

**Department of Cinema Studies
New York University
Fall 2007**

Film Theory

Instructor: Ohad Landesman
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Office Hours: Thursdays 10:00am-12:00pm
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Office Hours: Tuesday 09:30-11:30am
(721 Broadway, room 635)

Course Description:

This course will provide a basic introduction to the major works of Western film theory. We will closely discuss seminal works of significant film theorists, starting from the classical period (Arnheim, Balász, Eisenstein and Bazin), when early efforts were made to define the crucial elements of film and to recognize it as a distinct art form. We will then move on to discuss more contemporary theories (Baudry, Mulvey, Metz) which employ structuralist semiotics, psychoanalysis, and ideological critique to help establishing a distinguished place for film studies in academia. The final segment of the class will be devoted to the “Post-Theory” age, focusing attention on cultural postmodernism, the alternative of cognitivism, and the recent trend of analytical film theory. Emphasis will be put on close readings, discussions, and written assignments.

Course Website and Blackboard:

This course will use Blackboard. Please be sure to check it regularly for course announcements, assignment guidelines, supplemental screenings, presentations from lectures, and your own personal grading and attendance records. To access Blackboard, point your browser to <http://classes.nyu.edu> and log in using your NYU Net ID and password. You will find our course under "Courses You Are Taking."

Required Readings:

The followings books should be purchased for the course:

Braudy, Leo, and Marshall Cohen. Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings. 6th edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Stam, Robert, and Toby Miller, ed. Film and Theory: An Anthology Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2000.

All other readings listed below will be available as Portable Document Format (PDF) files via Blackboard. We will also put copies on reserve in Bobst library.

Course Policy:

Attendance in the course is vital. If you miss more than three class sessions, those absences will count against your final grade. Missing more than 30 minutes of class, either due to late arrival

or early departure, will count as one absence. Please note that all screenings are part of the lecture time.

It is essential that you complete each week's readings before our class meets. The lectures will cover material that assumes you have completed that week's assigned readings. Re-read the material before your recitation session meets for further developing ideas and concerns. It is imperative that the textbook and/or copies of each week's readings be brought to every class and to every recitation session.

Course Requirements:

- 15% first paper (covering weeks 1-4)
- 25% midterm exam (covering weeks 1-6)
- 20% second paper (covering weeks 7-9)
- 30% final paper (covering all weeks)
- 10% class attendance, participation, and consultations with the TA (at least once during the semester).

Specific guidelines for each assignment will be given in class.

Please refrain from sending papers as email attachments. Hand in assignments only as hard copies to your TA's mailbox.

The papers are to be typed (double-spaced) and submitted on time. I reserve the right to lower the grade of any late paper unless the student has made arrangements in advance of the due date.

Plagiarized material found in any paper is inexcusable and will result in a failing grade for the paper; *in extremis* it leads to expulsion from school. It is the student's responsibility to ensure proper documentation of any information.

Holiday and Make-Up Class:

Our last session, on Tuesday, December 11th, is being used to make up for Thanksgiving.

Schedule of Classes:

Part I: Classical Film Theory

Session 1 (Sep. 6th)

Introduction to Film Theory: Film as Art

Screenings:

Sherlock Jr. (Buster Keaton, 1924)

The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (Robert Wiene, 1920)

Readings:

Arnheim, Rudolf. "The Complete Film", "Film and Reality" and "The Making of a Film." Film Theory and Criticism 183-186, 322-331.

Carroll, Noël. "The Specificity Thesis." Film Theory and Criticism 332-338.

Session 2 (Sep. 13th)

Soviet Film Theory: Sergei Eisenstein and the Formalist Tradition

Screening:

October: Ten Days that Shook the World (Sergei Eisenstein, 1928)

Readings:

Eisenstein, Sergei. "Beyond The Shot" and "The Dramaturgy of Film Form" Film Theory and Criticism 13-40.

---. "The Montage of Film Attractions" and "The Problem of the Materialist Approach to Form". Eisenstein Writings 1922-1934 Vol. 1 Ed. Richard Taylor. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 39-64.

Recommended:

Carroll, Noël. "Eisenstein's Philosophy of Film." Camera Obscura, Camera Lucida: Essays in Honor of Annette Michelson. Ed. Richard Allen and Malcolm Turvey. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2003. 127-146.

Session 3 (Sep. 20th)

Film and Modernity I: Analogies Between Camera and Eye/Mind

Screening:

The Man with a Movie Camera (Dziga Vertov, 1929)

Readings:

Münsterberg, Hugo. "Hugo Münsterberg on Film: The Photoplay: A Psychological Study and Other Writings." New York: Routledge, 2002. 64-108.

Vertov, Dziga. "WE: Variant of a Manifesto", "Kinoks: A Revolution", "The Birth of Kino-Eye" and "On Kinopravda." Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov. Ed. Annette Michelson. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984. 5-21, 40-47.

Session 4 (Sep. 27th)

Film and Modernity II: Weimar Film Theory

Screening:

The Passion of Joan of Arc (Carl Theodor Dreyer, 1928)

Readings:

Balász, Béla. "The Close Up." and "The Face of Man." Film Theory and Criticism 314-321.

Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." Film Theory and Criticism 791-811.

Kracauer, Sigfried. "Photography", "The Cult of Distraction". The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays. trans. Thomas Levin. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995: 47-63, 323-328.

Session 5 (Oct. 4th)

Theories of Realism

[first paper is due]

Screening:

Rules of the Game (Jean Renoir, 1939)

Readings:

Bazin, André. "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema" and "The Ontology of the Photographic Image." Film Theory and Criticism 41-53, 166-170.

Kracauer, Siegfried. "Basic Concepts" and "The Establishment of Physical Existence." Film Theory and Criticism 143-153, 303-313.

Prince, Stephen. "True Lies: Perceptual Realism, Digital Images, and Film Theory." Film Theory and Criticism 270-282.

Session 6 (October 11th)

The "Audio-Vision Illusion": Theorizing Sound in Cinema

Screening:

The Great Dictator (Charlie Chaplin, 1940)

Readings:

Eisenstein, Sergei, Vsevolod Pudovkin, and Grigori Alexandrov. "Statement on Sound." Film Theory and Criticism 370-372.

Doane, Mary Ann. "The Voice in the Cinema: The Articulation of Body and Space." Film Theory and Criticism 373-385.

Chion, Michel. "Projections of Sound on Image." Film and Theory 111-124.

Part II: Apparatus Theory

Session 7 (Oct. 18th)

Cinema, Ideology, and the Positioning of the Spectator

[midterm exam]

no screenings (midterm exam)

Readings:

Baudry, Jean-Louis. "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus." Film Theory and Criticism 355-365.

Dayan, Daniel. "The Tutor Code of Classical Cinema." Film Theory and Criticism 106-117.

Recommended:

Althusser, Louis. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)." Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971. 127-186.

Session 8

Psychoanalytic Film Theory (Oct. 25th)

Screening:

Blue Velvet (David Lynch, 1986)

Readings:

Metz, Christian. "The Imaginary Signifier." Film and Theory 408-436.

Baudry, Jean-Louis. "The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in Cinema." Film Theory and Criticism 206-223.

Recommended:

Žižek, Slavoj. "Looking Awry." Film and Theory 524-538.

Session 9 (Nov. 1st)

Feminist Film Theory and the Female Spectator

Screening:

Peeping Tom (Michael Powell, 1960)

Readings:

Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." Film Theory and Criticism 837-848.
---. "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' Inspired by King Vidor's *Duel in the Sun*." Visual and Other Pleasures. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989. 29-38.

Doane, Mary Ann. "Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator." Film and Theory 495-509.

Part III: Formalist Permutations

Session 10 (Nov. 8th)

Structuralism and Semiotics: Is Film (Like) a Language?

[second paper is due]

Screening:

Tout Va Bien (Jean Luc Godard and Jean Pierre Gorin, 1972)

Readings:

Metz, Christian. "Some Points in the Semiotics of Cinema." and "Problems of Denotation in the Fiction Film." Film Theory and Criticism. 65-86.

Wollen, Peter. "The Semiology of the Cinema." Signs and Meaning in the Cinema. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973: 116-156.

Recommended:

Harman, Gilbert. "Semiotics and the Cinema: Metz and Wollen." Quarterly Review of Film Studies (February 1977). 15-24.

Session 11 (Nov. 15th)

Authorship in Cinema: The Auteur Theory

Screening:

Adaptation (Spike Jonze, 2002)

Readings:

Sarris, Andrew. "Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962." Film Theory and Criticism 561-564.

Wollen, Peter. "The Auteur Theory." Film Theory and Criticism 565-580.

Barthes, Roland. "The Death of the Author." Image/Music/Text. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977: 142-148.

Recommended:

Andrew, Dudley. "The Unauthorized Auteur Today." Film and Theory 20-29.

Part IV: Postmodernism and Post-Theory

Session 12 (Nov. 21st) [class meets on Wednesday for three consecutive recitations (by instructor)]

Postmodernism and Postmodern Aesthetics

Screening:

Kill Bill: Vol. 1 (Quentin Tarantino, 2003)

Readings:

Baudrillard, Jean. "The Precession of the Simulacra" Simulations (1983) Trans. Paul Foss, Paul Patton and Philip Beitchman. Autonomedia, 1-79.

Jameson, Frederic. "Postmodernism and Consumer Society." The Anti-Aesthetic. Ed. Hal Foster. WA: Bay Press, 1983. 111-25.

Recommended:

Dyer, Richard. Pastiche: Knowing Imitation. London: Routledge, 2006. [pages TBA]

Session 13 (Nov. 29th)

Cognitive Film Theory

Screening:

Rear Window (Alfred Hitchcock, 1954)

Readings:

Bordwell, David. "The Viewer's Activity." Narration in the Fiction Film. Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1985: 29-47.

Currie, Gregory. Image and Mind: Film, Philosophy and Cognitive Science. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995.164-197.

Recommended:

Bordwell, David. "A Case for Cognitivism." Iris 9 (Spring 1989): 11-40.

Session 14 (Dec. 11th) [class meets on Tuesday]

Analytical and Post-Analytical Film Theory (Case Study: Identification in the Cinema)

[final papers are due]

Screening:

Psycho (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960)

Readings:

Smith, Murray. Engaging Characters. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995. 73-109.

Gaut, Berys. "Identification and Emotion in Narrative Film." Palntinga and Smith, ed. Passionate Views: Film, Cognition and Emotion. John Hopkins University Press, 1999. 200-216.

Recommended:

Currie, Gregory. "The Film Theory that Never Was: A Nervous Manifesto." Film Theory and Philosophy ed. Richard Allen and Murray Smith. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997: 42-59.