Course content:

This course explores the history of world cinema through the study of narrative and non-narrative works from the silent-film era to the present day. The areas to be explored include the prehistory of film; so-called primitive cinema; early instances of fiction and nonfiction cinema; the development of editing and narrative techniques; Soviet montage theory; German Expressionism; the transition from silent to sound cinema; auteur theory; international movements such as Italian Neorealism and the French New Wave; avant-garde film; and minority cinema. Attention will be paid to economic and industrial as well as aesthetic and ideological aspects of film history. Filmmakers to be examined and discussed include Thomas Edison, Louis and Auguste Lumière, Georges Méliès, D.W. Griffith, Alice Guy-Blaché, Sergei Eisenstein, F.W. Murnau, Jean-Luc Godard, Kenji Mizoguchi, Agnès Varda, Stan Brakhage, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Spike Lee.

Required book – available at MICA bookstore
Wheeler Winston Dixon & Gwendolyn Audrey Foster, A Short History of Film (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2008)

The reading assignments given below are meant to guide you to certain pages in connection with specific topics covered in class. You are expected to familiarize yourself with the entire book over the course of the semester. Expect additional reading assignments to be given in class on a week-by-week basis.

Course schedule:

Part 1: Introduction

August 31
Week 1 – Origins of cinema
  Topics: The prehistory of film. Eadweard Muybridge and serial photography.
  Reading: Dixon and Foster, 1-11.
  Screening: Thomas A. Edison, short films, France, 1890s.
    Louis and Auguste Lumière, short films France, 1890s.

Part 2: Silent film

September 7
Week 2 – Editing and storytelling.
Reading: Dixon and Foster, 11-21.
Screening: Georges Méliès, A Trip to the Moon, France, 1902.
    Edwin S. Porter, The Great Train Robbery, USA, 1903.
    Alice Guy-Blaché, Falling Leaves, US, 1912.

September 14
Week 3 – Griffith and the first blockbuster
    Reading: Dixon and Foster, 22-49.
    Screening: Excerpts and short films by D.W. Griffith, Buster Keaton, and others.

September 21
Week 4 – Eisenstein and Soviet montage theory
    Reading: Dixon and Foster, 70-78.
    Screening: Sergei Eisenstein, Strike, USSR, 1925.

September 28
Week 5 – German Expressionism
    Topics: Germany in the Weimer period. Expressionist style. Film and fantasy. From Caligari to Hitler.
    Reading: Dixon and Foster, 78-85.
    Screening: Sunrise, F.W.Murnau, US, 1927

Part 3: Sound film

October 5
Week 6 – Sound cinema and classical film style
    Reading: Dixon and Foster, 89-136
    Screening: My Darling Clementine, John Ford, US, 1946

Part 4: International cinemas

October 12
Week 7 – Italian Neorealism
Topics: Italy in the post-World War II years. Realism versus “white telephone” films. Neorealist rules and guidelines. The decline of the Neorealist aesthetic.
Reading: Dixon and Foster, 160-161, 168-171.
Screening: Germany Year Zero, Roberto Rossellini, Italy, 1948
October 19
Week 8 – The French New Wave
   Reading: Dixon and Foster, 239-250.
   Screening: Band of Outsiders, Jean-Luc Godard, France, 1964.

October 26
Week 9 – Japanese cinema
   Reading: Dixon and Foster, 203-206.
   Screening: Street of Shame, Kenji Mizoguchi, Japan, 1956.

Part 4: Avant-garde film

November 2
Week 10 – Experimental cinema
   Reading: Dixon and Foster, 281-287.
   Screening: Short films by Andy Warhol, Joseph Cornell, Maya Deren, Bruce Conner, Stan Brakhage, and others

Part 5: Case study – Minority cinema
November 2
Week 11 – New German Cinema
   Reading: Dixon and Foster, 302-310.
   Screening: Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Fox and His Friends, West Germany, 1975.

November 9
Week 12 – Feminist cinema
   Topics: Cinema and sexism. Mulvey, the male gaze, and feminist film theory.
   Reading: Dixon and Foster, 228-229.

November 16
Week 13 – African-American cinema
   Reading: Dixon and Foster, 368-372.

Part 6: Case study – Apocalyptic cinema
November 30
Week 14 – History as tragedy
  Topics: Problem pictures, message movies, and entertainment.
  Reading: Dixon and Foster, 177-178.

December 7
Week 15 – History as farce
  Topics: The politics of the cold war. Fighting peace. Social satire.
  Reading: Dixon and Foster, 269-271.
  Screening: Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb, Stanley Kubrick, UK, 1964

Course requirements:

  Students must attend all class sessions, complete all reading assignments in a timely way, and participate actively in class discussions.
  In addition, each student must complete all assigned papers (see below) and keep a journal during the course, to be submitted on in class on December 7, the last day of the course. Guidelines for journals are given below.
  Final grades will not be calculated according to a rigid formula, but will take account of all work during the course – your weekly papers, your journal, and class participation.
  All written work must be typed.

Attendance and Participation:

  Attendance will be taken every week. It is your responsibility to get to class on time. Unexcused absences will result in a lower final grade. If you know you will be absent on a future date, let me know in advance. Absences will be excused only if you provide verification (documentation of a legitimate reason: illness, family emergency, etc.) as to why the class was missed. It is your responsibility to catch up with work missed due to absences, excused or otherwise. This includes all films that have been screened in class; if you miss a film, you must watch it on your own. (Get in touch with me if you aren’t certain how to obtain a film you need to see.) You should participate fully in class discussions, since part of your final grade will reflect class participation.
  No late assignments will be accepted unless the lateness has been excused, and this requires verification (documentation of a legitimate reason: illness, family emergency, etc.) as to why the due date was missed.

Journal rules and guidelines:

  Every student must keep a course journal throughout the semester, to be turned in at the final class. It must contain two to three pages on each week’s subject matter, demonstrating knowledge of the pertinent films and filmmakers, material covered in class discussions, and material covered in the reading assignments. You are encouraged to view additional relevant films outside class and include references to them in your journal entries. This is not a diary – it is an academic journal, meant to record what you
are learning and thinking with regard to the course on a weekly basis. You are welcome to include material suggested by reading and film viewing outside class, but the material must be relevant to this course.

Assignments for papers

Each paper should be one page long, give or take a few lines, and typed. Papers are due in the first class after the assignment is given.

Assignment for September 7, due September 14
Most critics regard the films of Georges Méliès and Alice Guy-Blaché as an artistic advancement over the works of such earlier filmmakers as the Thomas Edison studio and the Lumière brothers. Why do critics take this view?

Assignment for September 14, due September 21
D.W. Griffith’s epic The Birth of a Nation was made in 1915 but remains controversial today. Some feel its obvious racism is too ignorant and offensive to tolerate, while others feel its historical importance and high artistic quality make it worth viewing today. Based on what you have seen, which side do you take on this issue – the first, the second, or both, or neither? State and briefly explain your opinion.

Assignment for October 5, due October 12
Give a brief account of how and why world cinema made the transition from silent film to sound-film production in the late 1920s.

Assignment for October 19, due October 26
What is the auteur theory? Is it valid, in your opinion, or not?

Assignment for November 9, due November 16
Do you feel that Agnès Varda’s Vagabond reflects a feminine or feminist point of view in style and subject matter? Give specific evidence to support your answer.

Assignment for November 16, due November 30
Spike Lee intended Do the Right Thing as a hot-button political movie. Are its political ideas still relevant today? Why? Or why not?

Don’t forget to keep up with your course journal, 2-3 pages for each week’s work

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Additional information

Academic integrity:
Academic integrity -- the pursuit of scholarly activity free from fraud and deception -- is an educational objective of this institution. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication of information or citations, facilitating acts of
academic dishonesty by others, submitting work of another person or submitting work previously used without informing the instructor, and tampering with the academic work of other students.

A student charged with academic dishonesty will be given oral or written notice of the charge by the instructor. If students believe they have been falsely accused, they should seek redress through informal discussions with the instructor, department head, dean, or campus executive officer. If the instructor believes the infraction is sufficiently serious to warrant the referral of the case to the Office of Conduct Standards, or if the instructor decides to give a final grade of F in the course because of the infraction, the student and faculty will be afforded formal due-process procedures.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is using someone else’s words or ideas without acknowledgment. Submitting work containing plagiarism is grounds for failure of an assignment or failure of the course. Repeat offenses will be brought to the attention of the department chair. To be responsible when summarizing, paraphrasing, or quoting, include a citation like:

*** I read in yesterday’s New York Times that…
*** As Simone de Beauvoir famously asserts: “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (p. 34).
*** My roommate Pete noticed that…
*** If it’s common knowledge and your own idea, you do not need quotations. The yellow of the Lance Armstrong bracelet suggests bravery.

Document your citations in a bibliography or “works cited” page at the end of your paper and follow standard guidelines such as MLA or Chicago manual style. Familiarize yourself with these guidelines in Diana Hacker’s A Pocket Style Manual, and always check with your instructor before turning in questionable work. You may also check on these and other language-related issues with one of the helpful tutors in the Writing Center, (410) 225-2418. The Writing Center has copies of the Hacker manual as well.

ADA Compliance Statement

The LRC recommends the following statement for use on course syllabi:

Learning Resource Center ADA Compliance Statement Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the instructor privately to discuss specific needs. Please contact the Learning Resource Center at 410-225-2416, in Bunting 458, to establish eligibility and coordinate reasonable accommodations. For additional information please refer to: http://www.mica.edu/LRC

Health and Safety Compliance

From the Office of Environmental Health and Safety (EHS)
It is the responsibility of faculty and students to practice health and safety guidelines relevant to their individual activities, processes, and to review MICA's Emergency Action Plan and attend EHS training. It is each faculty member's responsibility to coordinate with the EHS Office to ensure that all risks associated with their class activities are identified and to assure that their respective classroom procedures mirror the EHS and Academic Department guidelines. Each of these policies and procedures must be followed by all students and faculty. Most importantly, faculty are to act in accordance with all safety compliance, state and federal, as employees of this college and are expected to act as examples of how to create art in a way to minimize risk, and reduce harm to themselves and the environment. Faculty must identify, within each art making process, and require personal protection equipment use, by each student for each class, when applicable. Students are required to purchase personal protection equipment appropriate to their major. Those students who do not have the proper personal protection equipment will not be permitted to attend class until safe measures and personal protection is in place.