

FM 210: The Transformation of the World – Introduction to Film Studies

Seminar Leader: Matthias Hurst

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Office Hours: Tuesday, 13.30 – 15.00, or by appointment

Course Times: Monday, 14.00 – 15.30, Tuesday, 19.30 – 22.00 (film screening),
Thursday, 14.00 – 15.30

SR 5 (P24) and Lecture Hall (P98a)

Course Description

French film theorist, critic and filmmaker Jean Mitry claimed that film connects with a “deep psychological reality and satisfies our desire to understand the world and each other in a powerful way. The aesthetics of film is based on this psychological truth and need. And so cinema is the greatest of the arts because it meets this need by showing us the process of the transformation of the world.” This course is an introduction to Film Studies addressing the basic ideas of film history and theory, cinematic language and visual storytelling, while at the same time exploring the function and the aesthetics of film as artistic expression that comments on our experience of *reality* and its transformations through profound historical, political, technological, cultural and social processes in the 20th and early 21st centuries. We will watch and discuss films by, among others, Darren Aronofsky, Claire Denis, Federico Fellini, Ari Folman, Werner Herzog, David Lynch, Terrence Malick, and Yasujirô Ozu that mirror the human condition, our relation to the world and the critical consciousness of the modern and postmodern age, in which unsettling change seems to be the only constant.

Module: Approaching Arts Through Theory

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 laptops, 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.

I expect everybody to do their own work and to write their own papers, including correct MLA citation. Plagiarism or the use of AI are no options; they are an absolute no-no. Anybody who cheats will fail that particular assignment and may, depending on the severity of the case, fail the class.

Accommodations

Bard College Berlin is committed to inclusion and providing equal access to all students; we uphold and maintain all aspects of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and Section 3 of the German Disability Equality Act of April 27, 2002 (Federal Law Gazette I p. 1468). If you have a disability, or think you may have a disability, please contact the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, Atticus Kleen, (accommodations@berlin.bard.edu) to request an official accommodation.

Requests for accommodations should be made as early as possible to ensure adequate time for coordination and planning. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and may require advance notice to implement.

If you have already been approved for accommodations with the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, please arrange to meet with me outside of class so that we can develop an implementation plan.

Students may face extenuating circumstances related to various personal or external factors, which impact their academic performance. While these circumstances often do not fall within the legal framework of Disability Accommodations, Bard College Berlin is committed to supporting students experiencing such circumstances. A student needing a short extension or a replacement assignment because of an extenuating circumstance is encouraged to make arrangements directly with instructors if possible. If further support is needed, please visit the [Bard College Berlin Accessibility page](#). Questions about this process can be directed to James Harker (j.harker@berlin.bard.edu) or Maria Anderson-Long (m.andersonlong@berlin.bard.edu).

Attendance

Attendance at all classes 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.

Please, do not use laptops, cell phones, smart phones or similar electronic devices during seminars and screenings! When you are in class, you need to be there (and not leashed to or distracted by electronic devices). Please turn your phones off before 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. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

Assignments / Assessment

Two screening reports (1000 words each), due in week 3 (deadline for screening report # 1: Thursday, February 13, 2025, 14:00/2:00 pm), and week 7 (deadline for screening report # 2: Thursday, March 13, 2025, 14.00/ 2:00 pm)

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

Final essay (3000-3500 words), due in week 15, Thursday, May 15, 2025, midnight

* **Please note: Graduating students** – Final essay due in week 14, Monday, May 5, 2025, 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.

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

Week 1

Introduction: The Transformation of the World

Film as a cultural and 'anthropological' phenomenon (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 Neldes (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.

Good Bye, Lenin! (2003, Wolfgang Becker)

Week 2

Film as a cultural and artistic phenomenon (2)

Week 3

Basic Model of Film Analysis – Story and Discourse

Structural analysis: The means and elements of filmic storytelling (1)

Primitive Mode of Representation (PMR), Cinema of Attractions

(Suggested) Reading:

David Bordwell. *Narration in the Fiction Film*. London/New York: Routledge, 1990.

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

Noël Burch. "A Primitive Mode of Representation?" In: Thomas Elsaesser (ed.). *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*. London: BFI 1990, pp. 220-227.

Thomas Elsaesser and Warren Buckland. *Studying Contemporary American Film. A Guide to Movie Analysis*. London: Arnold Publishers, 2002.

Tom Gunning. "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.

James Monaco. *How To Read a Film. Movies, Media, Multimedia*. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Allan Rowe and Paul Wells. "Film Form and Narrative." In: Jill Nelmes (ed.). *An Introduction to Film Studies*. Third edition. London/New York: Routledge, 2003, pp. 53-90.

Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell. *Film History. An Introduction*. Second edition. New York: McGraw-Hill (Higher Education), 2003.

Screening report No. 1 – Deadline: Thursday, February 13, 2025, 2:00 pm

Week 4

Structural analysis: The means and elements of filmic storytelling (2)

Mise-en-scène and montage, Institutional Mode of Representation (IMR), Découpage classique/Continuity editing (Cinema of Narrative Integration)

(Suggested) Reading:

André Bazin. "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.

David Bordwell. "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.

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

Week 5

Structural analysis: The means and elements of filmic storytelling (3)
Descriptive Montage, Montage of Attractions, Intellectual Montage

(Suggested) Reading:

David Bordwell. *The Cinema of Eisenstein*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993.

Ian Christie and Richard Taylor (eds.). *Eisenstein Rediscovered*. London/New York: Routledge, 1993.

Eisenstein, Sergei. *Writings, 1922-1934. Selected Works, Vol. 1*. Edited by Richard Taylor. London/New York: I. B. Tauris, 2010.

Mark Joyce. "The Soviet Montage Cinema of the 1920s." In: Jill Nelmes (ed.). *An Introduction to Film Studies*. Third edition. London/New York: Routledge, 2003, pp. 389-420.

Al LaValley and Barry P. Scherr (eds.). *Eisenstein at 100. A Reconsideration*. New Brunswick/New Jersey/London: Rutgers University Press, 2001.

Anne Nesbet. *Savage Junctures. Sergei Eisenstein and the Shape of Thinking*. London/New York: I. B. Tauris, 2003.

Week 6

Film semiotics: Signs and codes; denotation and connotation of signs (1)

(Suggested) Reading:

John Gibbs. *Mise-en-Scène. Film Style and Interpretation*. London/New York: Wallflower Press 2003.

Christian Metz. *Film Language. A Semiotics of the Cinema*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.

Week 7

Denotation and connotation of signs (2); paradigmatic and syntagmatic connotations

Screening report No. 2 – Deadline: Thursday, March 13, 2025, 2:00 pm

Week 8

Approaches to Film – Different modes of film interpretation (1)

Week 9

Approaches to Film – Different modes of film interpretation (2)

Week 10

Approaches to Film – Different modes of film interpretation (3)

Week 11

Approaches to Film – Different modes of film interpretation (4)

Spring Break: Monday, April 14 – Friday, April 18, 2025

Week 12

No class on Monday, April 21, 2025 (public holiday)!

Approaches to Film – Different modes of film interpretation (5)

Week 13

No class on Thursday, May 1, 2025 (public holiday)!

Approaches to Film – Different modes of film interpretation (6)

Week 14

Approaches to Film – Different modes of film interpretation (7)

Deadline for final essay (graduating students): Monday, May 5, 2025, midnight

Week 15: Completion Week

Deadline for final essay: Thursday, May 15, 2025, midnight

Film selection (depending on availability of films during the semester):

Tokyo Story (1953, Yasujirô Ozu)

8 ½ (1963, Federico Fellini)

Fata Morgana (1968/1971, Werner Herzog)

The Last Picture Show (1971, Peter Bogdanovich)

The Life and Times of Judge Roy Bean (1972, John Huston)

Slaughterhouse-Five (1972, George Roy Hill)

Themroc (1973, Claude Faraldo)

Days in Heaven (1978, Terrence Malick)

Excalibur (1981, John Boorman)

Koyaanisqatsi (1982, Godfrey Reggio)

And the Ship Sails On (1983, Federico Fellini)

Chocolat (1988, Claire Denis)

Lost Highway (1996, David Lynch)

Good Bye, Lenin! (2003, Wolfgang Becker)

Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter ... and Spring (2003, Kim Ki-Duk)

White Material (2009, Claire Denis)

The Tree of Life (2011, Terrence Malick)

The Congress (2013, Ari Folman)

mother! (2017, Darren Aronofsky)

Annihilation (2018, Alex Garland)

Everything Will Change (2021, Marten Persiel)

Poor Things (2023, Yorgos Lanthimos)

Literature:

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

- Carroll, Noël. *Mystifying Movies: Fads and Fallacies in Contemporary Film Theory*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988.
- 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.
- 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.
- Hockley, Luke. *Cinematic Projections. The Analytic Psychology of C .G. Jung and Film Theory*. Luton: University of Luton Press, 2000.
- Kaplan, E. Ann (ed.). *Psychoanalysis & Cinema*. New York/London: Routledge, 1990.
- 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. *The Imaginary Signifier. Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*. Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1982.
- Metz, Christian. *Film Language. A Semiotics of the Cinema*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.
- Mitry, Jean. *The Aesthetics and Psychology of the Cinema*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997.
- 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 reports (1000 words each): No. 1 – Week 3, Thursday, February 13, 2025, 2:00 pm / No. 2 – Week 7, Thursday, March 13, 2025, 2:00 pm
Final essay (3000-3500 words): Week 14, Monday, May 5, 2025, midnight (Graduating students only) / Week 15, Thursday, May 15, 2025, midnight (all other students)