FILM HISTORY/THEORY

ENGLIT 2451 (CRN 29915), Fall 2003, Thursdays 1-5pm, CL 444
Dr. Adam Lowenstein

Office Hours: CL 517F, Tuesdays 3-5pm, and by appointment
Office Phone: 412-624-6524
Email: alowen@pitt.edu

Course Description. What do we mean when we talk about "film studies"? Is it film history, in the sense of significant movements such as German Expressionism and Soviet Montage? Is it film theory, with its shifting conceptions of genre, authorship, stardom, reception, representation, and ideology? Or is it film analysis, the close reading of cinematic techniques of mise-en-scène, cinematography, editing, and sound? This graduate seminar assumes that film studies exists in tension between these areas, and that our goal as a class is to investigate their relations so that we might arrive at our own understanding of this complex discipline. No prior knowledge of film studies will be required, so the course will necessarily take shape as an intensive immersion experience -- film history, theory, and analysis will be engaged simultaneously, on multiple fronts.

By the course's end, students will be prepared to pursue further graduate work in film studies, and to discuss crucial questions the discipline poses for related fields such as English, history, and cultural studies. Students with previous training in film studies will be encouraged to pursue advanced research projects under the supervision of the instructor. This course is required for the graduate certificate in Film Studies.

Course Requirements. 1. Active, vocal, engaged class participation. 2. A journal with short, typed, weekly entries focusing on analysis of each unit's readings, including questions and/or observations to raise in class and points of connection with previous films/reads/discussions. These journals should be brought to each class, as they may be collected periodically or shared with classmates. 3. An oral presentation designed to spark discussion of that particular week's unit by offering a fresh vantage point -- ideally by presenting a film clip and a hand-out guide to research you have conducted beyond that week's assigned material. 4. A short midterm paper. 5. A final research paper that applies the seminar issues to original areas of scholarly inquiry. Please note that all due dates are FIRM; extensions will not be granted. If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both your instructor and Disability Resources and Services, 216 William Pitt Union, 412-648-7890/412-383-7355 (TTY), as early as possible in the term. DRS will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course.

Course Texts (available at the University of Pittsburgh Book Center and on Hillman reserve):
The two-letter abbreviations following each title provide a key to their appearances in the seminar schedule. Texts without a two-letter abbreviation are recommended for further reading, but not required.

Seminar Schedule

WEEK 1, AUG. 28 – INTRODUCING CINEMA: THEN AND NOW, NEW AND OLD
Screening: Bram Stoker's Dracula (Francis Ford Coppola, 1992, USA) 123m
In-Class Writing Exercise

WEEK 2, SEPT. 4 – PRE-CLASSICAL, CLASSICAL, POST-CLASSICAL: ABSORPTION AND DISTRACTION
Screening: Assorted early cinema clips and short films

WEEK 3, SEPT. 11 – MISE-EN-SCENE AND MODERNISM
Screening: The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (Robert Wiene, 1919, Germany) 69m
Reading: David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, “The Shot: Mise-en-Scene” and “German Expressionism” [BT, 156-192 and 406-408]; Siegfried Kracauer, “Photography” [SK]; Erwin Panofsky, “Style and Medium in the Motion Pictures” [BC]; Siegfried Kracauer, “The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari” [BC]

WEEK 4, SEPT. 18 – CINEMATOGRAPHY: CINEMATIC PRESENCE AND ABSENCE
Screening: Man With a Movie Camera (Dziga Vertov, 1928, USSR) 60m; Un Chien andalou (Luis Buñuel, 1929, France) 17m
WEEK 5, SEPT. 25 – EDITING: CONTINUITY, DISCONTINUITY, EVOLUTION
Screening: Potemkin (Sergei Eisenstein, 1925, USSR) 74m

WEEK 6, OCT. 2 – SOUND AND IMAGE, REPRODUCTION AND REALITY
Screening: M (Fritz Lang, 1931, Germany) 99m

WEEK 7, OCT. 9 – HOLLYWOOD AS GENRE, OR GENRE VS. HOLLYWOOD?
Screening: Casablanca (Michael Curtiz, 1942, USA) 102m

WEEK 8, OCT. 16 – REALISM AND AS ART CINEMA
Screening: Bicycle Thieves (Vittorio De Sica, 1947, Italy) 90m

***MID-TERM ESSAY DUE***

WEEK 9, OCT. 23 – THE AUTEUR IN (AND OUTSIDE) THE FRENCH NEW WAVE
Screening: Night and Fog (Alain Resnais, 1955, France) 30m; Eyes Without a Face (Georges Franju, 1960, France) 88m

WEEK 10, OCT. 30 – CINEMA AND PSYCHOANALYSIS
Screening: Marnie (Alfred Hitchcock, 1964, USA) 129m

WEEK 11, NOV. 6 – BODY AND CINEMA
Screening: The Act of Seeing With One’s Own Eyes (Stan Brakhage, 1971, USA) 32m; Videodrome (David Cronenberg, 1983, Canada) 90m

WEEK 12, NOV. 13 – RACE, POSTCOLONIALISM, THIRD CINEMA
Screening: Xala (Ousmane Sembene, 1974, Senegal) 123m

WEEK 13, NOV. 20 – NATIONAL CINEMA AND (SUB)CULTURAL IDENTITY
Screening: The Last Wave (Peter Weir, 1977, Australia) 106m

WEEK 14, NOV. 27 – ***THANKSGIVING***

WEEK 15, DEC. 4 – NORMS, DIFFERENCE, AND DISCIPLINARITY
Screening: Office Killer (Cindy Sherman, 1997, USA) 83m
Reading: Patricia White, “Feminism and Film” [HG]; David Bordwell, “Contemporary Film Studies and the Vicissitudes of Grand Theory” [X]; Bill Nichols, “Form Wars: The Political Unconscious of Formalist Theory” [X]

***FINAL RESEARCH PAPER DUE***