

McGill University
Department of Languages, Literatures and Cultures
LLCU 300

Photography and Cinema

Thinking the Modern Image through Stillness and Motion



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Office hours by appointment

Zoom Meetings
TTR 4:05-5:25

The experience and understanding of modernity have been deeply shaped by an ongoing revolution in visual media, from the invention of photography in 1839 to cinematography in 1895, to the diffusion, more recently, first of television and then digital media. Despite the strong temptation to read this historical unfolding in terms of technical progress and obsolescence, the question of the “mechanically” reproduced image (the original *phōtós-graphê*, the writing of light) remains stubbornly central to the hybrid streaming of imagery

that defines our contemporary visual culture. This seminar will use the relation between photography and cinema as a point of entry to question our present engagement with an increasingly slippery image. So close in their technical, aesthetic and artistic elements, yet so strikingly different, cinema and photography have borrowed from each other and relied on one another for definition throughout their history. Working against the usual binaries that oppose cinema and photography (speed vs. stillness; animate vs. inanimate; spectacle vs. document) will allow us to raise questions of how cinema has understood photography, what cinema finds so compelling in photography, and how photography questions the cinematic image.

We will study how photography and cinema collaborated and competed to represent the modernist impulses, from early cinema to the celebration of speed and urban life in the Russian cinema of Dziga Vertov and European surrealism. The seminar will proceed to explore how post-war cinema reacted to the earlier avant-garde by embracing a “slow image” aspiring to the pensiveness of photography. In addition to avant-garde experimentation, popular classics like Hitchcock’s *Rear Window* (1954) and Christopher Nolan’s *Memento* (2000) will allow us to flesh out a cultural history of photographers from protagonists to victims of modernity. Along the way, the seminar will explore theories of spectatorship, the relation between ethics and aesthetics, and the evolution of photographic concerns with memory, history, the archive and the materiality of the image, especially at the moment when older media morph into a new digital environment.

COURSE MATERIALS

TEXTS

All the readings will be available on MyCourses, with the exception of the two books listed below which can be purchased at the McGill bookstore: you can do a curbside pick up or ask to have the books mailed to you.

David Company, *Cinematic*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007

Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida. Reflections on Photography*, New York: Hill and Wang, 2010.

FILMS

The links to the films will be posted on MyCourses. The films will be available through Kanopy, a streaming video service that you can access directly through McGill library [marked with **K**], YouTube [**YT**] or through a link to McGill OneDrive [**OD**].

EVALUATION

Short reactions and questions	20%
Forum and Class Discussions	20%
2 Quizzes	10%
Midterm Group Presentation	20%
Final Project	30%

Statement of Academic integrity: McGill university values academic integrity. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences

under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see <http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity> for more information). L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le site <http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity>).

Extraordinary Circumstances Statement: In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

COURSE ORGANIZATION

This course will be taught in a mostly synchronous online format organized around two Zoom class meetings held on Tuesday and Thursday at our scheduled time: 4:05 pm to 5:25 pm. The course will alternate between lectures, group activities and discussions of the films within the conceptual framework provided each week. To ensure everybody's participation and address the eventuality that a student's live attendance might be impaired because of the time zone or internet access, the live sessions will be recorded for the students unable to attend. Additionally, the in-class discussions will be held in conjunction with the online forum discussions, so as to guarantee a mixed synchronous and asynchronous access to the lessons. Our home base for all the materials, assignments, Zoom meetings, as well as the recordings of the live sessions, will be MyCourses.

Weekly Zoom Meetings

The link to the platform and the semester meeting schedule will be posted on MyCourses in the Zoom section. The Zoom meetings will take the mixed form of a lecture/seminar typically organized in a three-part format: 1) a short lecture 2) viewing of a clip, and 3) breakout in smaller groups for discussion. Following the Monday posting of the short reactions and questions and the ensuing forum discussion, Thursday will be mostly dedicated to group activities (structured analysis of photographs and/or film clips followed by a short PowerPoint online posting). After each meeting a recording of the class will be available on MyCourses. Given the format, it is essential that students be prepared to actively participate. Because the success of the sessions will depend on student contributions, students must read the material before class to be able to contribute their ideas, views and comments. Students unable to attend the class discussion will have the option to engage with the materials and their peers through the forum discussions. We will discuss and agree upon a Zoom etiquette on the first day of class. Hopefully we will be able to create a community of trust and collaboration that will approximate the normal classroom experience. There will be no recording of the breakout discussion rooms.

Organization of Online Materials and Activities

The course is divided in ten modules. The first one, exploring crucial questions central to the theory of photography and cinema, is two weeks long; all the others, organized around short films or one long feature film, are one week-long. Each module contains the course materials (readings, links to films, video clips) and learning activities. Starting with the week of January 26 the students' short reactions to and questions about the film will afford the

starting point for the weekly forum discussion and, together with the instructor's lectures, will structure the group work of analysis and discussion in the Thursday Zoom class. All the modules, as well as other course documentation and guidelines, are located in MyCourses under **Content**.

Technical requirements:

All students are required to have access to a computer, the internet, a microphone and webcam. Please do the following before joining the course:

- Create a basic account through this link: <https://mcgill.zoom.us> You must sign in with your McGill username/password. Having a Zoom account will help you facilitate virtual meetings for collaborative assignments.
- Read this section on getting started: <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/201362033-Getting-Started-on-Windows-and-Mac>
- Please contact me if you do not have a webcam or microphone so that we can find a solution together and make appropriate accommodations.

COURSE WORK

Short reactions and questions
 Forum and Class Discussions
 2 Quizzes
 Midterm Group Presentation
 Final Project

1. Short reactions and questions

20%

Starting on January 26 (week 3), you will be expected to upload to MyCourses, under the "Discussions" tab, a brief weekly reaction and question for the class about your assigned session. The surnames A-K will do the first posting and the following week the surnames L-Z will do their submission, then alternating for the duration of the course (there will be no submission on the last week of February before the midterm group presentation). The postings should be done by Monday at 12 noon. At the end of the semester, each student will put together a portfolio with all their submissions for evaluation. Every student should read all the short reactions and questions. They will form the basis for the Forum discussion and the Thursday Zoom class activities and subsequent online postings.

2. Forum and in-class discussions

20%

The group who did not do the week's post will be responsible for reacting to one question from the list elaborated by their peers for that week, and thus initiate a forum discussion. Every student will be expected to post two replies to the initial reaction by the Thursday Zoom class. The overall discussion grade will be based on the participation in this forum, in class discussions and group postings, as well as in the online engagement with these postings.

3. Two quizzes (5% each)

10%

There will be two quizzes in a mixed format (Multiple Choice, True/False, Fill-in-the-Blanks) to assess your understanding of the materials. The quizzes will be asynchronous;

they will remain available for 48 hours and you will have an hour to complete them. The quizzes will be held on **January 28-30** and **March 18-20**.

4. Midterm Group Presentation

20 %

The midterm assignment will be a group presentation. During Module VI, groups will be formed to work on one of the two short films viewed and discussed during the week's class: Agnes Varda's *Salut les Cubains* and Chris Marker's *La Jeteé*. Based on the week's discussions, the groups will articulate a research question and put together a PowerPoint presentation of 8 to 10 slides. A detailed description of the project and a list of questions will be provided in Course Basics. The project will be due on **February 28**.

5. Final essay or project

30%

For the final project, the students will have the option to write an essay (10 pages) researching a topic or idea discussed in class, or complete a video-essay accompanied by a commentary (2 double spaced pages) exploring through images a theme or idea from the seminar. For the project you will be allowed to work in groups of 3 to 4 people. A tentative proposal for the final project/essay is due after study break (March 9). On **March 30** a detailed outline of the essay (bullet points, choice of stills, brief bibliography) or project (one-page description of the concept, a tentative script, ideas engaged from the course, collection of materials) is due. A detailed description of what is expected for the draft/outlines will be provided in Course Basics. Each step of the project will receive detailed feed-back from the instructor. **The final essay/project will be due on April 20.**

KEEPING IN TOUCH—aka Office Hours

I will create a page on MyCourses where students will be able to post queries that either the instructor or fellow students will be able to answer. There will not be official office hours, but you will be able to reach me by email. Beside the regular feedback on the forum discussions, short essays and weekly Zoom meetings, I am planning to meet at least twice with each individual or group working on the final project to discuss the topic choice, the draft/outline, and its progress.

A FEW TIPS: How to succeed in the online setting

Create your workspace at home. Manage your time: complete the assignments in a timely manner, space the tasks, don't procrastinate. The organization of the course will help you early on to create a routine. The course is focused on Zoom and forum group discussions: make the most of the many options for group interaction and collaboration. Technology can be overwhelming, but we are all learning the tools of our new learning trade. We will make trial runs of the major platforms we will be using (Zoom; Microsoft One Drive). Please look at McGill's Teaching and learning services for more tips: <https://www.mcgill.ca/tls/students/remote-learning-resources>.

NETIQUETTE

The University recognizes the importance of maintaining teaching spaces that are respectful and inclusive for all involved. To this end, offensive, violent, or harmful language arising in contexts such as the following may be cause for disciplinary action: 1) Username (use only your legal or preferred name) 2) Visual backgrounds 3) "Chat" boxes. To maintain a clear and uninterrupted learning space for all, you should keep your microphone muted throughout your class, unless invited by the instructor to speak.

COURSE SCHEDULE

January 7 **Introduction: Little Histories of Modern Media**

Reading: ---David Company, "When to be fast? When to be slow?" *The Cinematic* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009) 10-17

MODULE I Photography: The Most Primitive/the Most Modern

WEEK: January 12-14

Readings: --- Walter Benjamin, "Little History of Photography," *The Work of Art in the Age of its Mechanical Reproducibility*. Ed. Michael Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Levin. Cambridge (Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008).

— Andre Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image." *Classic Essays on Photography*. Ed. Alan Trachtenberg (New Haven, Conn.: Leete's Island Books, 1980) 237-244.

WEEK: January 19-21

Readings: --- Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*

— Geoffrey Batchen, "Camera Lucida: Another Little History of Photography," *Photography Degree Zero* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011) 259-269

MODULE II Early Cinema: The Most Real/the Most Fantastic

WEEK: January 26-28

Film shorts [YT] Louis Lumière: *Arrivée des congressistes à Neuville-sur-Saône* (1895)
Barque sortant du port (1895); *Sortie des Usines Lumière à Lyon* (1895);
Le Repas de Bébé (1895)

Georges Méliès: *Le Voyage dans la lune* (1902); *Long Distance Wireless Photography* (1908)

Alice Guy-Blaché: *Chez le Photograph* (1900)

Edwin S. Porter, *The Old Maid Having Her Picture Taken* (1901)

Williamson Kinematograph, *The Big Swallow* (1901)

Readings: --- Tom Gunning, "Never Seen this Picture before: Muybridge in Multiplicity," *The Cinematic* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009) 20-23

— Edgar Morin, "The Charm of the Image"; "Metamorphosis of the Cinematograph into Cinema," in *The Cinema of the Imaginary Man* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2005) (selections)

— Dai Vaughn, "Let There be Lumière," in *For Documentary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999) 1-8

→QUIZ I January 28-30

MODULE III Photography/Cinema: The Heroic Montage of Modernity

WEEK February 2-4

Films: René Clair, *Paris qui dort* (1925) [OD]
Dziga Vertov, *The Man with the Movie Camera* (1929) [K]

Readings: --- Paul Saint-Amour, “Stillness and Altitude: Paris qui Dort,” in *Moving Modernisms: Motion, Technology and Modernity*, Eds. David Bradshaw, Laura Marcus and Rebecca Roach, oxford.universitypressscholarship.com, 1-19
— David Bordwell, “Man With a Movie Camera,” *Film Art: An Introduction* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993) 413-417

MODULE IV: Modernity after the Catastrophe: The Pensive Spectator

WEEK February 9-11

Films: Max Ophüls, *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1948) [OD]

Readings: --- Raymond Bellour, “The Pensive Spectator,” *The Cinematic* ed. David Company (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007) 119-123
— Roland Barthes, “The Third Meaning,” in *A Barthes Reader* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1982) 317-333

MODULE V: Cameras and Photographers in Post-War Cinema

WEEK: February 16-18

Films: Alfred Hitchcock, *Rear Window* (1954) [OD]

Readings: ---“The Photostory”; “Photography in Film,” *Photography and Cinema*, (London: Reaktion, 2008) 83-86; 94-118.

MODULE VI: Movies or Stillies? Avant-Garde Experiments with History and Memory

WEEK: February 23-25

Films: Agnes Varda, *Salut les Cubains* (1963) [OD]
Chris Marker, *La Jetée* (1962) [K]

- Readings:** --- Alison Smith, "Who is Agnès Varda?" "Cinéécriture and the Power of Images" in *Agnès Varda* (Manchester & NY: Manchester UP) 1-11; 12-53
 — Chris Marker, 'La Jetée' Dvd booklet of *La Jetée and Sans Soleil*, Criterion Collection, 2007.
 — Uriel Orlow, "Photography as Cinema: *La Jetée* and the Redemptive Powers of the Image" in *Cinematic*, ed. David Company (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007) 177-184

→ MIDTERM GROUP PRESENTATION due on February 28

MODULE VII: Cinema and Photography in the Society of the Spectacle

WEEK: March 9-11

Film: William Klein, *Who are you Polly Magoo?* (1966) [OD]

- Readings:** --- Jared Rapfogel, "The Delirious Fictions of William Klein," *Cineaste*, Fall 2008, 20-23
 — Des O'Rawe, "Eclectic Dialectics: William Klein's Documentary Method," *Film Quarterly*, 66:1, Fall 2012, 50-61
 — "William Klein: "I was an outsider following my instincts," *The Guardian*, 28 April 2012 <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2012/apr/28/william-klein-interview-sony-photography>

→ March 9 Tentative proposal for final project

MODULE VIII: Slowly Looking Backwards through Landscape and the Archive

WEEK: March 16-18

Films: --- Claude Lanzmann, *Shoah* (1985) [YT excerpts]
 — Angela Ricci Lucchi and Yervant Gianikian, *Oh Uomo* and *From the Pole to the Equator* (1987) [YT excerpts]

- Readings:** --- Graham Fuller, "Claude Lanzmann Reflects on the Making of Shoah," *Cineaste*, Spring 2011, 16-19
 — "La nostra camera analitica," *Cinema Anni Vita. Yervant Gianikian and Angela Ricci Lucchi*, ed. Paolo Mereghetti and Enrico Nosei (Milan: Il Castoro, 2000) 32-58
 — Bellour, Raymond. "Il retromondo," *Cinema Anni Vita. Yervant Gianikian e Angela Ricci Lucchi*

→ QUIZ II March 18-20

MODULE IX Polaroids: Instantaneity and the Puzzle of Modernity

WEEK: March 23-25

Film: Christopher Nolan, *Memento* (2000) [K]

Readings: --- Thomas Elsaesser, “The Mind-Game Film,” in *Puzzle Films: Complex Storytelling in Contemporary Cinema*, ed. Warren Buckland (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009) 13-41.
 — Victor Burgin, “Possessive, Pensive and Possessed,” in *The Cinematic*, ed. David Campany (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007) 198-209

→ March 30 Outline for Final Essay/Project

MODULE X The Civil Contract of Film and Photography

WEEK: March 30-April 13

Class visit by filmmaker Eleonora Danco

Films: --- Eleonora Danco, *N-Capace* (2014) [OD]
 — Raoul Peck, *I Am Not Your Negro* (2016) [K]

Readings: --- Ariella Axoulay, “The Civil Contract of Photography,” in *The Civil Contract of Photography* (New York: Zone Books, 2008).

→Final project due on April 20