

Watching Films, Thinking About Films, Making Films

KHC UC102 A1

Fall 2013

Mondays and Wednesdays, 3:30PM-5:00PM

Room: KHC 107

Aaron Garrett and David Barker

Office hours: TBD

Office location: STH 619 (745 Comm. Ave)

Course Description

Almost all of us watch films. Most of us also think about the films we have watched -- often directly after we have viewed them but sometimes long after. And some of us also make films. This course is co-taught by a philosopher and a filmmaker/film teacher in order to explore and reflect on these three different aspects of our relation to film.

Course Objectives

Three interconnected areas will be investigated over the course of the semester. We will start the semester by reflecting on how we watch films and learn to pay attention to different elements of film viewing. This section will be focus on two main questions. First, how does the presentation of the visual and sound elements of film – for example visual framing devices, different types of visual and sound editing, and the use of music in film (but also acting styles) – affect our experience of films? Second, how do our expectations of what sort of film we are viewing – fiction or non-fiction, photographic or animated, as well as our assumptions about the genre it belongs to – guide and inform this experience? We will discuss some film history in this context as well.

Next, we will read a few philosophical essays on some basic questions connected with film (as well as interviews with filmmakers and essays by them). Some of the questions will flow directly from the previous section. For example, what is the role of the film actor in our emotional response to films? Do we respond with distinctively aesthetic emotions that depend on our belief that we are experiencing an artwork or a fiction, or with the same sort of emotions that we experience in our non-film viewing life? Other questions will include, but not be limited to what is the relation between sound and image in film (or, indeed, are they distinct)? How are they connected in narrative? What makes films art? (for example narrative ambiguity? Formal visual properties?) Again these questions will be considered in conjunction with viewing films that will orient the philosophical discussions.

In the third section of the course we will focus on learning the basic craft involved in constructing films drawing on the two previous sections of the class. This part of the course will involve a number of studio assignments as well as a final film project.

Required Texts

1. David Bordwell, *Figures Traced in Light*
2. Roger Critenden, *Fine Cuts: The Art of European Film Editing*
3. Carl Plantinga and Greg M. Smith, eds., *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition, and Emotion*

All other readings will either be made available on line (i.e., via links to online articles) or will be distributed to the class. These will include articles by philosophers of film, film theorists, and directors. There will generally be one reading per class.

Films are to be watched for the class in which they are assigned. Films will be made available either via pay streaming websites (Hulu Plus, Amazon, Netflix, etc.), free streaming (Youtube, Ubu, Archive.org) or will be screened for the class and put on reserve. We will make sure the films are available and the cost of accessing them not prohibitive.

Attendance

Attendance and participation in seminar, viewing all assigned films, and reading all assigned articles and books are required (counting for 10% of the grade).

Academic Dishonesty

Students are required to adhere to the University and Kilachand Honors College Academic Code of Conduct. <http://www.bu.edu/academics/resources/academic-conduct-code/>

Plagiarism, using the works of others in your work without appropriate citation, will not be tolerated. Students whose papers appear to have been plagiarized will be asked to submit a computer file for evaluation. If you have any questions as to what constitutes plagiarism please consult <http://www.bu.edu/cas/students/undergrad-resources/code/>

Grading

- Attendance and participation - 10%
- Five brief (1-2pp) papers – 25%
- Three editing/filmmaking assignments – 15%
- Midterm Essay – (6pp) – 20%
- Final film project submitted with an essay (6pp) – 30%

Course Outline & Readings

9/4: Introduction

UNIT 1 Visual framing and material specificity.

We will discuss aspects of visual framing and more broadly the way in which visual material is presented in film. The visual aspects of film have changed in concert with technological and

stylistic innovations – for example the rise of tableau framing (in part) due to limited camera mobility – as well as external influences – painting, still photography, theatre, television, video games. We will spend particular time on the distinction between the way in which television images are framed and film images. We will also spend time thinking philosophically about the consequences of different types of framing, and more generally different philosophical positions concerning whether the material and technological aspects of an art form determine its content and set standards for better and worse art.

9/9- 9/11 M David Bordwell, *Figures Traced in Light*, Chapter 1 [FILM *Sherlock Jr.*]; W David Bordwell, *Figures Traced in Light* Chapter 2 [FILM *Les Vampires*] SHORT PAPER 1 DUE

9/16-9/18 M Serge Daney, “Review – The Lover”; Discussion – The Film and Television Systems [King of Comedy and a television show of your choice]; W André Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” and Noël Carroll, “Against Material Specificity” SHORT PAPER 2 DUE

UNIT 2 Sound

Sound design, including music, is one of the most important but under discussed elements of film. It is often as, and sometimes even more important, than visual elements in how we experience a film.

9/23-9/25 M Annabelle Cohen, “Music as a Source of Emotion in Film” and Michael Chion, *Audio Vision* (selections) (*La Jetée*); W Edward Branigan, “Sound and Epistemology in Film” and “Interview” with Lucrecia Martel (*La Cienega* (opening scene)) FILMMAKING ASSIGNMENT 1 DUE Take a series of 12 snapshots. Give them to another member of class. Take the new set of snapshots you have received and arrange them to tell a story. Record sound to go along with the images.

UNIT 3 Styles of Acting and Emotional Response

Non-animated fiction films often use actors, although some well-known directors like Robert Bresson made exclusive use of non-actors (and some films make extensive use of animals). Acting styles and more broadly the ways in which acting is utilized are crucial for the emotional force of film. What is taken to be “realistic” acting has changed greatly over the history of film, as well as the associated art forms that feed into film acting (i.e. theatre, vaudeville, circus, etc.). As part of this we will also consider the sorts of emotions we respond to film with and how they are important for defining film genres.

Films: Griffith, *Broken Blossoms*; Robert Bresson, *Au Hasard Balthazar*; Kubrick, *The Shining*

10/30-10/2 M Carl Plantinga, “The Scene of Empathy” and selections from J. Paul Gorin’s *Lectures* (*Broken Blossoms* (Closet Scene)); W Tan and Frijda “Sentiment in Film Viewing” (Irma Vep) SHORT PAPER 3 DUE

10/7-10/9 M Berys Gaut, "Identification and Emotion in Narrative Film"); W Robert Bresson, Notes on Cinematography (selections) and Manny Farber, "The Decline of the Actor" (Au Hasard Balthazar)

UNIT 4 Fiction and Non-fiction

We will discuss whether there is a clear divide between documentary film and fictional film and consider the different ways that fiction and non-fiction content are integrated into films. As part of this we will also consider whether part of the power of films is due to the fact that they are dreamlike.

10/15-10/16 M Greg Currie, "Visible Traces" (Nanook of the North); W Kendall Walton, Mimesis as Make Believe (selection) SHORT PAPER 4 DUE

10/21-10/23 M Pedro Costa, "A Closed Door that Leaves us Guessing"; W Peter Lamarque, "Fiction and Reality" (Close Up) MIDTERM ESSAY ASSIGNED [The midterm essay will combines themes from units 4 and 5]

UNIT 5 Fakes, Copies, Originals, and Authorship

Unlike painting where the original artwork has special artistic authority, in film it is unclear what is the original artwork at all? The ideal film as imagined by the director? The initial print? The special director's cut? The DVD you own? The computer stream? The images streaming to you in a theatre? Thinking this through leads to thinking through interesting aspects of the media as well as what distinguishes the media from other artistic media. We will also think about fakes and copies in the context of film reference, i.e. the techniques films use to refer to other films. Finally we will consider it in connection with the issues of authorship insofar as both the ways in which films refer to one another and the nature of film production make authorship quite different than in painting or literature.

10/28- 10/30 M Sandor Radnóti, The Fake: Forgery and its place in Art (selection) (Certified Copy); Theodore Graszkyk, "Fakes, Originals, and Ontology" FILMMAKING ASSIGNMENT 2 DUE [EDITING ASSIGNMENT TBD]

11/4-11/6 M Nelson Goodman, Languages of Art (selection) (Voyage to Italy); W Nelson Goodman, Languages of Art (selection) MIDTERM ESSAY DUE

UNIT 6 Narrative structure, narrative closure, and ambiguity

We will discuss a number of theories of how narratives are structured. This will lead to considering the importance of narrative ambiguity for art. In this section we will extensively

draw on the previous three sections of the course and try to integrate them into thinking about how and why we respond to narratives.

11/18-11/20 M Noel Carroll, “Narrative Closure” and “The Power of Movies”; W Aristotle , Poetics (extract) (Le Bonheur); SHORT PAPER 5 DUE [This paper will outline the final project]

11/25-27 M Noel Carroll, “Film, Emotion, Genre”; W Hume, “Of Tragedy” (Sansho the Bailiff) FILMMAKING ASSIGNMENT 3 [This project will concern one aspect of the final project as outlined in SHORT PAPER 5]

UNIT 7 Editing, film time, and bringing it all together

The final two weeks of the course will be to in class work on editing – both technical and theoretical aspects thereof – and reflection on how editing is constitutive of our experience of film. We will also watch films of different lengths and use this to reflect on how editing gives rise to our temporal experience of film. Finally we will read some writing on film by filmmakers to help us to think through the final essay that accompanies the final projects. The last class will be devoted to sharing the final projects.

12/2- 12/4 M Fine Cuts: The Art of European Film Editing (selections); W Fine Cuts: The Art of European Film Editing (selections) (Daisies)

12/9- 12/11 M Raymond Durgnat, Films and Feelings (excerpt); W Concluding Class

FINAL PROJECT/ESSAY DUE 12/16

FILMS (only the films to be watched in full)

Sherlock Jr. (Keaton)
Les Vampires (Feuillade)
King of Comedy (Scorcese)
La Jetée (Marker)
Irma Vep (Assayas)
Au Hasard Balthazar (Bresson)
Nanook of the North (Flaherty)
Close Up (Kiarostami)
Certified Copy (Kiarostami)
Voyage to Italy (Rossellini)
Le Bonheur (Varda)
Sansho the Bailiff (Mizoguchi)
Daisies (Chytilova)