

Memory and History/Text and Image: The Essay-Film as Method
Media Lab Inaugural Course
Spring 2021
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This course looks at the ways memory and history are inscribed textually and visually. Take a moment right now and pick a topic you're passionate about. How has this topic been written about? How has it been visualized? How can we contextualize this topic by bringing to light its histories and your (or others) memories? And how might it shed light on our everyday lives and others around us?

With these as our main guiding question, we will keep asking questions and thinking together of answers as we examine different essay-films in the ways they've been envisioned, made, watched, reflected and written about. The course has light reading but only so we can meditate on them more thoroughly and focuses more on the activity of watching and understanding the language of the film-essay—the arrangement and art of written and spoken word as it melds with image and moving-images'; the relationship between the visual and discursive, etc.

Texts: especially the idea of 'essays' from which the term film-essay comes from- usually understood as short argumentative pieces.

Films: especially film-essays or the other related terms associated it with such as archival films, ethnographic film or visual ethnography, documentary, and even at times fiction films

Archive: we will arrange a special visit to a film archive (conditions permitting due to COVID 19).

By looking into visual and sound archives, recording videos and composing essays, the classes will take a practice-based/studio approach to learning and knowledge production. While exploring how artists, film-makers, historians, and ethnographers write and capture audio-visual material, we encourage students and visiting fellows to share their works in order to develop their own audio-visual and written material over the 12 weeks of the class (other ideas such as installation art is also possible). In other words, think of this course as that space where we can attempt (and fail) to develop films and writings (in groups or individually) from historical and contemporary audiovisual and discursive material.

Final projects can be something you're thinking about for another course or something you've been wanting to give attention to more systematically in general. It's up to you and your instructors—just make sure to know we are here to discuss is without anytime by appointment online (or in-person if you prefer) on Wednesdays and Thursdays (i.e. Media Lab days at CILAS).

Note: Films will not be available for online viewing all the time—this depends on whether the film is available publicly online or not. Otherwise we will hold private screenings on CILAS's rooftop in the open air in the evenings on Wednesdays and/or Thursdays (Time: TBD).

Introductory Week

Film: Inflation by Hans Richter (1928-9/5 mins), Jean Rouch's Les Matire Fous (1955/36mins), Trinh Min-ha's Re-Assemblage (1983/40 mins)

Text: (in-class) by Nora Alter and Paul Arthur in The Subject of Documentary

Week 2

Film: Agnes Varda - Salut les Cubains / Chris Marker - *Statues also die*

Exercise

Week 3

Text: Michael Renov on Jonas Mekas's film Lost, Lost, Lost (1976)

Film: excerpts from Lost, Lost, Lost by Jonas Mekas (total film time is 3hrs, we will watch half)

Week 4

Film: Chris Marker - Sans Soleil

Discussion and Analysis + Exercise

Week 5

Text: Simon Critchley on Thin Red Line; Stanley Cavell on Terrence Malick reading

Film: feature film Thin Red Line

Week 6

Text: *Otolith 1*

Film: *Otolith 1, 2, 3 - Otolith Group*

Discussion and Analysis + Exercise

Week 7

Text: in-class image/film-making exercise (as we watch today's film)

Film: Cinema Komunisto (100 mins)

Week 8

Film: *Filipa Cesar*

Discussion and Analysis + Exercise

Week 9

Text: in-class writing/collage exercise

Film: Egypt's Modern Pharaohs

Week 10

Film: Denise Ferreira + Arjuna - *Deep Implicancy / Serpent Rain*

Discussion and Analysis + Exercise

Week 11

Presentations

Week 12

Presentations