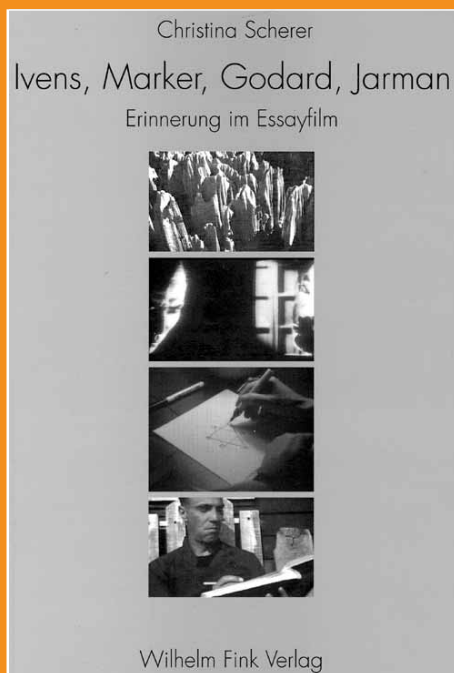


# New publications



## Ivens, Marker, Godard, Jarman. Erinnerung im Essayfilm. (Memory in Essayfilm)

'A film is horizontal, while the human mind is vertical,' Chris Marker once stated. The tension between both forms the crossroads, on which the director points out directions. Follow the horizontal film structure and create a linear narrative or try to adapt to the human mind, with its mind gaps, swifts and non-hierarchical associative structure. A director who wants to make his audience conscious of this tension, presenting his own reflection on it, is creating an essay film. Film scholar Christine Scherer from Munich published a book about essay films, focussing on how 'memory' has been presented by four filmmakers - Joris Ivens, Chris Marker, Jean-Luc Godard and Derek Jarman. In the introduction, Scherer outlines the characteristics of essay films:

- a subjective vision (related to dreams, imagination, experiences and memory),
- putting in question the possibility of representing reality,
- doubtfulness to statements,
- a non-linear narrative with fragmentation and multi perspective layers of meaning,
- a hybrid style of feature, documentary and experimental film,
- authors' poetry with the use of different media and art forms (literature, poetry, music, photography, painting),
- an open form with an active appeal to the audience to reflect and discuss on ways of seeing of themselves and the author.

The essay film is opposite to the rhetorical mode and a kind of personal recapitulation of the film maker's question of 'where do I stand with my art?'

In the second part of this lucidly written study, Scherer describes four completely different ways of how memory has been transferred to moving images by Ivens, Marker, Godard and Jarman. *A TALE OF THE WIND* was Scherer's point of reference for describing Ivens' film career. In her opinion, Ivens' film testament not only shows the way Ivens himself remembered his life and art, but also how Ivens

wanted people to remember him. After the embarrassment of the Cultural Revolution and the *YU KONG*-series resulting in a personal crisis, Ivens and Lorian wanted to go beyond the limitations of a political documentary linked to outdated historical moments, and presented a universal, mythical view of China. It linked past, present and future – a kind of play with memory, thus creating a new personal myth. It was similar to Godard and Bertolucci, who made radical films in the 1970's, while the 1980's were their 'cosmic years.'

One could also claim the reverse: *A TALE OF THE WIND* wasn't a break from his previous films, it wasn't a clever trick to improve his reputation in retrospect, but in fact was a completely organic apotheosis. Like a return to his early beginnings in film, to the romantic ideas of his youth, his Hegelian and catholic upbringing, his love for nature and harmony. Proof of this is the fact that, way back in 1929, French filmmaker Germaine Dulac predicted that Ivens would make a film about the wind, which he did 60 years later.

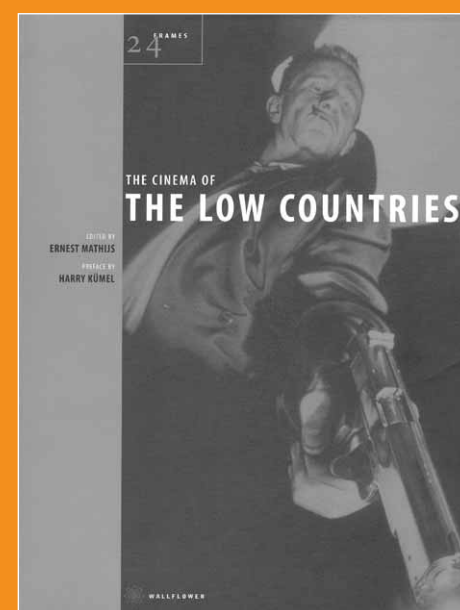
People who believe in a simple linear development of his career, from vanguard filmmaker to political filmmaker, up to 'his last film trick', do not recognise that he had experience of a wide variety of filmmaking styles in his first four years in the business from 1927 to 1931. Everything is present from the start: science films, home movies, feature films, political pamphlets, newsreels, publicity films, animation, subjective film, abstract film, aesthetic form movement studies. From that starting point on, he continuously alternated these styles. One should read his personal letters, written as a youngster, or research the film projects that never came to fruition and watch his complete film works to understand that Ivens was a composition builder, who created an amazingly organic oeuvre, with a repetition of various themes. He had the capacity to reinvent himself, adapt to new film techniques and situations, return to his roots, creating a mosaic of changing hybrid fictional styles. An oeuvre in which the differences between political documentaries, poetic documentaries, experimental films or feature films are not that important, because it's all about 'film'. A film oeuvre as one complete essay film about the 20th century, with all its subjectivity and multi perspective layers of meaning. Scherer's study inspires the reader to reflect on all these aspects, on the relationship between the human mind (especially the memory) and film.

Scherer, Christina *Ivens, Marker, Godard, Jarman - Erinnerung im Essayfilm*  
Wilhelm Fink Verlag, Munich.  
ISBN 3-7705-3576-6

## The Cinema of the Low Countries

By abandoning the confines of national filmmaking *The Cinema of the Low Countries* points out the interconnectedness between the national cinemas of the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg. This study explores in 24 essays the particular significance and influence of exemplary films. Two chapters written by Ivens-specialists Thomas Waugh (Concordia University, Montreal) and Bert Hogenkamp (University of Utrecht) describe the context of *ZUIDERZEE*, *NEW EARTH*

and *BORINAGE*. According to Waugh two of the most significant films produced in the Netherlands in the 1930s were Joris Ivens' silent *ZUIDERZEE* (1930-1933) and his radically transformed sound version of the same material made in 1933, *NIEUWE GRONDEN* (*NEW EARTH*). These two different film versions of the emblematically Dutch national epic, the mammoth *ZUIDERZEE* reclamation project have deep roots in the Dutch political, social, cultural and cinematic scene between the wars. They can be regarded as traces of an artistic process - exemplary, dynamic and complex, encapsulated in the binary terms 'from epic to agitprop'. In this process *NIEUWE GRONDEN* (*NEW EARTH*) marked his most radical shift from the indirect mode, expressed in the epic narrative of the silent *ZUIDERZEE*, to the direct mode. The dialectical relationship of epic and agitprop that he had first hammered out in his homeland would henceforth become his trademark.



In his chapter about *MISÈRE AU BORINAGE* / *BORINAGE* Bert Hogenkamp describes the Dutch/Belgian collaboration between Joris Ivens and Henri Storck. Besides the context and artistic choices made during the creation of the film also the aftermath of this classic of social documentary is interesting. Both Ivens and Storck made sound versions of the silent *BORINAGE* on their own - Ivens in Russia in 1934, Storck in the early 1960s in Belgium - without interference of the co-director. The film proved to be topical during the decades and inspired film makers. In 1960 Paul Meyer made a feature *DÉJA S'ENVOLE LA FLEUR MAIGRE* (*THE LANK FLOWER HAS ALREADY FLOWN*) about the population of Borinage, focussing on a Sicilian family, unemployment and immigration and envisaging a future without mining. Documentaries of Wieslaw Hudon, Helmut Brügel and Patric Jean present a direct link between the film of Ivens and Storck and the present day.

Ernest Mathijs (ed.), *The Cinema of the Low Countries*, 2004, London, Wallflower Press.  
ISBN 1-904764-00-2 (paperback), 1-904764-01-0 (hardback).