

NYU Steinhardt
Department of Media, Culture, and Communication

FILM: HISTORY AND FORM
MCC-UE 1007

Course Description:

This lecture/discussion course is designed to introduce the broad range of formal, theoretical, and historiographic issues specific to cinema. Careful attention will be paid to how the film medium differs from other media as a condition of its formal and stylistic properties, its institutional production, and its historical reception. First, the course will develop skills in film analysis through an emphasis on screenings. Students will learn to identify the major elements of the language of film (including cinematography, lighting, mise-en-scène, sound, editing, and performance), and learn to construct an argument about what a film's sounds and images mean and how it structures and achieves its meanings. Each week will also introduce relevant historical contexts of the assigned films. Second, the course will provide an introduction to the theories, methods, and concerns of film scholarship. Readings and screenings will illustrate a variety of approaches to film (genre, auteur theory, feminism, etc.), and raise issues central to the various modes of film production (narrative, documentary, experimental).

Required Text:

Readings and screenings are to be completed BEFORE class, even if you have seen the film already. Come to class prepared to discuss both.

1. Bordwell, David & Kristin Thompson. *Film Art: An Introduction* (10th ed.) 2013. (FA)
2. Additional readings listed below and available on Blackboard.
3. Screenings: You are responsible for viewing all required films on your own. While the films should be available in the library, it will behoove you to make your own viewing arrangements (as scheduling conflicts are likely). An online DVD delivery service such as Netflix, Amazon, or Hulu is a good strategy. Another possibility is to arrange your own group screenings with other members of the class. Regardless of your arrangement, all films are to be watched before the class period for which they are assigned on the syllabus. All excerpts will be shown in class.

Method of Evaluation:

1. Attendance, Quizzes, Class Participation: 20%

If you cannot come to class, notify the instructor BEFOREHAND. Unexcused absences will be counted against your final grade, and a maximum of two absences are permitted at Steinhardt. For absence related to religious observances, students must come talk to me at the BEGINNING of the semester. Regardless of the reason for your absence YOU will be responsible for any missed work. Chronic lateness will also be reflected in your evaluation of participation.

From time to time, there will be a quiz or an in-class writing assignment based on a topic of concern to the course. These in-class assignments are required as part of your class participation and they cannot be made up should you miss class.

2. Weekly Viewing Journal: 20%

The journal is designed to help you to engage critically with the films. Take notes on everything you watch as a way to maintain an active engagement with the assigned films. Keep notes on costume, lighting, and camera angles that you find interesting, curious, or innovative. Also, what questions does the film raise? Note details, problems, and ideas for discussion. Write as much as you can because you might consider your notes useful for your critical essay, and this practice will also prove indispensable for writing the long essay in the final exam. Journals are due in class on the day the film is assigned. See Handout for additional guidelines.

3. Midterm Exam: 20% (Oct. 9, 2012)

This is an in-class exam on the major elements of film grammar and other subject matter that has been presented to this point in the course from lecture presentations, screenings, and readings. The exam is a combination of multiple choice, short answer, definitions, and one brief essay in response to a film clip. There is no 'make-up' exam except for documented instances of illness or emergency, so please take notice of the course schedule and plan accordingly.

4. Critical Essay: 20% (Due Nov. 20, 2012)

This is a 4-5 page paper analyzing one of the assigned films. The paper must be (1) typed, double-spaced, in 12 point New York, Arial, or Helvetica font; (2) Use a 1-inch margin all around, and number your pages; and (3) Use MLA-style citation (parenthetical reference to author's name and page number in text: For example (Bordwell 43). See [Notes on Written Work](#) below for more instructions.

5. Final Exam: 20% (Dec. 11, 2012)

This is an in-class exam, similar to the midterm in form, but with a focus primarily on material since the midterm and requiring a longer essay.

Evaluation Rubric:

A= Excellent (A = 94-100; A- = 90-93)

This work is comprehensive and detailed, integrating themes and concepts from discussions, lectures and readings. Writing is clear, analytical and organized. Arguments offer specific examples and concisely evaluate evidence. Students who earn this grade are prepared for class, synthesize course materials and contribute insightfully.

B=Good (B+ = 87-89; B = 84-86; B- = 80-83)

This work is complete and accurate, offering insights at general level of understanding. Writing is clear, uses examples properly and tends toward broad analysis. Classroom participation is consistent and thoughtful.

C=Average (C+ = 77-79; C = 74-76; C- = 70-73)

This work is correct but is largely descriptive, lacking analysis. Writing is vague and at times tangential. Arguments are unorganized, without specific examples or analysis. Classroom participation is inarticulate.

D= Unsatisfactory (D+ = 67-69; D = 64-66)

This work is incomplete, and evidences little understanding of the readings or discussions. Arguments demonstrate inattention to detail, misunderstanding of course material and overlooks significant themes. Classroom participation is spotty, unprepared and off topic.

F=Failed (F = 63 and below)

This grade indicates a failure to participate and/or incomplete assignments.

Plus (+) or minus (-) grades indicate your range within the aforementioned grades.

Course Policies:

General Decorum: Slipping in late or leaving early, sleeping, text messaging, surfing the Internet, doing homework in class, eating, etc., are distracting and disrespectful to all participants in the course. Avoid such behavior.

Notes on Written Work: All written work (journal, exams, critical essay) must observe the following: 1. Film titles need to be underlined or *italicized*; 2. After the first mention of the title, you include in parenthesis the film's director and year of release: For example *Inception* (Christopher Nolan, 2010); 3. When you introduce a significant character's name, include the actor's name in parenthesis: For example J. Edgar Hoover (Leonardo DiCaprio); 4. You do not need to footnote when quoting dialogue, just introduce the reader to the context of the scene you are about to quote.

Writing help is available through the Writing Center, 411 Lafayette, 3rd Floor. The telephone number is: (212) 998-8866. I encourage you to use this resource.

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism: Please be sure that you have read and understand NYU and Steinhardt's (see http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/policies/academic_integrity) standards of Academic Integrity. Plagiarism is using someone else's intellectual work (including words, concepts, phrases, data, images, and so forth) and passing it off as one's own without properly crediting the source. If you have any questions concerning plagiarism in general, be certain that you ask them. Please note that plagiarism is grounds for automatic failure of this course, and further disciplinary actions.

Students with Disabilities: Students with diagnosed disabilities should contact the Henry and Lucy Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at 726 Broadway, 2nd Fl. The telephone number is: (212) 998-4980. Please give the instructor a copy of the letter you receive from the Moses Center detailing class accommodations you may need. If you require accommodation for test-taking please make sure the instructor has the referral letter no less than two weeks before the exam or assignment due date.

Course Schedule:

NB: This syllabus is subject to an occasional change, and it is your responsibility to keep track of those changes as we progress through the semester. Unless otherwise noted, all reading assignments are to be prepared for the day they appear in the syllabus.

Section I: Elements of Film

Week 1 (Sept. 4). Course Introduction / Early Cinema

- Readings: • *FA* Ch. 1, "Film as Art: Creativity, Technology, and Business," pp. 2–48;
 Ch.12, "Historical Changes in Film Art," pp. 458-466
- Screenings: Excerpts from the works of Lumière, Méliès, and Edison

Week 2 (Sept. 11). Mise-en-scène

- Screenings: • *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1926, 153 min., Germany)

• Excerpts from: *Nosferatu* (F.W. Murnau, 1922, Germany); *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, (Robert Wiene, 1920, Germany); *Edward Scissorhands* (Tim Burton, 1990, USA)

Reading: • *FA* Ch. 4, "The Shot: Mise-en-Scene," pp. 112-159; Ch. 12, "German Expressionism," pp. 469-472

Week 3 (Sept. 18). Cinematography

Screenings: • *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, 1941, 119 min., USA)
• Excerpts from: *The French Connection* (William Friedkin, 1971, USA); *Touch of Evil* (Orson Welles, 1958, USA); *Run Lola Run* (Tom Tykwer, 1998, Germany)

Readings: • *FA* Ch. 5, "The Shot: Cinematography," pp. 160-217; Ch. 8, "Style in Citizen Kane," pp. 316-326

Week 4 (Sept. 25). Editing: Continuity and Discontinuity

Screenings: • *The Godfather* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1972, 177 min., USA)
• Excerpts from: *The Great Train Robbery* (Edwin S. Porter, 1903, USA); *Ballet Mécanique* (Fernand Léger & Dudley Murphy, 1924, France); *Strike* (Sergei Eisenstein, 1925, USSR); *The Man with the Movie Camera* (Dziga Vertov, 1929, USSR)

Readings: • *FA* Ch. 6 "The Relation of Shot to Shot: Editing," pp. 218-265; Ch. 12, "The New Hollywood and Independent Filmmaking," pp. 488-493; Ch. 12, "Soviet Montage (1924-1930)," pp. 476-479

Week 5 (Oct. 2). Film Narrative and Subjectivity

Screenings: • *Rear Window* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1954, 112 min., USA)
• Excerpts from: *Trapped in the Closet* (R. Kelly and J. Swaffield, 2005, USA); *La Jetée* (France, 1962, C. Marker, 1962, France); *Lady in the Lake* (Robert Montgomery, 1947, USA)

Readings: • *FA* Ch. 3, "Narrative Form," pp. 72-110;

Week 6 (Oct. 9). Sound

Screenings: • *Playtime* (Jacques Tati, 1967, 155 min., France)
• Excerpts from: *M* (Fritz Lang, 1931, Germany); *Singin' in the Rain* (Kelly and Donen, 1952, USA); *The Artist* (Michel Hazanavicius, 2011, France and Belgium); *High Anxiety* (Mel Brooks, 1977, USA)

Reading: • *FA* Ch. 7, "Sound in the Cinema," pp. 266-307

IN-CLASS MIDTERM EXAM

Tuesday, October 16 – Fall Break – No Classes Scheduled

Section II: Modes of Film Practice and Reception

Week 7 (Oct. 23). Classical Hollywood: The Rise of Stars and Studios

Screenings: • *The Lady Eve* (Preston Sturges, 1941, 94 min., USA)

- Readings:
- *City Lights* (Charlie Chaplin, 1931, 87 min., USA)
 - *FA* Ch. 12, "The Classical Hollywood Cinema After the Coming of Sound," pp. 480-483
 - Thomas Schatz, "The Whole Equation of Pictures" [Blackboard]
 - Gomery, "The Rise of the Studio System" [Blackboard]

Week 8 (Oct. 30). Genre – Ideology and Form

- Screenings:
- *Meet Me in St. Louis* (Vincente Minnelli, 1944, 113 min., USA)
 - Excerpts from: *On the Town* (Donen and Kelly, 1949); *Funny Face* (Stanley Donen, 1957); *Silk Stockings* (Rouben Mamoulian, 1957)
- Readings:
- *FA* Ch. 9, "Film Genres," pp. 327-349; Ch. 11, "*Form, Style, and Ideology*," pp. 438-444
 - Richard Dyer, "Entertainment and Utopia" [Blackboard]

Week 9 (Nov. 6). Documentary

- Screenings:
- *The Thin Blue Line* (Errol Morris, 1987, 103 min., USA)
 - *Nanook of the North* (Robert Flaherty, 1922, 79 min., USA)
- Readings:
- *FA* Ch. 10, "Documentary," pp. 350-369; Ch. 11, "*The Thin Blue Line*," pp. 433-438

Week 10 (Nov. 13). Avant-garde and Experimental Filmmaking

- Screenings:
- *Meshes of the Afternoon* (Maya Deren, 1943, 18 min., USA)
 - *Un Chien Andalou* (Luis Buñuel & Salvador Dalí, 1929, 16 min., France)
 - *Ménilmontant* (Dimitri Kirsanoff, 1926, 38 min., France)
 - Excerpts from *An Optical Poem* (Oskar Fischinger, 1937, USA); *Mothlight* (Stan Brakhage, 1963, USA); *A Movie* (Bruce Connor, 1958, 12 min., USA)
- Readings:
- *FA* Ch. 10, "Experimental Film," pp. 369-398; Ch. 12, "French Impressionism and Surrealism (1918-1930)," pp. 472-476
 - Stan Brakhage, "From Metaphors on Vision" [Blackboard]
 - Maya Deren, "Amateur Versus Professional" [Blackboard]

Week 11 (Nov. 20). Neo-realism, New Wave, and Auteur Theory

- Screenings:
- *The Bicycle Thieves* (Vittorio De Sica, 1948, 93 min., Italy)
 - *The 400 Blows* (François Truffaut, 1959, 90 min., France)
- Readings:
- *FA* Ch. 12, "Italian Neo-realism" and "The French New Wave," pp. 483-488
 - André Bazin, "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema" [Blackboard]
 - Robert Stam, "The Cult of the Auteur" [Blackboard]
 - Andrew Sarris, "Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962" [Blackboard]

CRITICAL ESSAY DUE

Week 12 (Nov. 27). Feminist Film Theory

- Screenings:
- *Gilda* (Charles Vidor, 1946, 110 min., USA)
 - Excerpts from *Blonde Venus* (Josef von Sternberg, 1932, USA); *In the Cut* (Jane Campion, 2003, Australia, USA, UK); *American Psycho* (Mary Harron, 2000, USA); *Thor* (Kenneth Branagh, 2011, USA)

- Readings:
- Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" [Blackboard]
 - Claire Johnston, "Women's Cinema as Counter Cinema" [Blackboard]
 - E. Ann Kaplan, "Is the Gaze Male?" [Blackboard]

Week 13 (Dec. 4). The Future of Film (Old/New Media), Final Review

- Screenings: • TBA
- Readings: • Lev Manovich, "What is New Media?" and "How Media Became New," from *The Language of New Media* available online at:
<http://andreknoerig.de/portfolio/03/bin/resources/manovich-langofnewmedia.pdf>, pp. 43-65

Week 14 (Dec. 11). Conclusion, Final Exam

IN-CLASS FINAL EXAM

Bibliography:

- Belton, John. *American Cinema, American Culture*, Rutgers University Press, 2009.
- Corrigan, Timothy and Patricia White. *The Film Experience*, 2nd edition. New York: Bedford St. Martins, 2009
- Giannetti, Louis. *Understanding Movies*. Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2008.
- Monaco, James. *How to Read a Film*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Stam, Robert. *Film Theory, An Introduction*. New York: Blackwell, 2000.
- Wexman, Virginia Wright. *A History of Film*. New York: Pearson, 2006.