

Film & Media Theory (CMA 2300)

Professor Jennifer Fay

Office: 132 Buttrick Hall

Email: jennifer.m.fay@vanderbilt.edu

Office Hours: M 4:00- 5:30, and by appointment.

Class Meetings: MWF 11:10- 12:00 Buttrick 015

Mandatory Weekly Screening: W. 6:00- 8:30 p.m. Buttrick 103

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 on 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 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 should acquire the following texts:

Rudolf Arnheim. *Film as Art*. U of California Press, 1957

Andre Bazin. *What is Cinema Vol. I*. U of California Press, 1967

Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. Hill & Wang, 1981.

James Baldwin, *The Devil Finds Work*. Dial Press, 1976

Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed*. Harvard U Press, 1979

D.N. Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film*. Harvard U Press, 2007.

All books are on reserve in the main library or as electronic reserves.

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. 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. 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>

Attendance: You are expected to attend all scheduled 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.

Blackboard Postings: 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 five 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 no later than 9 a.m. on the day of our class. Anything posted after 9 am will not count towards this requirement. Your posts, which are ungraded, 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 (posted by the deadline *before* class) may boost your participation grade. Students are expected to read the discussion posts before class.

Students with Special Instructional Needs: 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 in the first two weeks of the semester.

Grade distribution:

Blackboard Posts	5%
Final Exam	15%
Participation	20%
Three top paper grades	60% (20% each)

Important Dates:

- Paper #1: Feb. 3
- Paper #2: March 3
- Paper #3: March 31
- Paper #4 April 24
- Final Exam: May 2

Reading and Screening Schedule

Week 1 (Jan 9, 11, 13): Where Film Theory and Film Art Begin (And Mechanical Reproduction Leaves Off)

- M. Syllabus, start reading Arnheim *Film As Art*
- W. Arnheim, *Film As Art*, 1-58
Screening: *The Circus* (Chaplin, 1928, 71 min)
- F. Arnheim, *Film As Art*, 58- 134

Week 2 (Jan 16, 18, 20): The Aesthetics of the Sound/Silent Film

- M. No class in honor of MLK Day.
- W. Arnheim, *Film as Art*, 134-160,
Screening: *Playtime* (Tati, 1967, 145 min.)
- F. Arnheim, *Film as Art*, 199-230

Week 3 (Jan 23, 25, 27): Changed Mummified: Bazin's Mythic Narrative

- M. Bazin, "Introduction" and "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" in *What is Cinema?* Vol.I, 1-16
- W. Bazin, "The Virtues and Limitations of Montage" in and "The Myth of Total Cinema" *What is Cinema?*.
Screen: *The Red Balloon* (Lamorisse, 1956, 34 min.)
Kon Tiki (Heyderahl, 1950, 58 min.)
- F. Bazin, "Cinema and Exploration," in *What is Cinema?* 154-163.

Week 4 (Jan 30, Feb. 1, Feb. 3): Bazin, History, and the Democratic Style

- M. Bazin "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema" in *What is Cinema?*
- W. Bazin, Evolution, cont.
Screen: *The Best Years of Our Lives* (USA, Wyler, 1946, 172 min.)
- F. Bazin, "William Wyler, or the Jansenist of Directing"
Paper #1 Due, Friday Feb. 3, 5:00 p.m.

Week 5 (Feb. 6, 8, 10): Photograph, Fragmentary Pasts, and Unconscious Futures

- M. Kracauer, "Photography"
- W. "Photography," contd.
Screen: (*nostalgia*) (Frampton, 1971, 38 min) Discussion to follow film.
- F. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, Part I

Week 6 (Feb. 13, 15, 17): The Sting of the Photographic Image

- M. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, Part II
- W. Smith, "Race and Reproduction in *Camera Lucida*"
Screen: *Strike* (Eisenstein, 1925, 82 min).
- F. Taylor, "Eisenstein: A Soviet Artist"; Eisenstein, "The Montage of Attractions,"

Week 7 (Feb. 20, 22, 24): Eisenstein's Cinema of Assault

- M. Eisenstein: "The Montage of Film Attractions"

W. Eisenstein, "The Problem of the Materialist Approach to Form"; "The Dramaturgy of Film Form"

Screen: *Battleship Potemkin* (Eisenstein, 1925, 75 min).

F. Discuss *Potemkin*

Week 8 (Feb. 27, March 1, 3): Whose Visual Pleasure?

M. Mulvey, "Narrative Cinema and Visual Pleasure"

W. Hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze: Back Female Spectators."

Stella Dallas (Vidor, 1937, 106 min.) For week 10.

F. Doane, "Introduction" to *Desire to Desire*

Paper # Due Friday, March 3rd at 5:00 p.m.

Spring Break: March 6- 12

Week 9 (March 13, 15, 17): Impossible Subjects

M. Doane "Pathos and the Maternal"

W. Cavell, "Stella's Taste."

Screen: *Guess Whose Coming to Dinner?* (Kramer, 1965, 108 min).

F. Baldwin, *The Devil Finds Work*, 1- 35.

Week 10 (March 20, 22, 24): What Film Does Not Teach Us

M. Baldwin, *The Devil Finds Work*, 36- 95.

W. Baldwin, *The Devil Finds Work*, 96- 127.

****International Lens: *A Separation***** 7:30 p.m. Sarrat Cinema.

F. Wrap up Baldwin

Week 11 (March 27, 29,31): The Autobiography of Companions

M. Cavell, *The World Viewed*. "Forward to Enlarged Edition"; "Preface" +1-25.

W. Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 25-55.

Screen: *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence* (Ford, 1962, 123 min.)

F. Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 55- 80.

Paper #3 Due Friday, March 31th at 5 p.m.

Week 12 (April 3, 5, 7): Cinema and the Implicated Camera

M. Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 80 -118

W. Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 118-146

Screen: *Vivre sa Vie* (Godard, 1962, 83 min.)

F. Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 147-160.

Week 13 (April 10, 12, 14): What Was Cinema?

M. Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film*, 1- 24.

W. In class, *La jetée* (Marker, 1962, 28 min).

F. Rodowick, *Virtual Life of Film*, 26-62.

Week 14 (April 17, 19, 21): Two Futures

M. Rodowick, *Virtual Life of Film*, 62-87

W. Rodowick, *Virtual Life of Film*, 87-141

Screen: *Russian Ark* (Sukoruv, 2002, 99 min.)

F. Rodowick, *Virtual Life of Film*, 141-180

Week 15 (April 24): Cinema, Old and New

M. Rodowick, *Virtual Life of Film*, 181-189.

Paper #4 Due Monday, April 24th at 5:00 p.m.

Comprehensive Final Exam: Tuesday, May 2nd, 3:00-5:00 p.m.