

Call for Papers

Conference: ‘World Cinema and the Essay Film’

Conference convenor: Igor Krstic, Postdoctoral Fellow, University of Reading

Venue: Minghella Building

Department of Film, Theatre and Television

University of Reading, Whiteknights Campus

Date: 30th April – 2nd May 2015

The essay film became a widespread practice in Europe with the rise of the New Waves in the 1950s. The digital revolution in the 1990s gave it a further boost. But it is only recently that it has deserved proper scholarly attention. Laura Rascaroli (2009) has defined it as a form of “subjective cinema” in which embodied authors perform themselves in the first person mode. Timothy Corrigan (2011), in turn, has divided what he calls the “mode of essayistic expression” into a set of subcategories. Similarly, in Kramer’s and Tode’s edited volume on the subject (2011) film scholars address various “modulations” of the essayistic practice on film. Honouring its different appearances and protean nature, most authors agree that the essay film is not a genre and that it, in fact, contradicts the very notion of generic predictability given its elusive borders.

Despite its strong ties to French (film) culture - from Michel de Montaigne to Chris Marker and Jean-Luc Godard - the essay film has, according to Timothy Corrigan, always been a truly “transnational practice”. Yet, existing scholarship has largely focused on defining the essay film’s formal aspects within European conceptual and aesthetic traditions. This conference will situate the essay film as a world cinema practice as a means to expand its reach and encompass a variety of productions which have so far escaped the radar of essay film specialists. The concept of world cinema has been increasingly oriented towards the interrelatedness of regional productions on a

global scale, while simultaneously decentring its traditional Euro- and Hollywoodcentric bias. In combining both concepts, this conference will be allowing the essay film to benefit from its relation with the global breadth of world cinema, whilst pushing world cinema itself out of the fenced-in realm of fiction and into a world where documentary, fiction and theoretical thought combine.

Indeed, a closer look reveals that at least since the 1960s, with the emergence of movements such as “Third Cinema” and films such as *The Hour of the Furnaces* (Getino and Solanas, 1968), essayistic film practices can be identified both South and North of the Equator, especially in those filmmakers who, like Getino and Solanas, wanted to convey a political message in their films. In recent and contemporary world cinema a distinctive trend of essayistic films continues to tackle pressing political issues in a rapidly globalizing world. Films like *The Hungarian Passport* (Sandra Kogut, 2001), *Grandmother’s Flower* (Jeong-Hyun Mun, 2007) or *Purgatorio: A Journey Into the Heart of the Border* (Rodrigo Reyes, 2013) provide very personal as well as highly innovative perspectives on topics such as forced migration and national identity. Such films tackle the personal-political while literally transgressing national borders, resulting in transnational essayistic journeys and quests. Other films predominantly use and re-use the rich pool of images and sounds from private and public archives to address similar issues, such as *That’s My Face* (Thomas Allen Harris, 2004), *Fotografías* (Andres di Tella, 2007), *Beyond the Mountains* (Aya Koretzky, 2011) or *The Stuart Hall Project* (John Akomfrah, 2013). Well-known festival auteurs from Russia (Aleksandr Sokurov) to Thailand (Apichatpong Weerasethakul) explore the aesthetic possibilities and qualities of the essayistic format, while testing the ever-crumbling boundaries between experimental, fiction and non-fiction filmmaking.

This conference will address this fascinating production as well as more general topics that are related to the notion of the essay film, in the hope of resituating and amplifying some of the most important concepts in film studies.

Possible Topics

- The essay in world cinema
- The essay in “Third Cinema”

- The politics of the essay film
- Transnationalism and the essay film
- Identity quest and the essay film
- Intermediality and the essay film
- “Accented essay films” , or the issue of migration and displacement in the essay film
- First-person narration
- Essay vs. non-fiction film
- Essay vs. fiction film
- The essay as a literary and philosophical tradition
- The essay (film) and the postmodern condition

Confirmed Keynote Speakers

Timothy Corrigan (Professor of Cinema Studies, University of Pennsylvania)

Thomas Elsaesser (Professor Emeritus at the Department of Media and Culture, University of Amsterdam)

Proposal Submissions

Please submit a title and an abstract of between 200 – 300 words for your presentation, as well as a biography of c. 150 words to Dr. des. Igor Krstic

cfac@reading.ac.uk

The submission deadline is 15th December 2014

The conference is sponsored by CFAC - Centre for Film Aesthetics and Cultures
<http://www.reading.ac.uk/cfac/>