

Comm6020: Advanced Film Theory

Angelo Restivo
737 One Park Place
651-0592
Office hours: 11:30 Mon, 2:30-4 Tues, and by arrangement

Books:

Philip Rosen, ed., *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology* (required for PhD students; MA students can purchase, or can xerox required essay from volume on reserve in library)
J. Hill, P. Church Gibson, eds., *Film Studies: Critical Approaches*
Eisenstein, *Film Form*
Bazin, *What is Cinema? V. 1*
Xeroxed course pack: I'll announce in class where to pick this up.

Other readings, on the web, are indicated in the weekly assignment calendar.

Course description, student learning goals, etc. : See *ANotes on Critical Theory@ below..*

Graded assignments and due dates:

3 short take-home essay exams (5 to 6 pp. double-spaced each); proposal for final paper; final paper.

Important note: PhD students will write an article-length final paper (approx 20 pp.), which will be done in two stages, with the first draft submitted to the other PhD students for a group workshop.

MA students MAY, if they are critical studies students, opt to participate in the PhD requirement, but should discuss this with me early in the course. Otherwise, for MA students (especially those in production), the final paper will be approx 10-12 pages, submitted only to me.

Note on final paper options: production students may opt to do a multi-media final project which incorporates moving images or still images; however, at this point I want to limit this option to a hypertext project (ie, either on cd-rom or on the web), one that incorporates analytical writing with sound and image.

1. DUE TH 2/20: Short (5 pp. double-spaced) take-home exam #1 on classical film theory. [15%]
2. DUE 4/3: Short take-home exam #2, on semiotic and psychoanalytic film theory. [15%]
3. DUE week of 3/20, submitted via email. (One-page single-spaced topic proposal for your final paper, with a one-page preliminary bibliography: two pages total) [5%]
4. DUE 5/1: Short take-home exam #3. [15%]

5. FINAL PAPER SCHEDULES:

***FOR PHD AND CRITICAL STUDIES STUDENTS:** APRIL 24: Distribute copies of draft of final paper to all fellow participants, and to me. MAY 1: Workshop for all Phd and critical studies students. MAY 8:

Submit revised final paper. [40%]

***FOR MA STUDENTS - PRODUCTION STUDENTS:** MAY 4: submit final paper or project. [40%]

Other assignments (totaling 10%):

6. ALL STUDENTS: Various assigned presentations. Usually, this will be presentation of the film(s) for the given week, including a 2 minute clip.

7. PhD STUDENTS: In addition to the above, PhD students will be required to present on more difficult material.

Note on the final paper: I will give more extensive instructions for this paper as we go along. At this point, I'll just say that the final paper should investigate some NARROW issue of theory, and should use one or a small number of CAREFULLY SELECTED moving-image works in relation to that theoretical issue. Please keep focused on the words in capital letters in this paragraph. I'll expect to talk with each of you about this paper before you write your proposal.

Policy on attendance, etc.: One absence is permitted, encompassing any and all reasons (conferences, sicknesses, death, etc.). Above one absence, the final grade is lowered. Period. Thus, think before using up your Afreebie.@ (Job commitments should be scheduled around this class; as should production schedules, etc. They are not acceptable excuses for absence.)

Late papers and take-home exams will be penalized! *Please note that the subject matter of this course, Acritical theory,@ is often extremely difficult material. Not attending class will severely affect your understanding and thus will impact your performance. You cannot possibly understand and master this material on your own.*

Note on the readings/screenings: 1. The films are considered an integral part of the course and should be watched attentively, ideally in one sitting, without interruptions and while taking film notes.

2. You should come to class having read the readings beforehand!

3. Videotapes of required viewing will be placed on reserve in the library, and most titles are readily available at the good rental shops and from Netflix.

Policy on academic integrity: Be sure to familiarize yourself with GSU=s policies on academic integrity. On the web, at www.gsu.edu/~wwdos/codeofconduct.html.

Plagiarism will result in failure of the assigned work and can have more severe repercussions.

Notes on Critical Theory

I have written these notes for you to refer back to throughout the semester, especially when the readings may seem to have become extremely arcane or infuriatingly difficult. Hopefully these notes will help you to get the Abigger picture@ of what we are doing.

1. Note that film has opposed to newer media is a primary focus of the first half of the course. This is simply because, until very recently, the major concepts we have had to talk about moving images have come from the study of films. We will always try to consider the ways in which newer media, new reception practices, and so on, might complicate or problematize the concepts of film theory.
2. I don't want students to fall into the trap of thinking that theory is something that is applied to films in order to interpret them. This generally leads to bad, cookie-cutter criticism that negates the complexities of moving image works. Think of the relation between theory and the work of art as open-ended: theory opens up new ways of thinking about the work, while the work often forces us to refine and rethink the theory.
3. Note that I've been using the word theory rather than film theory this is because film theory is but a subset of a much larger endeavor which has, since the 60s at least, increasingly influenced work in the humanities across the board. Thus, many of the works of film theory we will be reading will PRESUME a familiarity with broader theoretical discourses: psychoanalysis, for example, or Marxism, or Saussurian linguistics. Thus, in any film theory course, a large amount of time and effort needs to be devoted to studying material which is not directly addressing the issue of film. That comes with the territory.
4. So: what then is theory? Generally speaking, we could say that theory emerges out of a number of crises that beset Western European thought in the latter half of the 19th century. First was Marxism, which forced a radical rethinking of the problem of subject and object, as well as a rethinking of the logic of historical development; then there were the thorough-going and even devastating critiques, by Nietzsche and Heidegger, of the entire Western philosophical tradition; and finally, Freud's elaboration of the unconscious processes that dominate our mental lives and also operate in the realm of society and culture.
5. Given the above, theory emerged as a way to take up the challenge to traditional philosophy posed by all the forces above: critical theory seeks to formulate answers to questions of the possibility of human agency after Marx and Freud; the relation of the social subject to his/her surrounding culture; how complex systems of signs mediate between the subject and the social formation; and so on.
As far as I know, the first self-conscious use of the phrase critical theory comes from the members of the Institute for Social Research (at the Frankfurt School) Adorno, Horkheimer, Benjamin, Kracauer, Marcuse, Habermas).
6. Again very generally, we could say that what distinguishes critical theory from empiricism is that critical theory is REFLEXIVE: that is, it refuses to concede that the investigator or theoretician can set him/herself above the object or event being studied, as a neutral, objective observer. Critical theory must inevitably account for itself for its own production in a given historical moment; it cannot presume a neutral Cartesian subject objectively describing reality, not simply because such a subject (I think, therefore I am) had been thoroughly demolished by Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, and Heidegger, but also because the Cartesian subject was a product of a particular historical moment for particular historical reasons, and thus cannot be posited as universal.

Advanced Film Theory
Schedule of classes

[P] = coursepack

[NAI] = Narrative Apparatus Ideology. For those students who don't purchase this volume, I will put it on reserve where you can go in and xerox the appropriate essays.

In some weeks, two films are listed as AC@ and AD@. Films marked AD@ will be the ones discussion will focus on; films marked AC@ are so canonical for the week's topic that you should be familiar with them.

NB: This course syllabus provides a general plan for the course. Deviations may be necessary.

Mondays:

1/9: Introduction: (1) History of the institutionalization of film studies in the academy; (2) some questions re: early cinema.

In-class viewing: Griffith, *Musketeers of Pig Alley*

I. The History of Forms

1/23: FORMALISM

Readings: Hill, chap 2, chap 7.

Eisenstein, from *Film Form*

Shkovsky, A Poetry and Prose...@ (Hill, p65)

Students will bring in clips from Griffith, Eisenstein, German expressionism

1/30: REALIST FILM THEORY

Readings: Hill, chap 6, chap 8.

Kracauer, A Photography,@ and A The Mass Ornament@ [P]

Bazin, from *What is Cinema?* Vol. 1 [book]; and A DeSica: Metteur en scene,@ A In Defense of Rossellini@ [P]

View: (C:) DeSica, *Bicycle Thieves*

(D:) Rossellini, *Viaggio in italia* [out of print; obtain dvd copies from me]

Students should bring in one very old photograph.

2/6: CINEMA AND MODERNITY

Readings: Simmel, A Metropolis and Mental Life@ [P]

Benjamin, A On Some Motifs in Baudelaire@ [P]

Benjamin, A Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction@ [P]

In-class clips: G. L. Tucker, *Traffic in Souls*

View: King Vidor, *The Crowd*

2/13: POSTMODERNITY

Readings: Hill, Chap. 11

Jameson, APostmodernism and Consumerism@ [MA students][on the web:
http://evans-experientialism.freewebspace.com/jameson_postmodernism_consumer.htm]

Jameson, APostmodernism: the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism@ [PhD students][on the web:
<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~DRBR/JAMESON/jameson.html>]

PRINT OUT THE ESSAYS!

Morse, AOntology of Everyday Distraction: Freeway, Mall, Television@ [P]

Baudrillard, AThe System of Objects@; AImplosion of the Masses@ [P]

View: tba

Short take-home exam #1 handed out today.

II. Semiotics and its Limits

2/20: STRUCTURALISM-SEMIOTICS

a. Language: langue-parole; signifier-signified; syntagm-paradigm.

Read: Hill, chap 6 again. And, on the web: Chandler, *Semiotics* (browse and find sections of interest, but esp look at AModality and Representation@ and AParadigms and syntagms@).
[\[www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/S4B/semiotic.html\]](http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/S4B/semiotic.html)

b. Narrative: Two doctoral students will present a 15-minute presentation on Barthes= *S/Z* (include a few overhead transparencies of some of the pages of the book).

Read: Barthes, AMyth Today@ [P]

c. Film: the *grande syntagmatique*. Read: Metz, AProblems of Denotation@ [NAI]

No viewing: MA students will each bring in one print advertisement to read in relation to the Barthes; PhD students will each bring in one short clip which illustrates ONE of the syntagms defined by Metz.

DUE: take-home exam #1.

2/27: IDEOLOGY AND THE UNCONSCIOUS

Read: Editors of Cahiers du cinéma, AJohn Ford=s *Young Mr. Lincoln*@ [NAI]

Heath, AJaws and Ideological Criticism@ [P]

PhD student will present on Althusser=s theory of ideology and ideological state apparatus.

View: (C:) Ford, *Young Mr. Lincoln*

(D:) Curtiz, *Mildred Pierce*

-----spring break week-----

3/13: APPARATUS - SPECTATOR POSITIONING

Read: Metz, selection from *Imaginary Signifier* [NAI]
Silverman, *A Suture@* [NAI]
required for PhD students: Baudry, *A The Apparatus@* [NAI]

View: Bertolucci, *The Conformist*

3/20: PSYCHOANALYSIS: RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Read: Zizek, *A In His Bold Gaze My Ruin Writ Large@* [P]

View: (C) *Psycho*; (D) tba

III. The Critique of Representation

3/27: FEMINIST FILM THEORY

Read: Hill, chap 13
Mulvey, *A Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema@* [NAI]
Doane, *A Film and the Masquerade@* [P]
Williams, *A Film Body: Implantation of Perversions@* [NAI]

View: (C) C. Vidor, *Gilda*; (D) Hitchcock, *Rebecca*

Short take-home exam #2 handed out today.

4/3: RACE, POSTCOLONIALISM, THIRD CINEMA

Read: Hill, chap 12, chap 17, chap 18
Solanas/Gettino, *A Toward a Third Cinema@* [P]
In-class clips: Pontecorvo, *The Battle of Algiers*

View: Babenco, *Pixote*; Hughes bros, *Menace II Society*

DUE: take-home exam #2.

4/10: QUEER THEORY

Read: Hill, chap 14, 15, 16
D. A. Miller, *A Anal Rope@* [P]

View: Hitchcock, *Rope*

IV. Philosophical Investigations

4/17: Foucault - Modern

Read: Foucault, the panopticon section of *Discipline and Punish* [on the web:
[http://foucault.info/documents/disciplineAndPunish/foucault.disciplineAndPunish.panOpticism.h
tml](http://foucault.info/documents/disciplineAndPunish/foucault.disciplineAndPunish.panOpticism.html)]

Foucault, selection from *History of Sexuality, vol. 1* [P]

Restivo, A The Nation, the Body, and the *Autostrada*@ [P]

PhD students also read Foucault, analysis of *Las Maninas*

View: Pasolini, *Comizi d=amore* [aka A Love Meetings@]

4/24: Deleuze

Read: Interviews on the Movement-image and Time-image [P]

Deleuze, chap from *Movement-image* [P]

chap from *Time-image* [P]

View: Wong Karwai, *In the Mood for Love*

(1) Short take-home exam #3 handed out; due next week.

(2) All PhD students and those others writing the article-length option will distribute drafts of their papers to me and others in this group.

5/1: PhD writing workshop

All students: turn in exam #3.

Final paper due dates:

5/4: for those students doing the shorter-length paper.

5/8: for PhD and others doing the article-length paper and workshop.