

Film & Media Theory (CMA 2300)

Professor Jennifer Fay

Class Meetings: T/R 11:00- 12:15 Buttrick 015

Screenings: Tuesdays: 7:00- 10:00 Buttrick 103.

Office: Buttrick 003B 12:30- 2:00 Tuesdays and by appointment. j.fay@vanderbilt.edu

Course Description: What is film? What is the relationship between film and photography and the “real” world that a film may (or may not) capture? What is a good film? How does a film affect, construct, or delimit a spectator? What is a film spectator? And might we push back on and resist the ways films construct us? 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? What is the relationship between the image and time? Answers to queries as fundamental as these may seem obvious (“A good film is entertaining for me...”). 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 queries 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 thought and perception. This is a reading intensive class and the material is challenging. But it is very worth the investment!

Assigned Texted

In addition to essay posted on Brightspace, students should acquire the following texts:

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

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

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

Course Policies:

Participation: This course presupposes *active and participating* students. Our aim is to create an intellectual community and culture of exchange. In order to achieve this, you are expected to come to class on time, having done the reading, watched the film, 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. 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> Exceptions for laptop note-taking will be made for students with special instructional needs.

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. Students who spend time on their phones or other electronic devices will be asked to put them away and subsequently marked absent and earn a zero for class participation. Attendance does not count towards the participation grade. A student who misses more than three classes may expect a penalty of .1 for every subsequent absence on the final grade. A student who misses seven or more classes will fail based on attendance alone.

Assignments: There are three principle assignments for this class: Two papers and a final exam. Failure to complete these assignments will result in a failing grade regardless of the grades earned on other assignments. We may also do some in-class writing. Brightspace posts constitute a significant portion of your grade (see below).

Brightspace Postings: In addition to these formal papers, you are required to post responses to readings (and films in relation to the readings) at least eight times during the course of the semester. These posting, which should be at least two substantial paragraphs, should be submitted to the Brightspace discussion board no later than 12:00 (midnight) on the evening before our class. 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. You are also expected to read the posts of your classmates before our meetings. If you find yourself too shy to participate in class discussion, additional postings (submitted by the deadline) may boost your participation grade. There are four days in the semester when I will ask everyone to post before class: Jan 28, Feb. 27, March 17, April 16.

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 EAD (2-4705) as soon as possible.

Religious Holidays: Students who expect to miss classes or deadlines 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:

Brightspace postings	20%
Participation	20%
Paper 1	20%
Paper 2	20%
Final Exam	20%

Important Dates:

Everyone Posts on Brightspace: Jan 28, Feb. 27, March 17, April 16.
Paper #1: Friday, Feb. 14
Paper #2: Friday, April 3
Final Exam: April 23

Reading and Screening Schedule

Week 1 (Jan 7, 9): Where Film Theory and Film Art Begin

- T. Intro to Class.
Screening: *The Circus* (Chaplin, 1928, 71 min.) Kanopy
- R. Arnheim, *Film as Art*, 1-59.

Week 2 (Jan 14, 16): The Aesthetics of the Sound/Silent Film

- T. Arnheim, *Film as Art*, 59-134
Screening: *Playtime* (Tati, 1967, 145 min.) Kanopy
- R. Arnheim, *Film as Art*, 134-160.

Week 3 (Jan 21, 23): Changed Mummified: Bazin's Mythic Narrative

- T. Bazin, *What is Cinema?* "Introduction" (By Hugh Grey) ; "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" "The Virtues and Limitations of Montage"
Screening: Watch both films below on your on through Kanopy:
Red Balloon (Lamorisse 1956, 34 min.)
Kon Tiki (Heyderahl, 1950, 58 min.)
- R. No class.

Week 4 (Jan 28, 30): Bazin, History, and the Democratic Style

- T. Bazin, *What is Cinema?* "Cinema and Exploration," "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema"
All Post on Brightspace: On readings above and on *Red Balloon* and *Kon Tiki*
Screening: *The Best Years of Our Lives* (Wyler, 1946, 172 min.)
- R. Bazin, "William Wyler, or the Jansenist of Directing"

Week 5 (Feb. 4, 6): Photographs, Fragmented Pasts, and Forgotten Futures.

- T. Kracauer, "Photography"
Screening: (*nostalgia*) (Frampton, 1971, 38 min) discussion to follow screening.
- R. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, Part I

Week 6 (Feb. 11, 13):

- T. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, Part II
Smith, "Race and Reproduction in *Camera Lucida*"
- R. No Class

Paper 1 due Friday, Feb. 14th by 10:00 p.m. on Brightspace.

Week 7 (Feb. 18, 20): Digital Realism: An Image without Ontology

- T. Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film*, pp. 90-141
Screening: *Jurassic Park* (Spielberg, 1993, 126 min.)
- R. Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film*, pp. 141-189.

Week 8 (Feb. 25, 27): Eisenstein's Cinema of Assault

- T. Taylor, "Eisenstein: A Soviet Artist"; Eisenstein,
Eisenstein: "The Montage of Attractions," "The Montage of Film Attractions"

- Screening: *Strike* (Eisenstein, 1925, 82 min) Kanopy
R. Eisenstein, "Dramaturgy of Film Form." [All post on Brightspace](#)

Week 9: Spring Break!

Week 10: (March 10, 12): The Work of Film in the Age of Extreme Politics

- T. Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Mechanical Reproducibility"
R. Benjamin, "Work of Art" continued.

Week 11 (March 17, 19): Impossible Subjects

- T. Doane, "The Desire to Desire." [All Post on Brightspace](#)
Screening: *Stella Dallas* (Vidor, 1937, 106 min.)
R. Doane, "The Moving Image: Pathos and the Maternal"

Week 12 (March 24, 26): The Good of Hollywood

- T. Cavell, "Stella's Taste."
Screening: *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (Capra, 1936, 116 min).
R. Cavell, "Two Cheers for Romance" and "The Good of Film"

Week 13 (March 31, April 2): Thinking with and against Cinema

- T. Hooks, "Making Movie Magic"; "The Oppositional Gaze: Back Female Spectators."
Screening: *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?* (Kramer, 1967, 108 min.)
R. Baldwin, *Devil Finds Work*, Part 1

[Paper #2 Due Friday, April 3 by 10:00 p.m. on Brightspace](#)

Week 14 (April 7, 9): What Film Does Not Teach Us

- T. Baldwin, *The Devil Finds Work*, Part II.
Screening: *Lady Sings the Blues* (Furie, 1972, 144 min.)
R. Baldwin, *The Devil Finds Work*, Part III.

Week 15 (April 14, 16): Delayed Cinema

- T. Mulvey, *Death 24 X a Second*
Screening: *Imitation of Life* (Sirk, 1959, 125 min.)
R. Mulvey, cont. [All Post on Brightspace](#)

[Take home final exam: due 5:00 PM, April 23rd.](#)