

International Symposium Essaydox

Friday, 7 October, 10 am – 6 pm
(followed by film programme with guests)
Zeughauskino, Deutsches Historisches Museum
Unter den Linden 2, 10117 Berlin
Conference language: English

The International Symposium explores contexts of production and the future of international essay films. Artists, essayists, film critics and scholars discuss philosophy, aesthetics, contextual position and future prospects of today's essay films. The working approaches, new forms of presentation, and distribution channels being employed by essayists are to be examined. To what extent do literary forms influence the creative process of essayists? Which roles do autobiographical elements play in the essay form? Here the focus is on contemporary essay films, which deal with migration, (auto)biographies, literature and memory and perceptual processes.

Participation in the symposium is free. Registration is required in advance at info@doku-arts.de.

Participants

Melis Behlil

Associate Professor of Cinema Studies and Head of Radio, Television and Cinema Department at Kadir Has University Istanbul

Sarah Cooper

Professor of Film Studies at King's College London

Thomas Elsaesser

Professor Emeritus at the Department of Media and Culture, University of Amsterdam, Visiting Professor at Columbia University

Igor Krstić

Postdoctoral Researcher, Department of Film, Theatre and Television, University of Reading

Ross Lipman

Filmmaker and restorationist at the UCLA Film & Television Archive

Laura Rascaroli

Professor of Film & Screen Media at University College Cork, Ireland

Nelson Carlo de los Santos Arias

Filmmaker, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic

Bo Wang

Filmmaker, Beijing, China

Moderation: **Jörg Taszman**

Film critic, amongst others for Deutschlandradio Kultur, Die Welt, epd Film

Keynote Essay and Esse

Ross Lipman

In the journey from thought to expression—from spirit to flesh—an essay is transformed. Its essence is mutable 'till locked, and its form becomes part of its character. Moving image essays, thankfully, are a highly fluid form. The present moment of their development is particularly exciting as technological advances enable new structures. Yet in that excitement lies peril, as structures become recognized and regulated. With roots in the written word, the illustrated lecture, and the movies, a rapidly developing future looms ahead. This presentation asks where the essence of a moving image essay lies amidst this shifting landscape. It asks: what is the "esse" of cinematic essays?

Ross Lipman is an independent filmmaker and archivist. Formerly Senior Film Restorationist at the UCLA Film & Television Archive, his many restorations include Charles Burnett's *Killer of Sheep*, Kent Mackenzie's *The Exiles*, the Academy Award-winning documentary *The Times of Harvey Milk*, and works by Charlie Chaplin, Orson Welles, Robert Altman, and John Cassavetes. He was a 2008 recipient of Anthology Film Archives' Preservation Honors, and is a three-time winner of the National Society of Film Critics' Heritage Award. His essays on film history, technology, and aesthetics have been published in *Artforum*, *Sight and Sound*, and numerous academic books and journals. His most recent film restorations are Thom Andersen's *Eadweard Muybridge*, *Zoopraxographer* and the film *Crossroads*.

The Essay Film between Festival Favourite and Global Film Practice

Thomas Elsaesser

Given the enormous popularity of the 'essay film', both as a practice among artists and filmmakers, and as a topic for academic research and writing, it may be a good moment to take stock, to try and redefine what we mean by this label, as well as to expand its reach, and include works from beyond the European home of the essay film. We may also want to listen to some of the critical voices that have begun to challenge the form from within the filmmaking community itself, and to explore further the distinctions between documentary and essay film, between found-footage film and essay film, and between essay film and the video essay.

My lecture tries to delineate a certain genealogy that wants to provide a clearer sense of the dynamics that drives the topicality of the essay film and ties its prevalence into the globalized world picture of contemporary visual culture.

Thomas Elsaesser studied English Literature and Comparative Literature at Heidelberg University and the University of Sussex. He went on to work as a film critic in London and as editor international of *Monogram* magazine. Starting in 1972, he taught at the University of East Anglia. In 1976, he created the institution's Film Studies programme and served as its director until 1986. Elsaesser was then called to the University of Amsterdam, where he built the first Film and Television Studies programme in the Netherlands, serving as its director from 1991 to 2001. From 2001 to 2008, he worked as a research professor at the University of Amsterdam. Since being conferred the status of Professor Emeritus in 2008, he has held guest professorships at Yale University (2006–2012) and Columbia University (since 2013).

Stories We Don't Tell: Trauma, History, and the Essay Film

Melis Behlil

Their reflectiveness and subjectivity make the essay film an ideal mode to deal with personal and collective memories, histories and traumas. I will be examining several essayistic films that circle around the same historical trauma from different angles. In films by descendants of Armenian genocide survivors, filmmakers are questioning what this means for their identity. In films made by Turkish grandchildren of Armenians who had been adopted and/or converted in Turkey, filmmakers try to uncover an unspoken past. By analysing these films, I will contemplate the possibility of reconciling with a traumatic past through essay films, both on a personal and perhaps a national level.

Melis Behlil is an Associate Professor of Cinema Studies and Chair of Radio, Television and Cinema Department at Kadir Has University in Istanbul, Turkey. Her areas of research interest are media industries, production studies, contemporary cinema in Turkey, and subjective documentaries. Her book, *Hollywood is Everywhere: Global Directors in the Blockbuster Era* has been published by Amsterdam University Press in 2016. In addition to teaching and other academic duties, she writes film reviews for various publications, co-hosts a weekly radio show, and is a member of the Turkish Film Critics Association.

From Home Movies to Moving Homes First-Person Documentaries and the Migrant Experience

Igor Krstić

Today more and more filmmakers address their family stories in so-called 'first-person documentaries', often to uncover buried family secrets, but frequently also to rework 'immigrant suffering', hence, the often painful experiences that moving from one place to another brought to other family members. However, these films can also be understood as filmic 'autobiographies', in which their producers inscribe not only their 'selves' into new 'oral family histories', but also seek to come to terms with what they perceive as traumatic or inconsistent in their own lives.

Dr. Igor Krstić studied literature, film and media at the universities of Tübingen, Amsterdam and Mannheim. From 2014 to 2016 he worked as a Postdoctoral Fellow on a DAAD-funded research project about essay films, personal documentaries and the figure of the migrant at the University of Reading. He is the author of *Slums on Screen* (Edinburgh University Press 2016) and co-editor of the forthcoming volume *World Cinema and the Essay Film* (planned for Wallflower Press / Columbia University Press in 2017).

Diaspora experiences, essayistic narratives and Asian subjectivity

Bo Wang

Japanese literary critic Takeuchi Yoshimi considered Asia's modernity as an experience of the invasion of Europe. For him Asia had become merely a subject of modernity, split from being a subjectivity itself. Taking the writings of Takeuchi Yoshimi as a starting point to discuss the opposition between Asia as a subject of Western modernism versus a subjectivity of its own, the lecture will show how it may be possible to re-address this conflict and explore the issue of Asian subjectivity

based on diaspora experiences, expressed through essayistic narratives.

Bo Wang (b. 1982, Chongqing, China) is an artist and filmmaker based in Brooklyn, New York. His works have been exhibited internationally, including venues like MoMA in New York, CPH:DOX in Copenhagen, Shanghai Biennale, Times Art Museum in Guangzhou, Asia Society Texas Center, among many others. He was a fellow at the Robert Flaherty Film Seminar in 2013 and attended the Berlinale Talents programme at Berlin International Film Festival in 2014. He is also a faculty member at Visual and Critical Studies, School of Visual Arts, New York.

Imaging Blindness

Sarah Cooper

In this paper I explore two remarkable documentary accounts of blindness: Gary Tarn's *Black Sun* (2005), based on the experience of the artist Hugues de Montalembert, and James Spinney and Peter Middleton's *Notes on Blindness* (2016), inspired by theology scholar John M. Hull's diary record. The filmic response to the aural narratives of both Hull and De Montalembert is visually rich, conjuring the world of blindness sensitively, perceptively and imaginatively, but it is the role of the image-making capacity of the imagination that concerns me here. De Montalembert and Hull describe vividly the persistence of mental imagery in spite of the loss of sight, and they reveal a continuing capacity for conscious visualization, as well as dream images. I focus on such mental images as they are imagined now through film, probing the contours of blindness with the light of the mind.

Sarah Cooper is Professor of Film Studies at King's College London. Her books include *Selfless Cinema?: Ethics and French Documentary* (Oxford: Legenda, 2006); *Chris Marker* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008); and *The Soul of Film Theory* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013). She has also edited a Special Issue of the journal *Film-Philosophy*: 'The Occluded Relation: Levinas and Cinema' (2007). Currently she is writing a book on film and the imagination.

Disjunctive Narration: The Essay Film's Thinking and Epistolarity as Argumentation

Laura Rascaroli

Aiming to offer an insight into the essay film's discursive structures and disjunctive method, this paper focuses on narration, including such aspects as the use of specific narrative structures, narrators and point of view, temporal organization, and textual rhythm. Setting off from the consideration that narration and argumentation are closely linked, and objecting to the view that narrative is merely a fictional layer superimposed on the essay's non-fictional core, this paper explores some of the ways in which narration may be said to be a key component of the essay film's thinking. In particular, epistolarity will be investigated as an example of the range of narrative forms on which the essay film may draw. The long-standing tradition of the epistolary essay will be explored via an engagement with a recent case study, *Lettres de Panduranga* (*Letters from Panduranga*, 2015) by Nguyễn Trinh Thi. Ultimately, the paper is an investigation into the fragility that is intrinsic to the essay form, into its potentiality for disassemblage—seen as the distinctive feature of its practice of cinematic thinking.

Laura Rascaroli is Professor of Film and Screen Media at University College Cork, Ireland. She is the author and editor of several volumes, including *The Personal Camera: Subjective Cinema and the Essay Film* (2009), *Crossing New Europe: Postmodern Travel and the European Road Movie* (2006), co-written with Ewa Mazierska, and *Antonioni: Centenary Essays* (2011), co-edited with John David Rhodes. Her work has been translated into several languages, including Chinese, Italian, Polish, and Spanish. Her new book on the essay film will be published by Oxford University Press in 2017. She is General Editor of *Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media*.

Orality as a Construction of Discourse and Montage – The Use of Modes of Storytelling in Experimental Cinema

Nelson Carlo de los Santos Arias

The universe of Chilean writer Roberto Bolaño is a complex net of truth and falseness; it was his perpetual questioning of the truth, the mystery of an act, murder lurking behind every sentence, and ultimately the impression of an exceptional crime novel that inspired me to work with Bolaño's text. I never knew whether he was being realistic or metaphorical but the darkness of the novel's genre seemed to be an ideal starting point for a conversation about our countries, the Dominican Republic as well as South and Central America. I am not certain whether I can speak of literary adaptation, rather my intention is to talk about a way of writing which, as an eternal tale within tale, creates a multiplicity of ideas and voices, an orality that, seen in the context of our countries, shaped not only our languages, ideas and ways of writing but can also be seen as the source of historiography.

Nelson Carlo de los Santos Arias was born in Santo Domingo in 1985. He attended the Iberoamericana University where he received his BFA in Creative Writing and Media Arts. In 2006, he studied cinematography in Buenos Aires, then later in Edinburgh College of Art where he started making experimental work. His film *She Said He Walks* was awarded a BAFTA for best experimental short film in 2009. His second film, *Should We Go Home?*, was shown at several film festivals as well as Bienal de São Paulo, and was also selected to be part of the permanent collection at the Film Makers Cooperative in New York. He has his MFA in Film/Video at CalArts. In 2013, his first fictional feature, *Cocote*, was awarded the prestigious Fundación Carolina scriptwriting residency in Madrid and was supported by the World Cinema Fund of the Berlin Film Festival.

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Registration at info@doku-arts.de
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