

Introduction to Film Theory

Prepared by Eric Whedbee

Course Description and Objectives

In this survey of film theory, this course will examine several historic developments in this field. Our discussions will include concepts related to classical film theory, realism, modernity, apparatus theory, genre, ideology, representation, psychoanalysis, affect, and new media.

Assignments:

-Weekly Journal : This assignment is a weekly report on your understanding of the readings and a place to synthesize these concepts vis-a-vis the screened film of the previous week. Each report should be a short and concise essay no more than one page in length. Each report will be submitted most Tuesdays at the beginning of class and will be used to prompt discussion on the stated topic that week.

-Mid-Term Take Home Exam : This exam is to be approximately 1000 words typed with one inch margins, double-space, no excessively large fonts. Please use MLA or Chicago style for format. One week before exam is due a prompt question will be handed out to the class. More details about the film and the choice of theories available to write about will be given at this time. This question will ask the student to perform a close-reading of a film by using a shot-by-shot analysis of a scene and to analyze the scene using a particular theory.

-Paper Proposal with Annotated Bibliography : This assignment should consist of 1-2 pages outlining the topic and film that you would like to address in your final paper. While a thesis statement does not yet have to be neatly defined at this point this proposal should demonstrate a clear understanding of the topic that you wish to write about and present a question that you would like to investigate. In addition to this proposal, you will need to include an annotated bibliography listing 3-5 scholarly sources: either articles or volumes that you think would be useful for your final paper. More information on the format of this assignment will be given in class.

-Final Paper : This exam is to be approximately 2000 words typed with one inch margins, double-space, no excessively large fonts. Please use MLA or Chicago style for format and citations (including films). When you include evidence from another author, place the evidence in the context of your work and discuss the material. Provide specific evidence from the readings and from the films, not generalized comments. This exam does not require outside sources beyond the texts assigned in class, but the use of outside sources are permitted if desired.

Using at least one of the texts we have read in class, take up one specific aspect of film theory and discuss and explore its implications in relation to one film (and no more than one) of your choice.

Grade Breakdown:

Class Participation (journal portfolio) 10%

Paper Proposal (20%)

Mid-Term Exam (30%)

Final Paper (40%)

Class Policies, Grading and Assignments

No late assignments or make-up exams or assignments. All assignments are due in class or during designated meeting times. No emailed assignments will be accepted for credit.

Required Text

Corrigan, Timothy and Patricia White, eds. *Critical Visions in Film Theory*, 1st ed. Bedford/St. Martin's 2010.

*Other assigned text will be provided in class.

Schedule

Week 1: Introduction: Film Language and Semiotics

Tuesday: Introduction: What is Film Theory?

Clips: *October* (Eisenstein, 1928)

Thursday:

Discussing:

Eisenstein, Sergei, "The Dramaturgy of Film Form"

Kuleshov, Lev "The Principles of Montage"

Screening: *The Loandale Operator* (Biograph, 2011)

Week 2: The Apparatus

Tuesday: Journal 1 Due

Reading:

Baudry Jean-Louis "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus"

Carroll, "Jean-Louis Baudry & 'The Apparatus'"

Thursday Screening: *Hanna* (Wright, 2011; 111min)

Week 3: Image & Sound

Tuesday: Journal 2 Due

Discussing:

Belton, John, "Technology & Aesthetics of Film Sound"

Doane, Mary-Ann, "The Voice in the Cinema: The Articulation of Body and Space"

Thursday Screening: *Umberto D* (De Sica, 1952)

Week 4: Realism and Neorealism

Tuesday: Journal 3 Due

Discussing:

Bazin, André "The Ontology of the Photographic Image"

& "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema" from *What is Cinema?*

Thursday Screening: *Red Desert* (Antonioni, 1965; 120 min)

Week 5: Modernism and Modernity

Tuesday: Journal 4 Due

Discussing:

Benjamin, Walter, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological
Reproducibility)

Hansen, Miriam "The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as
Vernacular Modernism"

Thursday Screening: *All that Heaven Allows* (Sirk, 1955; 89min)

Week 6: Genre

Tuesday: Journal 5 Due

Discussing: Gledhill, Christine "Rethinking Genre"*

Schatz, Thomas "Film Genre & the Genre Film"

Elsaesser, Thomas "The Tale of Sound and Fury: Observations on the
Family Melodrama

Thursday Screening: *Rear Window* (Hitchcock, 1954; 112min)

Week 7: Psychoanalytic Theory, Spectatorship, & Ideology

Tuesday: Journal 6 Due

Discussing: Mulvey, Laura "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"

Browne, "The Spectator-in-the-Text"*

Gunning, "An Aesthetic of Astonishment"

Thursday: *Two or Three Things I know About Her* (Godard 1966; 90mins)

Week 8: Counter-Cinema

Tuesday: **Paper Proposal Due**

Discussing: Wollen, Peter, "Godard and Counter Cinema: *Vent d'Est*"

Comolli & Narboni, "Cinema/Ideology/Criticism" Thursday Screening:

Thursday Screening: *The Black Girl* (Sembene, 1966)

Week 9: Post-Colonialism, Representation, and Third Cinema

Tuesday:

Discussing: Shohat & Stam "Stereotype, Realism, and the Struggle over Representation"

Rony, "The Third Eye: Race, Cinema and the Ethnographic Spectacle"

Clips: *King Kong / Xala*

Thursday Screening: *In the Mood for Love* (Kar Wai, 2000; 98min)

Week 10: Affect and Perception

Tuesday:

Discussing: Deleuze, Gilles. (excerpts from) *The Time Image*

Shaviro, Steven, "Introduction" *Post Cinematic Affect**

Clips: *N.O.T.H.I.N.G.*

Thursday Screening: *The Social Network* (Fincher, 2010; 120 min)

Week 11: New Technologies

Reading: Manovich "The Language of New Media

Final Paper DUE