

LTWL 184GS. Film Studies and Literature: Close Analysis of Filmic Text - The Video Essay

Professor Hoang Tan Nguyen

Course Description

The video essay blurs the boundaries between academic analysis and creative approaches to film criticism. Taking the meaning of essay ("to attempt" or "to try") seriously, the course encourages experimentation and play with form, style, structure, and mode of address. Our research-creations will draw on multiple senses of the essay: descriptive, poetic, personal, reflective, open-ended, and provisional. We seek to hold in tension the theoretical and experiential, visual and tactile, conventional and idiosyncratic, or didactic and meditative. This multimodal course combines scholarly research with artistic practice in the study and production of the video essay. It thus breaks down the division between theory and practice. Course readings include texts by scholars, critics, and filmmakers from different genres, periods, and national contexts. Films and videos range from didactic and scholarly to poetic and personal approaches and encompass documentary and avant-garde traditions.

Required Texts

- All readings are posted at links listed in the syllabus on Canvas. All films can be accessed at Electronic Course Reserves.

Recommended Texts

- Nora M. Alter and Timothy Corrigan, *Essays on the Essay Film*
- Timothy Corrigan, *A Short Guide to Writing about Film* (9th edition)
- Christian Keathley, Jason Mittell, and Catherine Grant, *The Videographic Essay: Criticism in Sound and Image* (2nd edition) <http://videographicessay.org/works/videographic-essay/index>
- Thomas Van den Berg and Miklós Kiss, *Film Studies in Motion: From Audiovisual Essay to Academic Research Video*. <http://scalar.usc.edu/works/film-studies-in-motion/index>
- *The Audiovisual Essay: Practice and Theory of Videographic Film and Moving Image Studies* <http://reframe.sussex.ac.uk/audiovisualessay/>
- *[in]Transition: Journal of Videographic Film & Moving Image Studies* "Resources" page: <http://mediacommons.org/intransition/resources>
- Timothy Corrigan and Patricia White, *The Film Experience* (any edition)

Equipment: Access to nonlinear video software, such as Adobe Premiere Pro, Apple's Final Cut Pro, iMovie, Davinci Resolve, or AVID. Some of these software are installed in the computer labs on campus. If you are living away from campus, I encourage you to consider purchasing a subscription (Adobe Premiere Pro \$19.99/month). You can choose to work with any editing software at your disposal. For those with no/minimal video editing experience, I highly encourage you to decide on a software and start on the associated tutorials as soon as possible.

Course Requirements and Policies

Students are expected to complete all readings and watch all assigned films before class, attend all class meetings on time, stay awake, and remain for the entire period. In addition, students should

participate actively in seminar discussions (speaking and listening), give a 20-minute group oral presentation, complete five video exercises, and produce a final video essay.

Assignments and Grading Guidelines

10% Short Critical Responses to Films & Readings

10% Group Oral Presentation

50% Five (5) Video Exercises

30% Final Project – 5 to 10-Minute Video Essay

Video Assignments: Students will produce five video exercises, each accompanied by a 100-word statement. In addition, students will create a final video project, accompanied by a 500-word critical reflection.

Group Oral Presentation: Once during the course, you will pair up with 1-2 classmates to give a twenty-minute presentation. The oral presentation offers you the opportunity to hone your public speaking skills by delivering a concise, provocative meditation on the central ideas generated by that week's readings and films. Avoid biographical and textual summaries. Instead, zero in on 3-4 concepts that you find surprising and/or insightful. Make connections between the readings and films, whether they be continuities, oppositions, and challenges. Anchor your commentary with specific passages from the texts or sequences from the films. You should end your presentation with two (2) questions to jump-start class discussion.

Course Content: Sexuality, gender, and race constitute the central themes of this course. Students will be asked to read, view, discuss, and write critically about materials pertaining to non-normative gender identities and sexual practices. It is your responsibility to consult the syllabus at the beginning of the quarter about the films we will study. If you are not comfortable with the content or form of any title, consider taking another course.

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COURSE SCHEDULE

INTRODUCTION

Watch:

*STATUES ALSO DIE / LES STATUES MEURENT AUSSI (Alain Resnais, Chris Marker, and Ghislain Cloquet, 1953, 30 min.)

*REASSEMBLAGE (Trinh T. Minh-ha, 1982, 40 min.; Excerpt)

*CHRONICLES OF A LYING SPIRIT (BY KELLY GABRON) (Cauleen Smith, 1992, 8 min.)

*HOSTAGE: THE BACHAR TAPES (Walid Raad, 2001, 17 min.)

*WHAT IS NEOREALISM? (Kogonada, 2013, 5 min.)

THE ESSAY FILM AS FORM

Watch:

- *MAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA (Dziga Vertov, 1929, 68 min.)
- *THE GLEANERS AND I (Agnès Varda, 2000, 83 min.)

Read:

- *Theodor Adorno, "The Essay as Form" (23 pages)
- *Max Bense, "On the Essay and Its Prose" (11 pages)
- *Timothy Corrigan, "Of the History of the Essay Film: Vertov to Varda" (30 pages)

DUE PechaKucha Video

FOUND FOOTAGE

Watch:

- *ROSE HOBART (Joseph Cornell, 1936, 20 min.; Excerpt)
- *A MOVIE (Bruce Conner, 1958, 12 min.)
- *NOW! (Santiago Álvarez, 1965, 5:30 min.)
- *TECHNOLOGY/TRANSFORMATION: WONDER WOMAN (Dara Birnbaum, 1978-79, 6 min.)
- *HOME STORIES (Matthias Müller, 1991, 6 min.)
- *SOLILOQUY (SHARON) (Candice Breitz, 1992-2000, 7:11 min.)
- *REMOVED (Naomi Uman, 1999, 6 min.)
- *SHE PUPPET (Peggy Ahwesh, 2001, 15 min.)
- *CINDERELLA+++ (Eileen Maxson, 2002, 4 min.)
- *WE ARE WINNING DON'T FORGET (Jean-Gabriel Périot, 2004, 7 min.)
- *LOS ANGELES PLAYS ITSELF (Thom Andersen, 2004, 169 min.; Excerpt)
- *LOVE IS THE MESSAGE, THE MESSAGE IS DEATH (Arthur Jafa, 2016, 8 min.)

Read:

- *Catherine Russel, "Introduction to Archiveology" (24 pages)
- *William C. Wees, "In the Domain of Montage: Compilation, Collage, Montage" (16 pages)
- *Corey Creekmur, "On the Compilation and Found-Footage Film Traditions of the Video Essay"

THE VOICE IN CINEMA

Watch:

- *SANS SOLEIL (Chris Marker, 1983, 100 min.; Excerpt)
- *SURNAME VIET GIVEN NAME NAM (Trinh T. Minh-ha, 1989, 108 min.)
- *THE PLACE OF VOICEOVER IN ACADEMIC AUDIOVISUAL FILM CRITICISM (Ian Garwood, 2016, 21 min.)

Read:

- *Ming-Yuen S. Ma, "Radical Otherness: Voiceover, Autoethnography, Performativity" (39 pages)
- *Pooja Rangan, "Documentary Listening Habits: From Voice to Audibility" (12 pages)
- *Adrian Martin, "A Voice Too Much"

DUE Voiceover Video

IMAGE + TEXT

Watch:

- *TELEVISION DELIVERS PEOPLE (Richard Serra and Carlota Fay Schoolman, 1973, 7 min.)
- *STILL LIFE (yann beauvais, 1997, 12 min.)
- *THE BLINDNESS SERIES (Tran T. Kim-Trang, 1992-2006)
 - *ALETHEIA (1992, 16 min.)
 - *KORE (1994, 17 min.)
 - *OCULARIS: EYE SURROGATES (1997, 21 min.)
 - *EKLEIPSIS (1998, 22 min.)
- *NOVEMBER (Hito Steyerl, 2004, 25 min.)

Read:

- *Lucas Hilderbrand, "Reflections on *The Blindless Series*"
- *Domietta Torlasco, "Film | Video | Essay" (12 pages)
- *Hito Steyerl, "In Defense of the Poor Image" (7 pages)

DUE Epigraphic Video

INTERMISSION – GUEST SPEAKERS – Nguyen Trinh Thi, Lin + Lam, and Tuấn Andrew Nguyễn

Watch:

- *THE BOAT PEOPLE (Tuấn Andrew Nguyễn, 2020, 20 min.)
- *ELEVEN MEN (Nguyen Trinh Thi, 2016, 28 min.)
- *UNIDENTIFIED VIETNAM NO. 18 (Lin + Lam [Lana Lin and H. Lan Thao Lam], 2007, 30 min.)
- *F FOR FAKE – HOW TO STRUCTURE A VIDEO ESSAY (Tony Zhou, 2015, 4:30 min.)
- *WHAT MAKES A VIDEO ESSAY GREAT? (Kevin B. Lee, 2014, 7 min.)
- *THE VIDEO ESSAY AS ART: 11 WAYS OF MAKING A VIDEO ESSAY (Conor Bateman, 2016)

Read:

- *Laura Kina, "Promiscuous Time Traveling (on Leaving and Returns): A Conversation with Lin + Lam and Việt Lê" (13 pages)
- *Pamela N. Corey, "Crafted Signs of Obsolescence: Tuan Andrew Nguyen's Aesthetic Artifacts" (12 pages)

*Allison de Fren, "From the Essay Film to the Video Essay: Between the Critical and the Popular" (21 pages)

DUE Final Video Essay Proposal

POETIC / NARRATIVE APPROACHES

Watch:

- *MEASURES OF DISTANCE (Mona Hatoum, 1988, 15 min.)
- *SINK OR SWIM (Su Friedrich, 1990, 48 min.)
- *NEXT YEAR / L'ANNÉE PROCHAINE / 明年 (Ming Wong, 2016, 18 min.)
- *VERTIGO SEA (John Akomfrah, 2015, 49 min.; Excerpt)
- *FAINTING SPELLS (Sky Hopinka, 2018, 11 min.)

Read:

- *Su Friedrich, Film Script of *Sink or Swim* (20 pages)
- *Su Friedrich, "Does Radical Content Deserve Radical Form?" (7 pages)
- *Fred Camper, "Daddy's Girl" (3 pages)
- *Christian Keathley, "La Caméra-Stylo: Notes on Video Criticism and Cinephilia" (16 pages)
- *Girish Shambu, "For a New Cinephilia" (3 pages)

DUE Multiscreen Video

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Watch:

- *PERFECT FILM (Ken Jacobs, 1985, 22 min.)
- *SUPERSTAR: THE KAREN CARPENTER STORY (Todd Haynes, 1987, 43 min.)
- *BLANCHE NEIGE LUCIE (Pierre Huyghe, 1997, 3 min.)
- *THE ARTWORK IN ITS AGE OF MECHANICAL REPRODUCIBILITY BY WALTER BENJAMIN AS TOLD TO KEITH SANBORN (Keith Sanborn, 1996, 4 min.)
- *GIMME THE MERMAID (Negativland and Tim Maloney, 2002, 5 min.)
- *ARTIST LOOKING AT CAMERA (Guthrie Lonergan, 2006, 3 min.)
- *VERSIONS (Oliver Laric, 2010, 9 min.)

Read:

- *Jonathan Lethem, "The Ecstasy of Influence: A Plagiarism" (13 pages)
- *Lucas Hilderbrand, "Grainy Days and Mondays: *Superstar* and Bootleg Aesthetics" (30 pages)
- *Jaime Baron, "The Archive Effect: Appropriation and the Experience of Textual Difference" (41 pages; Excerpt)

*Jason Mittell, "But Is Any of This Legal? Some Notes about Copyright and Fair Use" (8 pages)

*Society for Cinema and Media Studies' Policies on Fair Use

DUE Abstract Trailer

WRAP UP

SCREENING & CRITIQUE OF ROUGH CUTS