

CREATING POETIC CINEMA

USC School of Cinematic Arts

CTPR 499 18599R 2 Units Fall '09

1-4:50pm SCA 258

Instructor: **Pablo Frasconi**
805-895-5943 (cell)
 213-740-7244 (office)
 pfrasconi@cox.net

Teaching Assistant: Katherine Lo
 323-369-8261
 kaxulo@gmail.com

The poet makes himself a seer by a long, prodigious, and rational disordering of all senses. –Arthur Rimbaud (France 1854-1891)

When people look at my pictures I want them to feel the way they do when they want to read a line of a poem twice. –Robert Frank (US, b. Switzerland, 1924)

*A poem must resist the intelligence
 Almost successfully.* --Wallace Stevens (US, 1879-1955)

What is poetry? What are poetic images? The poetics of cinema? How are poetics engaged—especially by writer/directors—for intellectual, aesthetic, visceral, structural, emotional, and narrative purposes to create cinematic moments that resonate long after the film is over? Through the production of four short films in DV & 16mm, students will investigate poetic cinema from four different perspectives: 1) found poetry, 2) applied poetry, 3) poetry as image, and 4) poetry in narrative fiction.

The **found** poetry exercise, “From the Street,” focuses on the appropriation and manipulation of vernacular text and images; the **applied** poetry exercise, “From the Word,” translates ideas from written poetry to image; the **poetry as image** exercise, “From the Light,” explores the image as text—especially in imagistic, expressionist films; the **poetry in narrative fiction** exercise, “From the Eyes,” synthesizes the abstract and mimetic traditions of cinema.

During our journeys into film production, we will screen and analyze selected works that embody a breadth of approaches, including works from the acknowledged poets of cinema: Sergei Eisenstein, Yasujiro Ozu, Michelangelo Antonioni, Krzysztof Kieslowski, Stan Brakhage, and Maya Deren; the lesser-known: Raul Ruiz, Chris Marker, Sergei Parajanov, Derek Jarman, Mohsen Makhmalbaf, Abbas Kiarostami, Bruce Conner, and Michael Snow; and the younger generation of writer/directors: Hal Hartley, Miranda July, Charlie Kaufman, and Michel Gondry.

With illustrated lectures and creative exercises, we will explore the relationships among poetic cinema and the breadth of personal expression, including: painting, still photography, graphic art, music & collage –among them, the works of John Cage, Steve Reich, John Baldessari, Kurt Schwitters, Romare Bearden, Robert Frank, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Jackson Pollock, Ed Ruscha, and Barbara Kruger.

Poetic cinema will be explored in key texts, including David James', *"Allegories of Cinema,"* David Bordwell's *"Ozu and the Poetics of Cinema,"* Raul Ruiz's *"Poetics of Cinema,"* and Andrei Tarkovsky's *"Sculpting in Time,"* and lectures: *"What is Poetic Cinema?"* *"Poetry Across the Arts,"* *"The Resonance of Emotional Observation,"* *"Emotion Recollected in Tranquility,"* *"Poetic Images as Narrative,"* *"Light as Text,"* *"The Visual Palette,"* and *"Abstraction, Symbol & Mimesis."*

The course will provide all needed production equipment and resources including instruction in DV capture, Avid Editing, and sound design. A background in filmmaking is not required to successfully engage with these projects, and students with creative experience in writing, photography, painting, sculpture, textiles, music, and graphic arts will find this approach to filmmaking accessible and cohesive. Students with backgrounds in theory and criticism will have the opportunity to bridge their studies with "hands on" experience.

Individual mentoring in film concept and structure will compliment the technical workshops in production and post-production. This is a unique opportunity to engage with filmmaking at its most refined level while immersed in the crafts of filmmaking.

Office Hours are arranged with Frasconi for Mondays, Tuesdays & Thursdays by appointment. You are required to have at least one pre-production meeting with Frasconi during the semester. The SA is on-call throughout the week to assist you with your projects.

Safety is our highest priority during production. Hazardous Shooting Conditions forms and procedures are required IN ADVANCE for any hazardous shooting conditions, especially scenes involving: vehicles, weapons, violence (real, impending or implied), weapons, water, sand, electricity, minors, animals. Please contact us well in advance if you have any questions about how to shoot anything safely.

Permits: Check with the Student Production Office for the latest rules about shooting in L.A. Many locations do not allow filmmakers; many require permits or fees. In most cases if you are going to be visible by the public (on or off campus), you will need a permit. Many permits are free but are time-consuming.

Strict Limitations are an essential part of fostering creativity. Please do not augment your projects with additional resources and expenses without first getting permission from faculty.

PRODUCTION HANDBOOK AND SAFETY GUIDELINES are available at <https://scacommunity.usc.edu/index.cfm>

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or the TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301, and is open 8:30am-5:00pm Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

Statement on Academic Integrity

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. *Scampus*, the Student Guidebook, contains the Student Conduct Code in Section 11.00, while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A: <http://www.usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS/gov/>. Students will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards for further review, should there be any suspicion of academic dishonesty. The Review process can be found at: <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/>.

Grading will be based upon student growth during the semester. It is required that all deadlines on the calendar are met. Incompletes or delays are only acceptable due to illness (Dr's note required).

Grade breakdown:

In-classes exercises, assignments, and readings:	15%
Project 1	15%
Project 2	15%
Project 3	15%
Project 4	20%
Class Participation	10%
Collaboration	10%

Incomplete Grade (IN) - Grades of incomplete (IN) are given when a student cannot complete the course requirements as a result of a documented illness or an emergency occurring after the twelfth week of the semester. No more than one year is allowed for completion of an IN.

Each student will work on **FOUR DV & Film PROJECTS** (individual or collaborative; feel free to form your own collaborations for each project)

- 1) **Found Poetry: “From the Street”** (DV) will focus on found, observed, and vernacular poets and poetry (5 min max)
- 2) **Applied Poetry: “From the Word”** (DV) will focus on translating written poetry to images (5 min max)
- 3) **Poetry as Image: “From the Light,”** (16mm) will focus on the image AS poetry (silent; 100ft/student; group work suggested)
- 4) **Poetry in Narrative Fiction: “From the Eyes,”** (DV) will focus on incorporating the poetic image into a narrative scene (7 min mx)

COURSE OUTLINE:

1. August 24th: Orientation; Definitions: *“What is Poetic Cinema?”* samples of classic poetic cinema; assignment: readings #1
2. August 31st: *“Poetry Across the Arts”* (music, visual arts, architecture, performing arts) and their relationship to poetic cinema; assignments: exercises in idea development; readings #2
3. Sept 7th: Labor Day: no Classes
4. Sept 14th: Avid & Camera Tutorials Tutorial; Basic editing; DV camera operation: Prepare and shoot project #1
5. Sept 21st: *“The Resonance of Emotional Observation”* exercises
Assignment: Edit Project #1: “FROM THE STREET”
6. Sept 28th: Video Project #1: Screening & Analysis
Assignment: project #2 planning
7. Oct 5th: *“Emotion Recollected in Tranquility”* the relationship between word & image; Assignment: Shoot Project #2: “FROM THE WORD”
8. Oct 12th: *“Poetic Images as Narrative”* Brakhage, Deren & the imagistic tradition
Assignment: Edit Project #2
9. Oct 19th: Video Project #2: Screening & Analysis
Assignment: Film Project #3 planning & shoot
10. Oct 26th: *“Light as Text;“* visual abstraction; pure cinema
11. Nov. 2nd: Screen Project 3 Dailies; *“The Visual Palette,”* Assignment: Edit Film Project #3

12. Nov. 9th: Film Project #3: Screening & Analysis; “*Abstraction, Symbol & Mimesis*”
Assignment: plan & shoot Project #4: “FROM THE EYES;”
13. Nov. 16th: Video Project #4: Dailies Screening; shoot pick-ups
14. Nov. 23rd: Video Project #4: Cut screening
15. Nov. 30th: Video Project #4: Screening & Analysis
16. TBA: Final: Screening and Analysis of project re-edit

On-Line Resources:

<http://www.poetrymagazine.com>

<http://www.olivefilms.com>

<http://www.poets.org>

<http://www.uwv.org/programs/displayevent.aspx?rID=4169&fID=871>

David Lynch, “Consciousness, Creativity & the Brain” (a book too)

<http://egyptiantheatre.com/>

<http://www.sensesofcinema.com/>

<http://www.filmlinc.com/>

<http://www.filmquarterly.org/>

Suggested Texts:

Bordwell, David. *Ozu and the Poetics of Cinema*.* BFI Publishing, 1988.

Bordwell, David, *Poetics of Cinema*.* Routledge, 2007.

Brakhage, Stan. *Essential Brakhage*. Documentext, 2001.

Dowrick, Stephanie. *The Intimacy and Solitude Workbook*. Norton, 1995.

Gross, Philippe and S.I. Shapiro, *The Tao of Photography: seeing beyond seeing*. Ten Speed Press, 2001.

James, David. *Allegories of Cinema: American Film in the 1960's*.*Princeton, 1989.

MacDonald, Scott. *The Garden in the Machine*. University of California Press, 2001.

Morley, Simon. *Writing on the Wall; Word and Image in Modern Art*.* University of California Press, 2005.

Osho. *Creativity, Unleashing the Forces Within*. St. Martin’s Griffin, 1999.

Ruiz, Raul. *Poetics of Cinema 1, 2, 3*. Dis Voir, 2007.

Sitney, P. Adams. *Eye Upside Down: Visionary Filmmakers and the Heritage of Emerson*. Oxford University Press, 2008.

Tarkovsky, Andrei. *Sculpting in Time: reflections on the cinema*.* University of Texas Press, 1989.

FILMOGRAPHY

Please view *at least one* from each category by the date indicated.

FOUND POETRY: “FROM THE STREET”: (view one by week 5)

- POETIC JUSTICE* (John Singleton, 1993, USA)
fiction with Janet Jackson and Tupac Shakur; cosmetologist turns to writing after/during personal crises; includes poems by Maya Angelou
- HENRY FOOL (Hal Hartley, 1997, USA)
fictional story of a poet: from garbage-collector to Nobel Prize-winner; follow-up (10 years later): FAY GRIM (2006)
- THE WIND WILL CARRY US (Abbas Kiarostami, 2000, Iran)
fiction: a cameraman searches for a cellphone signal
- ME AND YOU AND EVERYONE WE KNOW (Miranda July, 2005, USA)
fiction: love story between a shoe salesman & performance artist
- FACTOTUM (Bent Hamer, 2005, USA)
fictional alter-ego of Charles Bukowski with Matt Dillon, Lili Taylor
- TRUDELL: INDEPENDENT LENS (Heather Rae, 2006, USA)
documentary on native American poet & activist John Trudell

APPLIED POETRY: “FROM THE WORD”: (view one by week 7)

- LE MÉPRIS (CONTEMPT) (Jean-Luc Godard, 1963, France/Italy)
Fiction about a screenwriter who tries to bring Homer’s Odyssey to the screen; with Fritz Lang, Brigitte Bardot, Jack Palance, Michel Piccoli
- ARIA (Robert Altman, etc, 1988, UK)
Collection of shorts based on operatic “Arias,” (songs); Directors include Altman, Godard, Jarman, Russell, Roeg, Beresford
- DEAD POETS SOCIETY (Peter Weir, 1989, USA)
fiction: with Robin Williams as a teacher; screenplay won an Oscar
- I, THE WORST OF ALL (Maria Luisa Bemberg [1922-1995], 1990, Argentina)
fiction: 17th Century Mexican poet caught between the inquisition & flesh
- IL POSTINO (Michael Radford, 1995, France/Italy/Belgium)
fiction: a romantic comedy; a postman learns about love from poet Pablo Neruda
- THE UNITED STATES OF POETRY (Joshua Blum, Bob Holman, 1996, USA)
five-part documentary/experimental film includes Ginsberg, Lou Reed, Johnny Depp, Leonard Cohen, Lawrence Ferlinghetti; book & CD)
- BEFORE NIGHT FALLS (Julian Schnabel, 2000, USA)
based on life of homosexual Cuban poet Reinaldo Arenas; with Javier Bardem and Johnny Depp; director is well-known visual artist, also directed BASQUIAT (1996) with Dennis Hopper and David Bowie; THE DIVING BELL & THE BUTTERFLY (2007; 4 Oscar nominations)

IMAGE AS POETRY: “FROM THE LIGHT”: (view one by week 10)

- MESHES OF THE AFTERNOON* (Maya Deren [1917-1961], Alexander Hammid [1907-2004], 1943, USA)
blending dreams, psychology and

- feminism; shot in L.A.; very influential; Deren was Brakhage's teacher*
 SAYAT NOVA (THE COLOR OF POMEGRANATES) (Sergei Parajanov,
 [1924-1990] 1968, Soviet Union/Armenia)
life and spiritual odyssey of medieval Armenian poet; banned in Soviet U.
 HATSU-YUME (FIRST DREAM) (Bill Viola, 1981, USA)
*observations of Asian culture with spiritual metaphors of light &
 darkness; Viola also a well-known museum installation artist*
 SANS SOLEIL* (Chris Marker, 1983, France)
*experimental; thoughts of a world traveler; explores memory & time;
 Marker also creates gallery installations*
 JE VOUS SALUE, MARIE (HAIL MARY) (Jean-Luc Godard, 1985,
 France/Switzerland/UK)
re-telling of the birth of Christ, set in urban France; widely banned
 THE WAY THINGS GO (Peter Fischli, David Weiss, 1987, Switzerland)
a Duchampian sculpture-in-motion; an allegory for narrative
 BY BRAKHAGE, AN ANTHOLOGY* (2003, USA)
*key experimental filmmaker (1933-2003) worked with abstract
 expressionism and visual metaphor; mostly silent, many painted on film*

POETRY IN NARRATIVE FICTION: "FROM THE EYES": (view one by week 12)

- BLOW-UP* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1966, UK/England)
*fiction: based on a very different short story by Julio Cortazar; with
 Vanessa Redgrave; modern use of composition for character info*
 BLUE* (Krzysztof Kieslowski, 1993, France/Poland/Switzerland/UK)
*fiction: first of three films based on France's national motto: Liberty,
 Equality, Fraternity; personal tragedy with Juliette Binoche*
 LA NIÑA SANTA (THE HOLY GIRL) (Lucrecia Martel, 2004,
 Argentina/Italy/Netherlands/Spain)
*fiction: teenage sexual awakening in a family-run hotel; explores
 boundaries; Martel is inspired by sound in the writing process*
 PARADISE NOW (Hany Abu-Assad, 2005,
 Palestine/France/Germany/Netherlands/Israel)
fiction: suicide bombers in Tel-Aviv; complex character-based suspense
 LA SCIENCE DE RÊVES (THE SCIENCE OF SLEEP) (Michel Gondry,
 2006, France/Italy)
*science-fiction-romance; a man can't control his dreams; with Gael
 Garcia Bernal and Charlotte Gainsbourg; Gondry also creates music-
 videos, many based on Gondry's own dreams*

*available at Doheny Library

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