

Introduction to Media Theory

FILM 120

Dr. James Lyons

Teaching Assistants :

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Course Description:

As an introductory study of film/media theory, this course is designed to offer you an in-depth foundation in theory through an examination of historically significant writings that analyze media/mediums and their social functions and effects. The course is primarily organized thematically, with a focus on particular theorists, schools of thought, the forums in which many key writings have appeared, and relations between theory and practice. Through this reading list, we will consider how ideas have developed and transformed, often in dialogue with one another. Our purpose will be to understand the arguments at stake in these works and to create our own dialogue with these theories.

The weekly readings constitute the central subject matter of the course. Please try to complete them by the first lecture (Monday) of every week. The essays can be difficult and lengthy. Plan to spend several hours each week reading them carefully so that you come to class informed about key issues and prepared to write and speak about them.

Sections: Sections will offer students the opportunity to develop her/his/their understanding of the readings and explore them through conversation and other various activities.

A & B: Fridays 8:00am-10:15am in Communications 117 - Alessia

C & D: Fridays 10:30am-12:45pm in Communications 117 - Boris

Requirements

Attendance and Participation:

This class requires your regular attendance and invested participation in class activities and scholarly investigation into social theories and topics. Please arrive having completed the scheduled readings and prepared to participate in class activities and discussions— noting questions or reactions to the material, and making connections between concepts in readings, videos, and your own life. Late arrival will disrupt the flow of class and compromise the collaborative nature of the work.

To reiterate: You are expected to prepare thoroughly for each class and section. Preparation includes any outside readings or viewings, completing assignments prior to class and being ready to discuss them.

We take attendance each day. There are only 18 lecture/screening days. You can miss one class OR section, no questions asked. After that, points are deducted from your attendance grade. The grading scale is as follows:

17-18 classes: A
16 classes: A-
15 classes: B
14 classes: C
13 classes: D
12 classes and below: F

Assignments

Class Attendance and Participation (20%)
In Class Responses (30%)
In Class Multiple Choice Mid Term (25%)
Final Essay (25%)

Grade Scale:
A+: 98-100
A: 93-97.9
A-: 90-93.9
B+: 87-89.9
B: 83-86.9
B-: 80-82.9
C+: 77-79.9
C: 73-76.9
C-: 70-72.0
D: 60-69.9
F: <60

Your final grade will be arrived at by evaluating the following: 1) how you performed in your section; 2) the overall quality of your work; and 3) whether you missed any responses; 4) whether your work was turned in on time; and, 5) whether you were respectful of others in class and contributed to a productive environment generally.

The midterm will be multiple choice, closed-book, and closed-note. You must bring a PINK scantron sheet with you on the date of the midterm.

The assignment for the Final Essay will be handed out a couple of weeks after the quarter begins and discussed in section at least two weeks prior to the deadline. Papers will be a minimum of the equivalent of 8 to 10 typed double-spaced pages.

Late Work

This is a large class. Because of the size, we must require all work be completed on deadline. This means that: Responses cannot be made up for reasons other than a demonstrated medical emergency. No exceptions will be made. Any response or assignment as well as the final essay must be turned in on time. Late work will have points deducted.

Discussion Sections: You must attend only the discussion section that you have enrolled in.

Your Teaching Assistants do not hold office hours because they are available to you during your sections every week, and also attend the weekly lectures. Your TAs have a set number of hours per week that they devote to working as TAs and we all must respect the limits on TA work hours. In order to respect their working hours, be thoughtful when emailing them, and know you can always email me at jaclyons@ucsc.edu.

Accommodations

All students need accommodations, and those accommodations vary from student to student. If you have an accommodation letter, please send it to me as soon as possible. I would also like to meet in person, to ensure that the class meets your needs. For more information: contact the Disability Resource Center 831-459-2089.

My Office Hours

Jamie Lyons: Wednesday 12PM – 1PM or by appointment
McHenry Library Cafe

Canvas

This course makes extensive use of the Canvas Learning Management System in class and out. Please familiarize yourself with Canvas and check the course page regularly throughout the quarter.

All assigned reading can be found on Canvas

Academic Integrity

We take plagiarism very seriously. Please also become acquainted with UCSC policies on plagiarism, beginning with the UCSC Library's website, "What is plagiarism?" UCSC maintains an Academic Misconduct Policy for Undergraduates. If a student has plagiarized in their work. We are required to report them to their College Provost, according to this procedure: https://www.ue.ucsc.edu/academic_misconduct

Week #1
Origins of Media and Media Theory

1.6 Monday

Intro to the course and review of syllabus and assignments

NO SCREENING and NO SECTIONS THIS WEEK

1.8 Wednesday

Lecture: Theory/History Fundamentals

Reading:

Bela Balazs, "In Praise of Theory"

Week #2
Media Archaeology

1.13 Monday

Lecture: Media Archaeology

Film Screening: *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1978)

San Francisco residents are slowly being replaced by emotionless replicas, and it's up to a handful of humans to stop the invasion!

Reading:

Roland Barthes, "Leaving the Movie Theater"
Bryher, "What Shall You Do in the War?"

1.15 Wednesday

Reading:

Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction."
In *Illuminations*. Orlando: Harcourt Brace, 1969. Pp. 217-251.

Week #3
The Revolution Will Not Be Televised

1.20 Monday

NO CLASS

1.22 Wednesday

Reading:

Horkheimer, Max, and Theodore Adorno. "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception." In *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*. New York: Continuum, 1995. Pp. 120-167

Week #4
Questions of Ownership and Control

1.27 Monday

Film Screening: Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954)

A man who's been confined to a wheelchair starts to snoop on his neighbors only to discover that one of them might have committed a grisly murder.

Reading:

Bela Balasz, "The Close-up" and "The Face of Man"
Jean Epstein, +++++ "On Certain Characteristics of Photogénie"

1.29 Wednesday

Lecture: The Social Document: Photography and Social Reform

Reading: f/64 Manifesto

Week # 5
Representation

2.3 Monday

Film Screening: Daughters of the Dust (1991)

“Beyoncé’s visual album, “Lemonade,” sparked the latest revival of interest in this masterpiece, a ravishingly beautiful work of historical reconstruction and feminist imagination. Set on the Sea Islands off the southeastern United States in the early 20th century, the film is a multigenerational matriarchal epic about the preservation of memory and the necessity of change. Comparisons to the novels of Toni Morrison are warranted — “Daughters” blends fact and folklore with poetic authority and arresting moral grace — but mostly because, like Ms. Morrison, Ms. Dash is a true American original who dared to fill an empty space in the American imagination. “ A.O. Scott (New York Times)

Reading:

bell hooks, “The Oppositional Gaze / Black Female Spectators”
Stuart Hall, “Encoding/Decoding”

2.5 Wednesday

MID TERM:
Please bring a pink scantron and a #2 pencil

Week #6
The Press: Technology, Power and Influence

2.10 Monday

Lecture: Television as Media Form

Reading:

Arnheim, Rudolf. "A Forecast of Television." In *Film as Art*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Pp. 188-198.

Gray, Herman. "The Politics of Representation in Network Television." In *Watching Race: Television and the Struggle for 'Blackness'*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995. Pp. 70-92.

Film Screening: *Good Night at Good Luck* or *Network*

2.12 Wednesday

Lecture: From Radio to the Podcast

Listen: War of the Worlds

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:War_of_the_Worlds_1938_Radio_broadcast_full.flac

Week #7 Models of The Digital Revolution

2.17 Monday

NO CLASS

2.19 Wednesday

Film: *La Jetée*

Chris Marker, filmmaker, poet, novelist, photographer, editor, and now videographer and digital multimedia artist, has been challenging moviegoers, philosophers, and himself for years with his complex queries about time, memory, and the rapid advancement of life on this planet. Marker's *La Jetée* is one of the most influential, radical science-fiction films ever made, a tale of time travel told in still images. This work is the inspiration for Terry Gilliam's *12 Monkey*'s.

Reading:

Michel Foucault. "Panopticism." In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage Books, 1977. pp. 195-228.

Week #8
Audiences as Producers and Receivers

2.24 Monday

Film Screening: Battle of Algiers

One of the most influential political films in history, *The Battle of Algiers*, by Gillo Pontecorvo, vividly re-creates a key year in the tumultuous Algerian struggle for independence from the occupying French in the 1950s. As violence escalates on both sides, children shoot soldiers at point-blank range, women plant bombs in cafés, and French soldiers resort to torture to break the will of the insurgents. Shot on the streets of Algiers in documentary style, the film is a case study in modern warfare, with its terrorist attacks and the brutal techniques used to combat them. Pontecorvo's tour de force has astonishing relevance today. (Criterion Description)

2.26 Wednesday

Reading:

Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1994. ISBN: 0472065211.

Week #9
Media Convergence and Power in the Digital Age

3.2 Monday

Film Screening: Fritz Lang, *Metropolis* (1927)

In Fritz Lang's crazy, visionary 1927 masterpiece, a mad scientist creates a female robot version of his late beloved. But later, he turns this robot woman into a fake version of the film's heroine, a charismatic revolutionary named Maria, to try to quell an uprising. Robot-Maria then proceeds to use her magical, nefarious powers to enthrall the populace of this dystopian society. There's no science behind this robot, of course; her powers are basically fantastical. (The film at times seems to be more about the threat of sexuality than about the threat of mechanization.) But in her embodiment of the potentially monstrous power of

science, Maria — and, by extension, the film — presents a prescient cautionary tale about the forces that the 20th century would soon unlock.

Reading: Haraway, Donna Jeanne (1991). "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century". *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*.

3.5 Wednesday

Reading: Leo Marx. "Technology: The Emergence of a Hazardous Concept." *Technology and Culture, Volume 51*, Number 3 (2010): 561-577.

Week #10 Postmortem

3.9 Monday

Film Screening: *In the Mood for Love*

Hong Kong, 1962: Chow Mo-wan (Tony Leung Chiu-wai) and Su Li-zhen (Maggie Cheung Man-yuk) move into neighboring apartments on the same day. Their encounters are formal and polite--until a discovery about their spouses creates an intimate bond between them. At once delicately mannered and visually extravagant, Wong Kar-wai's *In the Mood for Love* is a masterful evocation of romantic longing and fleeting moments. With its aching musical soundtrack and exquisitely abstract cinematography by Christopher Doyle and Mark Lee Ping-bin, this film has been a major stylistic influence on the past decade of cinema.

Reading:

TBD

3.11 Wednesday

Postmortem: Summary and review of issues, themes, and ideas covered this quarter.

Class screenings are subject to change.

All work must be turned in on time.

Any act of plagiarism will be met with a failing grade for the course.