Summer 2014 Graduate Schedule

Summer I: Tuesday, May 27 - Saturday, July 5

Engl.GA.2916.001: The British Essay Film

Sukhdev Sandhu

Tuesday/Thursday 4:00-6:00pm

The essay film – or cine-essay – has been described as “the most important and popular form of filmmaking since the 1990s”. Availing themselves of the freedoms that Aldous Huxley championed when he described essays as “literary devices for saying almost everything about almost anything”, and drawn to theorist Hans Richter’s call in 1940 for a new kind of documentary that eschewed “beautiful vistas” in favour of forms that could permit “a representation for intellectual content”, filmmakers as diverse as Chris Marker, Jean-Luc Godard, Errol Morris, Jonas Mekas and Trinh T. Minh-ha have used the essay film to fashion some of the most roaming, self-reflexive, politically astute works of cinema in recent decades.

This class, an introduction to the essay film, will highlight the ways in which the form is drawn to the important of process as much as final product; its capaciousness such that it can incorporate elements of travelogue, memoir, reportage and fabulation; its foregrounding of auditory and sonic effects; its relationship to the rise of creative non-fiction. What can literature students learn – in terms of shaping arguments, embracing visuality, utilizing humour – from the essay film? Artists to be studied will include the likes of John Berger, Black Audio Film Collective, Derek Jarman and Adam Curtis.