

Englit 1920
Fall 2005
Watts, P.

Advanced Seminar in Film Studies
English literature 1920
Thursday 1-4:50pm, CL 444

Professor Phil Watts
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Office hours Monday 2-4, Wednesday 2-4 and Thursday 11-12.

The goal in this class is to explore questions of realism in film. Realism is a slippery and highly contested term, with its share of advocates and discontents but it has shaped debates about how we view, use and understand films. From early enthusiasm for photography's ability to duplicate reality to claims that film is an artistic construct like any other, the question of realism has always been with us. Does cinema have a privileged relation to the real? Is there a realist tendency that could be traced from the films of the Lumière Brothers to Reservoir Dogs (1992), for instance? Is realism in cinema just an illusion? To answer these questions we will watch a number of films and study some of the foundational essays in film theory. We will read texts by film theorists such as Sergei Eisenstein, André Bazin, Laura Mulvey, Christian Metz and David Bordwell paying particular attention to what André Bazin called film's "mummy complex." Throughout the semester, we will also look at the ways in which questions about cinematographic realism are informing contemporary debates about morality, politics and justice. This course is a seminar. Students are required to participate actively, to give in-class presentations, and to complete several written assignments, including a final research paper.

Required Texts

Aristotle: Poetics trans. Malcolm Heath. New York: Penguin USA, 1997
André Bazin What is Cinema? Volume 1. Berkeley, University of California Press, 2003
Peter Lehman, editor: Defining Cinema. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997.
Susan Sontag Regarding the Pain of Others. New York: Farrar Strauss Giroux, 2002

Text on Reserve at Hillman Library

Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, editors: Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings 5th edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
David Bordwell et al. The Classical Hollywood Cinema. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985.

Program for the semester

September 1: Introduction. What is realism? What are we looking at when we're looking at pictures?

Readings: Peter Lehman "Introduction" in Defining Cinema pp.1-12.

September 8: André Bazin Part I

Readings: André Bazin “The Evolution of the Language of Cinema” and Dudley Andrew “André Bazin’s ‘Evolution’ in Defining Cinema pp. 59-94. “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” in What is Cinema? pp. 9-16.

Screening: Slacker (Richard Linklater, 1991)

September 15: André Bazin Part II

Readings: André Bazin “The Myth of Total Cinema” in What is Cinema? pp. 17-22 and “The Virtues and Limitations of Montage” pp. 41-53; Malcolm Gladwell “The Picture Problem” on courseweb

Screenings: Before Sunrise (Richard Linklater, 1995)

September 22: The Redemption of Physical Reality

Readings: Siegfried Kracauer “Basic Concepts” and Noël Carroll “Kracauer’s Theory of Film” in Defining Cinema pp. 97-131,

<http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/directors/03/linklater.html>.

Screening: Early films of Lumière Brothers and Georges Méliès; Waking Life (Richard Linklater, 2001)

September 29: Realism and Verisimilitude I

Readings: Aristotle Poetics

Screening: The Big Heat (Fritz Lang, 1953)

October 6: Realism and Verisimilitude II

Reading: David Bordwell “The Classical Hollywood Style” in The Classical Hollywood Cinema pp. 1-84 (Hillman reserve desk).

Screening: Shaft (Gordon Parks, 1971)

October 13. Film attractions

Readings: Sergei M. Eisenstein “The Montage of Film Attractions” and Vance Kepley Jr. “Eisenstein and Soviet Cinema” in Defining Cinema pp. 17-55.

Screening: Un chien andalou (Luis Buñuel, Salvador Dali, 1929), Memento (Christopher Nolan, 2000)

Mid-term paper due by October 12

October 20: Reality as ideological construct

Readings: Jean-Luc Comolli and Jean Narboni “Cinema/Ideology/Criticism in Braudy and Cohen Film Theory and Criticism pp.752-759 (Hillman reserve desk), Louis Althusser: “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” in Slavoj Zizek Mapping Ideology pp.100-140 (Hillman reserve desk)

Screening: Fahrenheit 911 (Michael Moore, 2004)

October 27: Intertextuality

Readings: Mikhail Iampolski “Intertextuality and Film” (e-handout)

Screening: Stolen Kisses (François Truffaut, 1968)

November 3: The Imaginary I

Readings: Christian Metz “Identification, Mirror” and “The Passion for Perceiving” and Robert T. Eberwein “Christian Metz” in Defining Cinema pp.171-206

Screening: The State of Things (Wim Wenders, 1982)

November 10: The Imaginary II

Readings: Laura Mulvey “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” in Braudy and Cohen Film Theory and Criticism pp.833-844 (Hillman reserve desk)

Film: Reservoir Dogs (Quentin Tarantino, 1992) and, on your own, Kill Bill Vol. 1&2 (Quentin Tarantino, 2003-2004)

November 17: Is Screen Violence Real?

Readings: Susan Sontag Regarding the Pain of Others, “Regarding the Torture of Others” <http://www.southerncrossreview.org/35/sontag.htm>

Screening: Close-Up (Abbas Kiarostami, 1990)

December 1: Realism and CGI

Readings: Stephen Prince “True Lies: perceptual realism, digital images, and film theory.” <http://communication.ucsd.edu/tlg/123/prince.html>

Screening: Sin City (Robert Rodriguez, 2005)

December 8: Student presentations of final papers

Wednesday December 14: Final paper due

Assignments

You have **three** major assignments in this course.

1. **Response papers.** Each week you will be required to write a short (1 or 2 page) response paper to the essays we are reading. For each response paper I will give you a topic or question (or series of questions) that I would like you to discuss in a thoughtful and original way. These papers will allow you to develop ideas on the readings and agree or, more interestingly, disagree with the theoretical essays. Specific instructions for each response paper will be handed out in class. I will grade and return to you each response.
2. You will have a **mid-term paper** (5 pages) in which you will confront the theories we have examined up to that point to a film.
3. You will be required to write a longish (10 pages) **final paper**. I will give you a list of suggested topics and guidelines for writing the paper. By **November 17**, I will ask you to give me a brief description of your project and a preliminary bibliography. Students will present their topics on the last day of class, **December 8**. The final paper is due, **Wednesday, December 14**.

Screenings: We will have screenings of films each week. These films will serve as the basis for discussions the following week. On the first day of class, I would like you to choose which films we will watch this semester.

Grades will be calculated in the following manner

Response papers 30%

Midterm paper 30%

Final paper 30%

Participation 10% (evaluation for participation includes your participation in classroom discussions, proof that you have done the readings and regular attendance)

Absences: As this class meets just once a week, it is important that you come to class regularly. More than one unexcused absence will result in your grade dropping by 1/3 (e.g. from B- to C+). More than two unexcused absences will result in your grade dropping by 2/3 (e.g. C+ to C-) and so on... You are requested to attend the screenings each week.

Policy on Plagiarism: Plagiarism of any sort will not be tolerated and will result in the automatic failure of the course. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism or how you should credit sources please see me and/or refer to the MLA handbook on writing research papers.

If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both your instructor and the Office of Disability Resources and Services 216 William Pitt Union 648-7890 as early as possible in the term.