

Englit 1920
Spring 2006
Majumdar, N.

Professor: Neepa Majumdar
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ENGLIT 1920 (11897): Advanced Seminar in Film Studies
Tuesdays, 6:00 – 9:50 pm in CL 444

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This capstone course for Film Studies majors focuses on the writings of major theorists and practitioners of cinema. In this course, we will consider the relation between cinema and other forms of modern experience, with an emphasis on vision, memory, and ideology insofar as they affect the way we watch films. We will also look at theories of realism in film in relation to the history of film technologies, such as sound, color, and digital imaging. One of the goals of this course is to understand the connections between the cinematic cultures of the present and of the beginnings of cinema, both of which have been obsessed with the fascination of new technologies and their impact on the individual's physical and psychological relation to reality. Our emphasis will be on theoretical concepts, rather than on the analysis of specific films, as we make connections between the different ideas we encounter in the readings and enliven our own thinking about what the movies mean to us. Since this class is a seminar, it will depend substantially on your active and vocal contribution to class discussion.

COURSE READINGS

FTC: Braudy, Leo and Marshall Cohen. *Film Theory and Criticism*, 5th or 6th edition (Oxford, 1998 or 2004)

FCR: Turner, Graeme (Ed.) *The Film Cultures Reader* (Routledge, 2002)

X: Additional readings available as a handout or in electronic reserves:

- Go to PittCat in the university library system
- Click on "Course Reserves"
- Check under my name or the course number
- Click on "e-reserves"
- Use the password "filmsem")

All course texts are also on reserve in the library. In addition, the Graeme Turner book (FCR) is available online through Netlibrary (via PittCat).

Note: This course assumes your complete familiarity with film analysis terms and concepts found in the textbook, *Film Art* by David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Attendance Policy:

1. Attendance is mandatory for this class. If you have more than one unexcused absence in this 14 week seminar, your final grade will be lowered by a third of a letter grade for each additional unexcused absence.
2. Leaving in the middle of the class or after the screening will be counted as an absence.
3. If you have a legitimate reason for being absent, you must inform me about it in writing for it to be excused. I will not accept any excuses that are presented to me more than a week after the absence. It is your responsibility to keep track of your absences and to arrive on time in class.
4. Late Arrival Policy: I will count each late arrival as a half absence. If you are habitually late to class, I will ask you to not come into class and will count that as an absence.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADE BREAKDOWN

Please make sure that you backup all files and also **keep a hard copy** of each assignment for your own protection. All deadlines are firm. I will accept **no electronic submissions**.

I. Weekly Reading Journal (30%): Keep all your graded journals in a folder. I will collect all of them again later in the semester. For each week's readings, your journal should be at least one, single-spaced page in length.

Note: I will collect your journals every week. I will not accept late submissions or printing mishaps as excuses. Please plan your journal accordingly. Journals will be graded as follows: minus=inadequate (below acceptable standards); check=okay (average); check plus=good; plus=excellent. This translates roughly into the letter grades D, C, B, and A. You get an F for that week's journal grade if you don't turn in a journal.

In your journal:

- * Summarize the main ideas of each of the readings scheduled for that class. Occasionally I will give you questions to consider as you do your readings.
- * Make connections between the ideas in the readings and other readings, films, and discussion.
- * Respond to the readings.
- * Write down questions that occur to you as you do the readings.

II. Class Discussion (15%): This is a seminar and it is your advance reading and journal writing in preparation for the class that will determine the quality of class discussion. If we never hear your voice in the semester, you will get an F for this 15% of your grade. Class participation may also include occasional in-class written assignments. I will inform you of your discussion grade from time to time.

III. Class Presentation (10%): With a partner, you will

- Summarize the readings.
- Make connections to the films seen in class and also the film scheduled for that week.
- Prepare a handout for the class.
- use film clips for your presentation.
- Lead class discussion with further questions to consider. This means that you must get the other students in the class to talk in response to your presentation and questions.
- Grade one another (by emailing me) on how equally you participated in the project.

This is not an automatic "A" and you will be graded poorly if you merely read from your handout.

IV. Midterm Essay (15%): In this essay, you will explore an assigned issue by comparing the ideas of any two or more theorists you will read in the first half of the semester. Due in class on **February 28th**

V. Research Proposal (10%): You will outline a topic, a list of relevant course readings, a list of outside readings, and a set of research questions. Due in class on **April 4**

VI. Research Paper (20%): In your final paper (10 to 12 pages) you will research an area that intersects with seminar issues. Due on Tuesday, **April 25** in my mailbox in CL 501.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

You will be expected to comply with the University of Pittsburgh's policy on academic integrity. Everything you write in your papers and reading journals must be your own work, except when you quote or summarize someone else's work and provide full citations. Any information or ideas you get on the Internet must also be fully documented. Any student suspected of violating this obligation for any reason during the semester will be required to participate in the procedural process, initiated at the instructor level, as **outlined in the University's *Guidelines on Academic Integrity***:

The integrity of the academic process requires fair and impartial evaluation on the part of faculty and honest academic conduct on the part of students. To this end, students are expected to conduct themselves at a high level of responsibility in the fulfillment of the course of their study. It is the corresponding responsibility of faculty to make clear to students those standards by which students will be evaluated, and the resources permissible for use by

students during the course of their study and evaluation. The educational process is perceived as a joint faculty-student enterprise which will perforce involve professional judgment by faculty and may involve – without penalty-reasoned exception by students to the data or views offered by faculty.

DISABILITY ACCOMMODATIONS

If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, please let me know and also contact Disability Resources and Services, 216 William Pitt Union, 648-7890 or 383-7355 (TTY) as early as possible in the term.

CLASS SCHEDULE

CLASS 1 (JANUARY 10): COURSE INTRODUCTION

Screening: *Singin' in the Rain* (Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly, 1952, USA, 103 mins.)
(In-class written assignment)

CLASS 2 (JANUARY 17): APPROACHES TO FILM STUDIES

Read for class: X: Richard Dyer, "Introduction to Film Studies" (*Film Studies: Critical Approaches* 1-8)
X: Gilles Deleuze, "Philosophy of Film as the Creation of Concepts" (*Philosophy of Film* 33-37)
Screening: *Wandafuru raifu/After Life* (Hirokazu Koreeda, 1998, Japan, 118 mins.)

CLASS 3 (JANUARY 24): TIME, MEMORY, AND CINEMA

Read for class: X: David MacDougal, "The Fate of the Cinema Subject" (from *Transcultural Cinema*)
X: Roland Barthes, extract from *Camera Lucida* (handout)
Screening: *Bright Leaves* (Ross McElwee, 2003, USA, 107 mins.)

CLASS 4 (JANUARY 31): CINEMA AND VISION

Read for class: X: Jonathan Crary, "Modernizing Vision"
X: Martin Jay, "The Scopic Regimes of Modernity" (handout)
FTC 199-205: Stan Brakhage, From *Metaphors on Vision*
Screening: Stan Brakhage films: *Mothlight* (1963), *The Wold Shadow* (1972), *The Garden Of Earthly Delights* (1981), *Study in Color and Black And White* (1993), *Stellar* (1993)
Pièce touchée (Martin Arnold, Austria, 1989, 15 min.)
Passage à l'acte (Martin Arnold, Austria, 1993, 12 mins.)
La Jetée (Chris Marker, 1962, France, 28 mins.)
Ways of Seeing (John Berger, 1974, 45 mins.)

CLASS 5 (FEBRUARY 7): CINEMA AND MODERNITY

Read for class: X: Wolfgang Schivelbusch, extracts from *The Railway Journey*
FTC 791-811: Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"
Jacques Aumont, "The Variable Eye" (handout)
Screening: *Sunrise* (F. W. Murnau, 1927, Germany, 95 mins.)

CLASS 6 (FEBRUARY 14): CINEMA AND POSTMODERNISM

Read for class: X: Anne Friedberg, "Cinema and the Postmodern Condition"
FTC 914-926: Anne Friedberg, "The End of Cinema: Multimedia and Technological Change"
X: Jacques Aumont, extract from "The Variable Eye, Or the Mobilization of the Gaze" (handout)
Screening: *They Live* (John Carpenter, 1988, USA, 93 mins.)

CLASS 7 (FEBRUARY 21): VISION IN EARLY CINEMA

Read for class: FTC 862-876: Tom Gunning, "An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)Credulous Spectator"
FTC 143-153: Siegfried Kracauer, "Basic Concepts"
FTC 314-321: Bela Balász, "The Close-Up" and "The Face of Man"
Screening: *The General* (Buster Keaton, 1927, USA, 75 mins.)

CLASS 8 (FEBRUARY 28): MUSEUM VISIT: JAMES TURRELL

No class: Visit the Mattress Factory Museum on a day and time to be determined. The museum is closed during our class time. Handout on James Turrell's work.

MIDTERM ESSAY and MUSEUM REPORT DUE IN MY MAILBOX

No late papers or electronic submissions accepted.

SPRING BREAK

CLASS 9 (MARCH 14): KINO-EYE AND HUMAN EYE

Read for class: X: David Tomas, "Manufacturing Vision: Kino-Eye, *Man with a Movie*

Camera and the Perceptual Reconstruction of Social Reality" (from *Visualizing Theory*)

X: Dziga Vertov, "Provisional Instructions to Kino-Eye Groups" (*The European Cinema Reader* 34-38)

Screening: *Chelovek s kinoapparatom / The Man with a Movie Camera* (Dziga Vertov, 1929, USSR, 68 mins.)

Eadweard Muybridge

CLASS 10 (MARCH 21): ALTERNATIVE VISIONS

Read for class: X: bell hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze" (from *Black Looks*)

X: Richard Dyer, "The Matter of Whiteness" (from *Theories of Race and Racism*)

FCR 95-106: Richard Dyer, "Lighting for Whiteness"

FCR 366-378: Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, "Imperial Imaginary"

Screening: *The Tourists* (Mack Sennet, USA, 1912, 5 mins.)

Watermelon Man (Melvin Van Peebles, 1970, USA, 98 mins.)

Or *Cannibal Tours* (Dennis O'Rourke, Australia, 1988, 70 mins.)

CLASS 11 (MARCH 28): SOUND AND IMAGE

Read: FTC 370-372: Sergei Eisenstein, Vsevelod Pudovkin, and Grigori Alexandrov, "Statement on Sound"

FTC 366-368: Christian Metz, "Aural Objects" (first 2 sections only)

FCR 107-114: Gianluca Sergi, "A Cry in the Dark: The Role of Post-Classical Film Sound"

FTC 386-394: John Belton, "Technology and Aesthetics of Film Sound"

FCR 85-94: Steve Neale, "Colour and Film Aesthetics"

Screening: *Ying Xiong/Hero* (Zhang Yimou, 2002, Hong Kong/China, 2002, 99 mins.)

CLASS 12 (APRIL 4): TECHNOLOGIES OF REALISM

Read for class: Andre Bazin writings: FTC 41-53: "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema,"

FTC 166-169: "The Ontology of the Photographic Image,"

FTC 170-173: "The Myth of Total Cinema"

FTC 174-182: "De Sica: Metteur en scène"

Screening: *Magnificent Ambersons* (Orson Welles, 1942, USA, 88 mins.)

Extract from *Umberto D* (Vittorio de Sica, Italy, 1952, 91 mins.)

Paper proposal due in class

CLASS 13 (APRIL 11): DIGITAL REALITY

Read for class: FCR 115-128: Stephen Prince, "True Lies: Perceptual Realism, Digital Images, and Film Theory"

X: Lev Manovich, "What is Digital Cinema?"

FTC 901-913: John Belton, "Digital Cinema: A False Revolution"

FCR 129-134: Barbara Creed, "The Cyberstar: Digital Pleasures and the End of the Unconscious"

Screening: *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (Michel Gondry, 2004, USA, 108 mins.)

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CLASS 14 (APRIL 18): MEDIA TRANSFORMATIONS

Read for class: X: Scott McQuire, "Pure Speed: From Transport to Teleport" (*Visions of Modernity* 183-190)

Screening: excerpts from *Soft Cinema* (Lev Manovich and Andreas Kratky, 2004)

Continuous Journey (Ali Kazimi, Canada, 2004,

TUESDAY, APRIL 25: RESEARCH PAPERS DUE IN MY MAILBOX BY 4PM