

# Liverpool Film Seminar

2016 – 2017 series

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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 Martin O'Shaughnessy (Nottingham Trent)

### **Cinema and the machinic: the history of a failure?**

Drawing on the work of Deleuze and Guattari and of Foucault, Maurizio Lazzarato, a leading contemporary critical theorist, develops a dual understanding of subjection: on the one hand, he is interested in subjectivation, or the production of subjects; on the other, he is drawn to the way in which, through machinic enslavement, fragments of our bodies or our attention are put to work by larger machineries, the latter not simply being technical machines, but also potentially involving them.

While the former mode of subjection typically involves language (named roles, rewards and so on), the latter relies on what, drawing on Guattari, Lazzarato calls asignifying semiotics (charts, algorithms, diagrams, data, graphs etc.). Critical theory, Lazzarato notes, has endlessly discussed subjectivation and language but has almost entirely ignored machinic enslavement and asignifying semiotics despite their crucial role in contemporary subjection. He also notes that, with its attention to the visual and the material, cinema is particularly suited for engaging with the non-linguistic and the interface between the human body and different socio-economic machines. It could be argued, however, in a way that may seem deeply paradoxical, that the machinery of cinema, its focus on individual subjects and their stories and words, endlessly works to block this potential. Picking up this latter point, this paper will scrutinize some films that engage, or fail to engage, with the machinic and asks what we can learn from them.

## Biography:



Martin O'Shaughnessy is Professor of Film Studies at Nottingham Trent University. He is the author of *Jean Renoir* (2000), *The New Face of Political Cinema* (2007), *La Grande Illusion* (2009) and *Laurent Cantet* (2014). He has written widely on French and French-speaking cinemas but his main interests relate to political cinema, film and neo-liberal governance and subjectivities, and film and work, not least in its machinic dimension. In more recent times, his principal focus has become cinema and the current Crisis in relation to topics such as film and debt but also with respect to the capacity of cinema to help us think beyond the Crisis by uncovering or imagining new modes of co-existence and new subjectivities.