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Humanities Seminar

Films in Context: The Language of Film

To study film language is to explore how films use narrative structure, visual style and sound design.

We begin at the beginnings of film, from the 1890s through the 1910s feature, through the European art film movements of the 1920s and the coming of sound.

With this grounding in camerawork, editing, sound, action, and motifs, we examine the theory and practice of stylistic devices that developed in the second half century of film history -- neo-realism, distancing, and feminist film.

Students are expected to view films outside of class. Those films use film language in deliberate ways to engage the audience in reflection on humanity, social justice, and history.

Filmmakers include Cheryl Dunye, R.W. Fassbinder, Warwick Thornton, Rene Clair, D.W. Griffith, Yasuhiro Ozu, Hiroshi Shimizu, Chris Marker, Pablo Larrain, and David Miller.

During class sessions we will screen clips from other films and filmmakers, thus broadening our understanding of the topic.

Also during class, we will do close analysis of scenes from that week's film. Close analysis - as its name implies - bringing us closer to the construction of the film, to how the film offers meaning to the spectator. A foundation of film studies, close analysis increases our understanding, awareness and appreciation of the art of film.

Readings will be uploaded to Box@UA and the link for this site will be shared with registered students in the second half of December.

All films are available on [kanopy.com](https://www.kanopy.com), a free streaming service accessed through a public or university library. To access Kanopy films: start at [kanopy.com](https://www.kanopy.com), select your public or university library, and log into your library account.

CAUTION: Kanopy allows ten views per month. Even a few seconds on a film counts as a view.

Week 1

Jan 28

Introduction to Course

Astonishment & Cinema of Attraction Gestures & Stereotypes

in class: 1895, 1910s

screen: WAYDOWN EAST (1920, D. W. Griffith)

read: PDF in Box@UA

Tom Gunning, "Cinema of Attraction: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde" in *Wide Angle* 8:3/4 (1986), 63-70.

Week 2

Feb 4

Experimental & Art Film Movements of the 1920s Subjectivity, Expressionism, Montage

in class: Soviet Montage, French Impressionism, German Expressionism

screen: JAPANESE GIRLS AT THE HARBOR (1933, Hiroshi Shimizu)

read: *Apparatus* online — www.apparatusjournal.net

Karen Pearlman, John MacKay and John Sutton, "Creative Editing: Svilova and Vertov's Distributed Cognition" in *Apparatus: Film, Media, and Digital Cultures in Central and Eastern Europe*, no. 6 (2018)

Week 3**Feb 11****Coming of Sound — The End of Cinema?**

screen: SOUS LES TOITS DE PARIS (1930, Rene Clair)

read: *New York Times* archive online - nytimes.com

Garson Kanin, “Rene Clair: Molder of Modern Cinema,” in *New York Times* (March 29, 1981)

Week 4**Feb 18****Classical Hollywood Cinema: The Hook**screen: SUDDEN FEAR (1952, David Miller)
LA JETEE (1963, Chris Marker)read: David Bordwell’s website on cinema - davidbordwell.net

David Bordwell, “Murder Culture: Adventures in 1940s Suspense”

Week 5**Feb 25****Fireworks as Cinematic Motif and Spectacle
Astonishment, Awe and Genre
Romance, Suspense, Slapstick Comedy, Patriotism, Art**

screen: clips in class, no outside screening

read: PDFs in Box@UA

Helen Watanabe-O’Kelly, “Fireworks Displays, Fireworks Dramas and Illuminations - Precursors of Cinema?” in *German Life and Letters* 48:3 (July 1995).

Simon Werrett, “Make Fire Work: Pyrotechnics and Natural Philosophy” in *Endeavor* 32:1 (2008).

SPRING BREAK

Week 6**March 11 Neo-Realist Influence — Compassionate Detachment**

screen: TOKYO STORY (1953, Yasuhiro Ozu)

read: Criterion Collection website, criterion.com

David Bordwell, “*Tokyo Story: Compassionate Detachment*” (posted November 18, 2013)

“The Signature Style of Yasuhiro Ozu” (posted December 11, 2015)

Week 7**March 18 History and Distancing Devices —European Auteur**

screen: THE MARRIAGE OF MARIA BROWN (1978, R. W. Fassbinder)

read: PDF in Box@UA

Mary Beth Haralovich, “The Sexual Politics of *The Marriage of Maria Braun*,” in *Perspectives on German Cinema*, edited by Terry Ginzberg and Kirsten Moana Thompson (New York: G. K. Hall: 1996), 378-396. [Reprinted from *Wide Angle*, 12, no. 1 (January 1990), 6-16]

Week 8**March 25 Social Justice, History: “Anti-BioPic”**

screen: NERUDA (2016, Pablo Larrain)

read: *IndieWire* online - indiewire.com

Eric Kohn, “*Jackie* Isn’t the Whole Story: Why Pablo Larrain’s Films Deserve Your Attention” in *IndieWire* (September 12, 2016)

Week 9

April 1

Feminism, Race History, Documentary Modes

screen: THE WATERMELON WOMAN (1996, Cheryl Dunye)

read: *Jump Cut* online - ejumpcut.org

Thelma Wills Foote, "Hoax of the lost ancestor: Cheryl Dunye's *The Watermelon Woman*" in *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*, no. 49 (Spring 2007)

Week 10

April 8

Indigenous Voices - Recounting Australian History

screen: SWEET COUNTRY (2017, Warwick Thornton)

read: *The Tracking Board* online - tracking-board.com

Interview: "Sweet Country Director Warwick Thornton on Documenting Australian History Through Indigenous Eyes" in *the Tracking Board* (April 9, 2018)