Film & Media Theory  
(CMA 2300)  
Professor Jennifer Fay  

Course Description:  

What is film? What is the relationship between film and photography, painting and the “real” world that a film may capture? What is a good film? How does a film affect, construct, or delimit a spectator? What is a film spectator? What difference does it make when cinema is analog or digital, on a small or big screen, seen in a theater, at home, or in a gallery? Answers to queries as fundamental as these may seem obvious. (“A good film is entertaining…”) But there is a long and rich tradition of film and media theory that is concerned with elucidating and complicating not only how we answer these questions, but how we frame such questions in the first place. This course is an advanced introduction to film and media theory as a mode of inquiry. We will read some of the major works representing significant movements in film, photography and digital media theory from the early part of the 20th century up to our contemporary moment. We will also consider films, in their own right, as theoretical experiments in perception. This is a reading-intensive class and the material is challenging. But it is very worth the investment!  

In addition to essay posted on OAK, students are required to acquire the following texts:  

Rudolf Arnheim. *Film as Art*. U of California Press, 1957  
All books are on reserve in the main library.  

Course Policies:  

**Participation:** This course presupposes an active and participating student body. Our aim is to create an intellectual community. In order to achieve this, you are expected to come to class on time, having done the reading, and ready to jump into class discussion with comments, questions, and connections you have made between this reading, the film, and other texts we have discussed in class. You should, therefore, take notes while you read. We may have periodic in-class writing exercises and/or reading quizzes just to keep you on your toes. I expect everyone to participate in our conversations and be considerate to me and to the other students in the class. For conversation to flourish, our classroom must be a space of civility. I don’t expect you to “get” all of the reading right away. But, you must try. You are all accountable to yourselves and to each other. Attendance does not count towards your participation grade.  
Always bring the reading with you to class in print form.  
Please no eating during class. Beverages are fine.  

**Laptop computers, cell phones, tablets, are banned during class meetings and screenings.**  
Please take notes the old fashioned way. Why? Such electronic distractions are disruptive to me and other students. Furthermore, as this study demonstrates, we pay a “mental price” for multi-tasking: [http://news.stanford.edu/pr/2009/multitask-research-release-082409.html](http://news.stanford.edu/pr/2009/multitask-research-release-082409.html)  

**Attendance:** You are expected to attend all class sessions and the one weekly screening. A student who sleeps through class will be marked absent. Students who come late will be marked absent. Attendance does not count towards the participation grade. A student who misses more
than two classes may expect a penalty of .1 for every subsequent absence on the final grade. A student who misses six or more classes will fail based on attendance alone.

**Assignments:** The principle assignments for this class are a final exam and a minimum of three papers. I will give out four paper assignments and take the best three grades. Thus you may decide to write only three of the four papers, or decide to write all four with the idea of dropping your lowest score. Whatever you decide, you are required to submit the first paper so that you may receive feedback from me before the mid-term period. Failure to write at least three papers and the final will result in a failing grade regardless of the grades earned on other assignments.

In addition to these formal papers and the final exam, I ask that you post responses to readings (and films in relation to the readings) at least three times during the course of the semester. These posting, which should be at least two substantial paragraphs, should be submitted to the OAK discussion board on Wednesdays, no later than 8 p.m. so that we may all read them before Thursday’s class. Your posts will serve as prompts for our class discussions and they will help you to formulate your ideas before we meet. If you find yourself too shy to participate in class discussion, *additional* postings may boost your participation grade.

**Students with Disabilities:** I am committed to accommodating students who have special instructional needs. If you need course accommodations due to a disability, if you have emergency medical information to share with me, or if you need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please make an appointment with me and/or the EAD (2-4705) as soon as possible.

**Religious Holidays:** Students who expect to miss classes, examinations, or any other assignment as a consequence of their religious observance should provide me with notice (via email) of the dates of religious holidays on which they will be absent no later than Monday, September 3rd.

**Grade distribution:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Posts on the discussion board</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Three top paper grades</td>
<td>60% (20% each)</td>
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**Week 1 (Tues. Jan 6-8) What is film theory?**

T. Read this syllabus, begin reading Arnheim.
W. Screening: *The Circus* (Chaplin, 1928, 71 min.)
R. Arnheim, *Film as Art*, 1-58

**Week 2 (Jan. 13-15) Where mechanical reproduction leaves off… Arnheim’s Aesthetics**

T. Arnheim, *Film as Art*, 58-160
W. Screening: *Playtime* (Tati, 1967, 145 min)
R. Arnheim, *Film as Art*, 188-230

**Week 3 (Jan. 21-22) Change Mummified: Bazin’s Mythic Narrative**

W. Screening: *The Red Balloon* (Lamorisse, 1956, 34 min) *Kon Tiki* (Heyderahl, 1950, 58 min)
Week 4 (Jan 27-29): Bazin, History, and the Democratic Style
T. Bazin, *What is Cinema? Vol. 1*, 23-40,
W. Screening: *The Best Years of Our Lives* (USA, Wyler, 1946, 172 min.)
R. Bazin, "William Wyler, or the Jansenist of Directing" (OAK)

**Paper #1 due Saturday, January 31st by 5:00 p.m.**

Week 5 (Feb. 3-5): Photography: Fragmentary Pasts and Unconscious Futures
T. Kracauer “Photography” (OAK)
W. **Extra credit: International Lens 7:30 P.M. Ivan & Ivana**
R. In class: *(nostalgia)* (Frampton, 1971, 38 min.)

Week 6 (Feb. 10-12): The Sting of The Photographic Image
T. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, part I
W. Screening: *Strike* (Eisenstein, 1925, 82 min.) – in anticipation of next week.
R. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, Part II
Recommended: Smith, “Race and Reproduction in *Camera Lucida*” (OAK)

Week 7 (Feb. 17-19): Eisenstein’s Cinema of Assault
T. Taylor “Eisenstein: A Soviet Artist” (OAK)
Eisenstein: “The Montage of Attractions,” “The Montage of Film Attractions.” (OAK)
W. Screening: *The Battleship Potemkin* (Eisenstein, 1925, 75 min.)
T. Eisenstein, “The Problem of the Materialist Approach to Form,” “The Dramaturgy of Film Form,” “The Fourth Dimension in Cinema”. (OAK)

**Paper #2 due Friday, Feb. 20 by 5:00 p.m.**

Week 8 (Feb. 24-26): Mechanical Reproduction Reconsidered
T. Jennings, “The Production, Reproduction, and Reception of the Work of Art.” (OAK)
Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility” (OAK)
W. Screening: *Rear Window* (Hitchcock, 1954, 112 min.)
R. Benjamin, “Work of art” continued.

**Week 9 Spring Break**

Week 10 (March 10-12) The Problem with Your Pleasure
M. Mulvey, Narrative Cinema & Visual Pleasure
T. Screening: *Stella Dallas* (Vidor, 1937, 106 min.)
R. Doane, *The Desire to Desire*, introduction. 1-37 (OAK)

Week 11 (March 17-19) Impossible Subjects
W. no screening

Week 12 (March 24-26), Cavell’s Companions
W. Screening: *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (Ford, 1962, 123 min.)

**Paper #3 due Friday, March 27th 5:00 p.m.**

**Week 13 (March 31 - April 2) The Whole World**
- **T.** Read Cavell, 101-146
- **W.** No Screening
- **R.** Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 146-160

**Week 14 (April 7-9) What was Cinema?**
- **T.** Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film*, 1-24
  - In class screening: *La jetée* (Marker, 1962, 28 min).
- **W.**
- **R.** Rodowick, 25-87

**Week 15 (April 14-16): Two Futures:**
- **T.** Rodowick, 89-141
- **W.** Screening: *Russian Ark* (Sukurov, 2002, 99 min)
- **R.** Rodowick, 141-189

**Paper #4 due Saturday April 18th by 5:00 p.m.**

**Final Exam: Thursday, April 23, 3:00 p.m. Buttrick 015.**