**FMST655D/2 (3 credits, fall)/ FMST855D/2 (3 credits, fall)**

**Topics in Documentary Film**

**Special Topic: The Essay Film**

**Instructor: Prof. Luca Caminati**

**Mondays 18-22 FB250**

**Office hours: Mondays 3-5, and Wednesday 4-6 in FB**

If Vimeo has now a dedicated group devoted to the essay film, it really means that something is up (<https://vimeo.com/channels/essayistic>)! A certain kind of documentary and non-narrative films have recently emerged as the most interesting, exciting, and innovative art form produced in the last twenty years. The work of Harun Farocki (*Images of the World and the Inscription of War*) and Agnes Varda (*The Gleaners and I*), of Chris Marker (*Sans Soleil*) and Chantal Akerman (*News from Home*) have challenged current taxonomies and forced viewers to renegotiate their epistemological parameters. While these films are understood as cinematic variations on the literary essay genre a la Montaigne–or, at least, so argues Timothy Corrigan in his new book–they are also a stand-alone emerging cinematic tradition. This seminar will introduce students to the contemporary debate on narrative forms in and spectatorial responses to documentary cinema, to issues of realism and authenticity in relation to the moving image, and to issues of politics of self and community in the global age.

**Requirements:**

Students will be required to write weekly one-page responses on Moodle (20%), submit a critical bibliography on the topic of their final paper (20%), present their final paper project to the class (10%), and write a final research paper of 15-20 pages (50%), to be submitted by **Wednesday, December 12 @ 5pm**

**Bibliography:**

Nichols, Bill. *Representing Reality*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1991

Rascaroli, Laura. *The Personal Camera*. London: Wallflower, 2009.

Corrigan, Timothy. *The Essay Film*. New York: Oxford UP, 2012

Electronic Course Reader

**Schedule:**

**Sept. 10, Week 1: Defining Documentary**

Reading: Nichols, “The Domain of Documentary” and “Documentary Modes of representation”, pp. 3-75.

Screening: *Bright Leaves* (dir. Ross McElwee, USA, 2004, 107 min.)

**Sept. 17, Week 2: The Ethics of Documentary**

Reading: Nichols, “Axiographics”, in RR, pp. 76-107; Corrighan, “On Thoughts Occasioned…”, pp. 13-49.

Screening: *The Gleaners and I* (*Les glaneurs et la glaneuse*, dir. Agnes Varda, France, 2000, 82 min.)

**Sept. 24, Week 3: The I of the Camera**

Reading: ; Corrighan, “Of the History of the Essay Film”, pp. 49-75; Bozak, Nadia. “Digital Neutrality: Agnès Varda, Kristan Horton and the

Ecology of the Cinematic Imagination”. *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, 28:3, 218-229, 2011

Screening: *Images of the World and the Inscription of War* (*Bilder der Welt und Inschrift des Krieges*, dir. Harun Farocki, Germany, 1989, 75 min.)

**Oct. 1, Week 4: The Personal Camera**

Reading: Alter, Nora. “The Political Imperceptible in the Essay Film”. *New German Critique* 68 (1996), 165-192; Rascaroli, “The Essay Film” and “The Metacritical Voice (Over)”, pp. 44-63.

Screening: *Reassemblage* (dir. Trin T. Minh-ha, USA, 1983, 40 min.)

**Oct. 15, Week 5: Inter-View**

Reading: Corrighan, “About Portraying Expression”, pp. 79-103; Trinh T. Minh-ha. “Documentary Is/Not a Name”. *October* 52 (1990), 76-98.

Screening: *Grizzly Man* (dir. Werner Herzog, USA, 2005, 103 min.)

**Oct. 22, Week 6: The Travel Essay**

Reading: Corrighan, “To Be Elsewhere”, pp. 104-130; Rascaroli, “Subjective Cinema” and “The Essay Film”, pp. 1-43.

Screening: *Appunti per un’Orestiade Africana* (*Notes Towards an African Orestes*, dir. Pier Paolo Pasolini, Italy, 1975, 65 min), and *Sopralluoghi in Palestina* (Location Scouting in Palestine, Italy, 1965, 55 min)

**Oct. 29, Week 7: The Notebook Film**

Reading: Rascaroli, “The Notebook Film”, 146-179; Corrighan, “On Essaystic Diaries”, pp. 131-153.

Screening: *The Autobiography of Nicolae Ciausescu* (*Autobiografia lui Nicolae Ceausescu*, dir. Andrei Ujica, Romania, 2011, 180 min.)

**Nov. 5, Week 8: The Found Footage Essay (Katie coming to class)**

Reading: White, Rob. “Interview with Andrei Ujica.” *Film Quarterly* 64.3, 2011, 66-71; and Catherine Russell (1999) “Archival Apocalypse: Found Footage as Ethnography,” *Experimental Ethnography: The Work of Film in the Age of Video*, Durham NC: Duke University Press, 238-272.

Screening: *Notre Music* (dir. Jean-Luc Godard, France, 1994, 80 min.)

**Nov. 12, Week 9: Performance (Tom coming to class)**

Reading: Rascaroli, “Performance and Negotiation”, pp. 84-103; Waugh, Thomas. “Acting to Play Oneself (1990)” in *The Right to Play Oneself*. Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 2011, 71-92.

Screening: [*Letter to Jane: An Investigation About a Still* (dir. The Dziga Group, France, 1972, 53 min.)](http://ubumexico.centro.org.mx/video/Dziga-Vertov-Group_Letter-to-Jane_1972.avi)

Screening: *Close-Up* (dir. Abbas Kiarostami, Iran, 1990, 98 min.)

**Nov. 19, Week 10: The ‘Refractive’ Essay**

Reading: Corrighan, “About Refractive Cinema”, pp. 181-204;  Johnson, David T. ["Critical Hearing and the Lessons of Abbas Kiarostami's Close-Up"](http://0-lion.chadwyck.com.mercury.concordia.ca/searchFullrec.do?id=R04103400&area=mla&forward=critref_fr&queryId=../session/1345241246_11232&trailId=1389C21A11B&activeMultiResults=CRITICISM)  
*In* (pp. 289-298) Beck, Jay (ed. and introd.); Grajeda, Tony (ed. and introd.), *Lowering the Boom: Critical Studies in Film Sound*. Urbana, IL: U of Illinois P, 2008, 289-298.

Screenings: *The Grin Without the Cat* (dir. Chris Marker, France, 1977, 240 min.); and *Level 5* (dir. Chris Marker, France, 1997, 106 min.)

**Nov. 26, Week 11: Essay Sound**

Reading: Stella Bruzzi “The Film and Its Voice”, in *New Documentary*. New York: Routledge, 2006, 47-72; Rascaroli, “The Musealisation of Experience”, 64-83.

**Critical Bibliography due in class today**

Clip: *Sunless* (dir. Chris Marker, France, 1983, 100 min.)

Screening: *News from Home* (dir. Chantal Akerman, France/Belgium/USA, 1985, 77 min.)

**Dec 3, Week 12. The Letter**

Reading: White Kenneth. “Urban Unknown: Chantal Akerman in New York”. *Screen*, 51:4, 2010, 365-378.

Screening: *Nostalgia for the light* (*Nostalgia de la luz,* dir. Patricio Guzmán, Chile, 2011, 90 min.)

**Dec 4. Week 13: The Political Essay**

Reading:

***Students present their final paper (10 min.)***

Screening: *Waltz with Bashir* (dir. Ari Folman, Israel, 2008, 90 min.)

**Dec 5, Week 14: The Editorial**

Reading: Schlunke, Katarina. “Animated Documentary and the Scene of Death”. *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 110: 4. 2011, 949-962; Corrighan, “Of the Currency of Events”, 154-180.

***Students present their final paper (10 min)***

**Final Paper due Wednesday, December 12 @ 5pm.**