

film theory

Course #: FILM 125
Instructor: adam wadenius
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Office Hours: By email or appointment
Semester: Spring 2014
Day & time: Thursday, 7:00p – 9:50p
Building: #1200, Room #1231

course description

This course will introduce students to a variety of critical approaches to and debates within film studies. We will consider the ontology of cinema, discuss the constituent elements of film language, examine the impact of psychoanalysis on film, consider contemporary cognitive film theory, and look critically at the politics of race and difference.

course requirements

Class Lectures & Screenings: You are responsible for attending the class lecture every Thursday. Each class session is structured to introduce you to a particular theme or concept, which will elucidate the weeks' topic. There is no talking/discussion during the films or clips. I will dismiss you from the course if you become a disruption during the film screenings. If at any time you decide that you do not wish to continue with the course, it is your responsibility to drop, as I do not take it upon myself to drop anyone from the roster at any time.

I encourage you to use your personal computer, iPad, or other learning tool during class time if you are using it appropriately (viewing class slides, taking notes), however, be sure to turn off any noisemaking functions on those and any other electronic devices such as cell phones, iPods, etc. Please keep the brightness levels on all LED screens at low intensity. There is no food allowed in class at any time (drinks are okay). Copies of all the lectures are available on the course website for download and review.

Readings: It is incumbent upon you to be prepared, and you should come to class each week having read the reading assignment posted on the schedule. We will be spending as much time discussing the readings as the films, and a firm understanding of them will benefit your overall understanding/interpretation of the film texts. All readings are located on the course website.

Quizzes: There will be three reading quizzes given at the beginning of class on selected dates throughout the semester. All quizzes will cover the reading materials assigned up until the date of the quiz, and there will be no opportunity for making-up any missed quizzes.

Essay Guidelines: You are required to write three, 4-5 page essays this semester. There are four assigned essays overall, and you only need complete three of them to receive credit. All papers are due on the designated due dates without exception, and no late papers will be accepted. I do not accept physical papers, so please email all of your assignments to me through the Turnitin application (discussed in further detail in the *Example Essay* on the website). All emergency situations leading to late papers will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. There will be no opportunity for re-writes after grading, as good writing skills are a must in this course. Each of the essay questions, as well as an example of an *A* paper are located on the course website. It is required that you visit the website to view the example paper, as there are additional guidelines for writing successfully in this course.

**** NOTE ** ~ Plagiarism and other issues concerning academic integrity will not be tolerated, and are grounds for an automatic failure in the course. Acknowledge all reading and research sources with appropriate footnotes and bibliography.** Keep all copies of your essays, exams, and notes until you have received a final grade for this class. ~

Discussion: You are encouraged to be actively involved in the class discussions, as your participation is key to your success in this course. My goal is to aid in the development of your analytical/critical skills, and I expect everyone to maintain an open mind, and take a creative approach to the material. Be respectful of your fellow classmates when addressing and critiquing conflicting viewpoints.

Film Notes: To compliment any notes you may be taking on the lectures and discussions, you will be required to keep a separate notebook with your notes on each of the films. This is a good habit to practice when watching and analyzing films, as it will help you to remember important narrative and stylistic elements to be used as supportive examples in your writing. This notebook will be checked on the final week of the semester (May 29th).

assessments

Film Notes	20%
Three Reading Quizzes	30%
Three 4-5 pg. Essays	50%

texts & materials

1. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
2. Additional readings and materials posted on the course website @ www.apwadenius.com.
3. All films screened in class, as well as any excerpt screened during the lectures.

Please remember that if you have any questions about the readings, assignments, or any of the course materials that I am readily available to help answer them. I can be reached through the email address above, the course website, or by placing a note for me in my box in FA 141.

schedule

~ *Formalist Film Theory* ~

week #1 ~ (Jan. 23rd) ~ film theory vs. film criticism

Lecture: Intro to film theory
Screening: *Broken Blossoms*, dir. D.W. Griffith (1919)

week #2 ~ (Jan. 30th) ~ Soviet montage theory

Reading: Film Theory – “Beyond the Shot,” Sergei Eisenstein
Film Theory – “The Dramaturgy of Film Form,” Sergei Eisenstein
Screening: *Stachka*, dir. Sergei Eisenstein (1925)

week #3 ~ (Feb. 6th) ~ realism and the image

Reading: Film Theory - “Basic Concepts,” Siegfried Kracauer
Film Theory - “The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari,” Siegfried Kracauer
Screening: *Das cabinet des dr. Caligari*, dir. Robert Wiene (1920)

week #4 ~ (Feb. 13th) ~ Bazin and the long-take style

Reading: Film Theory - "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema," Andre Bazin

Screening: *The Rules of the Game*, dir. Jean Renoir (1939)

~ *Film As A Language* ~

week #5 ~ (Feb. 20th) ~ the linguistic sign

Reading: Ferdinand de Saussure, "Nature of the Linguistic Sign," Course in General Linguistics. McGraw-Hill Publishing, 1966. Ferdinand de Saussure, "Linguistic Value," Course in General Linguistics. McGraw-Hill Publishing, 1966.

Screening: *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, dir. Howard Hawks (1953)

** *Essay # 1 due* **

week #6 ~ (Feb. 27th) ~ structuralist film theory

Reading: Roland Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," Image – Music - Text. New York: Hill & Wang, 1980.

Screening: *And God Created Woman...*, dir. Roger Vadim (1956)

** *First reading quiz* **

week #7 ~ (Mar. 6th) ~ filmic codes

Reading: Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding"

Screening: *Constantine*, dir. Francis Lawrence (2005)

week #8 ~ (Mar. 13th) ~ semiotics and making meaning

Reading: Film Theory – "Some Points in the Semiotics of the Cinema," Christian Metz
Film Theory – "Problems of Denotation in the Fiction Film," Christian Metz

Screening: *21 Grams*, dir. Alejandro González Iñárritu (2003)

week #9 ~ (Mar. 20th) ~ suture theory

Reading: Film Theory – "The Tutor-Code of Classic Cinema," Daniel Dayan

Screening: *Mildred Pierce*, dir. Michael Curtiz (1945)

week #10 ~ (Mar. 24th to Mar. 29th) ~ no class

** *Spring break* **

~ *Psychoanalysis & Feminism* ~

week #11 ~ (Apr. 3rd) ~ the imaginary signifier

Reading: Film Theory - "Identification, Mirror," Christian Metz
Film Theory - "The Passion for Perceiving," Christian Metz
Film Theory - "Disavowal, Fetishism," Christian Metz
Screening: *Caché* dir. Michael Haneke (2005)
** *Essay #2 due* **

week #12 ~ (Apr. 10th) ~ the male gaze

Reading: Film Theory - "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Laura Mulvey
Screening: *Vertigo*, dir. Alfred Hitchcock (1958)
** *Second reading quiz* **

week #13 ~ (Apr. 17th) ~ repression and the other

Reading: Robin Wood. "An Introduction to the American Horror Film," American Nightmare.
Toronto: Festival of Festivals, 1979.
Screening: *Carrie*, dir. Brian DePalma (1976)

week #14 ~ (Apr. 24th) ~ gender fluidity

Reading: Carol Clover. "Her Body, Himself," Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992.
Screening: *Halloween*, dir. John Carpenter (1978)

~ *Post-Theory & Popular Culture* ~

week #15 ~ (May 1st) ~ cognitive film theory

Reading: David Bordwell, "Contemporary Film Studies and the Vicissitudes of Grand Theory," in
Post Theory. Bordwell & Carroll, Eds. Wisconsin: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1996.
Screening: *There Will Be Blood*, dir. Paul Thomas Anderson (2007)
** *Essay #3 due* **

week #16 ~ (May 8th) ~ identity and representation

Reading: Film Theory - "Black Spectatorship" Manthia Diawara
Film Theory - "Colonialism, Racism, and Representation" Stam & Spence
Screening: *Posse*, dir. Mario Van Peebles, (1993)
** *Third reading quiz* **

week #17 ~ (May 15th) ~ queer theory

Reading: Alexander Doty, "There's Something Queer Here"
Alexander Doty, "Queer Theory"
Screening: *Velvet Goldmine*, dir. Todd Haynes (1998)

week #18 ~ (May 22nd) ~ postmodern film theory

Reading: Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, "In Search of the Postmodern," Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations. New York: the Guilford Press, 1991.
"Note on the Meaning of the Word 'Post' and Answering the Question 'What is Postmodernism?'" by Jean-François Lyotard
Screening: *Kill Bill*, dir. Quentin Tarantino (2003)

week #19 ~ (May 29th) ~ final class session

**** Fourth reading quiz ****

**** Essay #4 due ****

**** Film notes due ****

**** Please note that the final class session will be held on May 29th at the usual time and location. ****