Department of Art History
Seminar Series Semester 2, 2016

Schaeffer Seminar room 210
Thursday 4th August, 4-5.30pm

Bruce Isaacs (University of Sydney)
Exceptionally Exact Perceptions

Throughout his career but most emphatically in On the History of Film Style (2007), David Bordwell has called for a committed engagement with film form: its sounds, images and narrative materials that build what we take to be ‘cinema’. Yet film analysis remains a problematic aspect of the discipline of film studies. Precisely how do we engage the formal character of cinema in terms of image and sound? In what way does filmic form authorise the construction of textual meanings? This paper engages the somewhat nebulous concept of film form to present a close examination of a sequence in Brokeback Mountain (Ang Lee, 2005). In so doing, I present a model for expansive, complexly integrated filmic analysis.

Dr Bruce Isaacs is Senior Lecturer in Film Studies at the University of Sydney. He has published work on film history and theory, with a particular interest in the deployment of aesthetic systems in classical and post-classical American cinema. He is the author of the monographs Toward a New Film Aesthetic (Continuum, 2008) and The Orientation of Future Cinema: Technology, Aesthetics, Spectacle (Bloomsbury, 2013). He is also the co-editor of the special journal issue, The Cinema of Michael Bay: Technology, Transformation, and Spectacle in the Post-Cinematic Era (Senses of Cinema, June, 2015).
Writing in 1948, the French film critic Alexandre Astruc ends his famous caméra-stylo essay on a prophetic note: while the films of certain masters of his time (Renoir, Welles, Bresson) have marked the emergence of a new cinematic avant-garde for the post-war era, he argues that the works that will fully realise his ideal of cinema as a means of writing are still to come. The question of the aesthetic and technological inheritance of the caméra-stylo essay has been hotly contested by film historians, yet few have thoroughly examined its relationship to the specific French, post-war context in which it is written. This paper aims to redress the tendency in film history to universalise Astruc’s ideas, situating them instead within a series of debates in late 1940s French critical culture around the ailing state of the national film industry after WWII and the need for a nouvelle avant-garde to lead the cinema forward. It also suggests a continuity between Astruc’s aesthetic and technological model for the cinema and the French short film, a marginal cinematic form outside of the sphere of commercial feature filmmaking in France that experienced a creative flourishing in the decade following the caméra-stylo essay’s publication. Though initially threatened by changing film exhibition and distribution legislation, the short film became a testing ground for young French directors such as Alain Resnais, Georges Franju and Yannick Bellon to experiment with alternative aesthetic approaches and a broader philosophy of filmmaking.

Ivan Cerecina is a PhD candidate in the Department of Art History at the University of Sydney, writing a dissertation on French documentary film in the Fourth Republic (1946-1958). In 2016, he was a recipient of the Terrence and Lynette Fern Cité Internationale des Arts Fellowship courtesy of the Power Institute. He completed a three-month research residency at the Cité in Paris from January-March 2016. His research interests include the essay film, the history of French film criticism, modernism in the classical Hollywood cinema, and the films of Chris Marker.
August 18

PAPER TWO:
Graham Southwell (University of Sydney)
The Architecture, Decorations and Symbolism of the Mitchell Library, Sydney

The completion of the Mitchell Library building and its many adornments was largely due to the drive and passion of William Ifould, Principal Librarian of the Public Library of NSW, 1912 to 1942. During his 1923 and 1936 trips to the US and UK, Ifould inspected many public libraries and was greatly influenced by the Library of Congress, the New York Public Library and the Boston Public Library. On the Mitchell Library, the three pairs of bronze doors on the northern facade, the fourth pair of bronze doors on the southern facade, the Chaucer stained glass windows, and other decorations, are the result of the extremely generous donation of Sir William Dixson at the encouragement of William Ifould. In addition, Ifould attracted many other donors who funded the three foyer windows, the Caxton window and the window on the western wall of the main reading room. Their symbolic value is largely due to their celebration of the invention of printing in Europe by Johann Gutenberg.

Two pairs of bronze north doors feature Aboriginal people celebrating 40,000 years of their presence in Australia and one pair of navigators and explorers doors celebrating 400 years of European discovery and settlement. The south doors have images of 15th and 16th century printers’ marks celebrating the invention of printing in Europe.

Graham Southwell completed his Graduate Certificate in Arts in the Department of Art History in 2012 and is now engaged in a Masters Research supervised by Dr Anita Callaway. This thesis examines the Southern Bronze Doors of the Mitchell Library, interwoven with which are the other artistic decorations and the architecture of that library and their symbolism.
Seamless Cinema: An Integrative Theory of Film

The shift from celluloid to digital technologies has caused several ruptures within current discourses of film theory. I am a voracious consumer of film for both work and pleasure. However, some recent transformative cinematic experiences have challenged my conceptual grasp of the cinematic object. These challenges — perhaps conveniently — negate discussions of celluloid and digital materials, and instead call for ruminations on the object of cinema in the era of mobile and streaming media. This presentation considers the minute in cinema — the frame, the edit — before reaching outwards and examining cinema’s role in our multiplatform digitised lives. Connections are revealed between contesting theories; gaps are filled with unexpected concepts from outside the discipline of Film Studies. Film Theory, old and new, philosophy, games and media studies collide in what I tentatively call seamless cinema. The result is an understanding of cinema as an ‘integrative’ phenomenon: an object, a practice, and an area of inquiry that should resist theoretical fractures.

Daniel Binns is a screenwriter, producer, and researcher, and Lecturer in Film and Media at RMIT University. He has written and produced documentary and lifestyle programming for Fox Sports, National Geographic, and the Seven Network. His research and teaching focus is genre cinema, film philosophy and transmedia production. His first monograph, The Hollywood War Film: Critical Observations from World War I to Iraq, will be published by Intellect in February 2017. Continuing work explores multimodal connections between cinema, theatre, and video games, and bridging the digital divide in film theory.
Raising the spirits with the sight of various colours: An exchange of coins for paintings between Rome and Madrid in 1658*

This paper examines an exchange that took place from 1658-1662 between Camillo Massimo, who had just finished his tenure as papal nuncio in Madrid, and Donna Lorenza Cardenas, a Spanish noblewoman. In order to obtain a precious set of coins and medals from Donna Lorenza, Camillo Massimo undertook to commission in exchange 35 paintings from the ‘best’ painters available in Rome. The correspondence, which is extensive, involved a number of middle-men, including Giovanni Pietro Bellori, and art theorist and antiquarian, Giacomo Fantuzzi, a well-known travel writer and secretary to the nuncio in Spain, and Antonazzi, a painter. Donna Lorenza Cardenas was a pious noblewoman interested in devotional paintings to meditate and pray with while Camillo Massimo was an antiquarian passionately involved in ancient Roman classical culture. Split across national and gender divides, they were also divided by their differing emotional investment in the objects being exchanged. modern preoccupation with the condition.

*This paper is part of a joint research project undertaken with José-Luis Colomer.

Lisa Beaven is currently a post-doctoral research fellow in the Australian Research Council’s Centre for Excellence in the History of Emotions at Melbourne University. Her research focuses on art patronage and collecting in seventeenth century Rome and her project with the Centre examines the sensory and emotional reception of religious painting and sculpture. She has published widely on aspects of collecting and patronage, particularly on the paintings on Claude Lorrain, landscape painting and the Roman Campagna, most recently in The Site of Rome (2014), and her book, An Ardent Patron: Cardinal Camillo Massimo and his artistic and antiquarian circle, was published in 2010. With Professor Angela Ndalianis she holds an ARC Discovery Grant Spatial Encounters: The Baroque, the Neo-Baroque and the Senses.
PAPER ONE:

Karen Dayman (University of Sydney)

‘The Queen Never Fuggin’ Walk Around Here’: Ngurrara Canvas II and its Role in Claiming Title From the Crown.

Ngurrara Canvas II was produced in 1997 in support of the Ngurrara people’s native title claim over a vast area of the Great Sandy Desert. The artists and claimants who produced the work came from linguistically diverse and geographically distant reaches of the desert. They harnessed painting in a way that shifted their fledgling art practice out of their bible and literacy classes into the politically charged land-rights arena. This presentation considers the production of the work and some of the tensions that arose in censoring and distilling knowledge to provide the information that was required to claim traditional lands under the Native Title legislation. The resulting work, Ngurrara Canvas II, is of national significance.

Karen Dayman was the Coordinator at Mangkaja Arts Resource Agency in Fitzroy Crossing, 1991 – 2006. She has curated an extensive number of exhibitions and produced catalogues for artists of the Fitzroy Valley region. She trained in printmaking and photography at undergraduate level and holds a Dip Ed (Secondary Art) and a Master in Arts Administration/Curatorial Studies from the University of New South Wales. She is currently a doctoral candidate in Art History at the University of Sydney.
October 6  
PAPER TWO  
Victoria Souliman (University of Sydney)  

Modernity and National Identity:  
the case of Clarice Zander’s 1933 Exhibition of British Contemporary Art

The development of modernism in England is a problematic topic in art history. It has even been argued that British artists of the early twentieth century never effectively engaged with modernism, as their art was aesthetically conservative. Others have addressed the debate that occurred during the years between the World Wars, by opposing London’s Bloomsbury formalist conception of art to the functionalist approach, using this distinction to define how the British perceived modern art. During this watershed period, Britain signed the Treaty of Versailles, recognising its dominions as autonomous nations, thereby witnessing a fundamental decline in her imperial power. However, Australia maintained strong cultural bonds with Britain in the 1930s. The instance of the Empire Art Loan Collection Society established in 1932 shows that, on artistic grounds, the role of international exhibitions was particularly decisive as a means to maintain these bonds. Scholars such as Eileen Chanin and Steven Miller have extensively discussed the significance of the 1939 Herald Exhibition of French and British Contemporary Art in the circulation of modernism and its impact in Australia. However focusing on the case study of the Exhibition of British Contemporary Art organised by Clarice Zander and held in Melbourne and Sydney in 1933, my paper proposes a different take on these travelling exhibitions. The aim of my paper is to demonstrate how Zander’s 1933 exhibition of British art can be construed not only as a vehicle for disseminating a British concept of Modernism in Australia, but also as a primary means of defining modernism in an English context. This paper particularly addresses British modernism’s ties to tradition, imperialism and national identity in art.

Victoria Souliman is currently writing her PhD in Art History under the dual supervision of Frédéric Ogée (Université Paris Diderot – Paris 7) and Anita Callaway (The University of Sydney, Australia). Her thesis ‘Art and National Identity: The influence of Great Britain on Australian art and identity’ concerns the influence of Englishness on Australian art during the interwar years. Victoria is a member of the ‘Laboratoire de Recherches sur les Cultures Anglophones (LARCA) at Université Paris Diderot. She recently published the article ‘Les Antipodeans: quand l’artiste australien s’assume en tant que figure de l’Autre’ in Histoire de l’Art (vol.75, no.2, 2014, pp43-54).
This paper will examine the philosophical concept of mood found in Heidegger and Benjamin, by which Stimmung (mood, or ‘attunement’) is viewed as a significant means of encountering the phenomenal world. This is a notion that distinguishes mood from emotion and affect, a disposition or displacement within a structure of experience rather than a response to specific objects or stimuli. This modality of mood is temporal and historical, indicating a state of existence and of relating to our being-in-the-world. In such a way, Stimmung offers a productive optic in looking at the ethical imperative regularly found in those ‘slow’ cinemas that privilege atmosphere over narrative. Using the cinema of Bela Tarr as a specific example, I will look at the disposition of melancholic-boredom as it inheres in the tone, movement and duration of his image, in order to locate a transition from pathos to ethos produced in the experience of this milieu.

Nicky Hannan is currently undertaking a thesis on mood and temporality in the cinema of Bela Tarr. His research interests include European art cinema; ‘slow’ and minimalist trends in world cinema; ‘modernisms’ in film, literature and philosophy; and approaches to experience through Heidegger, Benjamin and Agamben.
In the last decade or two it has become commonplace to hear art historians talking about the ‘materiality’ of their objects, and indeed the very word has become fashionable in ways that probably transcend and distort its actual meaning. But what happens when our objects of study are, or have become, radically immaterial, existing in fragments, whispery underdrawings, broken or carved up altarpieces, rumours in written sources, panels overpainted or repurposed beyond recognition – when paintings become, in sum, insistent much more in their absence than in their presence? This paper will use recently sourced material from the Archivio di Stato in Bologna along with analysis of key fresco cycles and panels by Vitale da Bologna between 1330 to 1350 to explore the various kinds of absence that affect the study of fourteenth century painting. What are the methodological implications when working with drastically fragmentary sources? How can we broaden our field of enquiry in meaningful ways? How can we coax materiality out of these reluctant object?

Catherine Blake is a departmental PhD student currently in her second year. Her research looks at the fourteenth century painter Vitale da Bologna, investigating issues of attribution, style, workshop practice and influence, as well as the nature and consequence of fresco loss and accidental survival, and the way in which we write history in the context of these losses. Catherine teaches regularly in the department and is research assistant to Prof. Mary Roberts and Dr Louise Marshall.