

Intensive #2

Week 37: Monday September 7th 13.00-16.00 Intro

Week 40: Monday Sep 28th-Thursday Oct 1st

Title: Surfaces of (precarious) life and labor

Zoom room:

<https://zoom.us/j/93653746464?pwd=MHkwVy9XTmVIYmdQQitUcHVSNi9lQT09>

_ID: 936 5374 6464

Access Code: 720385

Lecturer: Edwin Culp, Universidad Iberoamericana

Course introduction:

That we live in precarious times has become almost a commonplace. The extractivist nature of global capitalism has reached a point where labor becomes a good to be extracted: more readily available sources are constantly being sought for, even if that means creating intolerable conditions for life. The results ranging from forced migration to unsustainable labor conditions. The substrate for life loses its depth turning into a thin, fragile and vulnerable surface. But the thinner the substrate, more surface becomes exposed, and a larger surface is a larger site for resistance; friction happens between surfaces. Focusing on surfaces can suspend precarity, set it in a parentheses that opens up to imagination. Within the contexts of COVID, life and labor find an even more precarious scenario. Also, surfaces have become both dangerous and more vulnerable to infection than ever.

This intensive workshop will explore film surfaces and their ability to reveal and suspend systemic injustices in global capitalism. The role of surface images is not to denounce deep inequities through propaganda or even an activist approach, as capitalism quickly assimilates them as individual issues. Thin, open, permeable surfaces can unfold the interiors and exteriors of that system without blending with them or losing sight of its separation. These surfaces become more evident when depthless, almost unimportant images take the forefront: landscapes, textures, skins, membranes, but also spectacularity or attractions, comedy and even thin layers of fiction.

There is a risk of approaching the precarity of experience from the narrative of the victim. This narrative tends to externalize and individualize the issue, hiding its systemic nature. Through an exploration with the surface tensions of life and labor, this workshop aims to produce a different set of images that open up to much needed imagination and empowerment, much needed in the emptied landscape of overwork and fatigue.

For this intensive, we will try to make use of what students have at hand to produce the images. When reality becomes unattainable, minimum fictions or fictionalizations are strongly encouraged as possible creative approaches.

Viewing references:

[*Bicycle Thieves*](#) (*Ladri di biciclette*, V. de Sica, 1948, from 4:25-8:00, with emphasis in the pawn shop)

[*Jean Gentil*](#) (I. Cárdenas, L.A. Guzmán, 2010, 83 min.)

* [*Maquinaria Panamericana*](#) (J. del Paso, 2016, 87 min.)

[*Vidros partidos*](#) (V. Erice in the omnibus film *Centro Histórico*, 2012, 37 min.)

[*Amphibious fictions*](#) (M. Ruido, 2005, 33 min.)

Waiting for the Carnival (*Estou Me Guardando Para Quando O Carnaval Chegar*, M. Gomes, 2019) - [2 min. clip](#). [1 min. clip](#).

Optional viewing references:

The nothing factory (*A fabrica de nada*, P. Pinho, 2017)

[ElectroClass](#) (M. Ruido, 2011)

[State of Distress](#) (M. Ruido, 2019)

[Jeanne Dielman, 23, quai du commerce, 1080 Bruxelles](#) (C. Akerman, 1975)

Fire at Sea (*Fuocoammare*, G. Rosi, 2016)

Eat, sleep, die (*Äta sova dö*, G. Pichler, 2012)

Zidane, A 21st Century Portrait (D. Gordon & P. Parreno, 2006)

Reading references:

Ruido, M. (2007). [In the Mood for Work](#). YProductions (Eds.): PRODUCTA 50. Barcelona, Generalitat de Catalunya.

Reeves-Evison, T. (2017). [Surface Fictions](#). In H. Gunkel, A. Hameed, & S. O'Sullivan (Eds.), *Futures and fictions* (Repeater Books paperback original ed.). London: Repeater Books.

Bruno, G. (2014). **The Surface Tension of Media**. In [Surface. Matters of Aesthetics, Materiality, and Media](#). Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, **73-106**.

Optional reading references:

De Certeau, M. (2002). General introduction to *The practice of everyday life*. In Highmore, B. (Ed.), [*The everyday life reader*](#). London: Routledge.

Melville, H. (1853) [*Bartleby, The Scrivener*](#).

Meneghetti, M. (2020). [The paradoxes of precarious labour in observational documentaries today](#). *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, 18(2), 190-213. doi:10.1080/17400309.2020.1738830

Ruido, M. (2007). Just Do It! Bodies and Images of Women in the New Division of Labour. Retrieved from: <http://www.workandwords.net/en/texts/view/501>.

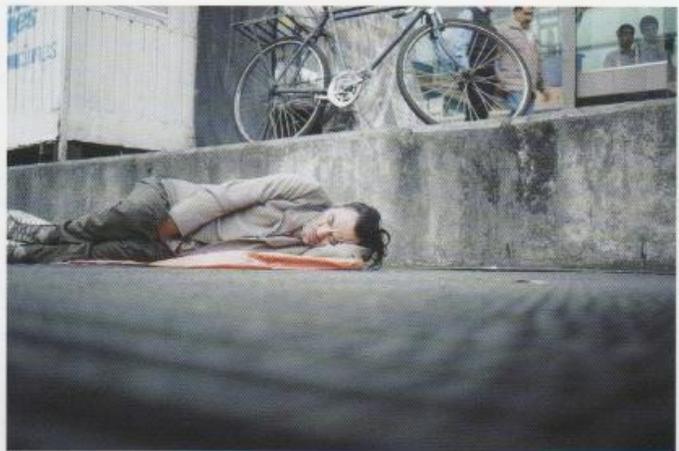
Project brief:

In this workshop, we will focus our explorations on surface images. We want to work with and produce surfaces that, though immiscible, are fundamentally permeable; thin layers that account for the tensions between interior and exterior, between what can be seen and what cannot be shown. These surface images should constantly expose any illusionary effect they can produce, but without breaking or ripping their surface. We are not to denounce a particular injustice, as these tend to be interpreted as individual cases, but to display the ways in which those injustices are occluded. This can be achieved by



working with strategies such as contiguity, analogy, displacement, impression, repetition, simulacrum, duration, spectacularity, laughter, layering or fictionalization. But all these should be carefully used as not to become impenetrable and closed versions of themselves.

You should begin the project by observing closely where and when labor happens, who does it. Put special emphasis on what remains visible of the invisible forms of labor—domestic labor, care workers (nowadays deemed as essential), immigrant workers, people with more than one job. This observation does not necessarily need to be a direct and close account of a person working, it can happen at moments when they are commuting to go to work or back, it can be an account from afar, or even an observation on an object that precludes work from being seen. We are interested in the bodies and, more specifically, the gestures surrounding labor. Think about the whole spectrum of labor-related gestures—repetitiveness, tiredness, unwillingness to work, etc.— and focus on some of them. Be very careful not to victimize the role or precarity of the workers. Produce an exercise that relates the



individual body to the gestures of work and/or non-work.

Then, go on to produce a short exercise about where this body performs its work-related gestures, where labor takes place. You can decide whether you want to set the body in the place of labor, or if you would rather keep them separate and let the spectator do the imaginative montage work. Consider filming the workplace as a landscape: an organized space that confines work from a distant gaze. How can that landscape be fissured, displaced or evidenced? Should unorganized places be shown? Or maybe just evoked? Remember, the goal of the workshop is to work and stay within the surfaces, so there is no need for ruptures or denunciations.

Finally, we go on to produce a superficial image that is contiguous to the first two and that will try to relate the individual to the global system of occlusion and precarization of labor. This can be done through a series of images, textures, a collection of objects, an emptied space, etc. This last exercise should try to drive the spectator towards imagination, that is, the possibility to produce new images that go against the emptying of experience characteristic of precarization. **It is not a synthesis nor a metaphor of the first two exercises.**

For these exercises, think about the layers that you want to address. These can be layers of images, but also, sound, fictional or speculative accounts, archive or internet images, etc. Each of these layers should be open and thin enough that they do not add up to a closed or propagandistic depiction. You can, however, work with propaganda images and bring their details to the surface.

The final project should be a composition of the three filmed exercises, no longer than 90 seconds in total. The exercises need not be of the same length. You should, of course, film much more material. On the intensive week, you will need to present 30-second extracts of the material from each exercise to your colleagues for Monday, September 28. You can work with single shots or use montage for each of them. On Tuesday, we will discuss ways for you to edit all three exercises, which you will present on Thursday.

The three exercises are the following, give each one a title:

1. A body or gesture connected to labor.
2. A landscape of labor.
3. Surfaces that relate the individual to the global system of labor, giving them their own agency. These should open up to the imagination of the spectator, disarming our certainties about the precariat.

Be careful that if you approach a character-driven narrative, keep their connection to the collective and multiple nature of labor. It should go from the individual (*someone*) towards the de-individualized (*anyone*). Also, make an effort not to reproduce images of exclusion and victimization. Likewise, the places you choose should be deterritorialized, *somewheres* should become *anywheres*. The exercises imply, then, a movement: from a context to decontextualization, from identification to multiplicity.

Course Breakdown:

MONDAY SEPTEMBER 7TH

13.00-16.15 Introduction to the intensive.

MONDAY SEPTEMBER 28TH

9.00-12.00 Discussion on the readings and references.

You should come prepared to the session, with questions and comments on the readings and the viewing references.

13.00-16.00 **Presentations (5 participants)**

5 min. To present + 20 min. Feedback and discussion.

You will prepare 30 second (maximum) fragments of each of the three exercises. **Please upload the material on canvas at the latest Monday morning at 9, so everyone can watch from their own computer.** During the viewing, you can talk us through the pieces.

https://canvas.gu.se/courses/38220/discussion_topics/113521?module_item_id=215298

TUESDAY SEPTEMBER 29TH

9.00-12.00 **Presentations (4 participants)**

5 min. To present + 20 min. Feedback and discussion.

You will prepare 30 second (maximum) fragments of each of the three exercises. **Please upload the material on Canvas at the latest Monday morning at 9, share the link with the class previously so everyone can watch from their own computer.** During the viewing, you can talk us through the pieces.

https://canvas.gu.se/courses/38220/discussion_topics/113521?module_item_id=215298

13.00-15.00 **Class discussion**

In this session, we will summarize the different approaches you had to the exercises and work through them together with the theoretical and viewing references. We will discuss the design of the final project that integrates all three exercises into a single experiment, no longer than 90 seconds. You will need a single title for the whole new

work. The final work may draw from the different exercises, in whatever order (montage) is necessary to express the clarity of the idea.

15.00-16.00 **Q&A** with Joaquín del Paso, director of *Maquinaria Panamericana*

WEDNESDAY SEPTEMBER 30TH

(Production day)

THURSDAY OCTOBER 1ST

9.10-12.00 **Presentations, discussion and feedback**

Please upload your final material on canvas to share with your colleagues to watch on their own computers, at the latest ONE HOUR PRIOR TO CLASS

https://canvas.gu.se/courses/38220/discussion_topics/123760?module_item_id=235974

13.00-14.00 **Class debriefing**

14.00-16.00 Introduction Intensive #3 with Mirka Duijn and Ram Krishna Ranjan