Interdisciplinary Programmes
Academic year 2019-2020

Visual Archives of Violence

IA103 - Autumn - 6 ECTS

Tuesday 18h15 - 20h00

Course Description

Radical shifts in the global media landscape are transforming our relationship to violence, memory, and conflict. Today, videos posted on platforms like Youtube or Facebook reveal the reality of violence in all its dull, visceral, and physical forms. It is now possible to see what was once hidden from view. Evil. Suffering. Pain. Death. We are now, more than ever, immersed in a global visual archive of violence. In this seminar, we explore this fact through social-theoretical texts, case-based analysis (mainly drawn from the Middle East and the Mediterranean region), and the (practical and analytical) engagement of a variety of genres of images. Importantly, we also do so by counter posing the current rise in user-generated visuals of violence with the cinematic production of narrative experience in relation to violence. Our goal here is to explore both what has been gained and lost in our transforming media landscape, as well as to point towards new trajectories through which to manage the tensions between visuality, violence, and memory.

Syllabus

Thematically, the seminar focuses on the circulation of visual images with a specific focus on humanitarian crises. We will explore how the production and circulation of different types of images are intertwined with the evolution of such crises and how their political status affects power relations between different actors. Two specific types of visuality will be focused on: ‘user-generated’ images created during humanitarian crises (war, mass migration, etc.) and cinematic visuals that explore the contours of crisis through fictional or documentary means. Each of these types of visuality will be explored practically and theoretically vis-à-vis their relation to the contemporary politics of global (in)security.
Through this course students will gain a deep grasp of the ways in which images, videos, art-works, and other visual forms are politically implicated in (growing) discourses of (in)security. Students will be introduced theoretically and practically to the ways in which shifting technological and media infrastructures are leading to the acceleration of the relevance of visual material to dictating social and political priorities, often at the expense of ‘facts,’ ‘information,’ or ‘truth.’ In doing so, students will gain a theoretical awareness of political problems of representing crisis in a new media environment. These insights will also be translated into practical lessons. Specifically, students will gain A) a grasp of some of the more technical tools involved in the new mediation of (in)security, problematize these tools, B) an understanding of the artifice involved in the political composition of marketing related to (in)security problematiques, and C) an appreciation for the multiple roles that the cinematic (and, by extension, the artistic) play in problematizing social and political discourses.

1. **Class Practicalities**

Teaching takes place Tuesdays 18:15-20:00 unless otherwise indicated.

1.1 **Attendance**

Regular attendance at the seminar is expected. Up to 2 absences per semester are acceptable, without justification (though that would be much appreciated!), after which 0.25 points will be removed from your final grade for unjustified further absences.

1.2 **Preparation**

Students are expected to come to class well prepared, having completed the required readings, and any other required material. More specifically, the following elements are key to this seminar:

**Reading**

Students are expected to complete all the compulsory readings for each session and come to class prepared to discuss the readings in depth. A list of recommended readings is also provided that students can peruse, and are particularly encouraged to do so where these overlap with the focus of their assignments.

**Watching**

Throughout the seminar, a series of film-screenings and other visual material will be organised. These materials will also be made available to students outside of class. Similarly to the assigned readings, students are expected to watch these materials and come to class prepared to discuss them.

**Doing**

The assignments set for this class demand a degree of practical engagement with the subject matter. Students will therefore be expected to ‘learn by doing’ and – most importantly – to reflect on how engaging with visual practice affects their own learning processes and its production of knowledge. Experimenting with the possibilities that visual mediums afford will thus be central to how the class proceeds.

2. **Assignments and Grading**

Your grade is comprised of the following components:

- 40%: Exercises related to each section of course
- 50%: Final Project on Doing Visual Security
- 10%: In-Class Presence and Participation

2.1 **Class Exercises**

Several short (and usually group-based) exercises will be introduced throughout the seminar. The exercises are intended to assist students in developing ideas and skills relevant to their final project. Instructions for each of these exercises will be provided to students at the first class.
2.2 Final Project on ‘Doing Visual Security’

The core assignment for the seminar involves students conceiving of, researching, ‘doing,’ and writing-up a final project on the broad theme of doing visual security in relation to humanitarian crisis. The project can be related to any of the core sections of the seminar, or move in a different direction (please discuss with us beforehand). The only requirement is that the project involves a practical element (‘doing’) that relates to visual security. Examples would include developing a humanitarian marketing campaign based on visual materials that might parody current efforts or explicate an alternative style that such campaigns might take-up to overcome their current political problems. Depending on the type and scope of the practical engagement undertaken, the final project should also be written-up in paper form. Here, students should describe the conceptual, political, and other rationales for their project, relate these to the broad themes of the course, and hence balance their practical engagement with a critical (theoretical) reflection.

Students are highly encouraged to work in groups of around 4 students for their final projects.

2.3 Workshop Presentation

The final two classes of the seminar will take a workshop format in which students present the ideas and preliminary findings underlying their final projects. Students will receive feedback on these presentations from the instructors and fellow students, prior to their submitting the final version of their project.

SESSIONS: READINGS AND FILMOGRAPHY

SESSION 1 - September 17th

a) Introduction: presentation of the seminar, the problematics and sessions, methods of work and final evaluation. The final readings will be communicated during this session.

b) The (Global) Politics of Local Images (JLA)

Session 2 – September 24th

The New Digital Mediation of Suffering (JLA)


Further Readings:

Session 3 – October 1st
Liberating/Polarizing: The Politics of User Generated Images (JLA)


Further Readings:


Session 4 – October 8th
Analysing/Verifying: The Socio-Technicalities of User Generated Images 1 (JLA)


Bellingcat. (2015). “Geolocating the Location Where the Syrian “Caesar” Photographs Were Taken,” Bellingcat, Available at: https://wp.me/s6D4OD-3062


Session 5 – October 15th
Distributing/Archiving: The Socio-Technicalities of User Generated Images 2 (JLA)


Film: The Immortal Seargeant (Ziad Kalthoum)

Session 6 – October 22nd
Silencing/Crediting: Visual Political-Economies of (In)Security (JLA)


**Further Readings:**

Session 7 – October 29th

**Migrants and Refugees through the Mediterranean Region: Filmic Representations (RB)**

**Readings:**

**Films:**
**Synopsis:** the film explores the current worldwide boom in illicit migration and human trafficking. Every year, an estimated 2 to 4 million people are shipped in containers, shepherded through sewage pipes, secreted in car chassis, and ferried across frigid waters. Others travel on legitimate carriers but with forged documents. An alarming number of these migrants end up in bondage, forced to work as prostitutes, thieves, or as laborers in sweatshops. By listening to the voices of those who pulled up their roots and risked all, the film puts a human face on what might otherwise be seen as statistical, overwhelming and remote, and reveals the circumstances that drove these migrants from their homes, the difficulties involved in their epic journeys, and what awaits them in their new world.

QUANDO SEI NATO NON PUOI PIÙ NASCONDERTI (When you are born you cannot hide anymore) by Marco Tullio Giordana, 2015, 115mn. Audio: Italiano subt. English
**Synopsis:** The film concerns undocumented migration to Italy via the Mediterranean, seen through the eyes of a thirteen years old. A young Italian boy, Sandro, accidentally falls overboard while yachting with his father on the Mediterranean. He is rescued by a boatload of undocumented immigrants attempting to reach Italy by sailing across the Mediterranean. On the ship, he is befriended by a young Romanian man, Radu, and his sister Alina. The film follows the relationship of the Italian boy with the Romanian once they reach the Italian shores. The movie director deals with the dilemma that Italians and the Europeans are confronted with daily: to help and accept persons that are like us, or to act according stereotypes, judging negatively the unfortunate migrants crowding immigration centers and abandoned buildings in the outskirts of cities. The film has an open ending. It is up to the spectator to be like Sandro, moved by sentiments of friendship toward Alina, or be like the ones that see the immigrants as a danger to society.

**Synopsis:** Linosa and Lampedusa are Italian islands although geographically in the Sicilian Channel, they are closer to Africa. Political and economic refugees from Libya and Tunisia and other African nations have for years tried to reach these islands as a launchpad into Italy and the rest of Europe. In 2011, 48,000 boat people arrived in Lampedusa. An untold number of them perished in the attempt, as unscrupulous smugglers crammed 200-300 people on an open boat designed for no more than 30. An Italian film crew arrives on Linosa (population 450) to shoot what looks like a big budget production based on the plight of the immigrants. They bring with them a group of African extras, some of whom actually arrived in Europe by way of these very islands. The director (Emanuele CRIALESE) explains to the extras, somewhat patronizingly, that this film will take a critical look at the manner in which the refugees are treated by Italy. It seems a transparent ploy to get them on the same page and to accept the indignities they will suffer during the shoot. The documentary takes a look behind the scenes, showing the frustrations of both the extras who believe they have been exploited and misled, and the bucolic locals, who have their lives turned upside down, as evinced in the scene where a production assistant cajoles a reluctant old woman to let them use her kitchen for a day’s shoot. Many of the locals, who are mostly fishermen, have been given jobs: as extras, set builders and gofers. They complain about being rushed. The African extras, likewise, question the director’s decision to have the narrative told from the point of view of a fictional white character, rather than following the journeys and struggles of an African migrant. The invasion of the film crew from the mainland is as disruptive as the arrival of the refugees. *Comparse* means “extras” in Italian. Prefixed by an “s” it becomes *scomparse* – “the vanished” or “the disappeared”. And this is the fate of thousands of would-be refugees who have paid their life savings to smugglers to bring them to a new life in Italy, only to have their hopes and bodies dashed upon the rocky shores of Lampedusa or lost in the deep water of the Mediterranean. Some parts of the sea off Linosa can no longer be fished, an older fisherman tells us; the nets bring up too many body parts and bits of debris from shipwrecks. Along the shores of Linosa are dozens of boats that did make it, but which have been abandoned along the beach.


**Synopsis:** Tamer, a Palestinian from a Syrian refugee camp, flees war-torn Syria and ends up in Austria after a three-month journey through Europe. He waits for the government’s response to his asylum application. The film tells the typical refugee story; the difference is that this boy is 14 years old.

**Session 8 – November 5th (6.15-9.00pm)**

**How to ‘read’ documentary films (RB)**

Invited Lecturer: Pierre-André Fink (IHEID)

Screening in class of:

**FUOCOAMMARE** by Gianfranco Rosi, 2016, 109mn. Audio: Italian subt. English

**Synopsis:** A young boy, Samuele Pucillo, cuts a forked twig from a pine tree to make a slingshot. With his friend Mattias Cucina, he then enjoys carving eyes and mouth on some shovels of prickly pear and throwing stones with the slingshot, as if against an enemy army. This happens on the island of Lampedusa, while the men of the Italian Navy's district office, received by radio a request for help, activate the search at sea with naval units and helicopters of the Coast Guard. Meanwhile, life on the island continues. A housewife, Maria Signorello, while preparing lunch, listens to the local radio station led by Pippo Fragapane who broadcasts music and songs on request and gives news about sightings and rescues at sea. Refugees and migrants from North Africa on overcrowded boats are taken on board Coast Guard ships and then, transhipped on spears and patrol boats, are taken ashore. Here they find Pietro Bartolo, the doctor who directs the outpatient clinic in Lampedusa and who for years has been making his first visit to every migrant who disembarks on the island. They are then transferred by bus to the Lampedusa immigrant reception center, searched and photographed. Samuele talks to Francesco Mannino, a relative fisherman who tells him about when he was a sailor on merchant ships living always on board for six, seven months, between sky and sea. A diver, Francesco Paterna, dives to fish for hedgehogs despite the rough sea. At home, during a thunderstorm, Samuel studies and then listens to his grandmother, Maria Costa, who tells him about when, during the Second World War, at night the military ships passed throwing light rockets into the
air and the sea turned red, it seemed there was "fire at sea". Maria Signorello calls the radio to dedicate a cheerful swing *Fuocoammare* to her fisherman son, wishing the bad weather will end soon so that he can go out on the boat to work. Meanwhile song is on the air, in the immigrant reception centre a group of refugees sing a heartfelt song accompanied by the story of their vicissitudes. Dr. Bartolo, showing the photo of a boat with 860 people, tells of those who have not made it. Especially those who sail below deck for days, tired, hungry, dehydrated, soaked and burned by fuel. Moved and upset, the doctor tells of how many he could treat and how many, however, had to inspect the bodies recovered at sea, including many women and children, making it very difficult to get used to. So, while Samuele grows up and faces his difficulties to become a sailor, in fact in Lampedusa everyone is, the tragedy of migrants and the commitment of rescuers continues at sea.

Session 9 – November 12th

**Portraying Migrations: Archives of Violence (RB)**

**Readings:**


**Films:**

LES MIGRANTS NE SAVENT PAS NAGER de Jean-Paul Mari, Franck Dhelens, 2016, 55mn. Audio : Français

*Résumé* : L’Aquarius, navire affrété par l’organisation SOS Méditerranée, prend la mer à Lampedusa pour une durée de deux mois. Pour la première fois, une opération humanitaire se consacre exclusivement au sauvetage des naufragés entre les côtes de la Sicile et celles de l’Afrique. C’est la partie la plus dangereuse de la Méditerranée : plusieurs milliers de migrants y ont péri noyés durant ces dernières années. Outre l’équipage composé de bénévoles et de sept Médecins du monde, deux journalistes sont montés à bord. Ce film raconte au jour le jour l’engagement des uns face à la détresse des autres…

OR

ELDORADO de Markus Imhoof, 2018, 93mn. Audio : German subt. English.

*Synopsis* : When the filmmaker, born in 1941, was a little boy in Switzerland, his parents took in a young Italian refugee named Giovanna. But global politics tore apart the children’s friendship. The director’s memories of those events have prompted him to address Europe’s current refugee policy. An Italian naval ship off the coast of Libya takes on board 1,800 boat people, none of whom would have a chance to come to Europe legally. From the ship they are taken to a refugee camp where they spend between eight and fifteen months on average. ‘We don’t promise them paradise, but it gets better every day, says one aid worker. For those who choose to leave the camp, often the only option is to work illegally: women are forced into prostitution and men hire themselves out to work on tomato plantations. As one of those affected concludes: ‘This isn't life, it's not even survival.’ And what about the few who are accepted by Switzerland? Imhoof’s film questions the system of organised aid, which delivers refugees into a vicious circle largely determined by economic interests. A quiet film which becomes a powerful reminder.

AND


*Synopsis* : the film documents the journey of Syrian refugees as they cross the Aegean Sea from Turkey into Greece. In the winter of 2015, over three thousand refugees attempted this treacherous
crossing everyday, all in hope of seeking asylum in the European Union. It’s a life and death gamble that they are willing to take, all for a chance at a new life away from their war-torn homeland.


Synopsis: In Athens, Amir, an Iranian immigrant, has a very modest flat which has become a place of transit for migrants who, just like him, chose to leave their country. But Greece is only a stopover, all of them hoping to reach other Western countries. They find themselves stuck at Amir’s, waiting for ID documents, contacts, and the smuggler to whom they might entrust their destiny. Of Iranian origin himself, Bakhtiari stayed one year in the flat with the film’s characters, in total secrecy, smuggling the footage every month to Switzerland.

Session 10 – November 19th

**Forensic Oceanography in the Mediterranean: counting the dead (RB)**

Invited Lecturer: Dr. Charles Heller (King’s College, London)

Films:


Synopsis: the film discusses the production of “technical images” behind the scenes of the crisis. Instead of explaining what caused the movement of approximately one million refugees towards Europe, Kruse directs the viewer’s attention towards a less explored topic: the technicalities behind the images portraying the crisis. The Migrating Image re-evaluates the images produced and consumed since the summer of 2015, exposing their hidden ideological substructure. In four acts, Kruse presents the techno-analytical perspective of a filmmaker on the production of images that influenced so many public opinions and political decisions.

NON ASSISTANCE de Frédéric Choffat, 2016, 52mn. Audio : Français.

Résumé : Depuis 2011, des dizaines de milliers de migrants fuyant les guerres et les situations économiques désastreuses dans leur pays d'origine tentent de traverser la Méditerranée, la route maritime la plus dangereuse du monde, pour se rendre en Europe. Alors que les gouvernements criminalisent de plus en plus ces flux migratoires, des femmes et hommes s'organisent : certains affrètent des bateaux pour sauver les naufragés, d'autres les accueillent à terre, d'autres encore déposent des plaintes pénales contre les États pour non-assistance à personne en danger. Tous ces individus, mues par leur seule détermination et courage proposent activement une alternative à l'indifférence générale. Parmi eux, Charles Heller, un jeune chercheur suisse qui, en participant activement à la création de la plateforme Watch The Med, qui documente les cas de bateaux de migrants disparus en pleine mer, puis du système d'appel d'urgence AlarmPhone, destiné aux bateaux en perdition, nous montre que tout cela n’est pas une fatalité. Il est non seulement possible de sauver les migrants en mer, mais il est également nécessaire de penser aujourd’hui la migration autrement. C’est en suivant son combat et celui de six autres personnes, engagées en Europe, sur la terre comme sur la mer, que le film tente d’apporter des pistes de réponses à cette tragédie qui se déroule sous nos yeux.

Session 11 – November 26th

**Portraying Migrants’ Personal Experiences**

Readings:


Films:

CLOSED SEA by Andrea Segre e Stefano Liberti, 2012, 63mn. Audio: Several languages subt English.

Synopsis: the documentary reveals the untold story of the endangered migrants who attempted to escape Libya to Italy during the 2011 war, only to be returned to the hands of Gaddafi as a result of
a prior agreement signed between Berlusconi and Gaddafi. During a perilous journey by boat from Libya to Italy, our protagonists become adrift, facing near certain death on the waves. A sighting, and subsequent rescue, by the Italian Navy cause scenes of unbridled joy and celebration – all captured by the stranded refugees on camera-phone. Their joy though was to be short lived as it soon became clear that their rescuers had other plans. *Closed Sea* meets the refugees who were forced back into the hands of the dictator, and witnesses the abuses faced by those who dared to attempt an escape. Families are divided and in limbo as Gaddafi’s regime crumbles and the revolution gains pace, though it is the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg that truly determine the final fate of our protagonists. From their battered vessels and failed rescue to their subsequent imprisonment, tenure at a refugee camp and onward to the distant European Court of Human Rights. The film captures the dramatic stories of those whose lives were torn apart and forgotten, not just by Gaddafi, but by his allies in Europe as well, who claim to stand for freedom and human dignity.


**Synopsis**: Fateful developments and surprising twists in the lives of their protagonists are welcome ingredients for documentary filmmakers. But when the director and his family are themselves the protagonists in their own film, every threatening situation becomes a conflict of conscience. Is it right to film every dramatic moment or is it morally wrong to think about a good film scene in the midst of misfortune? In 2015, a death threat from the Taliban saw Afghan director Hassan Fazili and his wife Fatima Hussaini, also a filmmaker, in exactly this situation. Together with their two daughters Nargis (11) and Zahra (6), they flee from their homeland to distant Europe in search of safety. The couple, and their two daughters, use their mobile phones to film their journey, which was to last several years. On the Balkan route, during long and uncertain stays in various refugee camps, they draw strength from documenting their difficult situation. Despite adversities and setbacks, the parents never once lose their humanity. They bear all manner of hardships and hope for a better future for their daughters, who become more and more independent as the long journey progresses.


**Résumé**: Ville-fenêtre du détroit de Gibraltar, Tanger a une identité ouverte. La frontière, à Tanger, est une présence, on la voit, elle apparaît par rebond, on la sent partout : c’est l’eau. En face, il y a une ligne continue : l’Espagne, la dernière avancée naturelle de l’Europe. Nul besoin de temps clair pour voir les côtes espagnoles. L’Europe est là, proche, palpable, évidente, à portée d’yeux, elle nargue de nouveaux aventuriers à la recherche d’une vie moins difficile. Les candidats au départ clandestin, Marocains, Maliens, Sénégalais, Mauritaniens et autres Africains affluent massivement et sans discontinuité à Tanger. On les appelle en dialecte marocain les "harragas", les "brûleurs", et le brûleur est celui qui est prêt à tout accepter pour partir, celui qui est prêt à brûler ses papiers, son identité, pour faire de ce départ une entreprise irréversible. Au-delà de la description globale d’un mouvement de masse, ce film suit l’aventure de quelques brûleurs.

**XENOZ** by Mahdi Fleifel, 2013, 12mn. Audio: Greek, Arabic subt. English.

**Synopsis**: Xenoz tells the untold stories of Palestinian refugees living on the streets of Athens, Greece: their day-to-day survival methods, both in terms of food and shelter, and in terms of their mental wellbeing. With the heavy toll that their dash for freedom has taken, do they still believe in the dream of Europe?

**Session 12 – December 3rd**

**Security and Insecurity: the ‘Migrants’ Crises’, Host States and Civil Societies**

**Readings**:


Films:
Synopsis: Each year, thousands of men and women in Switzerland are imprisoned without trial or sentence. Simply because they stay in the country illegally, they may be deprived of liberty for up to 18 months before being deported - some of them after having spent up to ten years in Switzerland, worked, paid taxes, and started a family. Those who refuse to leave are handcuffed, tied up, dressed in diapers and helmets, and forcibly put on a plane for a journey that can last for 40 hours at worst. In this extreme situation, despair has a name: “special flight.” Melgar filmed for nine months at Frambois, one of the 28 expulsion centers in Switzerland (the European Union has more than 200). Special Flight triggered such a controversy in Switzerland that immigration services had to humanize their expulsion protocols.

Synopsis: the filmmaker traveled to Italy after a race riot in the town of Rosarno (Calabria) in 2010 and decided to investigate the unfortunate plight of African migrants in European cities, specifically in Italy. First-time actor Koudous Seihon plays Ayiva from Burkina Faso. He, along with his buddy, Abas, make the perilous journey through Algeria on to Libya and took a harrowing boat ride, where the emigrants are picked up by the Italian coast guard. Carpignano highlights the horrors of the journey. Once they arrive, Ayiva is met by an uncle who only can provide shelter for a very short time. They are guided to a shantytown by a buddy from the old country and are given a 3-month temporary residence permit by the Italian government. Carpignano documents Ayiva’s sad travails in a cinema-verité documentary style. The film director also highlights the backlash from local residents, particularly young Italian toughs, who are constantly seeking to provoke the Africans into a fight. The tension between the locals and the migrants reach their apex when word is received that two blacks have been murdered. Almost immediately, the migrants begin to riot, with the crowd chanting, “don’t shoot at blacks.”

Synopsis: Tarifa, a city in the south of Spain. The wind surfers sail across the clear blue sea and the first tourists are taking their places in the deck chairs. Only a few steps away a dead body is being tossed up on the shore by crashing waves. They come when there is a full moon and a smooth sea. These are the nights of the ‘pateras’, the motorboats that try to cross the Strait of Gibraltar in the dark. They are filled to the hilt with ever-more people from Morocco and sub-Saharan Africa. Many cannot swim and have nothing except for the clothes on their backs. And it doesn’t take much for an overfilled boat to capsize or sink, leading to a catastrophe. The film looks at the people of Tarifa whose everyday life is influenced by the constant flow of illegal immigrants looking for a better future in the fortress that is Europe.

Session 13 – December 10th
Final Workshop (1): Preliminary Papers’ Presentations by the Groups

Session 14 – December 17th
Final Workshop (2): Preliminary Papers’ Presentations by the Groups