

Film Theory ENGL 382

Professor Rashna Richards

Office: 307 Palmer

Office Hours: W 12:00-3:00 and by appt.

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Semester: Spring 2012

Class: TR 2:00-3:15

Room: 207 Kennedy

Screening: W 7:00-9:30

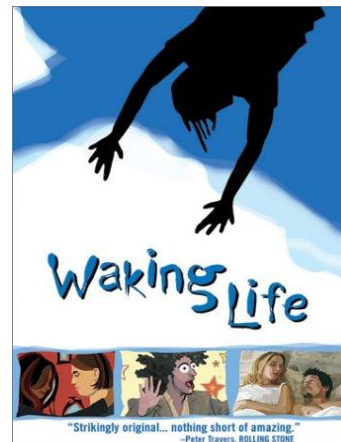
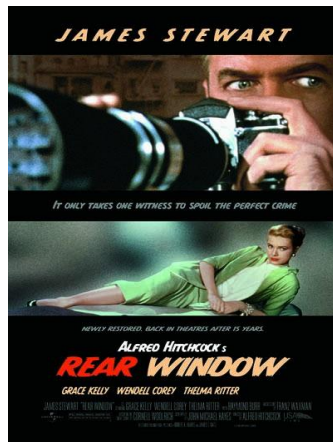
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Course Description

A film is difficult to explain because it is easy to understand.

—Christian Metz, *Film Language*

It has been over a century since the first grainy images flickered on a silent screen. Legend has it that at an early screening in Paris, spectators were so stunned by the image of a life-sized train hurtling toward them that they shrieked and ducked for cover. Since then, films have intrigued and frustrated, perplexed and inspired billions of viewers around the world. The issues that preoccupied the earliest film theorists continue to puzzle later generations: What is cinema? Is it an art? Is it a language? Is the filmed world realistic or artificial? In addition, since the 1960s, other important issues have been considered: What do movies reveal about the underlying ideologies of the cultures that produce them? How do they manipulate audience beliefs? How do they address, exploit, and satisfy various audience desires?



This course provides a comprehensive history of film theory. We will begin with classical film theorists, such as Rudolf Arnheim, Sergei Eisenstein, and André Bazin, evaluating their twin concerns of cinema's relation to reality and its status as art. Then, we will direct our attention to writers who challenged the classical tradition and destabilized the meaning of such terms as art, nature, reality, illusion, author, work, and artist. Assessing the semiotic turn in film theory, we will analyze the influence of new interpretive approaches, such as psychoanalysis, feminism, and critical race theory. Finally, we will focus on the latest developments in contemporary film theory, tracing in particular the role of globalization and digitization. We will end by reflecting

on the future of film and film theory in an age of new media. While more or less chronological, the course does not present the evolution of film theory merely as a linear progression of ideas and movements. International in scope, our study of films and film theories will stress the links between developments in cinematic thought, from France and the United States to Russia, Italy, and Japan to Latin America, Africa, and India.

Prerequisite: Any 200-level film class, preferably ENGL 202

Standard of Work: This is an advanced film studies course and is not recommended for students who are unfamiliar with rigorous film analysis. The readings are intellectually challenging, as are the films. Some films are black-and-white, and many of them are subtitled. You will need to take careful notes on the films, readings, and in-class discussions. Assignments will expect you to engage critically with complex issues in international film theory, history, and criticism and employ them in your writing. Therefore, you are encouraged to think seriously about your commitment to the course.

Course Policies

Attendance: You are required to attend all classes and screenings. You should not email me about your absences. If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to get information and/or handouts from a classmate. You are allowed two class absences and one screening absence over the course of the semester, no questions asked, for extracurricular activities or medical/personal emergencies. After the third absence, each subsequent absence will result in a deduction of 20 points from your final course grade. After six absences, you will fail the course.

Tardiness: You are required to be on time. Habitual tardiness, even if it's only a couple of minutes, will hurt your participation/professionalism grade.

Late Work: I do not accept late work. If you do not plan on being here when an assignment is due, it must be in my mailbox before the deadline. You will receive a zero on an assignment if it is not turned in when it is due. Please note that you are required to complete all assignments in order to receive a passing grade.

Class Participation: You are required to come to class prepared with the assigned reading for that day. I expect constructive verbal contribution to each class meeting. A student who disrupts class, interrupts another student's presentation, or in any way creates a hostile environment will be subject to disciplinary action. A student who reads the newspaper, chats with a neighbor, does any work for another class, or simply dozes off should expect a low participation grade even if they have contributed to class discussions on other occasions. I will likely say nothing at the time of the incident, but disruptive behavior will adversely affect your participation/professionalism grade.

Screenings: We will view a wide variety of films in class. You may find these films intellectually challenging or troubling. Learning how to watch and analyze them critically will be an important part of our discussions and assignments.

Electronic Devices: The use of all electronic devices is forbidden in this class. You should turn off all electronic devices, including laptops, before class begins.

Food or Drink: I don't mind if you bring something to drink, but please avoid bringing any food into the classroom or screening room.

Consultation: I'll be happy to talk with you about any questions or concerns you have about the class. Feel free to stop by during my office hours. If those times don't work, I can make an appointment to meet with you at a time that is mutually convenient. If you have questions about an assignment, do not wait until the last minute. Remember, I want you to do well in the class and am always willing to work with you.

Email: It is always preferable to meet in person to discuss any questions or concerns, since the impersonal medium of electronic communication is a poor substitute for a genuine face-to-face conversation. However, I'm available by email for simple queries (expect a response during business hours: 9am-5pm Monday-Friday). Please regard email correspondence as formal communication. It is always best to ask specific rather than general questions in an email and abide by rules of professional etiquette. It is not advisable to email me the evening before an assignment is due asking for help because there is very little I can do at that point; besides, last-minute emails are very unprofessional. Email is absolutely not the medium for negotiating special requests, addressing grade concerns, or discussing ideas for assignments; those issues must be handled in person.

Format of Assignments: All written assignments need to be typed and double spaced, in 12 pt. font, using Times New Roman, with one-inch margins on all sides. The format and citations must conform to MLA specifications, or the assignment may not be accepted. You do not need a title page; instead, include your name, my name, course name/number, and date in the top left corner of the first page. Be sure to number and staple your pages; also, proofread your work before printing up the final draft. I do not accept any assignments via email. A paper copy is expected at the beginning of class on the day the assignment is due.

Intellectual Honesty: All work is assumed to be the student's own and produced exclusively for the course in which it is submitted. Papers written for one course, even if revised, are not to be submitted in another without prior approval. Borrowing of ideas or language from other sources (including published material, other student papers, google or other electronic resources, etc.) must be carefully documented. You are advised against posting your work on the internet, since doing so may lead to suspicion of plagiarism. You are also advised to save drafts of your work to verify its originality. Cases of suspected plagiarism will be referred to the Honor Council, and, if convicted, you will receive an F in the course in addition to sanctions assigned by the Council. Clear evidence of plagiarism (failure to use quotation marks around verbatim or copied language, failure to adequately paraphrase, and failure to cite the source of quoted, paraphrased, or borrowed text and ideas), regardless of the Council hearing outcome, may likewise result in failure of the course. Carelessness in documenting sources, even if not technically plagiarism, will be penalized as appropriate. If you are uncertain about how or whether to document sources, consult me.

Disability Issues: Students with documented disabilities may be entitled to specific accommodations. Please contact the office of Student Disability Services for more information. In every case, it is your responsibility to provide me with an official letter from SDS.

Course Evaluation

Grade Distribution

Participation/Professionalism	10%	100 points
Response Papers (4 x 25 points)	10%	100 points
Essay #1	20%	200 points
Essay #2	20%	200 points
Research Paper	40%	400 points
Total	100%	1000 points

Assignments (Additional guidelines will be provided when each assignment is introduced.)

Participation/Professionalism: You are required to contribute comments and questions that further class discussion. Simply agreeing or disagreeing with your classmates and/or the readings is not enough. You are expected to add thoughtful ideas to the debate by engaging with the texts in a sophisticated manner. Participation will be evaluated in terms of quantity and quality. Failure to follow any course policies or guidelines will hurt your professionalism grade.

Response Papers (1 page each): Over the course of the semester, you will write four response papers. Prompts will be provided.

Essay #1 (4-5 pages): The first essay will evaluate your understanding of the theoretical materials from classical film theory to auteurism. You will be given several prompts. No research is expected for this paper.

Essay #2 (4-5 pages): For the second essay, you will be expected to apply two or more theoretical approaches to analyze a cluster of films. Research guidelines will be provided.

Research Paper (12-15 pages): The final paper for this course will be an experimental research project. Rather than a traditional thesis-driven essay, you will write a fragmented essay based on Robert Ray's ABCs approach. You will begin by picking marginal details from your chosen film that appear to suggest more than symbolic meanings. You will use those details to generate an ABCs essay, drawing on multiple film theories to pose interesting questions about and provide fresh insights into different (and sometimes contradictory) areas of your film in particular and filmmaking in general. The fragments will not be linked by an overarching argument, for there will not be a single thesis for the entire essay. Instead, each fragment will develop its own implied or explicit thesis for an experimental film criticism.

Grading Guidelines

A = 100-94; **A-** = 93-90

B+ = 89-87; **B** = 86-84; **B-** = 83-80

C+ = 79-77; **C** = 76-74; **C-** = 73-70

D+ = 69-67; **D** = 66-64; **D-** = 63-60

F < 60

A range (100-90): Excellent work; exemplary in argument and organization; professionally presented; free of mechanical errors.

B range (89-80): Good, solid work; substantive in argument and organization; meets all requirements, but needs some revisions; no more than five mechanical errors.

C range (79-70): Satisfactory work; addresses the assignment adequately, but requires some significant revisions of content and/or mechanics.

D range (69-60): Below average work; misses one or more central aspects of the assignment; inadequate focus and/or development; awkwardly written; requires extensive rewriting.

F range (< 60): Unacceptable work; fails to meet the requirements of the assignment; incomplete or irrelevant material; lack of focus or development.

Course Materials

- Braudy, Leo and Marshall Cohen, eds. *Film Theory and Criticism*. 7th ed. New York: Oxford UP, 2009.
- Additional essays—listed as handout in the schedule

Course Schedule (subject to change)

Week 1: Introduction

Thurs., Jan. 12 Introduction to the course

Week 2: What Is Film Theory?

Tues., Jan. 17 Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (665-85)

Clips: Porter, *The Great Train Robbery* (1903)

Screening Lynch, *Mulholland Drive* (2001)

Thurs., Jan. 19 Comolli & Narboni, "Cinema/Ideology/Criticism" (686-93)

Clips: Capra, *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946)

Week 3: Early Cinema and the Birth of Classical Film Theory

Tues., Jan. 24 Gunning, "An Aesthetic of Astonishment" (736-50)

Introduction to Response Papers

Clips: Lumière, *Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat* (1895); Méliès, *A Trip to the Moon* (1902); Porter, *Uncle Josh at the Moving Picture Show* (1902)

Screening
Thurs., Jan. 26 Chaplin, *The Gold Rush* (1925)
 Panofsky, "Style and Medium in Motion Pictures" (247-61)
 Balász, "The Close-Up" (273-81)
 Arnheim, "Film and Reality" (282-91)
 Clips: Wiene, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920); Dreyer, *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928); Vertov, *The Man with a Movie Camera* (1929)

Week 4: The Aesthetics of Montage

Tues., Jan. 31 Pudovkin, "[On Editing]" (7-12)
 Eisenstein, Pudovkin, & Alexandrov, "Statement on Sound" (315-17)
 Clips: Eisenstein, *Strike* (1925); Buñuel, *L'Age d'Or* (1930)

Screening
Thurs., Feb. 2 Eisenstein, *Battleship Potemkin* (1925)
Response Paper #1 due
 Eisenstein, "Beyond the Shot" & "The Dramaturgy of Film Form" (13-40)
 Clips: Sandrich, *Holiday Inn* (1942); Spielberg, *Saving Private Ryan* (1998)

Week 5: The Impression of Reality

Tues., Feb. 7 Kracauer, "Basic Concepts" (147-58)
 Introduction to Essay #1
 Clips: Flaherty, *Nanook of the North* (1922); Welles, *Citizen Kane* (1941)

Screening
Thurs., Feb. 9 De Sica, *The Bicycle Thief* (1948)
 Bazin, "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema" (41-53)
 Clips: Renoir, *The Rules of the Game* (1939); Ozu, *Tokyo Story* (1953)

Week 6: Auteurism and Its Discontents

Tues., Feb. 14 Sarris, "Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962" (451-54)
 Schatz, "'The Whole Equation of Pictures'" (523-27)
 Clips: Hitchcock, *Rope* (1948); Hitchcock, *Psycho* (1960)

Screening
Thurs., Feb. 16 Hawks, *Bringing Up Baby* (1938)
Response Paper #2 due
 Wollen, "The Auteur Theory" (455-70)
 Jewell, "How Howard Hawks Brought *Baby* Up" (515-22)
 Clips: Hawks, *The Big Sleep* (1946); Ford, *The Searchers* (1956)

Week 7: Semiotics and Genre Theory

Tues., Feb. 21 **Essay #1 due**

Screening
Thurs., Feb. 23 Hitchcock, *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943)
 Schatz, "Film Genre and the Genre Film" (564-75)
 Wood, "Ideology, Genre, Auteur" (592-601)
 Clips: Stevens, *Shane* (1953); Eastwood, *Unforgiven* (1992)

Week 8: Psychoanalysis and the Cinematic Apparatus

- Tues., Feb. 28** Baudry, "The Apparatus" (171-88)
Clips: Hitchcock, *Psycho* (1960)
- Screening** Allen, *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (1985)
- Thurs., March 1** Carroll, "Jean-Louis Baudry and 'the Apparatus'" (189-205)
Introduction to Essay #2
Clips: García, *Nine Lives* (2005)

Week 9: Feminisms

- Tues., March 6** **Response Paper #3 due**
Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (711-22)
Modleski, "The Master's Dollhouse" (723-35)
Clips: Hawks, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953); Hitchcock, *Rear Window* (1954)
- No Screening**
- Thurs., March 8** No Class (lecture at Hendrix College)

Week 10: Spring Break**Week 11: Critical Race Theory**

- Tues., March 20** hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze" (handout)
Clips: Sirk, *Imitation of Life* (1959); Dunye, *The Watermelon Woman* (1996)
- Screening** Lee, *Do the Right Thing* (1989)
- Thurs., March 22** **Essay #2 due**
Diawara, "Black Spectatorship" (767-75)
Clips: Griffith, *The Birth of a Nation* (1915); Spielberg, *The Color Purple* (1985)

Week 12: Globalization and Transnational Cinema

- Tues., March 27** Crofts, "Reconceptualizing National Cinema(s)" (853-64)
Dissanayake, "Issues in World Cinema" (877-85)
Clips: Godard, *Breathless* (1960); Sembene, *Xala* (1975)
- Screening** Chadha, *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002)
- Thurs., March 29** **Response Paper #4 due**
Ezra & Rowden, "What Is Transnational Cinema?" (handout)
Clips: Spielberg, *The Terminal* (2004); Boyle, *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008)

Week 13: Reinventing Film Studies

- Tues., April 3** Ray, excerpts from *The ABCs of Classic Hollywood* (handout)
Introduction to Research Paper

No Screening**Thurs., April 5** No Classes: Easter Recess**Week 14: The New Media Universe****Tues., April 10** Allen, "The Impact of Digital Technologies on Film Aesthetics" (824-33)
Clips: Cameron, *Terminator 2* (1991); Spielberg, *Jurassic Park* (1993)**Screening** TBD**Thurs., April 12** Whissel, "Tales of Upward Mobility" (834-52)
Clips: Cameron, *Titanic* (1997); Lee, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000)**Week 15: The End of Cinema as We Know It****Tues., April 17** Workshop for Research Paper**Screening** Linklater, *Waking Life* (2001)**Thurs., April 19** Dixon, "Twenty-Five Reasons Why It's All Over" (handout)
Clips: Van Sant, *Psycho* (1999); Ellis & Halaby, *Snakes on a Plane* (2006)**Week 16: What Is Film Theory Now?****Tues., April 24** Sontag, "A Century of Cinema" (handout)**No Screening****Thurs., April 26** Conferences for Research Paper**Fri., April 27** **Research Paper due by noon—leave in box on my office door (307 Palmer)**