

CTCS 500 – **Seminar in Film Theory**
Fall 2013
Th: 2-5:50p (SCA 310)

Nitin Govil
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(o) Th: 12-1:45p (SCA 317)

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Description

This course is a graduate introduction to classical and contemporary film theory, focusing on form, narrative, experimentation, and cultural transformation. We will work through the major traditions that have informed film theory from across the arts, humanities, and social sciences. Some of the themes to be considered include the relationship between film and the other arts, film as document and archive, the role of technology, spectatorship as ideology and apparatus, affect and embodiment, subjectivity and difference, and film as spectacle, attraction, and magic.

The present and historical condition of “theory” as form and practice will frame our inquiry. The emphasis will be on developing the ability to analyze and construct theoretical arguments. As participants in a graduate seminar, you are obliged to come prepared to every session, having read and assimilated the assigned material prior to our discussions.

Requirements

One 10-minute in-class presentation (10%)
Six short critical responses (300-500 words), posted to Blackboard (6x5%=30%)
One position paper (3000 words) - “My Film Theory” (40%)
Active class participation/discussion (20%)

Required Texts

1. Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener, *Film Theory: An Introduction Through the Senses*. New York: Routledge, 2010 [FT on syllabus]
2. Rachel Moore, *Savage Theory: Cinema as Modern Magic*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2000
3. D.N. Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007
4. All other material will be placed on the course Blackboard site. Please print out hard copies of each article and bring them to the session for which they are assigned.

Course Schedule

Session 1 – August 29

Why Theory?

Read: 1. David Weddle, "Lights, Camera, Action. Marxism, Semiotics, Narratology: Film School Isn't What it Used to Be, One Father Discovers." *Los Angeles Times Magazine*, July 13, 2003.

2. Michael Warner, "Queer and Then?" *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 1, 2012.

See: *The Specialist: Portrait of a Modern Criminal* (Eyal Sivan, 1999) 128m

Session 2 – September 5

What is Film Theory?

Read: 1. FT, Introduction

2. Francesco Casetti, *Theories of Cinema, 1945-1995*. Trans., Francesca Chiostrì and Elizabeth Gard Bartolini-Salimbeni, with Thomas Kelso. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999. 7-20.

3. D.N. Rodowick, "An Elegy for Theory." *October* 122 (Fall 2007): 91-109.

4. Rey Chow, *Sentimental Fabulations, Contemporary Chinese Films: Attachment in the Age of Global Visibility*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007. 1-17; Reprinted in Paul Bowman, ed., *The Rey Chow Reader*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010: 180-195.

See: *Night of the Living Dead* (George Romero, 1968) 95m

Session 3 – September 12

Framing Theory

Read: 1. FT, Chapter 1

2. Siegfried Kracauer, "Basic Concepts." *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1960. 27-40.

3. Rudolf Arnheim, "Film and Reality." *Film as Art*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 1957. 8-34.

4. Alison Griffiths, "Spectacle and Immersion in the Nineteenth-Century Panorama." *Shivers Down Your Spine: Cinema, Museums, & the Immersive View*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2008. 37-78; 293-300.

See: *Tales of Hoffman* (Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, 1951) 128m

Study in Choreography for Camera (Maya Deren, 1945) 3m

Session 4 – September 19

Narrating Theory – Sign and System

Read: 1. FT, Chapter 2

2. Andre Bazin, "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema." In Hugh Gray, trans., *What is Cinema? Volume 1*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967. 23-40.
3. Fatimah Tobing Rony, "Introduction – The Third Eye." *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1996. 2-17.
4. Jane Gaines, "White Privilege and Looking Relations: Race and Gender in Feminist Film Theory." *Cultural Critique* 4 (Autumn 1986)

See: *The True Meaning of Pictures: Shelby Lee Adams' Appalachia* (Jennifer Baichwal, 2003) 75m

Session 5 – September 26

Reflecting Theory

Read: 1. FT, Chapter 3

2. Anne Friedberg, "The Screen." *The Virtual Window: From Alberti to Microsoft*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006. 150-180.
3. Caetlin Benson-Allot, "Introduction: Opening Up to Home Video." *Killer Tapes and Shattered Screens: Video Spectatorship From VHS to File Sharing*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013. 1-24.
4. Richard Dyer, "The Light of the World." *White: Essays on Race and Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1997.

See: *Zidane: A 21st Century Portrait* (Douglas Gordon and Philippe Parreno, 2006) 91m

Session 6 – October 3

Looking Theory

Read: 1. FT, Chapter 6

2. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Screen* 16.3 (Autumn 1975): 6-18.
3. bell hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators." *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. Boston: South End Press, 1992. 115-131.
4. Jacques Rancière, "The Emancipated Spectator." *The Emancipated Spectator*. Gregory Elliot, trans. New York: Verso, 2009. 1-23.

See: *Red Road* (Andrea Arnold, 2006) 113m

Un Chant D'Amour (Jean Genet, 1950) 25m

Session 7 – October 10

Savaging Theory

Read: Rachel Moore, *Savage Theory*

See: *(nostalgia)* (Hollis Frampton, 1971) 38m
L'Argent (Robert Bresson, 1983) 83m

NO CLASS – October 17

October 18 and 19 (Friday and Saturday)

Attend *Visions and Voices: Indian Film Centennial, 1913-2013*

Screenings include: *Ship of Theseus* (2012), *Celluloid Man* (2012) and *Besharam* (2013)

Schedule and Reservations: <http://web-app.usc.edu/ws/eo2/calendar/113/event/903767>

Session 8 – October 24

Touching Theory

Read: 1. FT, Chapter 5

2. Vivian Sobchak, from *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience*

3. Laura Marks, from *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*

4. Steven Shaviro, from *The Cinematic Body*

See: *Hunger* (Steve McQueen, 2008) 90m

Session 9 – October 31

Hearing Theory

Read: 1. FT, Chapter 6

2. Jonathan Sterne, "Format Theory," *MP3: The Meaning of a Format*. Duke, 2012. 1-31.

3. Kaja Silverman, from *The Acoustic Mirror*

4. Michel Chion, from *Audio-Vision*

See: *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* (Tsai Ming-Liang, 2003) 82m

Session 10 – November 7

Thinking Theory

Read: 1. FT, Chapter 7

2. Hugo Munsterberg, from *The Photoplay*

3. Gilles Deleuze, "Thought and Cinema." In *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*; AND "The Brain is the Screen." In Gregory Flaxman, ed., *The Brain is the Screen: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Cinema*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000. 365-373.

4. David Bordwell, "A Case for Cognitivism." *Iris* 9 (Spring 1989): 11-40.

See: TBA

Session 11 – November 14

After Film, Theory?

Read: 1. FT, Conclusion

2. D.N. Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film*

See: *Russian Ark* (Alexander Sokurov, 2002) 96m

Session 12 – November 21

Theory as Manifesto

Read: Dziga Vertov, "Kinoks: A Revolution (From an Appeal at the Beginning of 1922)"

Jack Smith, "The Perfect Filmic Appositiveness of Maria Montez" (1962)

Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, "Towards a Third Cinema" (1969)

Claire Johnston, *Notes on Women's Cinema* (1975)

Naimy Manifesto of African Filmmakers (1982)

Trinh T. Minh-ha, with Pratibha Parmar, "Between Theory and Poetry" (1990)

See: *Flaming Creatures* (Jack Smith, 1963) 43m

****NO CLASS ON NOVEMBER 28 (Thanksgiving)****

Session 13 – December 5

Your Film Theory

In-Class Workshop

Read: You

See: Us