Reality, Illusion, and the Moving Image

FLMM 355-TH .01
Dr. David Sterritt – djsterritt@gmail.com
Brown 320
Thursdays 1:00 - 3:45 p.m.
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Course description:

This course explores the shifting and elusive boundary between reality and illusion in the moving-image media, developing an understanding of film and video as complex cultural phenomena through discussion of key theoretical and critical approaches. We will identify ways in which diverse uses of the moving image construct emotionally compelling fantasies, set forth presumptive truths about ourselves and our world, and self-reflexively reveal their own nature as fluid, mutable, and inherently subjective simulacra. We will examine this multifaceted topic through reading selected texts, viewing a wide range of film and video materials, and participating in classroom lectures and discussions.

Course objectives:

• Students will sharpen their critical viewing skills through intensive study of written and cinematic texts that foreground the cultural and economic roles played by moving-image media in our society.
• Students will cultivate skills for distinguishing among ideological, commercial, and aesthetic functions of moving-image expression and for analyzing the various forms and relationships that such functions may take on in contemporary society.
• Students will learn to integrate different modes of understanding related to modern artistic phenomena – historical, sociological, psychological – and will acquire proficiency in bringing these to bear on moving-image art and artists.
• Students will further their ability to communicate ideas and opinions cogently and effectively in both written and spoken form.

Required books [available at MICA bookstore]

**Course schedule:**

**Part 1: The Reality of Illusion, the Illusion of Reality**

**Week 1 – August 30**
**Topic:** Truth, fakery, and us
**Reading:** Nora Sayre, “David Holzman’s Diary Spoofs Cinéma-Vérite” [URL below]
**Screening:** *David Holzman’s Diary* – Jim McBride, USA, 1967

**Week 2 – September 6**
**Topic:** Blurred boundaries, colliding categories
**Lecture and discussion:** Documentary, mock documentary, docudrama, the biopic, and “the powers of the false.”
**Reading:** Ian Conrich and Roy Smith, “Fool’s Gold: New Zealand’s Forgotten Silver, Myth and National Identity,” in Rhodes and Springer, pp. 230-236
Craig Hight and Jane Roscoe, “Forgotten Silver: A New Zealand Television Hoax and Its Audience,” in Rhodes and Springer, pp.171-186
**Screening:** *Forgotten Silver* – Peter Jackson and Costa Botes, New Zealand, 1995

**Week 3 – September 13**
**Topic:** Anthropology, reality, authenticity, and documentary
**Lecture and discussion:** Tracking down truth in ethnographic cinema.
**Reading:** Luis Buñuel, “Land Without Bread,” in Juhasz and Lerner, pp.
91-98
Jared F. Green, “This Reality Which Is Not One: Flaherty, Buñuel and the Irrealism of Documentary Cinema," in Rhodes and Springer, pp. 64-87
Screening: Nanook of the North – Robert J. Flaherty, USA/France, 1922
Las Hurdes – Luis Buñuel, Spain, 1933
By Night with Torch and Spear, Cornell, USA, ca. 1940s

Week 4 – September 20
Topic: Forgery
Lecture and Discussion: Scams, shams, trickery, and magic in art, literature, and cinema
Reading: Catherine L. Benamou, “The Artifice of Realism and the Lure of the 'Real' in Orson Welles’s Fake for Fake and Other T(r)eas(u)er(e)s,” in Juhasz and Lerner, pp. 143-170
Screening: F for Fake – Orson Welles, France/Iran/West Germany, 1973

Part 2: Truth and Illusion in the Hollywood Dream Factory

Week 5 – September 27
Topic: TV and the tyrannical gaze
Reading: Dusty Lavoie, “Escaping the Panopticon: Utopia, Hegemony, and Performance in Peter Weir's The Truman Show.” [will be distributed]
Screening: The Truman Show – Peter Weir, USA, 1998

Week 6: October 4
Topic: Life imitating art imitating life
Lecture and discussion: Satire. Wars as video games. Media as tools for deceit and deception in public policy.
Reading: Bert Cardullo, “Medium Cool.” [will be distributed]
Screening: Wag the Dog – Barry Levinson, USA, 1997
**Part 3: Radical Visions**

**Week 7 – October 11**  
**Topic:** Memory. Myth. Surrealism.  
**Lecture and discussion:** The avant-garde. Nonnarrative cinema. Reaching for the limits of moving-image media.  
**Reading:** Ed Halter, “A Hollis Frampton Odyssey: Nostalgia for an Age Yet to Come.” [URL below]  
Adrian Danks, “Shooting the President: Bruce Conner’s Report.” [URL below]  
**Screening:** *(nostalgia)* – Hollis Frampton, USA, 1971  
*Night Music* – Stan Brakhage, USA (1986)  
*The Dante Quartet* – Stan Brakhage, USA, 1987  
*Murder Psalm* – Stan Brakhage, USA, 1980  
*Report* – Bruce Conner, USA, 1967  
*Take the 5:10 to Dreamland* – Bruce Conner, USA, 1976  
*Valse Triste* – Bruce Conner, USA, 1977  
*Mongoloid* – Bruce Conner, USA, 1978  
*America Is Waiting* – Bruce Conner, USA, 1981

**Week 8 – October 18**  
**Topic:** Movie = dream, dream = movie  
**Lecture and discussion:** Narrative film and the unconscious.  
**Reading:** David Sterritt, “3 Women: Dream Project.” [URL below]  
**Screening:** *3 Women* – Robert Altman, USA, 1977

**Part 4: Politics and Propaganda**

**Week 9 – October 25**  
**Topic:** Hidden persuaders  
**Lecture and discussion:** Educational, instructional, and industrial documentaries as subliminal sales pitches  
**Reading:** Donald Levin, “Reconstructing Reality: The Industrial Film as Faux Documentary,” in Rhodes and Springer, pp. 88-101  
**Screening:** *All in One* – Jam Handy Organization, 1938  
*More Power to You* – Jam Handy Organization, ca. 1930s  
*A Case of Spring Fever* – Jam Handy Organization, 1940
Week 10 – November 1
Topic: Documentary, pulp fiction, and the terrors of the cold-war years
Lecture and discussion: Comrades! Learn how a lame-brained Hollywood melodrama got nominated for the Academy Award as best documentary of 1951!
Reading: Reynold Humphries, “‘Documenting’ Communist Subversion: The Case of I Was a Communist for the F.B.I. (1951),” in Rhodes and Springer pp. 102-123
Listening: An episode of I Was a Communist for the F.B.I. – Syndicated Radio Program, 1952-1953
Screening: I Was a Communist for the F.B.I. – Gordon Douglas, USA, 1951

Part 4: Woody Allen, Comedy, and Reflexive Cinema

Week 11 – November 8
Topic: Mock documentary
Lecture and discussion: Celebrating and subverting documentary cinema.
Reading: Gerd Bayer, “Artifice and Artificiality in Mockumentaries,” in Rhodes and Springer, pp. 164-178
Robert Sickels, “‘It Ain’t the Movies! It’s Real Life!’ Cinematic Alchemy in Woody Allen’s ‘Woody Allen’s D(M)oc(k)umentary Oeuvre,” in Rhodes and Springer, pp. 179-190
Screening: Take the Money and Run – Woody Allen, USA, 1969

Week 12 – November 15
Topic: Historical pastiche
Reading: Harry Karlinsky, “Zelig: Woody Allen's classic film continues to impact the world of psychiatry.” [URL below]
Screening: *Zelig* – Woody Allen, USA, 1983

*Novermber 22 – No class*

**Part 5: Reality, Illusion, and the Case of Charlie Kaufman**

**Week 13 – November 29**
*Topic: Identity.*

**Lecture and discussion:** Film and acting. Thought experiments. Selves and others. Confusing the brain, the mind, and the senses. The celebrity as permeable vessel. Impossibility as entertainment.


**Screening:** *Being John Malkovich* – Spike Jonze, USA, 1999

**Week 14 – December 6**
*Topic: Filmmaking*

**Lecture and discussion:** Film and literature. The verbal, the visual, and the movies. Themes and variations. The perils and pitfalls of language.


**Screening:** *Adaptation* – Spike Jonze, USA, 2002

**Week 15 – December 13**
*Topic: Existence*

**Lecture and discussion:** Film and theater. Playing a role, being a role. What is illusion? What is reality? What does it mean to be human?


URLs for reading assignments available online:

http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9903E0DA1239E73AB C4F53DFB4678388669EDE


Adrian Danks, “Shooting the President: Bruce Conner’s *Report.*” *Senses of Cinema* 50 (14 April 2009)

http://www.criterion.com/current/posts/319-3-women-dream-project

Harry Karlinsky, “Zelig: Woody Allen’s classic film continues to impact the world of psychiatry.” *Canadian Psychiatry Aujourd’hui* vol. 3, no. 5 (October 2007)
http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:UCQI3Qx_BX YJ:publications.cpa-apc.org/browse/documents/265+%22Zelig+Syndrome%22+%22%22Zelig-like+syndrome%22&cd=1&hl=en

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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 keep a journal during the course, comprising two to three pages per week. This is the equivalent of a short paper each week, in which you respond to that week’s course material: the reading, the film, the lecture, and the class discussion. Journals must be printed by computer, not written by hand. Additional rules and guidelines for the journal are given below.

Grading schedule: Journals are due in two installments. Entries for the first seven weeks must be submitted on October 18. They will be returned to you on October 27 with a midterm grade. Entries for the remaining weeks are due in class on December 13. No journal entry is required for our last class on December 14, since journals are due on that day.

Attendance and Participation:

Attendance will be taken. It is your responsibility to get to class on time. Unexcused absences or excessive lateness 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. You must catch up with work missed due to absences, excused or otherwise. This includes all films that have been screened in class; if you miss something, you must watch it on your own. (All film material for this course is on reserve in the Media Resources Collection for re-viewing or catching up.) You should participate fully in class discussions, since part of your final grade will reflect class participation.

Journals must be submitted on the dates given above unless a later date is arranged because of special circumstances. Handing in a journal late because of unforeseen circumstances requires verification (documentation of a legitimate reason: illness, family emergency, etc.) as to why the due date was missed.

Journal rules and guidelines:

The journal must contain two to three pages on each week’s subject matter, demonstrating knowledge of the pertinent film material, topics considered in class discussions, and subjects 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 such material must be relevant to this course.
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

Classroom: Health and Safety Guidelines

Health and Safety
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.

Classroom: ADA Compliance

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

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