

Stevens Institute of Technology  
College of Arts and Letters

**HAR 320A - VIDEO I**

**Fall 2008**

**Monday, 12-4 pm, Morton 201**

**Instructor: Mariam Ghani**

**Office: Morton 206**

**Office hours: Monday, 4:30-5:30 pm**

**Telephone extension: n/a**

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**Course description:** This course is an introduction to video production using current video technologies and to video art as a time-based art medium. Traditional camera, sound, and lighting techniques in production are taught, non-linear editing is introduced, and key theoretical, historical and aesthetic approaches to video art are surveyed. Students learn to conceptualize, pitch, plan and execute projects and engage with a variety of video art genres, including experimental, narrative, and documentary forms. This course does not fulfill general humanities requirements and may be taken as a free elective. Open to ARTC majors and non-majors. **No prerequisites.**

**CAL goals applicable to this course:**

- 1) Promote a fuller understanding of the traditional humanities and social sciences through the study of science and/or technology.
- 2) Increase awareness of cultures and societies other than one's own.
- 3) Improve writing and/or public speaking skills.
- 4) Increase one's love of learning for its own sake.
- 5) Develop leadership and team skills.

**Course objectives:**

During this course, students will:

- develop both a theoretical and practical knowledge of video. This includes a thorough grounding in production and postproduction techniques and understanding of their formal and conceptual uses, as demonstrated in projects, critiques, screenings, and readings.
- gain an understanding of the video camera as an art-making tool.
- become more critical observers of media and develop the medium-specific vocabulary needed to critique time-based work.
- continue to refine the image-making skills of composition, color and form, developed in foundation courses, while expanding them to include the fourth dimension of time.

**Course structure:** Video I is a studio course that meets weekly for four hours. We will split the classes between discussion, screening, critique, technical demos and lab time, with one break. Course objectives will be met through graded projects, critiques, demonstrations,

readings, discussions, lectures, and exposure to time-based art. Students will be required to present their own work verbally, as well as constructively comment on the work of their classmates, during class critiques of projects in progress. Remember that participation in critique is the best indicator of your class participation, which is part of your grade. Reading assignments include specific requirements for written responses. We will take one field trip to Manhattan to see either a relevant museum exhibition or a series of gallery video shows. A response paper will be due after the field trip, and a written treatment will be required for the final project. If an assignment is produced collaboratively, all group members are expected to contribute equally to the planning, execution, and reporting of the work, and you will be asked to submit a written evaluation of each group member's contribution. All writing submitted for this class must be typed and properly formatted (when in doubt, use MLA style). Reading responses may be neatly and legibly handwritten.

Keep a course workbook to develop your ideas, to document your experiments and results, and to take notes during lectures, demonstrations and shoots. Document all critiques throughout the semester, and pay special attention to keeping a written record of technical problems you encounter while shooting and editing and how you resolve them. The instructor is available during the semester for "in progress" critiques during office hours and by appointment, and for technical help via email or Skype (username ghanimariam).

**Office hours/meetings:**

Morton 206 is an office shared by several ARTC faculty members, which does not have a phone extension installed. I will usually have office hours on Mondays from 4:30-5:30 pm. Please send me an email if you are planning to stop by my office hours so that I can confirm that I will be in the office that day. You can also reach me by email if you have questions or concerns about the class. We will schedule individual meetings at the 2/3 mark of the semester to discuss your final project proposals and your progress in the course. If you are having any difficulties in the course, please do not hesitate to ask for extra help.

**Lab:** This course requires a considerable amount of time outside of class to conceptualize, plan, shoot and edit assigned projects. All students must have a user account to use the Mac lab, which may be obtained in Leib 104 (contact [moriarty@cs.stevens.edu](mailto:moriarty@cs.stevens.edu)). The lab is open on a regular schedule with lab attendants present (see schedule posted on the door of the Mac lab). The lab may be available when another class is in progress at the discretion of the individual instructor. A critical aspect of maintaining the functionality of the lab is to report any technical problems to lab attendants and your instructor. When reporting, make sure you indicate on which computer the problem is occurring, what software was running, and exactly what steps caused the error. While your instructor will make every effort to ensure that the lab is serving the needs of this course, the upkeep of the lab and the resolution of technical issues are not, in fact, part of your instructor's job; the lab is currently not supported by ISSA so your instructors are trying to fill the gaps as best they can. **Remember:** you may only have food and drink in the lab if you keep it in the back, away from the computers and any unshelved equipment. Eating and drinking in the lab is a privilege that will be revoked if abused.

**Assignments:** Your assignments are due the following week (unless otherwise noted), for an in-class critique, during which students are required to respond in formal and contextual terms. Since you are not required to hand in work until the mid-term and final portfolio reviews, you have the opportunity to integrate the constructive criticism received in critique into your assignments before submitting portfolios for review. Late portfolios will not be accepted.

**Please note** that graphic and/or explicit images and/or subject matter may be part of the artworks shown and discussed in this course; any concerns regarding this matter should be brought to the instructor's attention at the very beginning of the course.

**Materials:**

- Notebook (bound) and pencil/pen (always bring to class)
- Mini-DV tapes
- DVD-Rs or CD for "portfolios"

FireWire drive – required for ARTC students, optional for non-majors

Note that we recommend that all students planning to continue working with video purchase a PC **and** Mac compatible FireWire drive on which to store all their media before beginning work with Final Cut Pro. LaCie or Western Digital drives are recommended by ARTC.

**Required texts:**

Handouts distributed in class & online

*Editing Video in the Media Arts Center (MAC) Lab: A Quick Start Guide* – PDF download

**Online materials for this course are linked from the online version of the syllabus at [www.kabul-reconstructions.net/mariam/video1syllabus.html](http://www.kabul-reconstructions.net/mariam/video1syllabus.html)**

A list of recommended online and library resources for this course is also linked from the online syllabus.

**Equipment Checkout:**

You are required to sign an equipment waiver at the beginning of the semester. You will need to be registered for this course and submit the signed equipment waiver before you can check out equipment. The checkout system temporarily in place requires that students in the course be divided into production groups (usually groups of 3). One member of the group must check out all equipment needed by all members of the group to complete assignments for the week from the instructor at the end of class. You must then make arrangements amongst yourselves to hand off the equipment during the week so that all members of the group have time to complete the assignment. The equipment must be returned to the lab at the beginning of the next week's class so that the instructor can check that all the equipment is still in good order. If equipment is not returned, or is returned broken, all members of the group will be held liable. So please, keep track of the equipment entrusted to your group at all times.

Please note: Do not keep equipment in your car. Do not keep it in hot or dusty areas. Always check your equipment when checking it out to make sure it works and has all of the parts you

are signing for, as you are responsible for everything you sign for. If a piece of equipment is damaged, tell us immediately so that it can be fixed.

There are five production packages available for your use. Each package includes a camera, tripod, and a lavalier microphone. We have two lighting kits and two shotgun mics with a boom (shared among all groups) that can be checked out from the cabinet. You will be responsible for the scheduling and budgeting of your time and equipment usage. Please do not check out any equipment before it has been introduced in class, unless you have received prior authorization from an instructor.

According to the terms of the required equipment waiver:

YOU WILL BE LIABLE AND RESPONSIBLE FOR THE COST OF REPAIRS DUE TO DAMAGE BEYOND NORMAL USE INCURRED DURING USE OF EQUIPMENT.

HANDLE ALL EQUIPMENT WITH UTMOST CARE. ELECTRONIC EQUIPMENT IS VERY SENSITIVE AND FRAGILE. DELIBERATE AND NEGLIGENT USE COULD RESULT IN LOWERING YOUR GRADE OR LEGAL ACTION BY THE UNIVERSITY.

Report any and all malfunctions, damage, problems, etc. with media equipment immediately to the appropriate person in charge. You will also be penalized if you keep equipment beyond the end of your check-out period. ALL EQUIPMENT MUST BE RETURNED BY THE LAST DAY OF THE SEMESTER. ABSOLUTELY NO EXCEPTIONS.

Please remember that it is your responsibility to make sure everyone has equal access to functioning equipment. This is part of your grade.

**Writing center:** If you are having difficulty with writing assignments for this course, please see me during my office hours, or take advantage of the tutoring available in the Writing and Communications Institute (drop-in hours at the Humanities Resource Center, M-Th, 3-5, Morton 210).

**Adding and/or dropping the course:**

Consult the registrar's website (<http://www.stevens.edu/registrar/>) for information re: add/drop policies.

**Honor board policies:**

Enrollment into the undergraduate class of Stevens Institute of Technology signifies a student's commitment to the Honor System. It is the responsibility of each student to become acquainted with and to uphold the ideals set forth in the Honor System Constitution. Specific student responsibilities include: Maintaining honesty and fair play in all aspects of academic life at Stevens; Writing and signing the pledge, in full, on all submitted academic work; Reporting any suspected violations to an Honor Board member or to the Dean of Student Development; Cooperating with the Honor Board during investigations and hearings.

The pledge signifies that the work submitted by a student is indeed his/her own. There is one designated pledge to be used for tests, homework assignments, lab reports, and computer projects. The pledge shall be written in full and signed by the student on all submitted academic work. Any references used (including texts, tutors, classmates, etc.) should be

listed below the written pledge: “I pledge my honor that I have abided by the Stevens Honor System.”

**Students with disabilities:**

If you require special accommodations due to a disability, or if you need individual arrangements should the building be evacuated, you must inform the office of Student Counseling and Psychological Services, Dr. Terence Hannigan, Director, in the Howe Center, 7<sup>th</sup> floor (x5177), and ask that he inform the instructor as early as possible.

**EVALUATION**

**Course criteria**

Quality of ideas, quality of work executed and ability to articulate and explain your thought processes.

Amount of time, effort, and thought given to coursework.

Technical skills mastered.

Understanding of the historical and theoretical material presented, and ability to relate that material to an overall understanding of digital and experimental media, as built up through other coursework and in your own practice.

Willingness to explore and take genuine risks in your work as an artist.

Participation in all levels of course activities.

**Department criteria:**

GRADE	QUALITY	EXPLORATION	WORK	DISCUSSIONS	ATTENDANCE
<b>A</b>	<b>Outstanding</b>	Insightful, generous, energetic	Excellent form & content	Always prepared for class, makes intelligent & considered contributions	Always present, work in on time
<b>B</b>	<b>Good</b>	Inquisitive, engaged	Good form & content	Usually prepared for class, able to make interesting contributions	Always present, work in on time
<b>C</b>	<b>Average</b>	Just sufficient	Holds together, but unconvincing	Not always prepared, only able to make obligatory contributions	Misses some classes, work sometimes late
<b>D</b>	<b>Poor</b>	Limited, formulaic	Work thrown together just before class	Only makes very limited contributions	Excessive absences, work late & incomplete
<b>F</b>	<b>Unsatisfactory</b>	Virtually none	Virtually none	Makes almost no contribution	Absent most of the time

**Grading policies:**

Your grade will be based on your mid-term and final video portfolios comprising a number of short assignments made during the semester, and a final project. For each project you will receive two grades of equal weight—one for concept and one for technique—that will be averaged into one grade. Your writing assignments are graded for completeness and punctuality, with extra points for style.

Grade allocation is as follows:

- midterm portfolio 40%
- final portfolio 20%
- final project 20%
- class participation 10%
- treatments 5%
- reading responses 5%

Assignments will be graded on a scale of four. Your final course grade will be determined as follows: 4=A; 3.67=A-; 3.33=B+; 3=B; 2.67=B-; 2.33=C+; 2=C; 1.67=C-; 1.33=D+; 1=D; .67=D-; below this is an F. Once issued, all grades are final and will not be changed unless a student hands in a substantially revised project. I reserve the right to determine borderline grades on a case-by-case basis. If you have questions about how grades are assigned in this course, please bring them up at the beginning of the semester, not the end.

**Attendance policies :** Your attendance will be factored into your class participation grade. Unexcused absences and unexcused lateness will reduce your participation grade incrementally. If you have a valid reason for your absence and/or lateness, send me an email before the beginning of class.

## SCHEDULE

### A note on changes in the syllabus:

The instructor may modify or alter the syllabus to make up for lost classes due to weather conditions or health, when she feels it would help to attain course objectives, or for any other such reasons. If you do not attend class, it is your responsibility to find out if any changes were made.

Monday, August 25<sup>th</sup>

### Week 1 – Introduction + Overview

Review syllabus + class structure, lab + equipment checkout protocol

Skill self-assessment

**Technical:** introduction to the production package and discussion of camera functions: pan, tilt, zoom, exposure

**Screening:** *Words in Your Face*, dir. Mark Pellington, 1991 (excerpt); *Children of Men*, dir. Alfonso Cuarón, 2006 (excerpt); *Serene Velocity*, Ernie Gehr, 1970 ([ubu.com/film/gehr.html](http://ubu.com/film/gehr.html))

**Discussion:** Introduce formal parameters of video: image, sound, text; shot, transition, sequence. The meaning of absence vs. presence of various elements. What is a shot? Where does a shot begin and end? How are they framed and structured? How do we classify them? When do similar shots (CU, WS) serve different purposes, e.g. in different genres?

### Due next class (in 2 weeks):

**Reading #1** - Handout from Chapter 3: "Using Your Camera," *Video Production Handbook*, 3rd edition, by Gerald Millerson. **Reading response:** Answer the following questions: 1. Describe some techniques to keep a hand-held camera steady. 2. How does the author suggest you frame a moving subject with a moving camera? With a still camera? 3. What is POV? 4. Describe at least two of the "rules" for framing people outlined in this chapter.

**Project #1: Single Shot** – Find and bring in to class an example (from TV, film, an artwork or the web) of a shot that is particularly memorable or effective as a single shot. Be prepared to explain your choice. Once you've found your example, check out a camera package and create your own single shot. While your examples may contain camera movement, you may want to restrict your own creations to fixed camera positions. Your shot can be from 30 seconds to 3 minutes long, but the duration must be justified by the elements within the shot. Cue your tapes to present your shot in class.

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Monday, September 1<sup>st</sup>

**Labor Day Holiday – No classes**

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Monday, September 8<sup>th</sup>

### Week 2 – The Camera-Eye

The camera's presence is never neutral. Observation always affects the object observed. How can we classify the different positions a camera can take with respect to its subjects, objects and operators? Hidden, Passive, Active. Subjective/Objective.

**Screening:** *Semiotics of the Kitchen*, Martha Rosler, 1975; *Early Work 1972-76*, William Wegman; *Man with a Movie Camera*, Dziga Vertov, *Kino Eye*, 1924

(ubu.com/film/vertov.html) / *Man with a Movie Camera*, 1925 (excerpt), Andy Warhol, Stan Brakhage.

**Discussion:** How do these artists address the presence of the camera – as directors, and in some cases as performers? Where do they situate the audience -- as voyeur, passive observer, or confidant? How do their formal strategies serve their concepts?

**Technical:** Intro to sound recording for video, camera movement with and without tripod, focus shifts, advanced settings & image control menu items on camera

**Due next week:**

**Reading #2:** “Dziga Vertov,” by Jonathan Dawson, *Senses of Cinema*

<http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/directors/03/vertov.html>

**Reading response:** List at least 2 movements and 3 artists / directors who were influenced by Vertov’s Kino-Eye Group, according to the article.

**Project #2: Real-Time Video:** How is video different from film? We often associate the look of video with the concept of “live” transmission, or with the “video record” of surveillance for evidence, voyeurism, or the desire to capture and control. For example: live news footage, amateur porn, court trials, roadside carnage, store and institutional surveillance, webcams.

For this assignment you will explore the idea of “real-time” video recording. Choose an activity (emphasis on “active”) and document it continuously for 5 minutes with your camera, without stopping or starting the recording. Decide on the target of your camera’s eye and keep that target constantly in view, while also moving around the subject and re-framing it.

Review what you’ve recorded and think about how the presence of the camera and nature of framing change the subject, then try shooting for another 5 minutes without stopping.

Continue until you create a 5-minute real-time recording that satisfies you, then cue up your tape to present it in class.

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Monday, September 15<sup>th</sup>

**Week 3 – Composition: Structure Within the Shot**

**Screening:** Shirley Clarke (ubu.com/film/clarke.html), Bruce Nauman, *Stamping in the Studio* (1968, excerpt), Bill Viola, Sam Taylor-Wood (ubu.com/film/tw.html, *Still Life & A Little Death*, 2001-02), Peter Fischli & David Weiss, *The Way Things Go*, 1987 (excerpt)

**Discussion:** What makes an interesting video composition? Visual criteria of form, color, structure, and relationships of balance, harmony or contrast; fourth dimension of time; how sound affects perceptions of the image

**Technical:** Intro to the light kit

**Due next week:**

**Reading #3:** Bruce Block, *The Visual Story: Seeing the Structure of Film, TV and New Media* (2001), excerpts. **Reading response:** Explain the principles of contrast and affinity, with examples. How can you create contrast and affinity within a fixed shot? A moving shot?

From shot to shot? Explain the different depth cues, with examples. Describe four ways to create movement in video. What is the “continuum of movement”?

**Project #3: Composition in Time** - Experiment with the controls of the camera and the visual elements around you to create a formal composition, a still life that changes over time, either on its own or through your manipulation of the camera, within the boundaries of one shot. Remember that you also have sound. You may bring in up to four different versions of



the composition, but the total duration of what you screen should not exceed five minutes. Select and cue up the most successful for screening in class, and be prepared to explain how you achieved your effects and why you believe it to be formally successful.

Monday, September 22<sup>nd</sup>

#### **Week 4 – Structure from Shot to Shot**

**Screening:** Maya Deren, *At Land* (1944), Hollis Frampton, *Nostalgia* (1971) and *Zorns Lemma* section 2 (1972); Bill Viola, *Anthem* (1983, excerpt); Steve James & Peter Gilbert, *Hoop Dreams* (1994, excerpt); current prime-time TV excerpts

**Lecture/discussion:** Structuring a sequence: shot-to-shot vs. overarching structures; continuity and illusions of continuity; narrative conventions & non-narrative formal systems (e.g. associative, categorical, abstract, rhetorical, theme & variation, mathematical); interactions between conceptual & formal structures; genre conventions

#### **Due next week:**

**Reading #4:** Lighting & Mic handouts

**Project #4: In-Camera Edit** - Film a 1-5 minute sequence of shots that tell a story or convey the mood of the observer without dialogue, through the objects, settings or scenes observed and the order in which they are presented to the viewer. You can only edit in-camera, so you need to plan your sequence before you record the first shot. Cue your tapes to the beginning of the sequence and bring your tapes to class. Be prepared to explain your storytelling strategies and your formal choices.

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Monday, September 29<sup>th</sup>

#### **Week 5 – Sound + Lighting**

**Screening:** *Visions of Light* – 1992 doc featuring great DPs; Robby Muller's DV cinematography; Walter Murch on sound mixing

**Technical:** Different mic purposes and recording patterns; lighting techniques for interiors and exteriors

#### **Due next week:**

**Project #5: Portrait** - Create a 1-3 minute video portrait of someone you know. (You can pair off and portray each other if you choose.) Your portrait may be narrative, documentary, experimental, or performative – and it may depict your subject's surface, how you imagine their internal world, or how they describe themselves. Your only restrictions are: 1) you must shoot indoors and use lights; and 2) you must use either a lavalier or shotgun microphone, as appropriate, to record your sound.

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Monday, October 6<sup>th</sup>

#### **Week 6 – Medium + Genre**

**Screening:** Ryan Trecartin, *I-Be Area* (2006)

**Discussion:** basic genres: 1) documentary 2) narrative 3) performance 4) appropriation 5) installation/ sculpture 6) experimental – including/crossing all other genres; film vs. video vs. new media platforms. How are medium and genre different? How do they intersect? How do they determine our context for viewing work and the interpretive models we apply to media we encounter?

**Technical:** quick + dirty digitize + export/author techniques

**Due next week:**

**Reading #5:** Screenplay for *Film About A Woman Who ...* PDF download from [http://www.ubu.com/film/rainer\\_woman.html](http://www.ubu.com/film/rainer_woman.html)

**Assemble midterm portfolio** – Projects 1-5, delivered either as a video DVD or as QuickTime movies on a data DVD

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Monday, October 13<sup>th</sup>

**Fall recess – class meets on Tuesday, October 9<sup>th</sup> instead**

**Week 7 – The Concept**

**Screening:** Yvonne Rainer, *Film About A Woman Who ...* (1974), Peter Campus, *Three Transitions* (1973)

**Lecture/demo: How to plan a major project:** Workflow from idea to finished project:

- Conceptualization in words vs. images
- Treatments (proposals) – standard formatting
- Storyboards – multiple formats
- Scripts and shooting scripts
- Production management; assignment of roles & division of labor
- Planning for post-production during production
- Post-production
- Output / presentation
- Production books / portfolios
- The pitch, “logline” or “elevator version”: how to talk about a project in three sentences or less

**Due next week:**

**Project #6: The Wildest Idea** - Create, in the form of a visual storyboard or a written treatment in one of the formats demonstrated today, a proposal for a project that would bring to the screen your boldest, strangest, craziest, most terrifying and unlikely idea. It should be a project that you do NOT have the means to realize (at least not yet). Rather, this assignment is an invitation to dream beyond the possible and familiar – to exercise your imaginations in the realm of the unknown. Your proposal must, however, show us that your project will not only have a wild idea but also a strong artistic intention, as evidenced by a story arc or a defined non-narrative structure, a clear formal strategy, and a thoughtful approach to questions of medium and genre. Storyboards and treatments will be collected by the instructors next week, but you must also prepare an “elevator version” of your proposal to present in class.

**Plus: brief treatment/storyboard for team project; be prepared to pitch in class**

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Monday, October 20<sup>th</sup>

**Week 8 – Team Production**

**Class shoot:** Time permitting, we’ll pick a concept from the brief treatments you pitch, a script and then shoot it several times, with students rotating roles (cast, cameras A & B, boom, technical director, director, set manager, lighting, sound, etc.)

**Due next week BY EMAIL:**

**Final project proposal:** Create a written treatment, using the format discussed in class, which explains your concept, formal strategy, technical means, and practical plan for your final project. You may include storyboards, installation sketches, or scripts, as appropriate to the genre and format of the project. Since treatments will be going through critique and instructor approval before moving into production, the more clearly your ideas are communicated through your materials, the more painless the process will be! If you're using visuals to supplement your written treatment, you may also want to photocopy them and hand them out for your presentation in class. Also keep in mind that final projects should not exceed 10 minutes (five is perfectly adequate, though). A good rule of thumb when planning a project is that each page of a narrative script will translate to one minute of screen time in the final cut, while each hour of documentary footage can often be reduced to five minutes or less after editing. **Plus: make an appointment for individual meeting with instructor**

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Monday, October 27<sup>th</sup>

### **Week 9 – Field Trip**

#### **Due next week:**

**2-page response paper:** Describe in detail 1-3 videos viewed on the field trip. Discuss the artists' formal and conceptual strategies in relation to what you have learned this semester.

#### **Production schedule for final project**

#### **Begin shooting final project**

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Monday, November 3<sup>rd</sup>

### **Week 10 – Intro to Post Production**

**Lecture/demo:** Overview of production to post workflow; introduction to Final Cut Pro's environment & capabilities; log and capture, timeline

**Screening:** Chris Marker, *La Jetée* (1963), James Broughton, *This is It* (1971), Mona Hatoum, *Measures of Distance* (1988)

**Discussion:** How does the juxtaposition of sound, and in particular voiceover, and still or moving images function in both of these works? What structures and strategies are used by the artists and why?

#### **Due next week:**

**Project #7: Voice On, Voice Off** - Digitize project #2 and add a voiceover that changes the viewer's perception of the original material.

#### **Finish production on final project**

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Monday, November 10<sup>th</sup>

### **Week 11 – Editing**

**Screening:** Bruce Conner, *America is Waiting*, 1982

#### **Due next week:**

**Project #8:** Re-cut either project #4 or project #5, whichever will be the most significantly changed by applying nonlinear edits.

#### **Digitize all footage for final project**

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Monday, November 17<sup>th</sup>

**Week 12 – Final Projects Lab**

**Due next week:**

**Rough cut of final project; be prepared to present for critique**

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Monday, November 24<sup>th</sup>

**Week 13 – Rough Cut Critique**

**Due next week:**

**Final portfolio:** Projects 7 & 8 as QuickTimes on a data DVD, plus final printouts of your wildest idea and group project treatments and your final project proposal (including treatment, storyboards, production schedule and/or script, as applicable).

**Final cut of final project exported to QuickTime and ready to hand in; be prepared to screen in class**

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Monday, December 1<sup>st</sup>

**Week 14 – Final project presentation**