

## **Eng 695: Film Theory**

CRN 16416

M: 2: 4: 50 @PLC 253

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Office Hours: W, 12:15-3: 15 pm and by appt.

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This course is a historical introduction to film theory. We will explore how the form and function of cinema was theorized at different temporal junctures from its beginnings at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present. It will be focused on the US and Europe for the most part. As we will see that questions like what cinema is, how it works, what it means, what it does have been answered variously in different cultural contexts and in response to diverse historical developments both within the institutions of cinema and in a broader cultural sphere. Thus our readings proceed roughly chronologically and are accompanied by film screenings that best exemplify and anchor particular ways of thinking about cinema. The course assumes that the various theories of cinema are in conversation certain kinds of films - that is to say that we must always hold theory and its object of contemplation in simultaneous and dialectical relation. Finally, as in any 10-week course, our survey is partial and selective but our hope is to journey on.

### **Readings**

Are posted as PDFs on BB under “Course Documents” in a folder entitled “Readings.” Those items colored RED are required. The rest are for your reading pleasure. I tend to upload in two-week chunks. This allows me to be flexible to your needs and interests and the pace of the course. If you need to know in advance of two weeks, please get in touch with me.

### **Screenings**

There are typically one (sometimes more) screenings per week and I expect you to see these in your own time. They will be on reserve in the library.

### **Requirements**

**Presentation:** You are required to make ONE presentation in the course of the term, starting in Week 3 and ending in Week 10. We will schedule presentations during Week 2 and there will be ideally one presentation a week. Some weeks we may end up with more. Presentations typically run about 20 minutes and usually comprise one (or sometimes more) of the readings for the day. As I see it, the task of the presenter is to briefly frame and contextualize the reading, perhaps link it to the screening (including

showing a relevant clip), draw attention to some salient interventions/arguments made by the reading, and finally and most importantly, to facilitate a discussion of the reading. Please get in touch if you need more directives as to what constitutes a presentation.

**Scene Analysis:** You are required to serve as a scene analysis leader once during the term. You will sign up for this. Your task is to pick one scene (quite brief) from the screening for the week, play it for us in class, and lead us through a close analysis of it. Your task is to help the class hone its viewing and hearing skills as well as to practice the formal language used to describe cinema. This should take up about 20 minutes.

**An annotated bibliography and filmography with rationale:** This is due in the 6<sup>th</sup> week and is stage one in what will become your final paper for the course. The purpose of this bibliography is to identify the core of critical texts that will become the basis for your final paper. In addition, you should list the films that you will be investigating in your final paper and provide a brief rationale for your choices. The critical works need to be listed and annotated (about 250 words a piece). While there is no ideal number, this document should contain at least 10 items (readings and films). In order to compile this list, you will have needed to identify an area of research/contemplation/reflection as well as the questions/concerns that you are bringing to this topic. At this stage, your goal is to research the topic and get some sense of what is out there on the topic of relevance to you. This will enable you to shape your argument by first mapping the field and then identifying its deficits (that your future paper will then proceed to explore).

**An abstract and the first 4 pages of your research paper:** This will become due on Week 7. The abstract should be about 400 words in length and will outline your subject enquiry, research questions, methodology and expected outcomes. It is, in essence, a brief summary of your future paper. The second part of this assignment is simply the first 4 pages of what will become your final 12-15 page paper. As in any paper that length, the first 4 pages are required to set up the problem in an engaging way, identify the stakes and contributions of this paper (without spelling out the argument) and then provide a roadmap of the remainder of the paper to come. All of you will conference with me to go over this document during week 8. I will post a sign-up sheet outside my door.

**And finally, a FINAL paper:** This will be 12-15 pages, typed, double-spaced and to be posted on BB by Monday of Week 11. This is a research paper that needs to be well-argued and illustrated. Your goal is to make it of a quality and heft that will enable you to present it at an academic conference in your field, with an eye to future publication.

**IN ADDITION, you will also write a two-paged typed response to the first film you view -- *Chungking Express*. The purpose of this assignment is for me to become acquainted with your writing, your interests, thoughts, relationship to cinema, the worlds it unfolds and the worlds it references. Please have fun with it and there is really no particular genre I have in mind here... just think of this film, its sounds, images, narrative flow as an invitation to reflection, critique and analysis. You may focus on the whole film or even fleeting images, a bar of music, a few sounds. You may refer back to the readings or not.**

## **Grade Distribution**

Presentation: 10%

Scene Analysis Leader: 10%

Bibliography: 10%

Abstract and first pages: 20%

Final Paper: 50%

Please acquaint yourself with guidelines pertaining to plagiarism as well as fair-use.

Please inform me about any accommodations you may need.

Please be aware that screenings include graphic content including sex and violence to humans and animals. If this presents problems, please see me.

## **Schedule (Subject to Revision and Modification)**

### **Week One: Media and Modernity**

Readings: Benjamin, Kracauer, Adorno etc on PDF

Screening: *Chong qing sen lin* (Chungking Express, Wong Kar Wai, 1994)

### **Week Two: Early Cinema and its Theorists**

Readings: Bruno, Munsterberg, Gunning, on PDF

Screening: The Lumiere Shorts

### **Week Three: Hollywood Paradigm: Narrative System and Continuity Editing**

Readings: Bordwell, Robert Ray and Gunning on PDFs

Screening: *Sunrise: A Story of Two Humans* (F. W. Murnau, 1927)

### **Week Four: The Soviet Paradigm: Modernity, Montage and Mobility**

Readings: Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Kuleshev, Tsivian, Wollen, Bordwell, Bruno on PDFs

Screening: *Bronenosets Potyomkin* (The Battleship Potemkin, Sergei Eisenstein, 1925)

*Chelovek s Kino-Apparatom* (The Man with the Movie Camera, Dziga Vertov, 1929)

### **Week Five: Theories of Realism**

Readings: Williams, Kracauer, Bazin, Arnheim, Zavattini, Ray, Andrew on PDFs

Screening: *Umberto D* (Vittorio de Sica, 1952)

### **Week Six: Psychoanalysis, Ideology and Apparatus Theory**

***PLEASE NOTE: I am delivering a keynote lecture at a conference on Monday, Nov 3 and we need to find a different meeting time just for this week.***

Readings: Baudry, Metz, Mulvey, Althusser etc on PDFs

Screening: *Morocco* (Josef Von Sternberg, 1930)

### **Week Seven: Third Cinema and Decolonization**

Readings: Solanas and Getino, Rocha, Rajyadaksha, Xavier, Espinosa

Screening: *Subarnarekha* (The Golden River, Ritwik Ghatak, 1964)

### **Week Eight: The Thought of Cinema**

Readings: Cavell, Deleuze, Rodowick, on PDFs

Screening: *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (Alain Resnais, 1959)

### **Week Nine: Aurality**

Readings: Chion, Metz, Belton, Lastra, Eisenstein et al on PDFs

Screening: *M* (Fritz Lang, 1931)

### **Week Ten: After Cinema**

Readings: Manovich, Rodowick, Friedberg, Jenkins et al

Screening: *San Soleil* (Chris Marker, 1980)