

THE MOVING IMAGE IN 20TH CENTURY ART: AVANT-GARDE FILM, VIDEO, AND DURATIONAL MEDIA

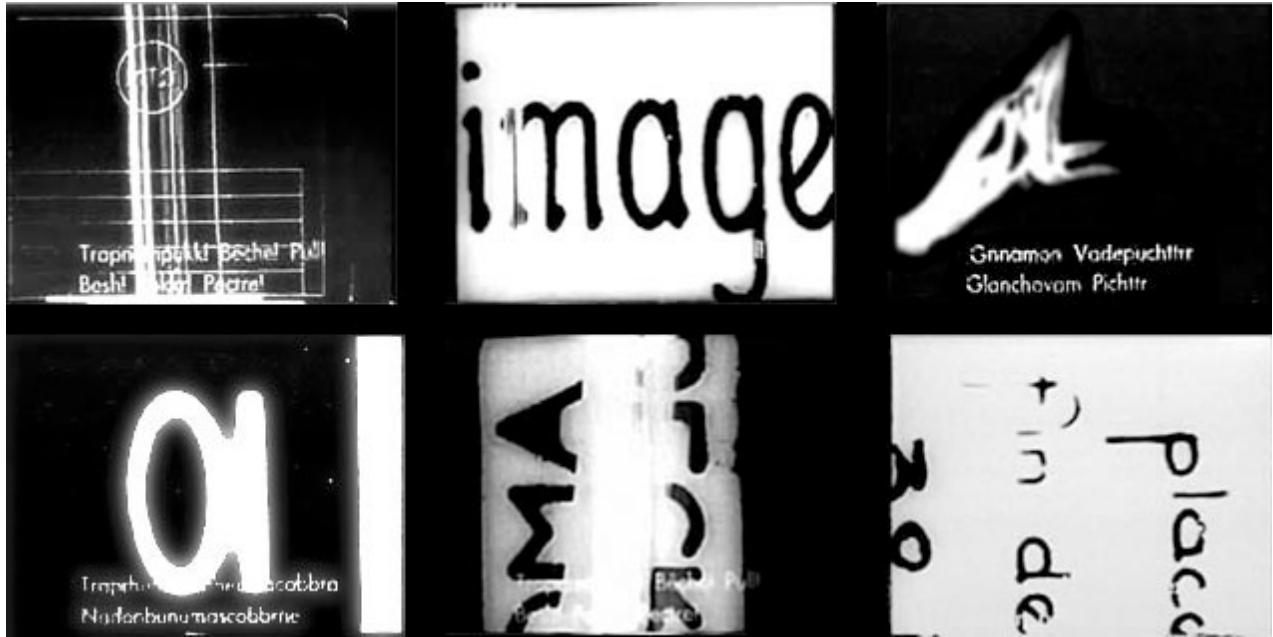
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ISIDORE ISOU, *TREATISE ON BLATHER AND ETERNITY* (1951)

The structure and experience of time, temporality, and duration has been fundamental to the manufacture and the experience of modern and contemporary art. In a world transformed by photomechanical technologies, the cinema—and its step-child, television— were destined to become a central, albeit problematic, points of reference. Yet while histories of modern and contemporary art have always understood this reference in general terms, it is only recently that we have come to appreciate the incredibly rich and diverse tradition of artists working directly with durational media, as well as the specific contributions made by these works to our understanding of the movements— from Cubism, Dada, Constructivism, and Surrealism to Abstract Expressionism, Pop, OpArt, Kineticism, Situationism, Fluxus, Minimalism, Performance and Conceptualism— that have come to define the century.

While beginning with a brief consideration of the cinematic avant-garde of the 1920s, our primary focus will be on those practices in small-gauge film and video which developed in and around the expansion of the aesthetic field in the 1960s. It will not be a course on “video art” or “experimental film” as those fields have been typically (and restrictively) understood, but seeks to embark upon a wide-ranging consideration of moving-image technologies in their complex and multifaceted relation to the evolution of the visual and performing arts. We will explore the radical transformation of both the practice and conceptualization of postwar art practice alongside an expanded cinema that both participated in, and responded to this transformation. The consideration of aesthetic theories regarding temporality, performance, site-specificity, and institutional critique will lead us to consider the complex question of documentation within film and photographic practices of the 1960s and 70s. To what extent is work aesthetically or conceptually distinct from its media documentation? What is the relationship between

activity and documentation in these works? How does the mediated nature of these practices seek to address the institutional tensions of an art market simultaneously oriented towards the production of rarified commodities *and* the global dissemination of information and media? Attending to the massive influx of film and video installation since the 1990s from an oblique angle, our seminar will attempt to construct an aesthetic and conceptual genealogy of contemporary practice, considering how the themes, forms, processes, questions, and problems of these early practices have been rearticulated within contemporary art.

As we view and consider works by Man Ray, Duchamp, Leger, Richter, Deren, Brakhage, Conner, Kubelka, Whitman, VanDerBeek, Warhol, Ono, Godard, Sharits, Snow, Serra, Frampton, Broodthaers, Acconci, Oppenheim, Burden, Graham, Smithson, Matta-Clark, Jonas, Rainer, McCall, Birnbaum, Rosler, Viola, Hill, Douglas, Huyghe, Dean, Buckingham, Ahtila and others, we will be attending to the critical rhetoric which has come to surround these works – terms such as “visionary,” “personal,” “underground,” “experimental,” “avant-garde,” “modernist,” “structural,” “materialist,” and “pure” – and how these classifications reflect competing possibilities and aspirations for both practice and criticism within the moving image works of the past and present.

Important Online References:

UBU Sound and Film Archive: <http://www.ubu.com>

The Early Video Project: <http://208.55.137.252/index.html>

Radical Software Magazine, 1970-1974. Web Archive: <http://www.radicalsoftware.org/>

Aspen Magazine, 1965-1970. Web Archive: <http://www.ubu.com/aspens/>

Selected NYC Resources for Archival Research:

Anthology Film Archives – library and public screenings <http://www.anthologyfilmarchives.org/>

Film Maker’s Cooperative – rentals and on-site screenings <http://www.film-makerscoop.com/>

Electronic Artists Intermix – rentals and on-site screenings <http://www.eai.org/>

Museum of Modern Art – film study center, rentals, public screenings, <http://moma.org/research/>

Class Discussions:

Throughout the semester, each student will be responsible for guiding two of the weekly discussions. We will select these at the beginning of the second week, when the syllabus, readings, and class attendance will all be finalized. At that point, the twelve students will each select two weeks from among the twelve remaining weeks (if we add additional students, we will have a few groups of three.) There should be one Art History MA/PhD student in every group. Groups can either divide the texts up amongst themselves or do them all collaboratively, but in either case, they should come to class having taken careful notes on the reading and having prepared a number of questions for discussion relating to both the texts and any assigned films for that week.

Final Paper:

A 20-25 page seminar paper employing significant independent research and relating to a historical or theoretical issue in moving image art practice will be due Friday, Dec 21st. While not required, I strongly recommend turning in a rough draft for comments by Dec 1st.

Screenings:

Due to the difficulty of scheduling additional class times for screenings, I will be making several copies of the required AV material available for use outside of class and will announce the screenings a week in advance. Since there will not be enough copies for everyone, they will be kept in the library and signed-out on an as-needed basis. Additionally, we will be reviewing selected materials as a part of our seminar discussion.

READINGS

Readings marked with an *asterisk indicate the seminal texts that must be read and prepared for our seminar discussion. Unmarked readings are generally useful overviews, background information, or canonical texts that you may have encountered already, or would probably find interesting and not terribly difficult. Readings marked with a +plus sign are those that are not strictly part of the week's reading, but explore a particular artist or idea in greater depth, and as such, would be especially appropriate to consider for a seminar paper - think of these as a partial bibliography for advanced study. We may add or subtract a few readings depending on our progress throughout the course of the semester.

1. The Idea of an Avant-Garde: Culture, Entertainment, Art and Film (Sept 17)

- *A.L. Rees, "Preface," "Introduction" and "Part 1: The Canonical Avant-Garde" up to "Origins of Abstract Film" from *A History of Experimental Film and Video* (1999)
- *Gene Youngblood, "Art, Entertainment, Entropy" (1965-1969)
- *Germaine Duloc, Dossier of Writings (1925, 1932)
- *Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of its Mechanical Reproducibility" (1934-6)
- *Rosalind Krauss, "The Originality of the Avant Garde" (1981)
- Fred Camper on Terminology (2000)
- Scott MacDonald, "Introduction" from *Avant-Garde Film: Motion Studies* (1993)
- Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception" (1944)
- Malcolm LeGrice, "Art and Cinematography" and "The First Abstract Films" from *Abstract Film and Beyond* (1977)
- Standish Lawder, "Painters Discover Cinema" from *The Cubist Cinema* (1975)
- +Theodor Adorno, "Culture Industry Reconsidered" (1975)

Related Events: Films by Ernie Gehr and Stan Brakhage at MoMA, Sat 22

2. Disruption: Towards a New (Old) Economy of Spectatorship (1920s) [Sept 24]

- *Malcolm LeGrice, *Abstract Film and Beyond*, “Another Direction of Formal Cinema”
- *Tom Gunning, “An Aesthetic of Astonishment” (1997)
- *Thomas Elsaesser, “Dada/Cinema?” (1987)
- *Buchloh, Krauss, Foster & Bois, *Art Since 1900*, “1916: Dada” (2004)
- *A.L. Rees, “Origins of Abstract Film” to “Reviewing the First Avant Garde” from *A History of Experimental Film and Video*
- Paul Wood, “The revolutionary Avant-Gardes: Dada, Constructivism, Surrealism” from *The Challenge of the Avant-Garde* (1999)
- A.L. Rees, Timeline from the UK Exhibition *Film as Film*
- +Standish Lawder, *The Cubist Cinema*, “Leger and Film” and “Ballet Mechanique”

Related Events: Films by Michael Snow and Chris Marker at MoMA, Fri 28

3. The Debate around “Pure Cinema”: Constructivism & Surrealism (‘20s - ‘30s) [Oct 1]

- *Standish Lawder, “Abstract Cinema: Richter, Eggeling, Ruttmann” from *The Cubist Cinema*
- *Malcolm LeGrice, “The First Abstract Films,” “Filmdrama is the Opium of the Masses” from *Abstract Film and Beyond*
- *Justin Hoffmann, “Hans Richter: Constructivist Filmmaker” (1998)
- *Dziga Vertov, “We: Variant of a Manifesto” and “Kinoks: A Revolution” (1922) from Annette Michelson, ed., *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov* (1984)
- *Kerry Brougher, “Visual Music Culture” in *Visual Music: Synaesthesia in Art and Music* (2005)
- +Malcolm Turvey, “Abstraction and Universal Language in Richter’s *Rhythym* films” (2003)

Related Events: Films by Michael Haneke at MoMA Oct 3 – Oct 15

“Much of Haneke’s early work centers on the historical amnesia of Old Europe and its wartime past, and on the loss of identity and individuality, whether during the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (The Rebellion, 1993), in the decade following World War II (Lemmings - Part 1 - Arcadia [1979] and Fraulein [1986]), or in the present day (Three Paths to the Lake [1976], Lemmings - Part Two - Injuries [1979], Variation [1983], and Who Was Edgar Allan? [1984]). More recent films, including his masterful collaborations with Isabelle Huppert (The Piano Teacher [2001], Time of the Wolf [2003]), and Juliette Binoche (Code Unknown [2000], Caché [2005]), are elliptical, Rashomon-like narratives, told with exquisite precision and in riveting detail, that shock viewers out of their willful indifference to the suffering of others and challenge their unquestioning acceptance of mediated reality. In a style at once musical and mathematical, Haneke’s films treat themes of alienation and social collapse; the exploitation and consumption of violence; the bourgeois family as the incubator of fascist impulse; individual responsibility and collective guilt; and the ethics of the photographic image.” (MoMA)

Related Events: The New York Film Festival “Views from the Avant-Garde” Oct 6 - 7

In particular: Ken Jacobs live “nervous magic lantern” performance, Oct 6 @ 7:30pm

4. Visionary Film: The Lyrical and Mythopoetic Forms ('40s - '50s) [Oct 8]

*P. Adams Sitney, "Meshes of the Afternoon," "Ritual and Nature," and "The Lyrical Film"
from *Visionary Cinema*

*Renata Jackson, "The Modernist Poetics of Maya Deren"

*David James on Brakhage from *Allegories of Cinema*

*Annette Michelson on Stan Brakhage

Stan Brakhage, "Metaphors on Vision"

Amos Vogel, "Visual Taboos" from *Film as a Subversive Art*

+Maya Deren, "An Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form, and Film"

+Annette Michelson, "Poetics and Savage Thought"

Related Events: Michael Haneke to introduce Code Unknown (2000) at MoMA – Oct 13

5. Neo-Dada: Collage / Décollage / Assemblage ['50s - '60s] [Oct 15]

*Guy Debord and Gil Wolman, "A User's Guide to Détournement"
<http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/detourn.htm>

*P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Cinema*, "Robert Breer"

*Beatrice Colomina, "The Eames Moscow Exhibition"

*Branden Joseph, "White on White"

+Hannah Feldman on Raymond Hains and *La France Déchirée*

+Thomas Y. Levin on Lettrist Film

+Henri Lebevre, "Social Space" from *The Production of Space*

+James Peterson, "The Logic of the Absurd: The Assemblage Strain" from *Dreams of Chaos, Visions of Order: Understanding the American Avant-Garde Cinema*

+Dossier on Robert Breer

+Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*

+Juan Suarez, "Pop, Queer, or Fascist? The Ambiguity of Pop Culture in Kenneth Anger's *Scorpio Rising*"

+Jonathan Katz on the Queering of Midcentury American Art

+Dossier on the Whitney Brothers

Related Events: No Wave Film Screenings @ EFA Gallery

www.efal.org

6. **Andy Warhol and the Intermedia space [1960s]** [Oct 22]

- *Wayne Koestenbaum, *Andy Warhol* (Ch 3: “Screens” & Ch 4: “Torture”)
- *David Joselit, “Yippie Pop”
- *Susan Sontag, “Against Interpretation”
- *Jonas Mekas, *Film Journal* [on Art and Censorship]
- *Patrick Smith, “The Films of Andy Warhol”
- +Sally Banes, *Greenwich Village, 1963* (selections)
- +John Handhardt, “The Cinematic Avant-Garde” (overview of 1950s-70s)
- +Roy Grundman, *Andy Warhol’s Blow Job* (selections)

Related Events: Warhol Film Festival at the Museum of the Moving Image Oct 20 – Nov 11
27 films are being screened: <http://www.movingimage.us> go to “Warhol’s World” for details

7. **Between the Black Box and the White Cube: The Emergence of an Expanded Cinema**
(‘60s – ‘70s) [Oct 29]

- *Sheldon Renan, “What is Underground Film?”, “The Blue Mouse” and “Expanded Cinema”
- *Liz Kotz, “Disciplining Expanded Cinema”
- *Branden Joseph on Robert Whitman
- *David Joselit on Robert Whitman
- *Malcolm LeGrice, “Around 1966” from *Abstract Film and Beyond*
- +Dossier on Ken dewey
- +Dossier on the 1964-64 New York World’s Fair
- +Bruce Jenkins “FluxFilm in three false starts”
- +Jonas Mekas on Light Shows
- +Gloria Sutton, “Networking the Subject: Stan VanDerBeek’s Movie-Drome”

Related Events: Warhol Film Festival at the Museum of the Moving Image
Nov 3: *Outer and Inner Space* (1965), *Lupe* (1965) and *Chelsea Girls* (1966)

8. **Postminimalist Aesthetics: Seriality, Loops, Structures and Processes** (‘60s – ‘70s) [Nov 5]

- *Art Since 1900, *FLUXUS* (1962)
- *Rosalind Krauss, "Video, The Aesthetics of Narcissism"
- *Dossier of Writings on Post-Minimalism: Seriality and Systems Aesthetics

- *P. Adams Sitney, "The Structural Film" (from *Visionary Cinema*)
- *Benjamin Buchloh, "Sculpture and Process in Richard Serra's Films"
- *David Ross, "Against Video Art"
- +Pamela Lee, "Some Kinds of Duration"
- +Peter Wollen, "The Two Avant-Gardes," "Ontology and Materialism"
- +Paul Sharits, "Cinema as Cognition," "Hearing :: Seeing"
- +Stewart Liebman, *Paul Sharits*
- +Annette Michelson, "Paul Sharits and the Critique of Illusionism"
- +Regina Corwell, "Michael Snow"
- +Annette Michelson, "Towards Snow"
- +Dossier on Hollis Frampton
- +Garrett Stewart, *Between Film and Screen: Modernism's Photo-Synthesis*
- +Rachael Moore, (*nostalgia*)
- +Scott MacDonald's Interviews with Hollis Frampton, Peter Kubelka, Ernie Gehr, Yoko Ono

9. Escape Attempts ('60s – '70s) [Nov 12]

- *Anne Wagner "Performance, Video, and the Rhetoric of Presence"
- *Kate Linker, "On Language and its Ruses: Poetry into Performance" in *Vito Acconci*
- *Amelia Jones, "Performance and Body Art"
- *Eric de Bruyn, "Postminimalist Film"
- *Art Since 1900 – 1967 and Earthworks
- *Art Since 1900 – 1971 and Institutional Critique
- *Performance Theory— Brief Excerpts from S. Freud, J. Lacan, H. Marcuse
- *Lucy Lippard, "Escape Attempts" from *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object*
- *Mark Godfrey, From the Box to the Street and Back Again
- *Benjamin Buchloh, "Gadget Video to Agit Video"
- +Chrissie Illes, "Between the Still and Moving Image (1966-1977)"
- +Robert Smithson, "A Cinematic Atopia" "Spiral Jetty" and "Art through the Camera's Eye"
- +Christina Kravagna, "It's Nothing worth Documenting if it's Not Difficult to Get" (on Gordon Matta-Clark)
- +Chrissie Illes, "Valie EXPORT: Body, Space, Splitting, Projection"
- +Jean-Christophe Royoux, "The Cinematographic Model in the Work of Marcel Broodthaers"
- +Kathy O'Dell, "He Got Shot" from *Contract with the Skin*
- +Andrew Uroskie, "Robert Smithson's Stratigraphic Cinema"
- +George Baker, The Cinema Model (on Robert Smithson)
- +Barlow on Mary Lucier
- +Michael Shamberg & Raindance, *Guerrilla Television*
- +Brian O'Doherty (Patrick Ireland) *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*
- +Ed Casey, *Earth-Mapping: Artists Reshaping Landscape*

10. From Resistance to Accommodation? Relational Aesthetics, Postproduction & the Emergence of the Moving Image in Art ('80s – '90s) [Nov 19]

*Mary Dery, "Slashing through the Empire of Signs" (on Ant Farm)

*Nicolas Bourriaud, *Postproduction* and *Relational Aesthetics*

*Claire Bishop, *Antagonism & Relational Aesthetics*

**Mix tape: The Art of Cassette Culture*

*Michael Zyrd on Craig Baldwin

*Dossier on Pierre Huyghe

*David Joselit, "The Video Public Sphere"

Selections from Geoffrey O'Brien, *Sonata for Jukebox*

Paul D. Miller, *Rhythm Science*

Deadline for Approving Final Paper Topic

11. Cinema and Site-Specificity ['90s – '00s] [Nov 26]

*Nick Kaye, *Site-Specific Art: Performance, Place, Documentation* (selections)

*Miwon Kwon, "One Place After Another: Site-Specificity and Locational Identity"

*Anna McCarthy, from *Ambient Television*

*Dossier on Stan Douglas

*Uroskie, "Cinema and Site-Specificity"

*Rosalind Krauss, Dossier of writings on the Postmedium Condition

12. Inner and Outer Spaces ['90s to '00s] [Dec 3]

*"The Idea of Linearity Bothers Me" – An Interview with Eija-Liisa Ahtila

*John Hanhardt, "Between Language and the Moving Image"

*Nancy Spector, "Only the Perverse Fantasy can Save Us" (on Matthew Barney)

*Doug Aitken, *Broken Screen* (Selections)

*Daniel Birnbaum, "Crystals of Time" from *Fantasized Persons and Taped Conversations*

+Philippe Dubois, "The Written Screen"

+Kaja Silverman and Harun Farocki, "La Gai Savoir (1969)" and "Numéro Deux (1975)"

13. Exhibitionary Cinema and the Idea of Projection, Presentation of MFA work [‘00s] [Dec 10]

*Jacques Ranciere, “The Emancipated Spectator” and “Interview”

*Dossier of Writings by Jean-Christophe Royoux

*Selections from *Future Cinema: The Cinematic Imaginary After Film*

*Dossier on Harun Farocki

Due to the already reckless pace of the class, I had to cut or drastically short-change a number of key Artists, Ideas, and Movements. These would all still be excellent topics for a final paper, and I’ve included some canonical readings on them on Blackboard to aid your research efforts:

19th c. Precinematic devices and their posthistory in contemporary art (Lantern Slides, Camera Obscura, Marey, Muybridge, ghosts & documentation of the supernatural...)

Surrealism – historical and contemporary examples, theories and practices

Theories of Cinematic Spectatorship: classic, modern and contemporary

Documentary Film (classic and “postmodern”)

The European Art Film: Resnais, Antonioni, Godard, etc.

Performance / Body Art / 1st Wave Feminist Works (and “pre-feminist” work like Duloc, Deren, etc.), the psychology of performance and spectatorship in these works and the question of their documentation

Video Art and its relation to Cinema, to Television, and to established art institutions and practices

The Essay Film (ironically referred to as “The New Talkie” in the 70s, when it first appeared)

No-Wave, Punk Film, and basically most of the experimental film/video of the 70s, 80s, and early 90s

The relation between contemporary photography and moving image installation

I’d be delighted to recommend readings, loan out films, and otherwise assist in research for these and any related topics – email, stop by my office, or grab me after class to discuss.