

CIN 3150

FILM THEORY & CRITICISM

M/W 1:20-4:07pm MSC 93

Instructor: Prof. Hunter Vaughan
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Office: 127 ODH
Office hours: W 12-1, 4-5pm, or by
appointment

Required Texts:

- *Braudy and Cohen, *Film Theory and Criticism*, 7th Ed.
- *Additional readings available electronically on MOODLE

Course Summary, Requirements, and Expectations: CIN 315 offers a survey of critical approaches to film and visual culture, including montage theory, auteur theory, film semiotics, feminist theory, and genre theory, as well as an introduction to the larger paradigms of twentieth- and twenty-first century thought, such as formalism, structuralism, and postmodernism. We will chart major developments in film theory alongside the unfolding of twentieth-century film, intellectual, and artistic histories. This course aims to develop an intensive theoretical perspective, demanding rigorous ongoing intellectual and analytic exercise from the students involved. Your full preparation, attention, and energy is required! By the end of the semester, students should have a broad understanding of film theory as a history and practice, and will have developed the potential for developing original and creative ways of understanding moving-image aesthetics and meaning. Prerequisite: CIN 150 or ENG 250; CIN 252.

Learning Goals:

By the end of this course, students should be able:

- to identify and to analyze the social, cultural, and industrial theories of the moving image;
- to construct theoretical arguments about screen culture, and to develop coherent and articulate written analysis of screen theories;
- to contextualize movements and moments in screen theory within larger intellectual and cultural histories.

Assignments and Grade:

		<u>100 pts.</u>
Participation	=	10 pts.
MOODLE discussion	=	10 pts.
Writing Exercises	=	20 pts. (10 pts. apiece)
Take-home Midterm	=	20 pts.
Creative Project	=	10 pts.
Take-home Final	=	30 pts.

This is a required core course of the Cinema Studies major, and is split between lectures and screenings—all of which are REQUIRED. Attendance, assignment preparation, MOODLE film discussions, classroom conduct and participation are expected and part of your grade. All assignments must be completed to receive course credit. All assignments will come with detailed instructions. *Work should not be submitted via e-mail without prior approval, and electronic submissions will RECEIVE NO FEEDBACK.*

Participation and Conduct: Participation is worth 10% of the course grade: students are expected to come to class on time and prepared, to be attentive in class and to contribute to class discussions. Students are expected to be respectful of the instructor and other classmates. Any student with a ringing cell phone or typing a text message will be dismissed from class and an absence will be recorded. Cell phones and pagers must be off (*not* set to vibrate) during class – we are going fully present, in real time, three dimensions. Any student who misses or is late to more than 4 classes will receive a zero in participation.

MOODLE responses: Each week poses questions that need to be answered through the reading, and worked out through consideration of the week's screening. This will be done in MOODLE discussion forums for each week, and is worth 10% of your grade.

Writing Exercises: You will have two writing exercises, which will be open book evaluations of your ability to analyze and apply the theories to films.

- 9/26: Medium Specificity: Students will write a 144-character “Tweet” to summarize Todd Haynes *Carol*. This can take any form: a narrative synopsis; an interpretation of the film's deeper meanings; a commentary on its identity politics, etc. Students must then discuss the difference between film form and Twitter form, and use the readings to argue for whether or not their example is an argument FOR or AGAINST medium specificity theory. Hashtags optional!
- 11/14: IDENTITY: Students will integrate *Peeping Tom*, *Orlando*, *Battle of Algiers*, *In a Perfect World*, and *Baraka* (CHOOSE TWO) into a “Norms and Alternatives” argument that uses identity theories in order to discuss the patriarchal and imperialist conventions of cinema as well as the subversive or conflicting discourses therein.

Midterm and Final Exams: The midterm and final will be open-note take-home exams. Students will be given the questions in advance, allowed to use notes and readings to prepare their answers, and then given a fixed amount of time to write. All assignments in this class will evaluate not only students' understanding of the material, but also their ability to apply and to organize this knowledge in a well-developed, clear, and coherent way. This mode of evaluation aims to encourage students to value deeper understanding and preparation over rote memorization, and to institute an atmosphere of learning and support as opposed to one of grade punishment.

Creative Project: In addition to understanding and applying traditional theories of film and media, students are encouraged in this course to develop their own original theories and to integrate the concepts learned here into their own creative use of visual media. At the end of the year, students will have the opportunity to develop a creative project that either develops an original theory or incorporates film theory into a creative project.

Academic Conduct: Students must adhere to the University's Academic Conduct policy, the details of which are available at <http://www.oakland.edu/?id=1610&sid=75>. Plagiarism (or the representation of someone else's work as your own) is prohibited, and will result in failing the course.

DSS Accommodations: Students who have learning, psychological, and/or physical disabilities may be eligible for accommodations that provide equal access to educational programs and activities at Oakland University. Students should notify me *early on* in the semester with a Faculty Notification Letter from the Office of Disability Support Services (DSS) regarding accommodation requests. Eligibility for services can be discussed by contacting DSS at 248-370-3266, room 103A North Foundation Hall.

Add/Drop: The University add/drop policy will be explicitly followed. It is the student's responsibility to be aware of the University deadline dates for dropping the course.

Syllabus may change, with ample forewarning, at the discretion of the teacher.

Course Calendar

Sept 5 Introduction to Course: *Carol* (Todd Haynes, 2015)

Sept 10-12 The Seventh Art and the Modern Subject

9/10 **SCREENING: *Modern Times* (Charlie Chaplin, 1936)**

- What was the social role of early cinema, and what does it signify in terms of the relationship between art and modernity?
- What about cinema mirrored the new twentieth-century human subject?

Read:

- Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age...” (665-85)
- Tom Gunning, “An Aesthetic of Astonishment...” (736-50)

Sept 17-19 Medium Specificity and Film Technology

9/17 **SCREENING: SELECTIONS FROM EARLY CINEMA**

- Why is unique about cinema?
- What is Carroll’s critique of the “specificity thesis”?
- Where does sound fit into film theory and style?

Read:

- Bela Balasz, “The Close Up” (273-5)
- Noel Carroll, “The Specificity Thesis” (292-8)
- John Belton, “Technology and Aesthetics of Film Sound” (331-9)

Sept 24-26 Early Experiments in Cinema and Theory

9/24 **SCREENING: *Strike* (Sergei Eisenstein, 1925)**

- How is “montage” theory a cinematic manifestation of Marxist dialectics?
- How do Pudovkin and Eisenstein’s theories of montage differ?
- What are “photogenie” and “cinographie”?

Read:

- Vsevolod Pudovkin, “[On Editing]” (7-12)
- Sergei Eisenstein, “The Dramaturgy of Film Form” (24-40)
- MOODLE: Jean Epstein, “On Certain Characteristics...”
- MOODLE: Germaine Dulac, “Aesthetics, Obstacles...”

9/26 ***DUE: WRITING EXERCISE 1: MEDIUM SPECIFICITY***

Oct 01-03 Recording and Representing the Real

10/1 SCREENING: *The Bicycle Thieves* (Vittorio De Sica, 1948)

- How does “realism” differ from “formalism”?
- What are some of Kracauer’s “basic concepts”?
- How can we position Bazin’s approach relative, for example, to Arnheim’s?

Read:

- Siegfried Kracauer “Basic Concepts” (147-58)
- Andre Bazin, “Ontology of the Photographic Image” (159-63)
- Rudolph Arnheim, “Film and Reality” (282-6)

Oct 08-10 Film Language, Auteur Theory, and Classical Cinema

10/8 SCREENING: *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, 1941)

- How does Bazin divide traditions in film directing?
- What is Andrew Sarris’ auteur theory, and how does Wollen challenge it?

Read:

- Andre Bazin, “The Evolution of the Language of Cinema” (41-53)
- Andrew Sarris, “Notes on the Auteur Theory” (451-4)
- Peter Wollen, “The Auteur Theory” (455-70)

Oct 15-17 Genre and Stardom: Industrial Practices and Social Myths

10/15 SCREENING: *It’s a Wonderful Life* (Frank Capra, 1946)

- How do genres serve both an industrial and ideological function?
- What are the social ramifications of the star system?

Read:

- Thomas Schatz, “Film Genre and the Genre Film” (564-75)
- Robin Wood, “Ideology, Genre, Auteur” (592-601)
- Richard Dyer, *From Stars* (480-5)
- Molly Haskell, “Female Stars of the 1940s” (501-14)

Oct 22-24 Film and Philosophy

10/22 SCREENING: *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (Michel Gondry, 2004)

- According to Bordwell, how do we understand films?
- How does Deleuze situate the “movement-image” and “time-image” historically?
- How can Deleuze’s theory be seen as a “film-philosophy”?

Read:

- Gilles Deleuze “Preface” (216-8)
- Gilles Deleuze, “The Origin of the Crisis” (218-27)
- David Bordwell, “Cognition and Comprehension...” (427-44)

10/24 **In-class screening: *Last Year at Marienbad* (Alain Resnais, 1961)**

Oct 29-31 Structuralism, Semiotics, and Psychoanalysis

10/29 **SCREENING: *Peeping Tom* (Michael Powell, 1960)**

—What does “suture” refer to?

—According to Baudry, how is cinema similar to certain psychic functions?

Read:

- Daniel Dayan, “The Tutor-Code of Classical Cinema” (106-17)
- MOODLE: Jean-Louis Baudry, “The Apparatus...” (171-88)

Nov 05-07 Gender and Sexuality in Theory

11/5 **SCREENING *Orlando* (Sally Potter, 1993)**

—What is Mulvey’s larger social/historical argument about cinema?

—How does patriarchy express itself both narratively and formally?

—How does Williams categorize particular body genres according to sexuality?

—How does Wood position the identity of the critic in the process of criticism?

Read:

- Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (711-22)
- Linda Williams, “Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess” (602-16)
- MOODLE: Robin Wood, “Responsibility of a Gay Critic”

Nov 12-14 National, World, Transnational Cinema

11/12 **SCREENING *The Battle of Algiers* (Gillo Pontecorvo, 1966)**

—What are some central problems of colonialism and racism in film?

—What are the politics of a theory of “National Cinema”? How does it differ from “World Cinema”?

Read:

- MOODLE: Andrew Higson, “The Concept of National Cinema”
- Robert Stam & Louise Spence, “Colonialism, Racism, and Representation” (751-66)

11/14 ***DUE: WRITING EXERCISE 2: IDENTITY***

11/14 **In-class screening: *In a Better World* (Susanne Bier, 2010)**

Nov 19-21 Ecocriticism

11/19 **In-class Screening: *Baraka* (Ron Fricke, 1992)**

—How are “eco-criticism” and “eco-cinema” different?

—What might an “ecomaterialism” of film be?

Read:

- MOODLE: David Ingram, “One: Discourses of Nature and Environmentalism”
- MOODLE: Paula Willocet-Maricondi, “Shifting Paradigms”
- MOODLE: Hunter Vaughan, “500,000 Kilowatts of Stardust”

11/21 **NO CLASS—HAPPY THANKSGIVING!!!**

Nov 26-28 Postmodernism and the Digital Age

11/26 **SCREENING *Mulholland Drive* (David Lynch, 2001)**

—According to Manovich, why do synthetic images succeed at faking reality?

—What is meant by “The End of Cinema”?

Read:

- Lev Manovich, “Synthetic Realism...”, “The Synthetic Image...” & “Digital Cinema...” (785-801)
- Anne Friedberg, “The End of Cinema” (802-13)

Dec 3-5 *IN CLASS: CREATIVE PROJECTS*

12/3 ~ **NO SCREENING** ~

12/7 *DUE: TAKE-HOME FINAL EXAM*