

UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
DEPARTMENT OF FILM STUDIES

Film 3371F – Film Theory, Fall 2011

Instructor: Paul Coates

Office: UC Room 76

Office Hours: Monday 11.30-12.30, Wednesday 11.30-12.30

e-mail: pcoates2@uwo.ca

phone: 661-2111 ext. 87865.

Screenings: Monday 12.30-3.30, UC84.

Lectures and tutorials: Wednesday 12.30-2.30, UC85.

Required texts (to be purchased from the University Bookstore):

1. Braudy, Leo and Marshall Cohen (eds.), *Film Theory and Criticism* (7th edition) (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008)
2. course pack.

Course aims

This course might best be called ‘Pre-“Theory” and Post-“Theory”’, for it will examine some of the alternatives to the form of theorization still dominant in Film Studies: that is, to that amalgam of Marxism, feminism and post-structuralism forged so tumultuously in the aftermath of the contestation of 1968, usually known in colloquial shorthand as ‘Theory’, and oriented primarily towards ideological critique.

In order to do so, it will both acquaint students with, and remind them of, many of the key issues in what is known as classical film theory: namely, the theory of the period from the early twentieth century to the mid-1960s. It will be shown how the period is haunted by the persistence of questions concerning the relationship between film and the other arts, its status as perhaps not even an art, the degree of validity of the notion of film as a ‘language’, the possible specificity of the medium, the status of the cinematic body, and cinema’s relations with pre-existing genres, in particular the contested and problematic one designated ‘melodrama’.

It will also consider various alternatives to ‘Theory’ that have either arisen alongside it, or – as of the 1990s - in the aftermath of the ending of the period of its greatest dominance. Some of this work is virulently hostile to ‘Theory’, while some is sympathetically critical. The course will take a (hopefully representative) sample of both approaches.

Methodologies The methodologies considered and employed in this course are appropriate for this level inasmuch as they build upon, offer alternatives to, and sometimes critique, the ones to which students will have been introduced in Film 1020E and Film 2200F/G.

Course objectives By the end of this course the student will be able to compare and contrast the dominant modes of thinking within Film Studies with several key alternatives. The student will be able to weigh the strengths and weaknesses of these various approaches.

Course and programme aims

1. Understanding, capacity for argument, judgement and analysis will be fostered by essays, presentations and assignments with formative comment, and by in-class small-group and whole-class discussion.
2. Communication skills will be imparted through in-class discussion and credit given for frequency and quality of contributions, and by essays and other assignments marked in accordance with a grading scale given to the students and including benchmarks for the expectations associated with each grade, from A+ to F.
3. Awareness of the limits of knowledge will be enhanced by exploring the legitimate differences of opinion and methodology within the field, and by requiring students to negotiate the formulation of their own opinions in-class with the terms and knowledge brought to that discussion by other students and the instructor.
4. The ability to argue and decide on complex issues will be fostered by essays and in-class discussion; that to manage time, by the need to prepare properly for class and to deliver assignments in a timely manner; and that for academic responsibility, by the need to source assignments accurately.

Mode of Evaluation

Mid-term exam (Oct 27) (20%)

Extended essay (2,000 words) (due Dec 7, 4.30, in Film Studies office) (30%)

Attendance/participation (10%)

In-class quizzes (20%).

Final exam (same format as mid-term)(20%)

Nb. Essays handed in late without an agreed extension will be penalized by 5% per day. They must be left in the Essay Drop Box outside the Film Studies departmental office. You are advised to keep a copy of your essay.

Any student unable to take the weekly quiz, for medical or compassionate reasons, may make up the quiz at a time mutually convenient to the instructor and the student. The grounds for the absence must be documented with the Dean's Office of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, which will determine whether or not the student should be given the opportunity of a make-up.

Should you have a disability, you are strongly urged to inform SSD, so that any misunderstandings can be avoided and accommodation can be made for you in a timely fashion.

Other Relevant regulations

For Film Studies Department regulations governing Term Work, Exams, Faculty Office Hours, Academic Relief (appeals, petitions), and other matters, please consult "Information for Students" on our website at www.uwo.ca/film

1. **Prerequisites:** Unless you have either the prerequisites for this course or a written special permission from your Dean to enrol in it, you will be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. The decision may not be appealed and you will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

2. **Final Grades:** A student must receive a passing grade for both term work and the final exam to receive a passing grade in a Film Studies course. Students whose term and final exam grades

average 50% or above, even though one of the two is a failure, shall receive a default grade of 48%.

3. Plagiarism Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or a passage from another author they must acknowledge their debt by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence (see Scholastic Policy in the Western Academic Calendar p. 40). An essay or assignment deemed to be plagiarised in part or in toto will receive a nil mark, as well as being subject to other disciplinary penalties. These are specified in the Film Studies departmental regulations for students, with which you are advised to familiarise yourself.

4. Plagiarism checking: Plagiarism is a serious offense and is prosecuted to the fullest extent that university regulations permit. Do not hand in anyone's work but your own, and always cite your sources whether you are quoting someone directly or paraphrasing their ideas or research. To avoid plagiarism, *all assignments must be downloaded to turnitin.com; essays that are not downloaded to the site will not be graded.* All required papers will be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. You should submit your essay to turnitin via your WebCt account for this course.

5. Complaints. If students have a complaint concerning a course in which they are enrolled, they must discuss the matter with the instructor of the course. If students are still not satisfied, they should then take the complaint to the Film Studies Office, University College, Room 80. These regulations are in place because a failure to follow these procedures creates the potential for injustices of various kinds affecting either the instructor or the students themselves, or both parties. Concerns should not be allowed to fester but should be raised with the instructor in a timely manner, so that they can be addressed in time to make a difference to the course.

6. Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness. Please go to the following site for information on the university Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness:

<https://studentservices.uwo.ca/secure/index.cfm>

Grading Criteria for Essays

Assignments will be given a separate grade for each of the four criteria of Argument, Presentation/structure, Language skills and Research/scholarship. The four will then be pooled to yield an overall grade. The midterm and final grades will be 80% argument and 20% language skills. The essay grade will be 50% argument, 20% language skills, 20% research and 10% presentation.

A+ (90-100)

- Argument: Clear development of a specific, challenging and original thesis. The writer has taken significant risks successfully; in the resulting piece, distinctive ideas and content have discovered their necessary distinctive form. Detailed reference to appropriate texts, with evidence of individual response. Ability not only to expound subject but to see it around—subtleties and ambiguities, qualifications and concessions, relations to other subjects, etc.

- Presentation, structure: Quotations well integrated into text. Proper paragraphs. Almost no typographical errors.
- Language Skills: Sentence structure correct, with full range of sentence types (compound, complex, and compound-complex), with full range of punctuation (including semicolons, colons, dashes, parentheses). Graceful style, neither pompous nor breezy, and few errors.
- Research/scholarship: Evidence of effective, extensive and independent research, with proper documentation of sources. Quotations used appropriately and purposively.

A (80 to 89)

- Argument: The writer has taken risks and most of them succeed. Clear development of a specific and challenging thesis, with proper paragraphs. Detailed reference to appropriate texts, with evidence of individual response. Ability not only to expound subject but to see it around—subtleties and ambiguities, qualifications and concessions, relations to other subjects, etc.
- Presentation, structure: Quotations well integrated into text. Proper paragraphs. Almost no typographical errors.
- Language Skills: Sentence structure correct, with full range of sentence types (compound, complex, and compound-complex), with full range of punctuation (including semicolons, colons, dashes, parentheses). Graceful style, neither pompous nor breezy, and few errors
- Research/scholarship: Evidence of effective and independent research, with proper documentation of sources. Quotations used appropriately and purposively.

B (70 to 79)

- Argument: Clear development of a specific thesis, with proper paragraphs. Adequately detailed reference to texts. Ability to expound reasonably sophisticated ideas with clarity.
- Presentation/structure: Quotations well integrated into text. Proper paragraphs. A few typographical errors.
- Language Skills: Sentence structure correct, with reasonable range of sentence types and full range of punctuation. Style not too wordy, with errors relatively few and minor.
- Research Scholarship: Evidence of adequate research, with proper documentation of sources.

C (60 to 69)

- Argument: Reasonably clear development of a thesis, with proper paragraphs. Basic ability to expound ideas, whose development might be rather thin. Effort to support points with references to the text. Tendency to replace analysis with descriptive retelling of plot.
- Presentation/structure: Presentation showing lapses in tidiness and/or proofreading. Poor use of paragraphs.
- Language Skills: Sentence structure correct, but perhaps overly simple, with tendency to avoid punctuation besides period and comma. Errors relatively few, but occasionally serious, with evident misunderstanding of some point of elementary grammar (comma splices, fragments, semicolon errors, subject-verb disagreements, poorly integrated quotations)
- Research/Scholarship: reasonable effort at documentation, but rather thin.

D (50 to 59)

- Argument: Difficulty with paragraphing or consecutive thought. Ideas inchoate but clouded by weak expression. Overgeneralization with inadequate support, or examples that run to lengthy paraphrase, with little or no analysis.
- Presentation/Structure: Very poor to non-existent use of paragraphs. Inadequate and inaccurate documentation. Multiple typographical errors.
- Language Skills: Errors of grammar or diction frequent enough to interfere with understanding.
- Research/Scholarship: Little serious effort to research the topic.

F (49 and down)

- Argument: Ideas too simple for level of course. Argument completely incoherent. Erroneous content showing little or no understanding of subject.
- Presentation/Structure: Very sloppy proof-reading. Documentation virtually non-existent.
- Language Skills: writing frequently ungrammatical.
- Research/Scholarship: Non-existent. Content largely “borrowed” from sources with no individual distillation, but no apparent attempt to deceive.

0 (Report to Department)

- Plagiarism with intent to deceive

Course schedule

All readings are from *Film Theory and Criticism* unless otherwise stated.

Week 1 (Sept 14) Introduction to course: Why Theory?

Week 2 (Sept 19, 21): A Theory of Everything? Film and Reality

Screening: *Sans Soleil* (Chris Marker, France; 1982) (100')

Reading: Kracauer, 262-72.

Week 3 (Sept 26, 28): Another Beginning: The Ontology of the Image

Readings: Bazin, 159-63; Allen, 824-33.

Screening: *The Flight of the Red Balloon* (Hsiao-hsien Hou, France/Taiwan; 2007) (115')

Week 4 (Oct 3, 5): Film and Specificity: The Crowd

Screening: *Triumph of the Will* (Leni Riefenstahl, Germany; 1934) (111')

Readings: Benjamin, 665-85; Kracauer, 267

Week 5: (Oct 12) Film Amidst the Other Arts 1: Literature and Point-of-View

Screening: *Une partie de campagne* (Jean Renoir, France; 1936) (45')

Readings: Andrew, 372-80; Chatman (Course pack); Maupassant (Course pack).

Week 6 (Oct 17, 19): Film Amidst the Other Arts 2: Melodrama

Screening: *Broken Blossoms* (D.W.Griffith, US; 1919) (90')

Reading: Elsaesser (Course pack).

Week 7: (Oct 26) Mid-term exam

Week 8: (Oct 31, Nov 2) Early loyal opposition to Lacan: *Really* 'back to Freud'
Screening: *Blood and Sand* (Fred Niblo, US; 1922) (109'); Reading: Hansen (Course pack).

Week 9 (Nov 7, 9): Structuralism and Genre
Screening (Oct 18): *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (John Ford, US; 1962) (123')
Reading: Altman, 552-63; Schatz, 564-75.

Week 10 (Nov 14, 16): Colour and Widescreen
Screening: *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle* (Jean-Luc Godard, France; 1967) (87')
Reading: Branigan (Course pack); Barr (Course pack)

Week 11 (Nov 21, 23): Pasolini and 'the Cinema of Poetry'
Screening: *Red Desert* (Michelangelo Antonioni, Italy/France; 1964) (120')
Reading: Pasolini (Course pack)

Week 12 (Nov 28, 30) Recent Loyal Opposition to Lacan
Screening: *Duel* (Stephen Spielberg, US; 1971) (90')
Reading: McGowan (Course pack)

Week 13 (Dec 5, 7) Trauma Theory
Screening: *Everything for Sale* (Andrzej Wajda, Poland; 1967)(94')
Reading: Coates; Elsaesser (Course pack)

Week 13 n.b. essays due to office by 4.30 on Wednesday December 7th.