

Katya Gorker

Teaching Philosophy:

As a Russian immigrant, arriving in the US at the age four, I have always been sensitive to language and the complexities of translating personal experiences. My introduction to film at an early age inspired me to think about my own life as a visual narrative made up of a series of discrete fragments that I could integrate in a meaningful way. Deliberate subjectivity in authorship and its ability to engage the viewer in a direct and intimate way reaffirmed for me the value of personal storytelling and its contribution to a collective reading of history. My attraction to film and my trajectory as a filmmaker and professor stem from an ongoing desire to understand and address the diversity of human experience in a visceral way.

As a professor, I have taught a range of courses in film/video production and media studies across diverse departments and colleges. I have found that my foundation in art and time-based media provide a unique perspective and through-line for students exploring the relationships of form and content in (cinematic) visual language. How a cinematic work's style, technique and construction relate to its essence, is (still) a fundamental building block of media literacy and aesthetic sensitivity.

During lectures unpacking film theory, I often use allegory and metaphor as a teaching tool to weave concepts and ideas through students' personal experience. It is a small but significant way of acknowledging the interdisciplinary nature of film/video as a medium grounded in the arts and humanities. When grappling with challenging topics after a film screening, I draw "mind maps" to illustrate the ways in which student generated ideas are interconnected and powerful in a progressive, horizontal and non-hierarchical way. I require all students to lead discussions on required readings, give each other critical feedback in and out of the classroom, and work together on exercises and assignments. Through technical instruction and a theoretical groundwork, students develop proficiency with the medium and are empowered to pursue both commercial and artistic approaches that will help them find their voice and develop their practice.

As an artist working across genre and disciplines, often in collaboration, I rely on an evolving practice incorporating diverse modalities, new technologies and visual strategies that intersect my teaching philosophy. My personal interests in film range from the mutable boundaries of narrative storytelling to expanded cinema, performance and installation. I am currently in production on a personal documentary that traces the cultural significance of mushroom foraging in the Russian diaspora and draws parallels between mycology and immigration, cultural identity and adaptation in the age of globalization.

In a world saturated with media and proliferating technologies, I try to remind my students (and myself), that there are many different paths and tools available to you on your journey. No one journey is the same, but we are all on it together. Teaching has been both a humbling and inspiring experience. Democratizing the classroom over the years has encouraged students to engage with the material and each other in more complex and meaningful ways. It has also shifted my own perspectives and introduced me to new works by students and professional artists, through teaching responsibilities, which take me to screenings and exhibits around the world. I value teaching as an integral part of my spiritual and creative work and ongoing intellectual growth.