

**Course Title:** The Video Essay: from Conception to Projection (STA 209)

**Instructor:** Marco G. Ferrari

**Franklin College Switzerland:** Summer II 2012 (7/2/2011–7/26/2012)

**Classroom:** MAC lab, North Campus Academic Building, Room 11

**Times:** Mon, Tue, Wed & Thurs 2:30 PM – 5:05 PM

### **Office Hours and Contact Information**

Office: MAC lab–North Campus Academic Building, Room 11

Office Hours: Mon, Tues, Wed, & Thurs 2–2:30 pm, and by appointment.

E-mail: [mferrari@fc.edu](mailto:mferrari@fc.edu)

\*It is advisable to schedule all appointments via e-mail at least 48 hours prior the date on which you would like to meet.

### **Course Description**

Video = from the Latin verb for “To see” – Essay = from the French verb for “To try”

This is an intensive video course that focuses on the theory and production of a contemporary film genre known as the video essay: a branch of cinema which stems directly from early cinema, subsequently growing from documentary, surrealism, experimental, and cinema art genres. The video essay, like its celluloid predecessor the essay film, sought to emphasize the artistic value of cinema as opposed to its more common function as an object of consumption for entertainment value. As the name implies, the film–video essay is a personal expression of how and what we see when we try to make audio-visual sense of the world.

How do students perceive their relationship to the environment? How can that relationship be translated into a visual vocabulary? How can this vocabulary be refined, through the craft of editing? Ultimately, how can the environment itself participate in facilitating the students’ creative expression?

Readings, screenings, discussions, and the creation of the video essay are essential components of the course. The key aspects of video-making to be studied in this course have been divided into four modules: planning, filming, editing and presenting. Students will follow this cycle of production for two video essay assignments, with each video being accompanied by a 2–3 page statement of artistic intent. These short papers should make reference to the theoretical readings assigned throughout the class while explaining the student’s personal vision and technical challenges encountered while creating the work.

\*Students enrolled in this class must have a their own digital video recording device.

### **Organization of Course**

**Each lesson will be divided into:**

- (I) Class discussion of assigned readings based on “Student Reading Notes.” Students should e-mail me their “Student Reading Notes” by noon on the day that the readings will be discussed. A guideline for these “Notes” is attached to this syllabus.
- (II) Conceptual/Technical Lesson and/or Work in Progress Session: planning, filming, editing, or presenting.
- (III) Film Screenings.

## **Required Reading**

All required readings will be posted on MOODLE (MOODLE password: *video*).

*Auxiliary Readings* will also be posted on MOODLE. These readings will generally be on technical aspects of production and can be used as reference materials during production.

Note: Additional photocopied material may be distributed in class or uploaded onto the course home page. In the event of absence, the student is responsible for all new assignments and information given during class time.

## **Evaluation Criteria and Grading**

The success of this course depends on the commitment of its students to engage creatively with theoretical and technical course materials. The willingness of students to share their personal stories and thoughts in the creation of the video essays will create the backbone of their video work. The student's openness and sensitivity towards their fellow classmate's expression will allow for greater growth and exploration in the class as well. Evaluation of all student work will take into consideration the student's availability to experiment intellectually and creatively in a way that demonstrates a thoughtful consideration and creative interpretation of the themes and questions raised in course readings and class discussions.

- 1) General Class Preparation, including active participation in class discussions and two "Peer Critiques" (20%)
- 2) Student Reading Notes (20%)
- 3) Creation of Two Video Essays: Video #1 approx. 3–5 min; and Video #2 approx. 5–7 min (40%)
- 4) Video Essays will be accompanied by a 2–3 page reflective "Statement of Intent" (20%)

\*Late Notes, Videos and Papers WILL affect your grade.

## **Attendance Policy**

Regular attendance is required. In the case of excused absences due to documented illness or family emergencies, please present a dean's note as soon as possible.

## **General Course Goals**

- 1) To highlight key movements and artists within the relatively unexplored branch of cinema known as the video essay.
- 2) To explore cinema's connection to performance and visual arts and how cinema's language continues to develop with new technologies.
- 3) To introduce and explore production techniques within the creation of a video essay.

## Student Learning Objectives

- 1) To see the value and the interconnectedness between one's personal story and the environment in which they are living, and to ultimately express these ideas and emotions in a creative way.
- 2) To be an attentive spectator and cultivate the skill of critiquing, reflecting sincerely and meaningfully on readings, discussions, screenings, and in peer review contexts.
- 3) To cultivate the ability to see the world cinematographically and find creative solutions to "capture" or "interpret" that vision.

## Schedule of Assignments

### WEEK I

#### Monday July 2:

- Course Introduction
- Overview of Student's Camera and Editing Skill Levels
- Video Essay Brief Concepts
- Screening (film essay): Chris Marker, *La jetée* (28 min, 1963, France) with Jean-Pierre Gorin interviews on Chris Marker (20 min, 2005)
- Discussion on Screenings

#### Reading Assignment due 7/3

Lopate, "In Search of the Centaur", 1989 (pp. 243–270)

Bresland, "On the Origin of the Video Essay" 2010 (pp. 1-3)

#### Viewing Assignment due 7/3

Please view the online journal video suite for examples of short video essays and select one to focus on, as we will discuss them in class:

[http://www.blackbird.vcu.edu/v9n1/gallery/ve-intro/intro\\_page.shtml](http://www.blackbird.vcu.edu/v9n1/gallery/ve-intro/intro_page.shtml)

#### Tuesday July 3:

- Student Notes for Class Discussion
- Screening of Online Short Video Essays
- Film-Essay Concepts (continued)
- Pre-Production Overview
- Introduction to Video Essay Project #1 (due 7/12): Ideas and Planning

#### Reading Assignment due 7/4

Thompson–Bordwell, *Film History*-Chap 01 (pp. 3-11)

Steyeri, "In Defense of the Poor Image" (pp. 1–9)

#### *Auxiliary Readings:*

*Videomaker Guide-Digital Camera Basics; Videomaker Guide-Shooting Tips;*

*Schoepfel-Bare Bones Camera-01 Basics*

#### Writing Assignment due 7/4

Video Essay Project #1: Ideas/Sketches

### **Wednesday July 4:**

- Student Notes for Class Discussion
- Screening (early beginnings): *Landmarks of early film* v.1 (Lumiere, Melies and other short films)
- Camera: Overview and Test Shoots
- Video Essay Project #1: Ideas, Planning, Treatment

#### Reading Assignment due 7/5:

Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" (pp. 9–16)

Bazin, "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema" (pp. 23–40)

#### *Auxiliary Readings:*

*Videomaker–Editing*

Vertov, "Kinoeye"

#### Writing Assignment due 7/5

Video Essay Project #1: Treatment (draft)

### **Thursday July 5:**

- Student Notes for Class Discussion
- Review Treatments
- Editorial: Final Cut Express Overview–Capture Video Tests
- Screening: (realism–poetic elements): Dziga Vertov, *Man with a Movie Camera* (68 min, 1929, Soviet Union)

#### Production Assignment due 7/9

Video Essay Project #1: Capture footage over weekend

#### Reading Assignment due 7/9:

McGinn, "Vision and the Screen" (pp. 15–57)

#### Writing Assignment due 7/9

Video Essay Project #1: Treatment (finalize)

## **WEEK II**

### **Monday July 9:**

- Student Notes for Class Discussion
- Screening (surrealism): Luis Bunuel, *Un Chien Andalou* (17 min, 1929, France–Spain); Man Ray, Hans Richter and Maya Daren short films
- Video Essay Project #1: Capturing Footage and Editing

#### Reading Assignment due 7/10:

Bunuel, "Cinema, Instrument of Poetry" (pp. 66–69)

Astruc, "La Camera-Stylo" (pp. 1–4)

Murch, *Blink of an Eye*, various chapters A (pp. 15–22, 32–33, 40–42)

## Tuesday July 10:

- Student Notes for Class Discussion
- Statement of Artistic Intent Overview
- Screening: Early Experimental Films
- Video Essay Project #1: Editorial Work

### Reading Assignment due 7/11:

Espinosa, "For an Imperfect Cinema" (pp. 24-26)

Deren, "Tempo and Tension" (pp. 144–150)

Murch, *Blink of an Eye*, various chapters B (pp. 43-51, 57–63)

## Wednesday July 11:

- Student Notes for Class Discussion
- Screening (documentary): Scenes of Orson Welles, *Filming Othello* (84 min, 1978); Pasolini, Pier Paolo. *Notes for an African Orestes*. (76 min, 1970, Italy); and Agnes Varda. *Daguerréotypes*. (80 min, 1978, France)
- Video Essay Project #1: Final Edits and Exporting

## Thursday July 12:

- **Video Essay Project #1 with Statement of Intent Due**
- **Video Essay Project #1 Screenings and Critiques**
- Video Essay Project #2 Assignment (due 7/26): Ideas and Planning
- Screening (avant-garde / experimental): Michael Snow, *Wavelength* (45 min, 1967, USA)

### Writing Assignment due 7/16

Video Essay Project #2: Ideas/Sketches

### Reading Assignment due 7/16

Alter, "Translating the Essay into Film and Installation" (pp.44–57)

Wollen, "Knight's Moves" (pp. 147–169)

### *Auxiliary Readings:*

*SchoeppeI–Bare Bones Camera–02 Composition; SchoeppeI–Bare Bones Camera–03 Sequences; SchoeppeI–Bare Bones Camera–06 Montage–07 Lighting;*

*SchoeppeI–Bare Bones Camera–08 Doing It*

## WEEK III

### Monday July 16

- Student Notes for Class Discussion
- Video Essay Project #2: Review of Ideas/Sketches, Logistics
- Screening (cinema art): Reinhard Wulf, *James Benning: Circling the Image* (84 min, 2003, Germany/USA)

### Reading Assignment due 7/17

Rabiger, "Directing the Documentary" Chap 05 (pp. 79–90)

Writing Assignment due 7/17

Video Essay Project #2: Treatment (draft)

**Tuesday July 17**

- Student Notes for Class Discussion
- Video Essay Project #2: Review Treatment and begin Production
- Screening: Short Avant-Garde Films

Reading Assignment due 7/18

Mondloch, "Screens" Chap 01–Interface Matters (pp. 1–19)

Production Assignment

Video Essay Project #2: Initial Filming (capture footage)

**Wednesday July 18**

- Notes for Class Discussion
- Video Essay #2: Editorial Work or Filming

Reading Assignment due 7/19

Lazzarato, "Video-Flows and Real Time" (pp.283–291)

Sontag, Against Interpretation (pp. 1–10)

Production Assignment

Video Essay Project #2: Filming (capture footage)

**Thursday July 19**

- Notes for Class Discussion
- Video Essay #2: Editorial Work or Filming
- Screening (looking back at the future): Chris Marker, *Sans Soleil* (100 min, 1983, France) or Agnes Varda, *The beaches of Agnes Varda* (110 min, 2008, France)

Production Assignment due 7/23

Video Essay Project #2: Final Filming (over weekend)

Reading Assignment due 7/23

Connolly, Introduction and Chap 01 "Between Space, Site, and Screen" (pp. 9–37)

**WEEK IV**

**Monday July 23**

- Student Notes for Class Discussion
- Video Essay Project #2: Editorial Work
- Screening: Compilation of Video Art Screenings

Reading Assignment due 7/24

Rascaroli, "The Essay Film: Problems, Definitions, Textual Commitments" (pp. 24–44)

## Tuesday July 24

- Student Notes for Class Discussion
- Video Essay Project #2: Editorial Work
- Screening: Tarkovsky, Andrei. Stalker (163 min, 1979, Soviet Union)

### Reading Assignment due 7/25

Barthes, "Leaving the Movie Theater" (pp. 343–349)

Sterling, "Vernacular Video" (pp. 1–5)

## Wednesday July 25

- Notes for Class Discussion
- Video Essay Project #2: Final Editorial Tweaks and Export

## Thursday July 26

- **Video Essay Project #2 with Statement of Intent Due**
- **Video Essay #2 Screenings and Critiques**

Summer Session II – The Video Essay: from Conception to Projection (STA 209)

Marco G. Ferrari, Franklin College Switzerland, [mferrari@fc.edu](mailto:mferrari@fc.edu)

### **STUDENT NOTES FOR CLASS DISCUSSION**

\*It is the student's responsibility to e-mail me their "Student Notes" by noon on the day that the readings will be discussed.

Name:

Date:

- 1) As you see it, what are the key themes/ideas explored in the readings?
- 2) Are there any connections you can make between these readings and previous course readings or screenings?
- 3) Which of the themes/ideas explored in this work, might you be interested in exploring as a filmmaker? Why are these themes particularly important to you? Could these ideas be developed within your current video project?
- 4) Provide at least two questions based off the readings.

\*(Please reference the work you are referring to in your answers or questions)

The Video Essay: from Conception to Projection (TA 209)  
Marco G. Ferrari, Franklin College Switzerland, Summer Session II

Bibliography of Assigned Readings

Alter, Nora. 2007. "Translating the Essay into Film and Installation". *Journal of Visual Culture*. 6, no. 1: 44-57.

Astruc, Alexandre. "The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La Camera-Stylo" *L'Écran française*. (1948).

[http://soma.sbcc.edu/Users/DaVega/FILMST\\_101/FILMST\\_101\\_FILM\\_MOVEMENT\\_S/FrenchNewWave/cameraStylo.pdf](http://soma.sbcc.edu/Users/DaVega/FILMST_101/FILMST_101_FILM_MOVEMENT_S/FrenchNewWave/cameraStylo.pdf). (accessed June 25, 2011).

Barthes, Roland. *The Rustle of Language*. Berkeley [u.a.]: Univ. of California Press, 1989.

Bazin, André, and Hugh Gray. *What Is Cinema?* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967, 9-16 and 23-40.

Bresland, John. "On the Origin of the Video Essay" *Blackbird*. 9. 1 (2010),  
[http://www.blackbird.vcu.edu/v9n1/gallery/ve-bresland\\_j/ve-origin\\_page.shtml](http://www.blackbird.vcu.edu/v9n1/gallery/ve-bresland_j/ve-origin_page.shtml).  
(accessed June 25, 2011).

Bunuel, Luise. "Cinema, Instrument of Poetry" in  
Aranda, Francisco. *Luis Bunuel: A Critical Biography*, Secker & Warburg, 1975, pp. 273–275. Translation by David Robinson.

Connolly, Maeve. *The Place of Artists' Cinema: Space, Site, and Screen*. Bristol, United Kingdom: Intellect Ltd, 2009, (pp. 9–37).

Deren, Maya. "Tempo and Tension" in Jacobs, Lewis, ed. *The Movies as Medium*. New York: Straus, 1970. pp. 144–150.

Lazzarato, Maurizio. "Video, Flows and Real Time," in Leighton, Tanya, ed. *Art and the Moving Image: A Critical Reader*. London: Tate Publishing, 2008.

Lopate, Phillip. "In Search of the Centaur: The Essay-Film," in *Beyond Document: Essays on Nonfiction Film*. Edited by Charles Warren, Wesleyan University Press, 1998. pp. 243–270.

McGinn, Colin. *The Power of Movies: How Screen and Mind Interact*. New York: Vintage, 2007, pp 15–57.

Mondloch, Kate. *Screens: Viewing Media Installation Art*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010.

Murch, Walter. *In the Blink of an Eye: A Perspective on Film Editing*. Los Angeles: Silman-James Press, 2001, pp. 15–22; 32–33; 40–42; 43-51; 57–63.

Rabiger, Michael. *Directing the Documentary*. Boston: Focal Press, 1987.



Rascaroli, Laura. 2008. "The Essay Film: Problems, Definitions, Textual Commitments". *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*. 49, no. 2: 24-47.

Sontag, Susan. *Against Interpretation, and Other Essays*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1966, pp.1–10.

Sterling, Bruce. "Vernacular Video*Wired*". (2007), [http://www.wired.com/beyond\\_the\\_beyond/2007/01/vernacular\\_videl/#comments](http://www.wired.com/beyond_the_beyond/2007/01/vernacular_videl/#comments). (accessed June 26, 2011).

Steyeri, "In Defense of the Poor Image" *E-flux Journal*, 10 (November 2009).

Thompson, Kristin, and David Bordwell. *Film History: An Introduction*. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2003, pp 3-11.

Vertov, Dziga. "We: Variant of a Manifesto" in *Kinoeye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*. Edited by Annette Michelson, University of California Press, 1984.

Wollen, Peter. "Knight's Moves" from *Camera Obscura, Camera Lucida: Essays in Honor of Annette Michelson*, ed. Michelson, Annette, Richard Allen, and Malcolm Turvey (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2003).

#### Auxiliary Technical Readings

Schoeppel, Tom. *The Bare Bones Camera Course for Film and Video*. Tampa: Tom Schroeppel.

Videomaker, *The Videomaker Guide to Video Production*. 4 ed. John Burkhart. Burlington: Focal Press, 2008.

## Filmography of Screenings

*Avant Garde 2: Experimental Cinema 1928–1954* (Kino Productions).

*Landmarks of Early Film, v. 1*, 1997 (Blackhawk Films Collections, 117 min, 1886–1913).

Bunuel, Luis. *Un Chien Andalou* (17 min, 1929, France–Spain).

Daren, Maya. Short Films.

*Man Ray Films* (Centre Georges Pompidou co-production).

*Hans Richter Short Films: 1921–1930* (Helmut Herbst production, 1969, Germany)

Marker, Chris, *La jetée* (28 min, 1963, France) with Jean-Pierre Gorin interviews.

Marker, Chris. *Sans Soleil* (100 min, 1983, France)

Pasolini, Pier Paolo. *Notes For An African Orestes*. (76 min, 1970, Italy).

Snow, Michael. *Wavelength* (45 min, 1967, USA)

Tarkovsky, Andrei. *Stalker* (163 min, 1979, Soviet Union)

Varda, Agnes. *The beaches of Agnes Varda* (110 min, 2008, France)

Varda, Agnes. *Daguerréotypes*. (80 min, 1978, France)

Vertov Dziga, *Man with a Movie Camera* (68 min, 1929, Soviet Union).

Video Essay Suite—Introducing Six Video Essays (curated by John Bresland).  
([http://www.blackbird.vcu.edu/v9n1/gallery/ve-intro/intro\\_page.shtml](http://www.blackbird.vcu.edu/v9n1/gallery/ve-intro/intro_page.shtml)).

Viola, Bill. Video Compilation

Welles, Orson. *Filming Othello* (84 min, 1978).

Wulf, Reinhard. *James Benning: Circling the Image* (2003, USA)

*\*For links to online material that was screened throughout the course, please feel free to request a list.*