

FM 150 Visual Storytelling: Narration in Fiction Film

Seminar Leader: Matthias Hurst
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Office Hours: Tuesday, 13.30 – 15.00, or by appointment

Course Times: Monday, 17.30 – 19.00; Monday, 19.30 – 22.00 (film screening); Tuesday, 17.30 – 19.00
Lecture Hall (P98a)

The focus of this introductory course is the analysis of structures and elements of filmic storytelling. Principles and general ideas of narratology will be explored in their application to film, story and discourse. Plot structure, characters, time, perspective, mise-en-scène and montage are the basic elements of filmic narration; to read a film properly means to analyze these elements as meaningful aspects of discourse and put their significance in context. Taking a look at historical, classical and contemporary films, ranging from popular movies to arthouse productions, we discuss the diachronic development of essential structures that generate film narratives and the specific aesthetics of visual storytelling.

Requirements

No prerequisites.

Attendance is mandatory for all seminars and film screenings. Students are expected to come to seminars and film screenings punctually and prepared, to participate actively in the class discussions and to do all the course assignments on time.

*** Please, do not use cell phones, smart phones or similar electronic devices during seminars and screenings!**

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the highest standards of academic integrity and expects students to adhere to these standards at all times. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

Attendance

Attendance at all classes and film screenings is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, two absences from twice-per-week courses or the equivalent (e.g. one absence from a once-per-week course) should not affect the participation grade or require documentation. More than two absences will affect the grade for the course.

Absences are registered in all classes, and lateness is registered as absence.

Students should notify the instructor if they are unable to attend class.

Bard College Berlin may not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences, whether excused or unexcused. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

Assessment / Assignments

Three screening reports (750 words each), due in week 2 (deadline for screening report # 1: Tuesday, February 6, 2024, 5:00 pm), week 4 (deadline for screening report # 2: Tuesday, February 20, 2024, 5:00 pm) and week 6 (deadline for screening report # 3: Tuesday, March 5, 2024, 5:00 pm)

The topics of the screening reports will be announced before the film screenings.

Final essay (3000-3500 words), due in week 15, Friday, May 17, 2024, midnight

* **Please note: Graduating students** -- Deadline for final essay: Week 13, Sunday, May 5, 2024, midnight! *

The topic of the final essay will be a film analysis/interpretation, based on one of the films screened or discussed throughout the semester.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Essays that are up to 24 hours late can be downgraded up to one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where a professor agrees to accept a late assignment, it should be submitted by the new deadline agreed upon by both parties. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss essay assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours.

Students receive mid- and end-of-semester grades for their seminar work. Students are entitled to make an appointment with an instructor to discuss seminar participation, or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

Grade Breakdown

Participation: 33 %

Screening Reports: 33 %
Final Essay: 34 %

If one of these components is graded F, the final course grade cannot be higher than C-.
If two components are graded F, the final grade will be F (i.e. the whole class will be failed).

Schedule

* Tentative schedule depending on availability of films and intensity of class discussions

WEEK 1:

Introduction: What is film? – Film as a historical, cultural and ‘anthropological’ phenomenon

Elements of Narration (1)

(Suggested) Reading:

André Bazin. “The Ontology of the Photographic Image.” In: André Bazin. *What Is Cinema?* Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1971, pp. 9-16.

Walter Benjamin. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." In: Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (eds.). *Film Theory and Criticism. Introductory Readings*. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 731-751.

Searle Kochberg. "Cinema as Institution." In: Jill Nelmes (ed.). *An Introduction to Film Studies*. Third edition. London/New York: Routledge, 2003, pp. 3-50.

Siegfried Kracauer. *Theory of Film. The Redemption of Physical Reality*. [1960] Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1997.

Marshall McLuhan. *Understanding Media. The Extensions of Man*. Cambridge, MA/London: MIT Press, 1994.

Hugo Münsterberg. “The Photoplay. A Psychological Study.” [1916] Excerpt in: Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (eds.). *Film Theory and Criticism. Introductory Readings*. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 401-407.

Erwin Panofsky. “Style and Medium in the Motion Pictures.” [1934/1947] In: Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (eds.). *Film Theory and Criticism. Introductory Readings*. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 279-292.

No film screening in week 1!

WEEK 2:

Elements of Narration (2) – Basic Model of Film Analysis / Plot Structure

Self-reflection: Real Life and Reel Life

(Suggested) Reading:

Larry A. Brown. *How Films Tell Stories. The Narratology of Cinema*. Nashville: Creative Arts Press, 2016, pp. 1-45.

Day for Night (La Nuit américaine, 1973, François Truffaut)

WEEK 3:

Development of film language (1) Primitive Mode of Representation (PMR), Cinema of attractions, Institutional Mode of Representation (IMR)

The Battleship Potemkin (Bronenosec Potemkin, 1925, Sergej Eisenstein)

WEEK 4:

Development of film language (2) Mise-en-scène, Close-Up

The Passion of Joan of Arc (La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc, 1928, Carl Theodor Dreyer)

WEEK 5:

Development of film language (3) Mise-en-scène and Montage (Descriptive montage, montage of attractions, intellectual montage)

Rashomon (1950, Akira Kurosawa)

WEEK 6:

Film Semiotics (Signs and codes; denotation and connotation of signs)
Story and Discourse

Citizen Kane (1941, Orson Welles)

WEEK 7:

Development of film language (4) – The means and elements of filmic storytelling: Sound and Color

TBA

WEEK 8:

Development of film language (5) – The means and elements of filmic storytelling: Time and Perspective

8½ (*Otto e mezzo*, 1963, Federico Fellini)

Spring Break: March 25 – April 1, 2024

WEEK 9:

Modes of Film Interpretation (1)

No class, no film screening on Monday April 1, 2024!

WEEK 10:

Modes of Film Interpretation (2)

Blow-Up (1966, Michelangelo Antonioni)

WEEK 11:

Modes of Film Interpretation (3)

Lost Highway (1997, David Lynch)

WEEK 12:

Modes of film interpretation (4)

The Congress (2013, Ari Folman)

WEEK 13:

Modes of film interpretation (5)

The Ordinaries (2022, Sophie Linnenbaum)

Final Essay deadline (Graduating students only): Sunday, May 5, 2024, midnight

WEEK 14:

Modes of film interpretation (6)

After Life (1998, Hirokazu Kore-Eda)

WEEK 15 (Completion week, May 13 – 17, 2024)

Final Essay deadline: Friday, May 17, 2024, midnight

Readings

- Allen, Richard and Murray Smith (eds.). *Film Theory and Philosophy*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Altman, Rick. "A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre." In: Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (eds.). *Film Theory and Criticism. Introductory Readings*. Fifth Edition. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 630-641.
- Altman, Rick. *Film/Genre*. London: BFI Publishing 1999 (reprint 2004).
- Baudry, Jean-Louis. "The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in the Cinema." In: Philip Rosen (ed.). *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology. A Film Theory Reader*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986, pp. 299-318.
- Bazin, André. "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema". In: André Bazin. *What Is Cinema?* Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1971, pp. 23-40.
- Bazin, André. *What is Cinema?* Vol. I & II. Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1971.
- Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." In: Leo Braudy / Marshall Cohen (eds.). *Film Theory and Criticism. Introductory Readings*. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 731-751.
- Blandford, Steve, Barry K. Grant and Jim Hillier. *The Film Studies Dictionary*. London/New York: Arnold, Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Bordwell, David, and Kristin Thompson. *Film Art. An Introduction*. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2004.
- Bordwell, David. "Classical Hollywood Cinema: Narrational Principles and Procedures." In: Philip Rosen (ed.). *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology. A Film Theory Reader*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986, pp. 17-34.
- Bordwell, David. *Narration in the Fiction Film*. London/New York: Routledge, 1990.
- Braudy, Leo, and Marshall Cohen (eds.). *Film Theory and Criticism. Introductory Readings*. Seventh Edition. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Brown, Larry A. *How Films Tell Stories. The Narratology of Cinema*. Nashville: Creative Arts Press, 2016.
- Burch, Noël. "A Primitive Mode of Representation?" In: Thomas Elsaesser (ed.). *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*. London: BFI 1990, pp. 220-227.
- Elsaesser, Thomas, and Warren Buckland. *Studying Contemporary American Film. A Guide to Movie Analysis*. London: Arnold Publishers, 2002.

- Frampton, Daniel. *Filmosophy*. London: Wallflower Press, 2006.
- Freud, Sigmund. "The 'Uncanny'." In: *Art and Literature. Jensen's Gradiva, Leonardo da Vinci and Other Works*. The Penguin Freud Library Vol. 14, edited by Albert Dickson. London/New York: Penguin, pp. 335-376.
- Gibbs, John. *Mise-en-Scène. Film Style and Interpretation*. London/New York: Wallflower Press 2003.
- Gunning, Tom. "The Cinema of Attractions. Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde." [1986] In: Thomas Elsaesser (ed.). *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*. London: BFI 1990, pp. 56-62.
- Hayward, Susan. *Cinema Studies. The Key Concepts*. Third Edition. London/New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Hill, John, and Pamela Church Gibson (eds.). *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Kracauer, Siegfried. *Theory of Film. The Redemption of Physical Reality*. [1960] Princeton (NJ): Princeton University Press, 1997.
- Lebeau, Vicky. *Psychoanalysis and Cinema. The Play of Shadows*. London: Wallflower Press, 2002.
- Litch, Mary M. *Philosophy Through Film*. New York/London: Routledge, 2002.
- McFarlane, Brian. *Novel to Film. An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press/Clarendon Press, 1996.
- McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media. The Extensions of Man*. Cambridge, MA/London: MIT Press, 1994.
- Metz, Christian. *Film Language. A Semiotics of the Cinema*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.
- Metz, Christian. *The Imaginary Signifier. Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*. Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1982.
- Monaco, James. *How To Read a Film. Movies, Media, Multimedia*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." In Philip Rosen (ed.). *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology. A Film Theory Reader*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986, pp. 198-209.
- Neale, Stephen. *Genre and Hollywood*. London/New York: Routledge 2000.
- Nelmes, Jill (ed.). *An Introduction to Film Studies*. Third edition. London/New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Nowell-Smith, Geoffrey (ed.). *The Oxford History of World Cinema*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Porter, Burton F. *Philosophy Through Fiction and Film*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Education/Prentice Hall, 2004.
- Read, Rupert, and Jerry Goodenough (eds.). *Film as Philosophy. Essays in Cinema after Wittgenstein and Cavell*. Houndmills Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- Rosen, Philip (ed.). *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology. A Film Theory Reader*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.

- Smith, Murray, and Thomas E. Wartenberg (eds.). *Thinking Through Cinema. Film as Philosophy*. Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2006.
- Thompson, Kristin, and David Bordwell. *Film History. An Introduction*. Second edition. New York: McGraw-Hill (Higher Education), 2003.
- Wartenberg, Thomas E., and Angela Curran (eds.). *The Philosophy of Film. Introductory Text and Readings*. Oxford/Malden: Blackwell, 2005.

Essay Deadlines

- Screening report # 1 (750 words): Week 2, Tuesday, February 6, 2024, 5:00 pm
- Screening report # 2 (750 words): Week 4, Tuesday, February 20, 2024, 5:00 pm
- Screening report # 3 (750 words): Week 6, Tuesday, March 5, 2024, 5:00 pm
- Final essay (3000-3500 words): Week 13, Sunday, May 5, 2024, midnight (Graduating students only) / Week 15, Friday, May 17, 2024, midnight