

Syllabus

The Visual Essay: Cinema as Thought

The Visual Essay focuses on film's capacity to think in images. In recent years, the visual essay has become a specialized field of research within film studies, cutting across modes of nonfiction and experimental film. The seminar will explore a range of classical to contemporary works by a variety of filmmakers with the purpose of considering film itself as a medium that makes ideas seen. Beyond film's thematic concern with abstract ideas, cinema can present what Gilles Deleuze has called a "direct image of thought," and Daniel Frampton described as "film-thinking." In a variety of examples, we will consider the taking shape of ideas in cinematic form.

We begin with Dziga Vertov's seminal *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), an example of "pure cinema," and go on to look at different types of film essays (including experimental documentary and found footage films). Other examples (by Werner Herzog and Katrin Gebbe) are not visual essays but works in which essayistic moments prevail.

To link the case studies with the essayistic more broadly, we will draw on written essays by Simone Weil, Svetlana Alexievich, and others. The combination of visual, literary, and philosophical materials allows us to approach, not only the film essay as a distinct form, but cinema itself as a medium of intellectual inquiry.

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WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Week 1

Mon. Introduction: *Man with a Movie Camera* (Dziga Vertov, 1929)

Timothy Corrigan, "'On Thoughts Occasioned by'... Montaigne to Marker," in *The Essay Film: From Montaigne, After Marker*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 13-37.

Daniel Frampton, "Introduction," *Filmosophy*. London: Wallflower, 2006.

Seth Feldman, "Peace Between Man and Machine': Dziga Vertov's *The Man With the Movie Camera*," in *Documenting the Documentary*. Edited by Barry Grant and Jeannette Sloniowski. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998. Pp. 40-54.

Wed. The found footage film: *Gustav Deutsch Film ist. (1-12) (1998-2002)*

Nico de Klerk, "Designing a Home: Orphan Films in the work of Gustav Deutsch" *Gustav Deutsch*. Wilbrig Brainin–donnenb, ed. Vienna: Austrian Film Museum, 2009, pp. 113-122.

Lucy Reynolds, "Altered States: Thoughts on the transformation of meanings in found footage film," *Vertigo*,

<file:///Users/anat/Downloads/VERTIGO%20%20Altered%20States.pdf>

Week 2

Mon. Affliction (Part 1): *Palms* (Artur Aristakisyan, 1993)

Graeme Hobbs, "The Opened Hand,"

https://www.closeupfilmcentre.com/vertigo_magazine/volume-3-issue-6-summer-2007/the-opened-hand-reflections-on-artur-aristakisyans-palms/

Simon Weil, "Affliction," *Gravity and Grace*. Emma Crawford and Mario von der Ruhr, trans. New York: Routledge, 2002, pp. 80-84.

"Welcome to Calais: Sylvain George and the Aesthetics of Resistance"

<http://cinema-scope.com/cinema-scope-magazine/interviews-welcome-to-calais-sylvain-george-and-the-aesthetics-of-resistance/>

Additional viewing:

The House is Black (Forough Farrokhzad, 1962)

May They Rest in Revolt (Figures of War) (Sylvain Georges, 2010)

Wed. Affliction (Part 2): *Nothing Bad Can Happen* (Katrin Gebbe, 2013)

Simone Weil, "The Love of God and Affliction," in *Waiting for God*,

<https://pacificpilgrim.files.wordpress.com/2016/07/simone-weil-the-love-of-god-and-affliction.pdf>

Week 3

Mon. "Like a plant": *The Gleaners and I* (Agnes Varda, 2000), *The Green Ray* (Eric Rohmer, 1986)

Michael Marder, "Is it Ethical to Eat Plants?," <https://www.michaelmarder.org/articles-etc/texts-in-pdf/>

Simon Weil, "Chance," *Gravity and Grace*. Emma Crawford and Mario von der Ruhr, trans. New York: Routledge, 2002, pp. 107-108.

Anat Pick, "Vegan Cinema," *Thinking Veganism in Literature and Culture*. Emelia Quinn and Benjamin Westwood, eds. London: Palgrave, 2018 (forthcoming).

"Eric Rohmer for Beginners," <http://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/news-bfi/features/eric-rohmer-beginners>

Wed. Cinema, labour, time: *The Turin Horse* (Béla Tarr, Ágnes Hranitzky, 2011)

Laura McMahon, "*The Turin Horse*: Animal Labour and Lines of Flight," *Animal Worlds: Film, Philosophy and Time* (Edinburgh University Press; forthcoming).

Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Caleta, trans. London: Athlone Press, 1989 (excerpts).

Week 4**Mon. Becoming-edible: *Grizzly Man* (Werner Herzog 2005)**

Val Plumwood, "Being Prey," *Utne Reader*, <https://www.utne.com/arts/being-prey>

Gilles Deleuze, "Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible," *A Thousand Plateaus*. Brian Massumi, trans. London: Continuum, 2004. (excerpt).

Wed. The end: *The Fukushima Trilogy* (Philippe Rouy, 2012-14).

Interview with Élise Domenach, in *Fukushima in Film. Voices from Japanese Cinema*. Tokyo: The University of Tokyo Center for Philosophy, 2015.

Svetlana Alexievich, *Chernobyl Prayer. A Chronicle of the Future*. Trans, Anna Gunin and Arch Tait. Penguin: London, 2016 (excerpt).

Trevor Paglen, "Operational Images," e-Flux, http://worker01.e-flux.com/pdf/article_8990555.pdf