

Framing the Self: The Autobiographical "Turn" in CFP: Framing the Self: The Autobiographical "Turn" in

Robin Curtis

CALL FOR CONTRIBUTORS

FRAMING THE SELF:

The Autobiographical 'Turn' in Germanophone Documentary

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In recent years, some of the most compelling, engaging, and innovative non-fiction film and video has been generated from a very personal point of view. The first-person stance in filmmaking is hardly new in the history of international documentary, nor is reflexivity about the technological apparatus which often attends such authorial endeavors. However, changing media (interactive, multi-media, digital camera, mobile phones, etc.) have expanded the possibilities for framing the self, and indeed, for pursuing diverse agendas pertaining to personal identity exploring intricacies of family relations, retracing the individual's interpellation by local and national historical events, mapping alterities of sexuality, ethnicity, race and culture, or abnegating the very possibility of a delimited self. In many

cases, such endeavors have resulted in the merging or 'nesting' of older, obsolete, technologies within newer ones.

As the status of the individual witness behind and before the camera gains global currency in both feature-length documentaries as well as independent experimental work, it behooves us as scholars to take stock of the cultural specificity of these autobiographical engagements. Is the self and its representation in audio-visual form truly so constant that interpretive models developed in particular cultural contexts, such as the North American, can simply be mapped onto films from other cultures

Existing

scholarship to date has seldom taken up this challenge. The German-speaking countries, in particular, have developed nationally distinct memory cultures addressing overarching legacies such as that of the Third Reich, the post-war division of Germany, and distinct political and economic regimes. They moreover trace a singular relationship to social and political categories of ethnicity, and the discourse (or lack thereof) of multiculturalism. From a production point of view, they also boast unique institutional structures and traditions in support of avant-garde and independent film, as well as commercial filmmaking.

The anthology *Framing the Self* is unique in establishing the central European nexus of Germanophone languages, cultures, and national histories, i.e. that of (East and West) Germany, Switzerland, and Austria, as a point of departure and of possible territorial return. We welcome rigorous and engaging scholarly essays that take stock of the remarkable proliferation of autobiographical documentary within these national arenas or spanning transnational pathways established through migration, exile, travel, or tourism. In acknowledgement of the increasing stylistic heterogeneity that characterizes contemporary non-fiction filmmaking, we understand the term 'documentary' to encompass both narrative-driven feature-length work as well as experimental modes that engage creatively with the lived world. We encourage thoughtful engagement with existing discourses on autobiography in the domain of literary theory (e.g. post-structuralist, deconstructionist, materialist, or feminist approaches) in combination with a recognition of the specific constraints and opportunities the audiovisual medium (whether analog or digital) poses for artists who 'cross the frame' to position themselves within an interpersonal, familial, national, or transnational tableau. While filmic autobiography has been taken up by contemporary theorists such as Michael Renov, Jim McBride, and Elisabeth Bruss, this volume refutes the assumption underlying some of this work, that theorization of the self and its visual representation can proceed outside of cultural contextualization.

We recognize that, in some instances, there may be implicit challenges to establishing a given audiovisual text as discernibly autobiographical. The

extensive documentary legacy of the GDR, for example, evinces virtually no engagement with the autobiographical self; alternately, within the avant-garde tradition, the self may elude definition or strive towards discursive displacement. In general, where is the authoring self to be located

And how has the auto/biographical stance undercut inherited distinctions between public and personal archival endeavors

What new

understandings are emerging regarding the relationship between public event and private experience; canonical historiographies and subjective memories; national character and personal identity; and the interrelation between family and the self

Recent innovations in recording technologies have also prompted experimentation with narrative form, the terms of authorship, performativity, confessionality, narcissism, and furthermore explore the political efficacy of inscribing the self. Such analytical considerations naturally assume a very different valence in the North American context than in the European; North American scholarship should display a fluency in recognizing and negotiating these differences.

This anthology will be published in English; however, some funds are available for non-native English authors outside North America requesting assistance with the translation or editing of original work. Negotiations are in progress for publication in one of several university press series that showcase German-speaking cinemas. We welcome queries or clarifying questions from potential contributors at any time.

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