

22nd International Bremen Film Conference – May 03- 07, 2017

Call for Papers: Film As Research Method.

Using film for research and deriving a method from this can take very different forms and directions. In natural sciences and the humanities, for example, film produces visual evidence by way of recording, visualizing and archiving motion sequences. Similarly to the philosophy essay, a film essay can be used as a method of thinking and writing. Furthermore, film can become a source for contributing to historiography or displaying a history of human ideas and desires. Finally, in the context of artistic research, film offers methodological approaches to linking science and art, ranging from experimental film to documentary and fiction film as well as to contemporary forms such as interactive documentaries and video essays. The 22nd International Bremen Film Conference will address the interdisciplinary implications of film as a research method. It is open to scholars in film, cultural studies and history, as well as to scholars working in related fields. During the conference, films will be screened at our local cinema, discussed with filmmakers and examined in relation to their research value.

Keynotes:

Paolo Favero (Antwerp), Sylvie Lindeperg (Paris), Catherine Russell (Montreal)

The idea to use film as a medium for research is as old as film itself. As early as the end of the 19th century the Lumière brothers' cinematograph was used in hospitals to document the patients' conditions and to develop a method for the visualization and diagnosis of mental illnesses. In the 1950s this approach was rekindled and extended: a scientific film project was developed with the intention of creating an 'Encyclopaedia Cinematografica'. The behavior of objects, plants, animals and humans was recorded to create a comprehensive archive of motion sequences of all kind. The project was promoted by international researchers of natural sciences, psychology, and ethnology. Furthermore, it was also intended to visualize and classify typical movements in order to record regularities and deviations. Until the present day similar procedures of visualization and recording are an integral part of several research methodologies in both natural sciences and humanities, thus creating their own aesthetic forms.

New approaches to research have recently been developed in the area of avant-garde films, a film form that explores the medium in a self-reflective manner, e.g. the *Sensory Ethnography Lab* of Harvard University that operates in-between science and art. It is widely recognized as a successful film area that attracts large audiences at festivals and has attracted a lot of interest within the art world. Furthermore, there is an increasing presence of online interactive screen productions focusing on issues of research in social interactions, reality, memory etc. which are often identified as interactive documentaries. In film studies the video essay has been established as a minor genre that somehow expands the field of the literary essay. Hence, these and related approaches aim for an aestheticization of science in general, a criticism of the scientific-media observation and a diversification of text-based knowledge production.

As early as the 1940s a film practice that settles on the border of science and art is defined by the filmmaker and theorist Hans Richter as "film essay": "[T]he film essay enables the filmmaker to make the 'invisible' world of thoughts and ideas visible on the screen. Unlike the documentary film that presents facts and information, the essay film produces complex

thought—reflections that are not necessarily bound to reality, but can also be contradictory, irrational, and fantastic”.

In 1948 Alexandre Astruc describes it in a far more radical manner: “a Descartes of today would already have shut himself up in his bedroom with a 16mm camera and some film, and would be writing his philosophy on film: for his *Discours de la méthode* would today be of such a kind that only the cinema could express it satisfactorily”. Astruc transfers the philosopher’s work, that has laid the foundations for a modern scientific understanding, into film practice. The discourse he refers to is: *Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting One's Reason and of Seeking Truth in the Sciences* which is characterized by a strong focus on the subject and directs it against the scholarly tradition. The concept of doubt and the study of the world are regarded as central means of insight next to a metaphysical ego-centration. With his statement Astruc called for a theory-based form of film that builds on literature and philosophy as well as on mathematics and history.

Siegfried Kracauer (1969) has located historiography and film itself into the liminal area between art and sciences, thus emphasizing the correlation of aesthetics and scientific production and the fact that history requires a medium in order to be told. Filmmakers such as Alain Resnais, Claude Lanzmann and Edgar Reitz have generated forms of filmic historiography in cooperation with historians. History has therefore not just accepted film into its spectrum of methods as a source, but has developed historiography itself as both a poetic as well as a media practice. Along these lines Marc Ferro (1977) talks about the prospect of a history of human ideas and desires by taking into account the most diverse film forms. In his long-standing work for television: *Histoire Parallèle / The Week Fifty Years Ago*, his research practice has taken on audio-visual form. Nowadays this research practice is shifting towards digital and net-based formats.

The **22nd International Bremen Film Conference** offers a platform for interdisciplinary exchange on historic and contemporary approaches to film with the intention of determining how the medium can be used as a research method. The conference will combine talks, panel discussions, film screenings, and Q&As with artists, and will take place from May 3rd to May 7th, 2017 at Bremen’s communal cinema CITY 46. Abstracts for papers that address the above topic with an inter-disciplinary and film-theoretical approach are welcomed. If you wish to participate in the **22nd International Bremen Film Conference** please submit an abstract (2000 characters) with a short curriculum vitae in German or English by October 1st 2016. A small travel allowance may be granted but funds are limited.

Astruc, Alexandre (1992) *The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La Camera Stylo* [1948].

Ferro, Marc (1977) *Cinéma et histoire*, Paris 1977.

Kracauer, Siegfried (1969) *History – The last things before the last*. New York.

Richter, Hans (1992) *The Film Essay. A New Form of Documentary Film* [1940]. See: <http://www.newwavefilm.com/about/camera-stylo-astruc.shtml>.