

Englit 2451
Spring 2006
Majumdar, N.

Professor: Neepa Majumdar

Office Hours: Tuesdays, 2:30 to 4:30 pm and by appointment

Office: Cathedral of Learning 450

Email: nmajumda@pitt.edu

Phone: 4-5578 (412-624-5578)

ENGLIT 2451 (18792): Film History/Theory

Thursdays, 1:00 – 4:50 pm in CL 444

COURSE DESCRIPTION: In this course you will engage some of the most influential theoretical writings on cinema and its role in culture. The focus will be three-fold: (1) formal analysis of film texts (2) the technological and social history of cinema; and (3) philosophical questions pertaining to cinema and its relation to modernity, perception, and identity. Each week's readings have been designed to stimulate your thinking in more than one of these three areas. A graduate seminar is a cooperative effort that depends for its success upon the active participation of its student members. You should be prepared to reflect on the readings and films in your weekly journal and to contribute your insights, questions, and views to the class.

REQUIREMENTS:

- 1) Active class participation: to be better prepared to speak in class and for your own future reference, I strongly recommend that you keep a brief, typed weekly reading journal in which you map out and respond to the main issues raised in each week's readings. I will not be collecting your journal but will expect you to bring it in to class each week and to read from it when I call on you to do so.
- 2) An oral class presentation in which you synthesize the week's readings, pose questions, and lead class discussion.
- 3) A 5 to 7 page formal analysis of a film sequence in relation to the film as a whole and in its cultural context. You can turn this in any time in the semester until **March 30th**.
- 4) A conference length (7 to 10 pages) midterm paper due on **March 2** in my mailbox.
- 5) A final 20-page research paper that can, but need not, build on your conference-length paper, due on **April 27** in class.

Feel free to talk to me at any point in the semester to discuss your paper topics.

COURSE TEXTS (boldface shows how they will be referred to in the syllabus):

- * Roland Barthes, ***Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*** (start reading this right away)
- * **RFS** Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams, eds. *Reinventing Film Studies* (London: Arnold, 2000)
- * **FTC** Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, *Film Theory and Criticism*, 5th or 6th edition (Oxford, 1998 or 2004)
- * **Pam Cook** and Mieke Bernink, eds. *The Cinema Book*, 2nd edition (BFI, 1999)
- * David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, ***Film Art***, 7th edition (McGraw Hill, 2004) Earlier editions will work fine, but you will have to find the correct page numbers.

X: Readings available in electronic reserves (go to PittCat, click on "Course Reserves," check under my name or the course number, click on "e-reserves," and use the password "06film")

* Any books that I have placed on reserve in the library is marked by an asterisk in this syllabus; these include more books than just the course texts
All films are available in the Hillman Library Media Resource Center
Note: Total number of reading pages is approximate and includes notes and bibliography

SYLLABUS AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

Week 1: Jan 5

Topic: Mapping the Terrain of Film Studies

Readings (31 pages): **RFS 8-17:** Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, "How Films Mean..."

X: Richard Dyer, "Introduction to Film Studies" (*Film Studies: Critical Approaches* (eds. Hill and Church Gibson) 1-8)

RFS 53-75: Steven Cohan, "Case Study: Interpreting *Singin' in the Rain*"

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

Optional: Watch *Ed Wood* (Tim Burton, 1994, 127 mins.) and read Jeffrey Sconse, "'Trashing' the Academy" (**FTC 534-553**)

Week 2: Jan 12

Topic: Why Theory?

Readings (57 pages): **RFS 18-33:** Gill Branston, "Why Theory?"

RFS 76-95: Tessa Perkins, "Who (and what) is it for?"

RFS 381-401: Robert Stam and Ella Shohat, "Film Theory and Spectatorship in the Age of Posts"

Screening: *Chong qing sen lin/Chungking Express* (Wong Kar Wai, Hong Kong, 1994, 102 mins.)

Optional: *Bhaji on the Beach* (Gurinder Chadha, UK, 1993, 101 mins.)

Week 3: Jan 19

Topic: Hollywood Paradigms: Narrative and Continuity Editing

Readings (125 pages): ***X:** Robert Ray, Introduction and Chapter I of *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema*, (3-69)

Film Art, "Narrative as a Formal System" (68-91), "The Concept of Style" (389-394), "The Development of the Classical Hollywood Cinema" (468-471), "Continuity Editing" (310-333)

Pam Cook, 39-44

Recommended: **X:** David Bordwell, "Classical Hollywood Cinema: Narrational Principles and Procedures" (*Narrative Apparatus Ideology* 17-34)

Screening: *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (John Ford, USA, 1962, 123 mins.)

Week 4: Jan 26

Topic: Montage and Modernity: Soviet Theories

Readings (59 pages): **Film Art**, "Alternatives to Continuity Editing" (333-343) and "Soviet Montage" (478-480)

FTC 7-12: Vsevolod Pudovkin, "On Editing"

FTC 13-40: S. M. Eisenstein, "The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram" and "A Dialectical Approach to Film Form"

X: S. M. Eisenstein, "The Montage of Film Attractions" (*The European Cinema Reader* 25-33)

X: Lev Kuleshov, "The Principles of Montage," (*Kuleshov on Film* 183-194)

Further Reading: * **X:** Yuri Tsivian, "Some Historical Footnotes to the Kuleshov Effect" (*Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative* 247-255)

X: Peter Wollen, "Eisenstein's Aesthetics" (*Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* 19-73)

* **X:** David Bordwell, "Monumental Heroics: Form and style in Eisenstein's Silent Films" (*Silent Cinema Reader* 368-388)

Screening: *Bronenosets Potyomkin / Battleship Potemkin* (Sergei Eisenstein, 1925, 67 min.)

On your own: *Stachka / The Strike* (Sergei Eisenstein, U.S.S.R., 1925, 82 mins.)

Week 5: Feb 2

Topic: Early Cinema and Modernity

Readings (84 pages): * **X:** Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, "Imperial Imaginary" (*Film Cultures Reader* 366-378)

FTC 411-417: Hugo Munsterberg (1916), "The Means of the Photoplay"

FTC 143-153: Siegfried Kracauer (1960), "Basic Concepts"

FTC 791-811: Walter Benjamin (1935), "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"

X: Wolfgang Schivelbusch, excerpt from *The Railway Journey* (25-31 and 41-50)

FTC 862-876: Tom Gunning, "An Aesthetic of Astonishment"

Recommended: *Film Art*, "Early Cinema" (464-468) and 422-425

Pam Cook, "Early Cinema After Brighton" (93-97)

Screening: Lumiere shorts

Trip to the Moon (Georges Melies, 1902, 10 min.)

Great Train Robbery (Edwin Porter, 1903, 10 min.)

Sherlock Jr. (Buster Keaton, 1924, 45 min.)

Mest' Kinematograficheskogo Operatora / The Cameraman's Revenge (Wladislaw Starewicz, Russia, 1912, 12 mins.)

Optional: *The General* (Buster Keaton, 1927, USA, 75 mins.)

Week 6: Feb 9

Topic: Modernity and Perception

Readings (102 pages): **X:** Ben Singer, "Making Sense of the Modernity Thesis" (*Melodrama and Modernity*, 101-130)

FTC 314-321: Bela Balasz (1945), "The Close-Up" and "The Face of Man"

X: Giuliana Bruno, "Streetwalking Around Plato's Cave" (*Streetwalking on a Ruined Map*, 35-57).

X: Jacques Aumont, "The Variable Eye, Or the Mobilization of the Gaze" (*The Image in Dispute* 231-258)

X: Jonathan Crary, "Modernizing Vision" (*Viewing Positions* 23-35)

Further Reading: **X:** Rene Descartes, "Optics" (*Visual Culture Reader* 116-121)

X: Martin Jay, "Scopic Regimes of Modernity" (*Vision and Visuality* 3-27)

RFS 332-350: Miriam Hanson, "The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular

Modernism”

X: David Bordwell, “Convention, Construction, and Cinematic Vision” (*Post-Theory* 87-107)

X: Anke Gleber, “Women on the Screens and Streets of Modernity: In Search of the Female Flaneur” (*The Image in Dispute* 55-86)

Screenings: *Sunrise* (F. W. Murnau, Germany, 1927, 95 mins.)

Optional: *The Crowd* (King Vidor, 1928) and *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, Germany, 1927)

Week 7: Feb 16

Topic: The Mobilized Gaze

Readings (104 pages): *Film Art*, “Framing” (252-277) and “Experimental Film” (146-161)

*X: Anne Friedberg, “Cinema and the Postmodern Condition” (*Viewing Positions* 59-83)

FTC 199-205: Stan Brakhage, From *Metaphors on Vision*

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

X: Dziga Vertov, “Kinoks: A Revolution” (*Technology and Culture: The Film Reader* 99-104)

*X: Murray Smith, “Modernism and the Avant-gardes” (*Oxford Guide to Film Studies* 395-412)

Further Reading:

X: Mary Ann Doane, “Technology’s Body: Cinematic Vision in Modernity” (*Feminist Reader in Early Cinema*, 530-551)

X: Martin Jay, “The Disenchantment of the Eye” (*Visualizing Theory* 173-201)

FTC 914-926: Anne Friedberg, “The End of Cinema: Multimedia and Technological Change”

Screening: *Un chien Andalou/The Andalusian Dog* (Luis Bunuel, France, 1929, 16 mins.)

Entr’acte (René Clair, France, 1924, 22 mins.)

Stan Brakhage films

Chelovek s Kino-Apparatom / Man with a Movie Camera (Dziga Vertov, USSR, 1929)

Week 8: Feb 23

Topic: Sound and Mise-en-Scene

Readings (78 pages): Pam Cook, “Sound and Colour” (45-49)

FTC 183-186: Rudolph Arnheim, “The Complete Film”

*X: Steve Neale, “Colour and Film Aesthetics” (*The Film Cultures Reader* 85-94)

*X: Richard Dyer, “Lighting for Whiteness” (*The Film Cultures Reader* 95-106)

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

FTC 366-369: Christian Metz, “Aural Objects”

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

X: Donald Lastra, “Sound Theory” (*Sound Technology and the American Cinema* 123-153)

Recommended: *Film Art*, “Mise-en-scene” (176-220) and “Sound” (347-360)

*X: Gianluca Sergi, “A Cry in the Dark: The Role of Post-Classical Film Sound” *The Film Cultures Reader* 107-114)

FTC 154: Siegfried Kracauer, “*The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*”

Screening: *M* (Fritz Lang, Germany, 1931)

On your own: *Das Kabinett des Doktor Caligari / The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Robert Wiene, Germany, 1920)

Week 9: Mar 2

NO CLASS

*****Midterm Papers due in my mailbox on March 3rd by 5 pm*****

SPRING BREAK

Week 10: Mar 16

Topic: Photography and Film: Presence/Absence

Readings (163 pages): Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*

FTC 303-313: Siegfried Kracauer (1960), “The Establishment of Physical Existence”

FTC 166-173: Andre Bazin (1946), “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” and “The Myth of Total Cinema

X: David MacDougal, “The Fate of the Cinema Subject” (*Transcultural Film* 25-60)

FTC 598-605: John Ellis, excerpt from “Stars as a Cinematic Phenomenon”

Screening: *La Jetee* (Chris Marker, France, 1962, 28 mins.)

Nuit et Brouillard / Night and Fog (Alain Resnais, France, 1955, 32 mins.)

On your own: *Les Quatre cents coups/ 400 Blows* (François Truffaut, France, 1959, 94 mins.)

Week 11: Mar 23

Topic: Theories of Realism

Readings (82 pages): *Film Art*, “The Long Take” (284-288)

X: Raymond Williams, “Realism, Naturalism, and their Alternatives” (*Explorations in Film Theory* 121-126)

FTC 41-53: Andre Bazin, “The Evolution of the Language of Cinema”

FTC 174-182: “De Sica: Metteur en scène” (Bazin)

X: “Umberto D” (Bazin)

FTC 303-313: Siegfried Kracauer, “Basic Concepts,” “The Establishment of Physical Existence”

FTC 322-331: Rudolph Arnheim, “Film and Reality” and “The Making of a Film”

X: Cesare Zavattini, “Some Ideas on the Cinema” (*Vittorio De Sica: Contemporary Perspectives* 50-61)

X: Brian Henderson, “Two Types of Film Theory” (*Movies and Methods I* 388-400)

Pam Cook, “Deep Focus” (51)

Further Reading: **X:** Brian Henderson, “The Long Take” (*Movies and Methods I* 314-324)

X: Mark Betz, “Art, Exploitation, Underground” (*Defining Cult Movies* 202-222)

Screening: *Umberto D* (Vittorio De Sica, Italy, 1952, 91 mins.)

On your own: *Ladri di biciclette / Bicycle Thief* (Vittorio De Sica, Italy, 1948, 93 mins.)

Citizen Kane (Orson Welles, USA, 1941)

Week 12: Mar 30

Topic: Politics, Ideology, and Meaning: French New Wave and Discontinuity

Readings (64 pages): *Film Art*, “The French New Wave” (486-489) and “Narrative Alternatives to Classical Filmmaking” (428-433)

FTC 54-64: Brian Henderson, “Towards a Non-Bourgeois Camera Style”

FTC 525-533: Peter Wollen, “Godard and Counter Cinema”

X: Colin MacCabe, extract from “Realism and the Cinema: Notes on some Brechtian Theses” (*The Film Studies Reader* 201-206)

FTC 513-624: Kristin Thompson, “The Concept of Cinematic Excess”

FTC 812-819: Commoli and Narboni, “Cinema/Ideology/Criticism”

X: Louis Althusser, extract from “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” (*Visual Studies Reader* 139-141)

X: Barbara Klinger, “Film History Terminable and Interminable” (*The Film Studies Reader* 299-302)

Further Reading: ***X:** Colin MacCabe “Theory and Film: Principles of Realism and Pleasure” (*Narrative Apparatus Ideology* 179-197)

Screening: *Week-End* (Jean-Luc Godard, France, 1967, 105 mins.)

On your own: *À bout de souffle/ Breathless* (Jean-Luc Godard, France, 1960)

*******Final due date for scene analysis paper*******

Week 13: Apr. 6

Topic: Media Transformations

Readings (87 pages): **FTC 270-282:** Stephen Prince, “True Lies: Perceptual Realism, Digital Images, and Film Theory”

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

X: Lev Manovich, “What is Cinema?” (*The Language of New Media* 287-333)

X: Vivian Sobchack, “The Scene of the Screen: Envisioning Cinematic and Electronic ‘Presence’” (*Technology and Culture: The Film Reader* 127-142)

Further Reading: *Texts* link on <http://www.manovich.net/>

Screening: Selections from *Soft Cinema* (Lev Manovich and Andreas Kratky, 2004)
student choice

Week 14: Apr 13

Topic: Colonialism and Third Cinema

Readings (90 pages): ***X:** Ashish Rajadhyaksha, Realism, Modernism, and Post-Colonial Theory” (*Oxford Guide to Film Studies* 413-425)

X: Glauber Rocha, “An Esthetic of Hunger” and “The Tricontinental Filmmaker” (*Brazilian Cinema* 68-71 and 76-80)

***X:** Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, “Towards a Third Cinema” (Stam and Miller’s *Film and Theory* 265-286)

***X:** Julio Garcia Espinosa, “For an Imperfect Cinema” (Stam and Miller’s *Film and Theory* 287-297)

***X:** Ismail Xavier, “Historical Allegory” (Stam and Miller’s *Companion to Film Theory*, 333-362)

X: Michael Wang, "The Critical Practice and Dialectics of Third Cinema" (*The Third Text Reader* 211-225)

Further Reading: X: Stam and Johnston, "The Cinema of Hunger: Nelson Pereira dos Santos's *Vidas Secas*" (*Brazilian Cinema* 120-127)

FTC 877-891: Robert Stam and Loïuse Spence. "Colonialism, Racism, and Representation: An Introduction"

Screening: *Vidas Secas/Barren Lives* (Nelson Pereira dos Santos, 1963, 115 min.)

On your own: *La Battaglia di Algeri/Battle of Algiers* (Gillo Pontecorvo, Italy, 1965, 117 mins.)

Week 15: Apr 20

Topic: Debates in Race, Gender, and Cinematic Representation

Readings (80 pages): FTC 837-848: Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"

*X: bell hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze" (Stam and Miller's *Film and Theory* 510-523)

X: Richard Dyer, "The Matter of Whiteness" (*Theories of Race and Racism* 539-548)

X: Angela McRobbie, "Post-Feminism and Popular Culture: Bridget Jones and the New Gender Regime" (*Media and Cultural Theory* 59-70)

*X: Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation" (Stam and Miller's *Film and Theory* 704-714)

X: Tommy L. Lott, "Aesthetics and Politics in Contemporary Black Film Theory" (*Film Theory and Philosophy* 282-302)

Further Reading: *X: Laura Mulvey, "Afterthoughts" (*Feminist Film Theory: A Reader* Ed. Sue Thornham available on netlibrary)

X: Claire Johnston, "Women's Cinema as Counter Cinema" (*Feminist Film Theory* in netlibrary)

*X: Masilela Ntongela, "The Los Angeles School of Black Filmmakers" (*Black American Cinema*)

Screening: *Nice Coloured Girls* (Tracey Moffatt, Australia, 1987, 16 mins.)

Bush Mama (Haile Gerima, U.S.A., 1976, 97 mins.)

Optional: *Black Girl* (Ousmane Sembene, Senegal 1965, 60 mins.)

Illusions (Julie Dash, U.S.A., 1982, 34 mins.)

Week 16: Apr 27

Topic: Film History, Memory, and Cinematic Time

Readings (116 pages): X: D. N. Rodowick, "A Short History of Cinema" (*Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine* 3-17)

*X: Gilles Deleuze, "Montage: the American school and the Soviet school" (*Movement-Image* 29-40) and "Recapitulation of Images and Signs" (*Time-Image* 25-43)

FTC 240-269: Gilles Deleuze, extracts from *Time-Image* and *Movement-Image*

X: Mary Ann Doane, "The Afterimage, the Index, and the Accessibility of the Present" (*The Emergence of Cinematic Time* 69-107)

Screening: *Hiroshima mon amour* (Alain Resnais, France, 1959, 90 mins.)

Passage à l'acte (Martin Arnold, Austria, 1993, 12 mins.)

OR

Topic: Final Thoughts

Readings (42 pages): *X: Henry Jenkins, “The Work of Theory in the Age of Digital Transformation” (Stam and Miller’s *Companion to Film Theory* 234-261)
X: Sean Cubitt, “Virtual Realism: Machine Perception and the Global Image” extract (*Digital Aesthetics* 29-44)
X: Scott McQuire, “Pure Speed: From Transport to Teleport” (*Visions of Modernity* 183-190)

Screening: student choice