History of Film

AH 390-.01  Fall 2014  
Tuesdays 1-3:45 pm / Brown 320  
Dr. David Sterritt  
djsterritt@gmail.com  
GTI: Nicholena Moon (nmoon@mica.edu)

Note from David: I can be reached by e-mail only at the gmail address given above.  
Do not use my MICA e-mail address! Thanks!

Course description:  
This course offers an overview of film history. Among the topics covered are the prehistory of cinema in the nineteenth century; the early emergence of narrative and documentary forms; the growth of silent film as a popular art; the influence of Soviet montage theory and German expressionism; the conversion to sound cinema; the rise of such movements as the French New Wave, the American avant-garde, and a revitalized Asian cinema; and such contemporary trends as indie cinema, digital filmmaking, and computer animation. Prerequisite: AH 201.

Course Objectives:  
• Students will sharpen their critical skills through intensive study of historically important films and careful reading of books and essays on the history and theory of international cinema.  
• Students will cultivate skills for discerning major themes, ideas, and tropes of modern visual and verbal expression through the analysis of paradigmatic moving-image works and discussion of related historical, theoretical, and critical texts.  
• 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 cinematic and critical texts.  
• 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]:


Assignments not included in the above-listed books are available via the URLs given below and also via links for this course on Moodle, and most will also be e-mailed directly to all students.  
• Note that additional reading may be assigned during the semester.
Course schedule:

**Part 1: Beginnings – Silent Cinema**

**Week 1 – September 2**
Guy-Blaché blazes a trail for women.
Reading: Dixon & Foster, pp. 1-21
Screening: *The Kiss* - William Heise, USA, 1896
*Serpentine Dances* - William Heise, USA, 1895
*Sandow (The Strong Man)* - William K.L. Dickson and William Heise, USA, 1896
*Employees Leaving the Lumière Factory aka La Sortie des usines Lumière* – Louis Lumière, France, 1895
*Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat aka L’Arrivée d’un train à La Ciotat* – Louis Lumière, France, 1896
*Repas de bébé aka Baby’s Dinner* - Louis Lumière, France, 1895
*The Sprinkler Sprinkled aka L’Arroseur arosé* - Louis Lumière, France, 1895
*A Trip to the Moon aka Le Voyage dans la lune* – Georges Méliès, France, 1902
*The Race for the Sausage aka La Course à la saucisse* – Alice Guy, France, 1907
*Le Récit du colonel aka The Colonel’s Account* Louis Feuillade, France, 1907

**Week 2 – September 9**
Topic: The emergence of the feature film.
Lecture and discussion: Griffith and silent storytelling. Eisenstein, the Kuleshov effect, and Soviet montage theory.
Reading: Dixon & Foster, pp. 22-52, 70-78
Screening: *Lonesome* – Paul Fejos, USA, 1928

**Week 3 – September 16**
Topic: French impressionism, German expressionism
Reading: Dixon & Foster, 53-70, 78-85
Screening: *The Smiling Madame Beudet aka La Souriante Madame Beudet* – Germaine Dulac, France, 1922
*Vampyr* – Carl Th. Dreyer, Germany/ France, 1932

---

**Part 2 – Genres and auteurs in American cinema**
**Week 4 – September 23**
Topic: Talking pictures! Hollywood! Chills and thrills!
Lecture and discussion: The transition from silents to talkies. The studio system. The classical narrative style.
Reading: Dixon & Foster, pp. 89-136
Screening: *Shanghai Express* – Josef von Sternberg, USA, 1932

**Week 5 – September 30**
Topic: The western
Lecture and discussion: American history, American myth, American film.
Reading: Buscombe, *Stagecoach*
Screening: *Stagecoach* – John Ford, USA, 1939

**Week 6 – October 7**
Topic: Film noir
Lecture and discussion: Hollywood in the 1950s. Gender issues. Women on screen, behind the camera, and occasionally both.
Reading: Hastie, *The Bigamist*
Dixon & Foster, pp. 171-202
Screening: *The Bigamist* – Ida Lupino, USA, 1953

**Part 3 – Movements and styles in international cinema**

**Week 7 – October 14**  
*Journal entries for first six classes due*
Topic: Italian neorealism
Lecture and discussion: The quest for reality in fiction film. The neorealist aesthetic in historical, geographical, and political context.
Reading: Dixon & Foster, pp. 159-161, 168-171
T.M.P., "*Shoe-Shine*, Italian Film Study of Homeless Children, Bill at Avenue Playhouse – Smordoni and Interlenghi Take Leads.” *The New York Times*  
(27 August 1947)  
Screening: *Shoeshine* aka *Sciuscià* – Vittorio De Sica, Italy, 1946

*October 21 – Fall Break – No Class*

**Week 8 – October 28**
Topic: The French New Wave and the Left Bank Group
Lecture and discussion: La Nouvelle Vague and new directions in cinematic style. Auteur theory.
Reading: Dixon & Foster, 187-195, 239-255
Adrian Martin, *Cleo from 5 to 7: Passionate Time.” Current* (21 January 2008)  
http://www.criterion.com/current/posts/499-cleo-from-5-to-7-passionate-time
Screening: *Cleo from 5 to 7* aka *Cléo de 5 à 7* – Agnès Varda, France/Italy,
Week 9 – November 4
Topic: The New German Cinema
Lecture and discussion: Das Neue Kino challenges Germany’s historical memory.
Reading: Dixon & Foster, 302-310
Screening: Young Torless aka Der junge Törless – Volker Schlöndorff, West Germany/France, 1966

Week 10 – November 11
Topic: The British New Wave
Reading: Dixon & Foster, 264-271
Screening: Momma Don’t Allow – Karel Reisz, Tony Richardson; UK, 1956
  The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner – Tony Richardson, UK, 1962

Week 11 – November 18
Topic: Asian cinema
Lecture and discussion: After the Fifth Generation in China, a revitalized Asian cinema charts new directions in cinematic style. Art film meets action film in Hong Kong.
Reading: Dixon & Foster, 336-342
Screening: The Grandmaster aka Yi dai zong shi – Wong Kar-wai, Hong Kong/China 2013

Part 4 – Indie Cinema

Week 12 – November 25
Topic: American minority cinema
Lecture and discussion: African-American film. A movie with a “revolutionary” message refuses to sell out and raises a ruckus.
Reading: Dixon & Foster, 369-372
  Steven Schneider, “Sweet Sweetback’s Baadasssss Song.” Film Reference http://www.filmreference.com/Films-Str-Th/Sweet-Sweetbacks-Baadasssss-Song.html
Screening: Sweet Sweetback’s Baadasssss Song – Melvin Van Peebles, USA, 1971
**Week 13 – December 2**
Topic: Pros and cons of independent filmmaking.
Lecture and discussion: American film and the end of the censorship system.
Reading: Taubin, *Taxi Driver*
   Dixon & Foster, 351-369
Screening: *Taxi Driver* – Martin Scorsese, USA, 1976

---

**Part 5 – Nonnarrative Cinema**

**Week 14 – December 9**
Topic: Documentary
Lecture and discussion: Nonfiction film. Traditional documentary, poetic documentary, and cinéma-vérité or direct cinema.
Reading: Tyree, *Salesman*
   Dixon & Foster, 279-281
Screening: *Salesman* – Albert Maysles, David Maysles, Charlotte Zwerin;
   USA, 1968

**Week 15 – December 16**
Topic: Avant-Garde Cinema
Lecture and discussion: Experimental films and radical styles.
Reading: Dixon & Foster, 283-287
Screening: *Mothlight* – Stan Brakhage, USA, 1963
   *Window Water Baby Moving* – Stan Brakhage, USA, 1959
   *Allures* – Jordan Belson, USA, 1961
   *A Study in Choreography for Camera* – Maya Deren and Talley Beatty, USA, 1943
   *Mario Banana (No. 1)* – Andy Warhol, USA, 1964
   *The Off-Handed Jape…& How to Pull It Off* – Robert Nelson, William T. Wiley; USA, 1967
   *The White Rose* – Bruce Conner, USA, 1967
   *Mongoloid* – Bruce Conner, USA, 1967
   *America Is Waiting* – Bruce Conner, USA, 1981
   *Take the 5:10 to Dreamland* – Bruce Conner, USA, 1976
   *Valse Triste* – Bruce Conner, USA, 1977
   *His Eye Is on the Sparrow* – Bruce Conner, USA, 2006
   *Easter Morning* – Bruce Conner, USA, 2008

**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 one to two 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.

Due dates: **Journals are due in two installments. Entries for the first six weeks must be submitted on October 14.** They will be returned to you on October 28 with a midterm grade. **Entries for the remaining weeks are due in class on December 16.** No journal entry is required for December 16, 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 one to two 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 and encouraged to include material suggested by reading and film viewing outside class, but such material must be relevant to this course.

```
******
Additional Information:

Americans with Disabilities Act
Any student who may need an accommodation based on the potential impact of a disability should contact the Learning Resource Center at 410-225-2416, in Bunting 458, to establish eligibility and coordinate reasonable accommodations.

Environmental Health and Safety (EHS)
It is the responsibility of faculty and students to follow 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 and require appropriate personal protective equipment for each art making process, for each student, in all of their classes, when applicable. Students are required to purchase personal protection equipment appropriate for 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 are in place.

**Plagiarism**
Each discipline within the arts has specific and appropriate means for students to cite or acknowledge sources and the ideas and material of others used in their own work. Students have the responsibility to become familiar with such processes and to carefully follow their use in developing original work.

**Policy**
MICA will not tolerate plagiarism, which is defined as claiming authorship of, or using someone else's ideas or work without proper acknowledgment. Without proper attribution, a student may NOT replicate another's work, paraphrase another's ideas, or appropriate images in a manner that violates the specific rules against plagiarism in the student's department. In addition, students may not submit the same work for credit in more than one course without the explicit approval of the all of the instructors of the courses involved.

**Consequences**
When an instructor has evidence that a student has plagiarized work submitted for course credit, the instructor will confront the student and impose penalties that may include failing the course. In the case of a serious violation or repeated infractions from the same student, the instructor will report the infractions to the department chair. Depending on the circumstances of the case, the department chair may then report the student to the Office of Academic Affairs, which may choose to impose further penalties, including suspension or expulsion.