FULL VERSION OF PROGRAMME (with abstracts of papers and film summaries)


Friday 28 February

6.00-6.15
Registration

6.15-7.00
Cecilia Sayad in conversation with Michael Temple about her new book
Performing Authorship: Self-Inscription and Corporeality in the Cinema
In an era defined by the instability of identities and the recycling of works, Performing Authorship offers a refreshingly new take on the cinematic auteur, proposing that the challenges that once accelerated this figure's critical demise should instead pump new life into it. This book is about the drama of creative processes in essay, documentary and fiction films, with particular emphasis on the effects that the filmmaker's body exerts on our sense of an authorial presence. It is an illuminating analysis of films by Jean-Luc Godard, Woody Allen, Agnes Varda, Orson Welles, Jean Rouch, Eduardo Coutinho and Sarah Turner that shows directors shifting between opposite movements towards authorial assertion and divestiture, palpability and disappearance, exposure and masking. In making this journey, Cecilia Sayad argues, the film author is not necessarily at the work's origin, nor does it constitute the end product. What the new concept of performing authorship describes is the making and unmaking of a subject.

7.00-8.30
Screening & discussion: Robert Kramer, Berlin 10/90,1990, 60 min
Kramer's self-portrait derives from a commission from French TV, specifically for a series called 'Live' in which each film would consist of one long take. The shot takes place in a Berlin hotel room, from 15.15 to 16.16 on 25 October 1990. In the days after the reunification of Germany, Kramer films himself sitting next to a TV monitor, discussing the filmmaking process and the changing world around him.

Saturday 1 March

10.00-10.15
Registration

10.15-10.30
Introduction by Laura Mulvey, Birkbeck Institute for the Moving Image

10.30-11.10

11.10-11.50
Speaker: Laura Rascaroli, ‘Liquid Europe, Fluid Cinema: on Aleksandr Sokurov’s *Elegy of a Voyage*’

Shot with special anamorphic lenses that distort the image, Aleksandr Sokurov’s *Elegy of a Voyage* (*Elegiya dorogi*, France/Russia/Netherlands, 2001) seems framed through a quivering veil of steam. The film’s obsession with the element of water in all its forms (snow, rain, waves, clouds, vapours) is coupled with a persistent emphasis on movement – of peoples, thoughts and images. I will argue that fluidity is the central metaphor of the film, the fulcrum of Sokurov’s reflection on Europe, on authorship, and on medium. Going against the essay’s tradition of a solid, coherent author, who confidently speaks in the first person and controls the development of a rational argument, Sokurov debunks his authority by presenting his subjectivity as fluctuating and uncertain. Through the fragmented image of his body, coupled with an asynchronous voiceover, he creates interstices between narrator, film and spectator. These interstices assist the extension of authorship to the audience, and the development of a reflection on the liquid state of Europe, of subjectivity, and of the filmic image in the twenty-first century.

11.50-12.10
Screening: Jonas Mekas, *Self-portrait*, 1980, 20 min

12.10-12.35
Speaker: Laura Bussetta, ‘Jonas Mekas’s *Self-portrait*: subjectivity, fragmentation, and displacement’

*Self-portrait* is a short film made by Jonas Mekas in 1980, now part of his broader project entitled *365 Day Project*, a set of video diaries made every day throughout 2007 available online in a section of the filmmaker website. In these approximately 20 minute long videos, the Lithuanian born filmmaker offers a reflection on amateur practices, diaristic cinema, notions of identity, and strategies of self-representation. In *Self-portrait*, the body of the filmmaker, which is usually absent from the image, appears on the screen, while the self-portrait itself opens up a relational dimension, involving an additional body (and eye) filming. The exhibition of the fragmented body of the subject is related to procedures of identification, and self-writing practice becomes at the same time an auto-ethnographic journey where personal history is implicated in larger social formations and historical processes (Russell). The film offers a brief condensation of self-representational practices, and a consideration of the particular personality of the displaced person, always split between origin and adopted homelands. Jonas Mekas’s ‘accented cinema’ (Naficy) is often connected with memory, and subjective space is crossed by social and cultural phenomena, in which personal cinema opens up to a universal and historical dimension.

12.35-1.45
Lunch

1.45-2.30
Screening of short experimental works:
Dietmar Brehm, *Kamera*, 1997, 9 min, 16mm
Louise Bourque, *Self Portrait Post Mortem*, 2005, 3 min, 35mm
Cécile Fontaine, *Autoportrait*, 1982, 3 min, 8mm
Olivier Fouchard, *Autoportrait refilmé*, 1998, 4 min, 16mm
Christian Lebrat, *Autoportrait au dispositif*, 1981, 9 min, 16mm
Jun’ichi Okuyama, *La face et le dos en même temps*, 1990, 6 min, 16mm
Jean-François Reverdy, *Vidéo sténopé*, 10 min, DV

2.30-2.50
Speaker: Muriel Tinel-Temple, ‘The self-portrait in experimental cinema’
In experimental cinema, the self-reflexive film is one of the most common forms. Besides diaries and autobiographies, both of which involve the filmmaker’s identity, we find numerous films called ‘self-portraits’, in which the filmmaker’s personality is definitely not the main subject. The subject is rather the film itself, and the filmmaker appears literally at work, i.e. experimenting with the medium and showing what s/he can do with images and sounds. In *La face et le dos en même temps* and *Vidéo sténopé* the filmmakers have invented a movie-camera: the first one with two lenses in order to film two images at the same time, and the second one without any lens but a kind of camera obscura. In *Kamera*, Brehm wanted to test his new camera in front of a mirror and decided to try everything the instruction manual told him not to do. In one of her very first films, Fontaine plays with framing by filming herself in extreme close-ups, while Lebrat is more interested in mobile frames obtained by using frame masks. Fouchard experiments with re-filming from one format to another (from 8mm to 16mm), and Bourque worked on the celluloid itself and its natural deterioration when she buried her film underground for several months. Like painters before them, these filmmakers are using the cheapest and the most available model – themselves – to learn about their medium and show their abilities.

2.50-3.20
Speaker: Marlène Monteiro, ‘Vincent Dieutre’s *Leçons de ténèbres*: the self-portrait as fragmented self’
This paper seeks to explore the effects of *self-portraying moments* within narrative self-representation through the example of *Leçons de ténèbres* (2000), a film by French documentary maker Vincent Dieutre, whose work tends to be described as self-fictional essays. *Leçons de ténèbres* consists of a sensory exploration of Caravaggism as the film-maker travels across Europe, from Paris to Utrecht, to Naples, and eventually Rome. Throughout the film, he dialogically experiments with the medium’s plasticity in search of correspondences with the Caravaggist aesthetics. At the same time, the film is punctuated by sequences shot on Super 8 in which Dieutre appears, alone or with his partner, in what resembles a shooting studio. These scenes come across as isolated figures, to paraphrase Deleuze; they stand outside the diegesis and break the narrative flow, in what Laura Mulvey also described as segments of delayed cinema. Moreover, while these visual, almost oneiric, interludes enable the film-maker to reflect on the intermedial relation between painting and film (by way of the chiaroscuro lighting technique), and thus
ultimately on the cinematic medium, they also suggest a fragmented representation of the self, detached from narrative coherence and linearity.

3.20-3.40
Coffee break

3.40-4.15
Screening of two short self-portraits:
Jack Hazan, United Kingdom, 1982, 15 min
Commissioned by French TV, for a series entitled ‘Lettres de cinéastes’ (Filmmakers’ letters), Hazan’s letter is filmed in London in the early days of the Thatcher period. He discusses his career in advertising, his past films and current projects, and we see the filmmaker at work in Soho. More broadly, the letter reflects on the state of British cinema in the gloomy economic crisis and violent social climate of the early 1980s.

Chantal Akerman, Chantal Akerman par Chantal Akerman, 1997, 63 min
[extract]
This self-portrait is in two parts. In the first part, Akerman addresses the camera, reflecting on the nature of a filmic self-portrait and on the circumstances in which this particular film was born – in fact it is a commission for the French TV series ‘Cinéastes de notre temps’ (Filmmakers of our time). Concluding that the best way to represent herself is simply to show her work, Akerman then edits together – without commentary – a series of clips from her films.

4.15-4.55
Round table with the speakers (chaired by Alisa Lebow)

4.55-5.00
Closing words by Laura Mulvey
ABSTRACTS


In an era defined by the instability of identities and the recycling of works, *Performing Authorship* offers a refreshingly new take on the cinematic auteur, proposing that the challenges that once accelerated this figure’s critical demise should instead pump new life into it. This book is about the drama of creative processes in essay, documentary and fiction films, with particular emphasis on the effects that the filmmaker’s body exerts on our sense of an authorial presence. It is an illuminating analysis of films by Jean-Luc Godard, Woody Allen, Agnes Varda, Orson Welles, Jean Rouch, Eduardo Coutinho and Sarah Turner that shows directors shifting between opposite movements towards authorial assertion and divestiture, palpability and disappearance, exposure and masking. In making this journey, Cecilia Sayad argues, the film author is not necessarily at the work’s origin, nor does it constitute the end product. What the new concept of performing authorship describes is the making and unmaking of a subject.

Laura Rascaroli, University College Cork: ‘Liquid Europe, Fluid Cinema: on Aleksandr Sokurov’s *Elegy of a Voyage*’

Shot with special anamorphic lenses that distort the image, Aleksandr Sokurov’s *Elegy of a Voyage* (*Elegiya dorogi*, France/Russia/Netherlands, 2001) seems framed through a quivering veil of steam. The film’s obsession with the element of water in all its forms (snow, rain, waves, clouds, vapours) is coupled with a persistent emphasis on movement – of peoples, thoughts and images. I will argue that fluidity is the central metaphor of the film, the fulcrum of Sokurov’s reflection on Europe, on authorship, and on medium. Going against the essay’s tradition of a solid, coherent author, who confidently speaks in the first person and controls the development of a rational argument, Sokurov debunks his authority by presenting his subjectivity as fluctuating and uncertain. Through the fragmented image of his body, coupled with an asynchronous voiceover, he creates interstices between narrator, film and spectator. These interstices assist the extension of authorship to the audience, and the development of a reflection on the liquid state of Europe, of subjectivity, and of the filmic image in the twenty-first century.

Laura Busetta, Sapienza University of Rome: ‘Jonas Mekas’s *Self-portrait: subjectivity, fragmentation, and displacement*’

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history is implicated in larger social formations and historical processes (Russell). The film offers a brief condensation of self-representational practices, and a consideration of the particular personality of the displaced person, always split between origin and adopted homelands. Jonas Mekas’s ‘accented cinema’ (Naficy) is often connected with memory, and subjective space is crossed by social and cultural phenomena, in which personal cinema opens up to a universal and historical dimension.

Muriel Tinel-Temple, Birkbeck College: ‘The self-portrait in experimental cinema’

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Marlène Monteiro, Birkbeck College: ‘Vincent Dieutre’s Leçons de ténèbres: the self-portrait as a fragmented self’

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**FILM SUMMARIES**

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