Liverpool Film Seminar

2018 – 2019 series

Every year, Liverpool Film Seminar invites experts to deliver a series of talks. Topics vary greatly and the series does not focus on a specific aspect of film. Instead, a range of genres and approaches are celebrated, from historical reach to the internet's impact on cinematic material.

Professor Janet Harbord (Queen Mary, University of London)

Greta Gerwig's Gestures: approaching Agamben's work on cinema

In Giorgio Agamben's small yet significant body of work on cinema the most potent concept to emerge is that of gesture, a term that contains in its history the verbs to act, to make and to carry. From this etiology, Agamben argues for a politics of gesture that is communication without a goal, a politics of carrying and support operating through the body; gesture is a 'common social substance', severed from means and ends. This talk explores and tests the limits of Agamben's 'Notes on Gesture' when it is brought to bear on the contemporary film star, Greta Gerwig. The particularity of her gestures, it is suggested, operates through codes of gender and sexuality that provide for a different form of politics. Drawing on Gerwig's performance across a number of films (particularly those made with Noah Baumbach), in which gestures are incomplete, uncertain and awkward, it is argued that the cost of 'coming of age' in the accession to female adulthood becomes evident.

Biography:

Janet Harbord is Professor of Film Studies at Queen Mary, University of London. Her work concerns itself with the connections between early cinema and digital culture, film theory and continental philosophy, medical and entertainment film. She is the author or editor of eight books, the most recent being Ex-centric Cinema: Giorgio Agamben and Film Archaeology (Bloomsbury Academic, 2016). She is currently working with the filmmaker Steven Eastwood on a four year project 'Autism through cinema: gesture and the illegible body', funded by the Wellcome Trust.