History of Film

AH 390-.01  Fall 2015
Tuesdays 1-3:45 pm / Film Center 208
Dr. David Sterritt
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• 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 because your message will not be seen! 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, German expressionism, and French impressionism; the conversion to sound cinema; the rise of such movements as Italian neorealism, 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 book [available at MICA bookstore and elsewhere]:


Assignments not included in the required book are available on moodle, and most can also be accessed through the URLs listed under the course schedule below.

• Note that additional reading may be assigned during the semester.

Course schedule:

Part 1: Beginnings – Silent Cinema
**Week 1 – September 1**

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 8**

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
David Bordwell, “Suspense (1913)”
Screening: *The Lonely Villa* – D.W. Griffith, USA, 1909 (8m)
The *Mothering Heart* – D.W. Griffith, USA, 1913 (23m)
The *Battle at Elderbrush Gulch* – D.W. Griffith, USA, 1914 (29m)
Excerpt (Odessa Steps Sequence) from *Battleship Potemkin aka Bronenosets Potemkin* – S.M. Eisenstein, USSR, 1925
*Suspense* – Phillips Smalley & Lois Weber, USA, 1913

**Week 3 – September 15**

Topic: French impressionism, German expressionism
Reading: Dixon & Foster, 53-66, 78-85
Screening: *The Smiling Madame Beudet aka La Souriante Madame Beudet* – Germaine Dulac, France, 1923
*Faust aka Faust: Eine deutsche Volkssage* – F.W. Murnau, Germany, 1926
Part 2 – Periods, genres, and issues in American cinema

Week 4 – September 22
Topic: Talking pictures! Hollywood! Comedy, drama, and life’s vast parade!
Lecture and discussion: The transition from silents to talkies. The studio system. The classical narrative style. American film censorship before and after the Production Code.
Reading: Dixon & Foster, pp. 89-134
Screening: Merrily We Go to Hell – Dorothy Arzner, USA, 1932

Week 5 – September 29
Topic: Film noir
Reading: Dixon & Foster, pp. 134-136, 170-182
Screening: The Lost Weekend – Billy Wilder, USA, 1945

Week 6 – October 6
Topic: The western
Lecture and discussion: Hollywood in the 1950s. Auteur theory. Genre theory. Gender issues. Feminism on the frontier?
Reading: Dixon & Foster, pp. 187-202
Screening: The Furies – Anthony Mann, USA, 1950

Week 7 – October 13
Topic: Stars and spectacle
Lecture and discussion: Celebrities. Competing with television. Hollywood goes big!
Reading: Dixon & Foster, pp. 183-187
   Daniel Bates, “Charade.” Film Quarterly vol. 17 no. 3 (Spring 1964), pp. 61-62
Screening: Charade – Stanley Donen, USA, 1963

[October 20 – Fall Break – No Class]

Week 8 – October 27  [Journal entries Week 1 through Week 7 due]
Topic: Minority cinema
Lecture and discussion: African-Americans in a white-dominated industry. Cracking the
color barrier.

Reading: Dixon & Foster, pp. 369-373
Thomas Doherty and Jacquie Jones, “Two Takes on Boyz n the Hood.” Cineaste vol. 18 no. 4 (1991), pp. 16-19
Screening: Boyz n the Hood – John Singleton, USA, 1991

Part 3 – Movements and styles in international cinema

Week 9 – November 3
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, 159-161, 168-171
Screening: I vitelloni aka The Young and the Passionate – Federico Fellini, Italy/France, 1953

Week 10 – November 10
Topic: The British New Wave
Reading: Dixon & Foster, 264-269
Screening: A Taste of Honey – Tony Richardson, UK, 1961

Week 11 – November 17
Topic: The French New Wave and the Left Bank Group
Lecture and discussion: La Nouvelle Vague and new directions in cinematic style.
Reading: Dixon & Foster, 239-255
Screening: Vagabond aka Sans toit ni loi – Agnès Varda, France, 1985

Week 12 – November 24
Topic: Asian cinema
Lecture and discussion: Giving a bold new look to a time-tested genre. Japanese studios break new ground. Suzuki gets fired for breaking too much new ground!
Reading: Dixon & Foster, 85-87, 161-162, 203-206, 290-291, 339-341
Manohla Dargis, “Tokyo Drifter.” Current (22 February 1999)
Screening: Tokyo Drifter aka Tôkyô nagaremono – Seijun Suzuki, Japan, 1966

Week 13 – December 1
Topic: The developing world
Lecture and discussion: Developments in cinema far from the major film centers.
Reading: Dixon & Foster, 332-336

Screening: *Timbuktu* – Abderrahmane Sissako, France/Mauritania, 2014

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**Part 4 – Nonnarrative Cinema**

**Week 14 – December 8**

Topic: Documentary

Lecture and discussion: Nonfiction film. Traditional documentary, poetic documentary, and cinéma-vérité or direct cinema.

Reading: Dixon & Foster, 279-281

Stuart Klawans, “The Plague Years.” *The Nation* (12 September 2012)


Screening: *How to Survive a Plague* – David France, USA, 2012

**Week 15 – December 15** [Journal entries for Week 8 through Week 14 due]

Topic: Avant-Garde Cinema

Lecture and discussion: Experimental films and radical styles.

Reading: Dixon & Foster, 283-287

Calvin Tomkins, “Experimental People.” *The New Yorker* (24 March 2014)


Screening: *Item Falls* – Ryan Trecartin, USA, 2013

*Immer zu* – Janie Geiser, USA, 1997

*Lost Motion* – Janie Geiser, USA, 1999

*Altair* – Lewis Klahr, USA, 1995

*Lulu* – Lewis Klahr, USA, 1996

*Pony Glass* Lewis Klahr, USA, 1998

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Reading assignments outside the Dixon & Foster book are on moodle. Most are also available via the URLs below:

- **Bordwell, “Suspense”**
  http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2008/08/29/lucky-13/

- **Crowther, “The Lost Weekend”**
  http://www.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9402E6DA163FE533A25750C0A9649D946493D6CF

- **Wood, “The Furies”**

- **Crowther, “Audrey Hepburn and Grant”**
  http://www.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9A0DE6DA1E30EF3BBC4E53DFB4678388679ED

- **Ratner, “Knocking on Modernity’s Door”**
  http://brightlightsfilm.com/knocking-on-modernitys-door-fellinis-i-vitello/#.VeNNVlJW0kM

- **Savage, “A Taste of Honey”**

- **Willis, “Vagabond”**  

- **Dargis, “Tokyo Drifter”**  
  https://www.criterion.com/current/posts/54-tokyo-drifter

- **Hampton, “Tokyo Drifter”**  
  https://www.criterion.com/current/posts/54-tokyo-drifter

- **Leigh, “Timbuktu’s director”**  

- **Klawans, “The Plague Years”**  
  http://www.thenation.com/article/plague-years/

- **Bruni, “The Living After the Dying”**  
  http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/18/opinion/sunday/bruni-the-aids-warriors-legacy.html?_r=1

- **Tomkins, “Experimental People”**  
  http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/03/24/experimental-people

- **Langley, “The Real Internet Is Inside You”**  
  http://www.thewhirereview.org/art/ryan-trecartin-the-real-internet-is-inside-you/

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**Course requirements:**

Students must attend all class sessions, complete all reading assignments in a timely way, and participate 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. You don’t have to cover all of those areas every week; just focus on what you find most interesting. Journals must be printed by computer, not written by hand.

The idea of the journal is to show that you are engaging with each week’s subject matter, demonstrating knowledge of the pertinent film material and topics considered in class discussions and reading assignments. This is not a diary and it is not class notes – 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.

Due dates: Journals are due in two installments. Entries for the first seven weeks must be submitted on **October 27**. Entries for the remaining weeks are due in class on **December 15**. No journal entry is required for December 15, since journals are due on that day.

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**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 available in
the Decker Library for re-viewing or catching up.) You should participate 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.

**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.