); Lesson 8 (Working with Stills and Graphics); Lesson 9 (Working with Effects); Lesson 10 (Manipulating Clip Speed)

10.24.   Screening of Student Videos
ASSIGNMENT DUE: Elaboration (1 additional page) on a troublesome topic

Screening of revised videos on how computers and digital media change moving-image media and/or our relations to them

10.26.   Lab Time/Discussion and Consultation on Projects

No required readings or viewing, but continue to view examples and collect materials for your project. Class time devoted to discussion, consultation, and working on projects.

Project partners to be announced by Friday, Oct. 22.

Week 6

TUTORIALS: How to Datamosh, Part 1 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tYytVzbPky8); How to Datamosh on a Mac in 2021 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Wruh4RLE04); Datamoshing 101 (https://www.premiumbeat.com/blog/datamoshing-make-footage-look-trippy/)

10.31.   Glitches, Datamoshing, and Databending

TEXTS: Hugh S. Manon and Daniel Temkin, "Notes on Glitch" – http://worldpicturejournal.com/WP_6/PDFs/Manon.pdf

VIDEOS: Jordan Schonig, "The Aesthetics of Compression Glitches" (2020, 6 min.) – https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S2At5NF6h54

Cory Arcangel and Paper Rad, *Super Mario Movie* (2005, 15 min.) – https://coryarcangel.com/things-i-made/2005-001-super-mario-movie

11.02.   Lab Time/Discussion and Consultation on Projects
ASSIGNMENT DUE: Video response (3-5 min.) to partner's letter

Week 7

11.07.   Traversals in Algorithmic Space

TEXTS: Hito Steyerl, "In Defense of the Poor Image" – https://www.e-flux.com/journal/10/61362/in-defense-of-the-poor-image/

VIDEOS: Peggy Ahwesh, *She Puppet* (2001, 15 min.) – https://ubu.com/film/ahwesh_puppet.html

Shane Denson, "Participatory Poverty (after Hito Steyerl)" (2015, 12 min.) – https://www.blog.shanedenson.com/?p=2597

11.09.   Lab Time/Discussion and Consultation on Projects
ASSIGNMENT DUE: Zoom with partner (record for possible use later), providing feedback on projects

The Video Essay (Fall 2022)

Week 8

11.14.   Forms of Interactivity

VIDEOS: Jeremy Mendes, Leanne Allison, and the NFB, *Bear 71* (2012/2017, ca. 20 min.) – https://bear71vr.nfb.ca/

Jonathan Harris and Greg Hochmuth, *Network Effect* (2015, variable duration) – http://number27.org/networkeffect

Noah Levenson, *Stealing UR Feelings* (2019, 6 min.) – https://stealingurfeelin.gs

Shane Denson, "Don't Look Now: Paradoxes of Suture" (2016, ca. 10 min.) – http://mediacommons.org/intransition/2016/10/06/don-t-look-now-paradoxes-suture (full screen version here: https://shanedenson.com/stuff/dont-look-now-javascript/full-screen.html)

Shane Denson, "The Algorithmic Nickelodeon" (2019, 17 min.) – https://www.blog.shanedenson.com/?p=5025

11.16.   Critique/Feedback Session
ASSIGNMENT DUE: Video map/walkthrough of project

Thanksgiving Break

No Classes 11.21.-11.25.

Week 9

11.28.   Deformative Criticism

ASSIGNMENT DUE: Feedback on partner's video map

TEXTS: Kevin L. Ferguson, "Slices of Cinema: Digital Transformation as Research Strategy," *The Arclight Guide to Media History and the Digital Humanities*, eds. Charles R. Acland and Eric Hoyt. Falmer: REFRAME/Project Arclight, 2016. 270-299. Ebook available online: http://projectarclight.org/book/

VIDEOS: Kevin L. Ferguson, "Volumetric Cinema" (online: http://mediacommons.futureofthebook.org/intransition/2015/03/10/volumetric-cinema)

Gregg Biermann, "Emergent Phenomena" (online: https://www.fandor.com/films/emergent_phenomena)

Gregg Biermann, various works (online: https://www.fandor.com/filmmakers/director-gregg-biermann-652)

11.30.   Lab Time/Discussion and Consultation on Projects

No required readings or viewing, but continue to view examples and collect materials for your project. Class time devoted to discussion, consultation, and working on projects.

Week 10

12.05.   Screening of Final Projects
ASSIGNMENT DUE: Final Project, Rough Cut (Video)

12.07.   Screening of Final Projects
ASSIGNMENT DUE: Final Project, Rough Cut (Video)

Finals Week

12.16. Final Project Due by 11:30am!

Exhibition

January 2022 (exact dates TBA): Public screening and/or exhibition of videos!