Film Theory

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Office Hours: Thursdays 10:00am-12:00pm  
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Course Description:
This course will provide a basic introduction to the major works of Western film theory. We will closely discuss seminal works of significant film theorists, starting from the classical period (Arnheim, Balázs, Eisenstein and Bazin), when early efforts were made to define the crucial elements of film and to recognize it as a distinct art form. We will then move on to discuss more contemporary theories (Baudry, Mulvey, Metz) which employ structuralist semiotics, psychoanalysis, and ideological critique to help establishing a distinguished place for film studies in academia. The final segment of the class will be devoted to the “Post-Theory” age, focusing attention on cultural postmodernism, the alternative of cognitivism, and the recent trend of analytical film theory. Emphasis will be put on close readings, discussions, and written assignments.

Course Website and Blackboard:
This course will use Blackboard. Please be sure to check it regularly for course announcements, assignment guidelines, supplemental screenings, presentations from lectures, and your own personal grading and attendance records. To access Blackboard, point your browser to http://classes.nyu.edu and log in using your NYU Net ID and password. You will find our course under "Courses You Are Taking."

Required Readings:
The followings books should be purchased for the course:


All other readings listed below will be available as Portable Document Format (PDF) files via Blackboard. We will also put copies on reserve in Bobst library.

Course Policy:
Attendance in the course is vital. If you miss more than three class sessions, those absences will count against your final grade. Missing more than 30 minutes of class, either due to late arrival
or early departure, will count as one absence. Please note that all screenings are part of the lecture time.

It is essential that you complete each week’s readings before our class meets. The lectures will cover material that assumes you have completed that week’s assigned readings. Re-read the material before your recitation session meets for further developing ideas and concerns. It is imperative that the textbook and/or copies of each week’s readings be brought to every class and to every recitation session.

Course Requirements:

15% first paper (covering weeks 1-4)
25% midterm exam (covering weeks 1-6)
20% second paper (covering weeks 7-9)
30% final paper (covering all weeks)
10% class attendance, participation, and consultations with the TA (at least once during the semester).

Specific guidelines for each assignment will be given in class.

Please refrain from sending papers as email attachments. Hand in assignments only as hard copies to your TA’s mailbox.

The papers are to be typed (double-spaced) and submitted on time. I reserve the right to lower the grade of any late paper unless the student has made arrangements in advance of the due date.

Plagiarized material found in any paper is inexcusable and will result in a failing grade for the paper; in extremis it leads to expulsion from school. It is the student’s responsibility to ensure proper documentation of any information.

Holiday and Make-Up Class:
Our last session, on Tuesday, December 11th, is being used to make up for Thanksgiving.

Schedule of Classes:

Part I: Classical Film Theory

Session 1 (Sep. 6th)
Introduction to Film Theory: Film as Art

Screenings:
Sherlock Jr. (Buster Keaton, 1924)
The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (Robert Wiene, 1920)
Readings:


**Session 2 (Sep. 13th)**
**Soviet Film Theory: Sergei Eisenstein and the Formalist Tradition**

**Screening:**
*October: Ten Days that Shook the World* (Sergei Eisenstein, 1928)

**Readings:**
Eisenstein, Sergei. “Beyond The Shot” and “The Dramaturgy of Film Form” Film Theory and Criticism 13-40.


**Recommended:**

**Session 3 (Sep. 20th)**
**Film and Modernity I: Analogies Between Camera and Eye/Mind**

**Screening:**
*The Man with a Movie Camera* (Dziga Vertov, 1929)

**Readings:**


**Session 4 (Sep. 27th)**
**Film and Modernity II: Weimar Film Theory**

**Screening:**
*The Passion of Joan of Arc* (Carl Theodor Dreyer, 1928)
Readings:


Session 5 (Oct. 4th)
Theories of Realism
[first paper is due]

Screening:
Rules of the Game (Jean Renoir, 1939)

Readings:


Session 6 (October 11th)
The “Audio-Vision Illusion”: Theorizing Sound in Cinema

Screening:
The Great Dictator (Charlie Chaplin, 1940)

Readings:


Part II: Apparatus Theory

Session 7 (Oct. 18th)
Cinema, Ideology, and the Positioning of the Spectator
[midterm exam]

no screenings (midterm exam)

Readings:


Recommended:

Session 8
Psychoanalytic Film Theory (Oct. 25th)

Screening:
Blue Velvet (David Lynch, 1986)

Readings:


Recommended:

Session 9 (Nov. 1st)
Feminist Film Theory and the Female Spectator

Screening:
Peeping Tom (Michael Powell, 1960)
Readings:

Doane, Mary Ann. “Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator.” Film and Theory 495-509.

**Part III: Formalist Permutations**

**Session 10 (Nov. 8th)**
**Structuralism and Semiotics: Is Film (Like) a Language?**
[second paper is due]

**Screening:**
*Tout Va Bien* (Jean Luc Godard and Jean Pierre Gorin, 1972)

**Readings:**


**Recommended:**

**Session 11 (Nov. 15th)**
**Authorship in Cinema: The Auteur Theory**

**Screening:**
*Adaptation* (Spike Jonze, 2002)

**Readings:**


**Recommended:**
Part IV: Postmodernism and Post-Theory

Session 12 (Nov. 21st) [class meets on Wednesday for three consecutive recitations (by instructor)]

Postmodernism and Postmodern Aesthetics

Screening:
Kill Bill: Vol. 1 (Quentin Tarantino, 2003)

Readings:


Recommended:

Session 13 (Nov. 29th)
Cognitive Film Theory

Screening:
Rear Window (Alfred Hitchcock, 1954)

Readings:


Recommended:

Session 14 (Dec. 11th) [class meets on Tuesday]
Analytical and Post-Analytical Film Theory (Case Study: Identification in the Cinema)
[final papers are due]

Screening:
Psycho (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960)
Readings:


Recommended: