

ENG5040—Winter 2013

Film Criticism and Theory

Meets Monday and Wednesday, 12:50–3:50pm, State Hall 326

Professor Scott Richmond

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Office Hours: Tuesdays 2–4pm, and by appointment.

1. Course Description

From the English department course sampler: This class provides an introduction to the major concepts and movements in the theory of film, from the 1920s to the present. The course will proceed largely historically. Topics will include formalism (Eisenstein), realism (Bazin), critical theory and film theory (Adorno and Benjamin), film semiotics, psychoanalytic theory (Metz), feminist theory (Mulvey and Doane), cinema and embodiment (Sobchack), and cinema and new media (Rodowick).

2. Course Objectives

There is one single objective to this course: **students in this course will learn to think theoretically about the cinema (and other media)**. This course differs substantially from the other courses you've probably taken in film and media studies at Wayne, either in the Communication or the English departments, as its focus is not primarily on films, but *on ways of thinking about the cinema as a medium* and as the dominant 20th century mass-cultural form.

This course is therefore reading intensive. As I'm sure you've discovered if you've looked at the book selection at the bookstore, and fainted due to sticker shock.

But this objective can be broken down into two separate but largely overlapping sub-objectives:

I. Students will learn how to read critical and theoretical texts. Much of what we're reading this semester lies on a spectrum of quite hard to fiendishly difficult. Not only is there a lot of reading, a lot of it is difficult. We will spend a great deal of time working on how to read these texts, what you can learn from them, and why anybody in their right mind would spend so much time dealing with abstruse theorizing about the movies.

II. Students will learn how to speak and write critically and theoretically about critical and theoretical texts. My objective in this course is not quite as namby-pamby as the old saw about "critical thinking" as the reason why people ought to take humanities courses, but it's close. What I'm calling "theoretical thinking" is its own special brand of thinking, and is a great deal more specific and pointed than "critical thinking." But thinking is an internal state: I can't tell if you're thinking directly. It has to pass through the needle's eye of language before I can get access to it. That means I can only tell if you're thinking if you're either talking or writing. So you'll be doing a bunch of both. Moreover, speaking and writing (having a conversation with another person, writing a paper for another person) are actually aids to thinking. So we will spend quite some time on speaking and writing well in this course.

3. Course Participation

Or, who should take this course: This is an upper-division humanities undergraduate course. The prerequisite in the course catalog is listed as intro to film (ENG2450/COM2010), or another film course in the English department, or permission of the instructor. This is a bit misleading. Most (but not all) students who have only taken intro to film will not, in fact, be prepared for this course. If you have only taken intro, *please* talk to me after the first class or during office hours to discuss the course and your preparation for it. If you are interested in taking a film class this semester but aren't really prepared for this course, I am happy to recommend other film studies coursework.

Contrariwise, many students (especially coming from other humanities and humanistic disciplines, including English, Art History, Anthropology, or Philosophy) not only are prepared for this course, but will benefit a great deal from it. If you are a junior or senior in another humanities program, but don't otherwise have the prerequisites under your belt, I will be delighted to discuss with you whether you should take this course.

The most important prerequisite for the course is some exposure to and a healthy commitment to humanistic thought. This course is likely one of the more difficult undergraduate courses offered at Wayne State, and that is by design. If you have questions about whether or not this course is appropriate for you, please come see me after class the first day, or in my office hours the first week.

I don't mean to scare you off: this course will be challenging, but it will be very rewarding. If you put in the work, a course like this really can change—and improve—the way you think not merely about films but about media broadly (—and likely the world). I'm not kidding. (Otherwise, I wouldn't be doing this: nobody thinks they're going to become a professor of film studies when they pack up to go off to college.) Students who are up for a challenge and are interested in the nature of contemporary media should take this course. Also: students who are eager to be treated like intellectual grownups.

4. Course Rules and Norms

Attendance. Attendance is expected at all class meetings. I will not take attendance. But be aware that class in-class activities of various kinds make up a substantial portion of your grade, and cannot be made up, even in the case of emergency.

Screenings and class time. We are scheduled for six hours a week, as is the case for all upper-division film studies courses in the English department. This schedule presumes, more or less, that one meeting will be a screening, and the other, a class session. Since there are weeks where we will not be watching films, this is subject to a bit of revision. I won't subject you to my rambling or to each others' company for six hours a week—that's cruel and unusual. As a general guideline (which may or may not be followed to the letter): *weeks when there are screenings of feature films, we will meet all six hours; weeks when there are no films or are only shorts, each session will meet for only two of the three hours of reserved course time (for 4 hours total).* We will always start at 12:50pm.¹

¹ With the possible exception of Week 12, when the screening may or may not be in the evening. More details to come on this, as I work this out with the Kunsthalle Detroit, who will hopefully be hosting this screening.

Collegiality. We will be dealing with challenging material this semester. It will come to some of you more easily than others. Please treat your colleagues, and their opinions, experiences, and even (especially) their ignorance, with the care and respect they deserve. Please also be considerate of the project of learning: before you offer an opinion or (especially) your personal reaction, ask yourself what you would like to teach the class with, about, or by it. (It will never go amiss if you actually tell us what you'd like to teach the class when you share a reaction.)

Questions. Contrary to popular cliché, there are such things as stupid questions. But we all do ask them, sometimes. And that's OK. I aim for an atmosphere where even stupid questions—and stupid statements—are treated with respect, and where everybody feels licensed to say anything. If somebody (including me!) says something obviously wrong, or airheaded, or clumsy, or whatever—it is right and appropriate to say something non-judgmentally corrective. That's actually the hard thing: correcting or disagreeing with somebody in a manner that is both intellectually rigorous and not judgmental. It's hard, but necessary, and expected.

Meetings with Scott. I want to stress this as emphatically as I know how: I am a resource to you not only during class time but also during my office hours. If you can't make my regular office hours, I will make an appointment to see you sometime when you can meet. Your professors are here (among other things) to teach you well, and that means discussing the course outside of scheduled class time. I am not requiring that you meet with me in office hours, but I promise you that doing so will improve your performance and enjoyment of the course.

5. Coursework

On writing, and writing well. I make no distinction (indeed I do not know how to make one) between the ideas in your written work and the written work itself (“the needle's eye of language”). You must attend carefully to your writing. I encourage you to avail yourself of the writing center, and of my advice and guidance, when it comes to writing. If you are not editing your papers thoroughly you are doing something wrong. For the shorter papers, I will hand out paper assignments 10 days before they are due (the Wednesday of the week before they are due on Friday). That amount of time is meant to reflect how much you ought to be working on your papers.

Coursework breaks down into a few different categories, listed here in decreasing order of frequency:

Discussion questions. Every class session in which we are discussing readings (which is to say, almost every one), you are required to bring with you at least two written discussion questions on a loose sheet of paper. These can be fairly straightforward (“What does author x mean when he says y?”), or they can be flights of fancy, or anywhere in between. My recommendation: one should be straightforward, one should be more involved. I will call on students to read them out loud during classes. I will collect these at the end of class.

Mini-papers. Starting in the second week, and every subsequent week throughout the semester (excluding weeks when papers are due), I will give you a brief (about 15 minutes) written in-class assignment (for a total of 10). These will be open-book and open-note. This will receive a grade of either S (Satisfactory) or U (Unsatisfactory). My commentary on these will be relatively minimal, but I am always more than happy (even eager) to talk about them with you

outside of class. Your grade for the mini-papers is exactly equivalent to the number of S's you receive over the course of the semester

Written work. There are four written assignments due over the course of the semester. The first two are relatively short (3–5pp.) and very narrow (analytical summary, conceptual adjudication), the third will be a brief proposal for a final paper, and the long (12–15pp.) final paper will be on a topic of your choosing. (NB: Students enrolled in graduate programs will be asked to write a longer research paper of 20–25pp.)

Presentations. Once during the semester, you will be responsible for leading class discussion on a text. Depending on class size, you may have to work in pairs (or trios). This will not be a *presentation* per se, since what you are doing is running a discussion—not showing how much you know. Also, once during the semester (in week 14), you will present your final paper to the class.

Discussion board. I have enabled the discussion board function on the Blackboard site. I will follow it myself, and may occasionally post, especially in response to questions. It is (against my usual practice) not required, and not graded. I do, however, heartily encourage you to make use of it.

6. Grading

Relative weights. Your final grade will be calculated according to the following relative weights (in decreasing order):

Final Paper	25%
Second Paper	20%
First Paper	15%
Mini-papers	15%
Class participation <i>includes discussion questions</i>	15%
Presentations <i>includes final paper proposal</i>	10%
Total	100%

Grades. I use an unusual grading system. It is designed to allow me to give “real” grades while reflecting the reality of grade inflation in the broader world.

A+	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D	F
10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0

- Papers*: Grades on papers will be assessed using rubrics, which will be distributed with the assignment parameters.
- Mini-papers*: The mini-paper grade is equivalent to the number of S's you receive over the course of the semester.
- Participation*: I will include a cumulative class participation grade when I return graded papers (not mini-papers).
- Presentations*: Grading on presentations will be done semi-democratically. Students in the class will submit their grade (and any comments) for presenters to me at the end of class. I will calculate that average (discarding the highest and the lowest grades assigned). This will be the default grade, but I reserve the right to deviate from it (by a little or a lot) when assigning a grade. I will give you a grade report on the presentations within a week of your presentation.

Handing in and returning papers. Papers will always be due on **Fridays at 11:59pm**. Papers are due by email to scr@wayne.edu and via SafeAssign on Blackboard. I will customarily return papers in class the Monday 10 days after papers are due.

Late work and extensions. The late penalty is a full point off for every stepwise 24-hour period the paper is late. I recognize that you have lives beyond the classroom, and will customarily grant reasonable requests for extensions of a day or two if you ask for it at least 48 hours in advance.

7. Other Housekeeping

Email. I will generally respond to emails that call for responses within 24 hours. I will always respond do so within 48 hours. Do not expect or rely on a response before then, especially if it is a time-sensitive manner.

The department requests and requires that you use your Wayne State email address. I will do so as well. This is to prevent fraud; apparently, email fraud has occurred recently at the university.

Please write emails in reasonably standard English. Computers have full keyboards, and emails do not have 140-character limits. I may have facial piercings and tattoos, but I am an old fuddy-duddy. I do not wish to have to work to decipher your emails, nor do I wish to have to squelch my indignation at incurteous or infelicitous emails.

You may call me Scott, but if you prefer, you may address me as either Dr. Richmond or Professor Richmond.

When you send me email, **PLEASE** use the email address listed here: scr@wayne.edu. If you use the LDAP/Directory server on Webmail, you very well may end up sending mail to another Scott Richmond who has a Wayne email address, and who does not reply to emails.

Academic Dishonesty. I do not tolerate cheating or plagiarism. Any instance of cheating or plagiarism, if discovered, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant, will result in the student's failing the course and being reported to the English department and the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.

Be aware that there is a due process for plagiarism cases, as outlined by the department. I sincerely hope that you should not ever discover what this process is.

Because the stakes are so high, if ever you have a question on whether something constitutes plagiarism, email me to ask. Be sure you know what plagiarism is and is not. Ignorance is not an excuse, and the embarrassment of not knowing is much less than the embarrassment you'll feel in a disciplinary hearing.

The College's regulations on plagiarism read: "The principle of honesty is recognized as fundamental to a scholarly community. Students are expected to honor this principle and instructors are expected to take appropriate action when instances of academic dishonesty are discovered. An instructor, on discovering such an instance, may give a failing grade on the assignment or for the course. The instructor has the responsibility of notifying the student of the alleged violation and the action being taken. Both the student and the instructor are entitled to academic due process in all such cases. Acts of dishonesty may lead to suspension or exclusion. Information on procedures is available in the Office of the Dean."

Withdrawing. You may withdraw from the class. Whether or not you receive a WP (withdrew with a passing grade) or WF (withdrew from a failing grade) will be calculated based on your marks for your submitted work with the same relative weighting they would have otherwise. Please be polite and let me know you are withdrawing before filing the request online. (If you do not wish to share your reasons for doing so, that's fine. But at least tell me that you're doing it.)

As of this year, the University has new, earlier deadlines for withdrawing. This semester the deadline is **March 23, 2013**. After this date, you will be required to complete the course, and will receive a grade reflecting the work you have done (or failed to have done).

Incompletes. Incompletes are sometimes a necessary evil. I will not consider giving one to you without extensive negotiations, so if you feel you may need one, start talking to me about it as soon as you possibly can. Everything else gets worked out on a case-by-case basis.

The University's policy on incompletes is as follows: "The mark of I—Incomplete, is given to either an undergraduate or a graduate student when he/she has not completed all of the course work as planned for the term and when there is, in the judgment of the instructor, a reasonable probability that the student can complete the course successfully without again attending regular class sessions. The student should be passing at the time the grade of 'I' is given. A written contract specifying the work to be completed should be signed by the student and instructor. Responsibility for completing all course work rests with the student" (2009-2011 WSU Undergraduate Bulletin, 40; emphasis added).

Writing Center Information (courtesy of the English Department):

The Writing Center (2nd floor, UGL) provides individual tutoring consultations free of charge for students at Wayne State University. Undergraduate students in General Education courses, including composition courses, receive priority for tutoring appointments. The Writing Center serves as a resource for writers, providing tutoring sessions on the range of activities in the writing process – considering the audience, analyzing the assignment or genre, brainstorming, researching, writing drafts, revising, editing, and preparing documentation. The Writing Center is not an editing or proofreading service; rather, students are guided as they engage

collaboratively in the process of academic writing, from developing an idea to editing for grammar and mechanics. To make an appointment, consult the Writing Center website: <http://www.clas.wayne.edu/writing/>

To submit material for online tutoring, consult the Writing Center HOOT website (Hypertext One-on-One Tutoring): <http://www.clas.wayne.edu/unit-inner.asp?WebPageID=1330>.

Instructors may require individual students to attend the Writing Center to receive tutoring on a specific assignment, skill, or aspect of the writing process. Instructors may also require individual students to attend the Writing Center to receive instruction in grammar and mechanics. Instructors may not require entire classes to attend the Writing Center. For more information about the Writing Center, please contact the Director, Jule Wallis (phone: 7-2544; email: au1145@wayne.edu).

For Students with Disabilities (courtesy of the English Department):

If you feel that you may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability, please feel free to contact me privately to discuss your specific needs. Additionally, the Student Disabilities Services Office coordinates reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities. The Office is located in 1600 David Adamany Undergraduate Library, phone: 313-577-1851/577-3365 (TTY). <http://studentdisability.wayne.edu>

Readings and Screenings

The readings for the course come in two forms: required books and PDFs that I have scanned and posted to Blackboard. Required books are available from Marwil Bookstore (on the corner of Cass and Warren), as well as online from places such as Amazon.com, which will likely be cheaper. You may wish to buy used copies of books.

Readings from books start “From *Title of Book*,” followed by a list of chapters or essays. Readings listed with the author’s name first are posted to Blackboard. (Please email me ASAP if you have technical or other difficulties obtaining the readings.)

You must bring your reading to class, in some adequate form. Bring your physical books to class. You must have some way of bringing PDFed readings to class. Preferably, this will either be a physical printout or an iPad, Kindle DX or other large-format tablet. Laptops are second best (they screen you from your classmates). iPhones or other small-screen devices are not adequate.

Required Books (in the order they appear on the syllabus):

Sergei Eisenstein, *Film Form*

André Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, volume 1

Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film*

Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*

Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*

(NB: Please ensure that you purchase the Stanford University Press edition of this, translated by Edmund Jephcott. Do not purchase the older 1970s Continuum translation by John Cumming.)

Kate Mondloch, *Screens: Viewing Media Installation Art*

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

Steven Shaviro, *Post-Cinematic Affect*

Course Schedule, Week-by-Week

Unit I: First Contradiction: Formalism and Realism

Week 1: Introduction & Eisenstein, part the first

January 7: Welcome and Introduction: What the hell is film theory, anyway?

January 9: Sergei Eisenstein: A Dialectic Approach to Film Form

Screening: Battleship Potemkin (dir. Sergei Eisenstein, USSR, 1926, 75 min.)

Sergei Eisenstein, “The Montage of Attractions” and “The Montage of Film Attractions.”

From *Film Form*: “Through Theater to Cinema,” and “The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram.”

Week 2: From Dialectics to Realism, or from Eisenstein to André Bazin

January 14: Eisenstein, part the Second (NB: Class will last 2 hours.)

From *Film Form*: “A Dialectic Approach to Film Form,” “The Filmic Fourth Dimension,” “Methods of Montage,” and “Dickens, Griffith, and the Film Today.”

January 16: The Foundations of Bazin’s Realism (NB: Class will last 3 hours.)

Screening: Crossroads (dir. Bruce Conner, USA, 1976, 35 min.)

André Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image.” (NB: Read the version of this posted on Blackboard, not the one in *What is Cinema?*)

From *What is Cinema?*: “The Myth of Total Cinema,” “The Evolution of the Language of Cinema.”

André Bazin, “Death Every Afternoon.”

Week 3: André Bazin: Change Mummified, or Ontology and the Cinematic Image

January 21—MLK Day; no class.

January 23: The Limits of Bazin’s Realism

From *What is Cinema*: “The Virtues and Limitations of Montage,” “In Defense of Mixed Cinema,” “Theater and Cinema 1 & 2.”

Daniel Morgan, “Rethinking Bazin: Ontology and Realist Aesthetics.”

Week 4: Siegfried Kracauer: Film, Medium of a Disintegrating World

January 28:

Screening: The Thin Red Line (dir. Terrence Malick, USA, 1998, 171 min.)

January 30:

From *Theory of Film*: Introduction, Chapters 1–4, 16.

February 1: 1st Paper (“Analytical Summary”) due by 11:59pm.

Unit 2: Second Contradiction: The Optical Unconscious and The Culture Industry

Week 5: Walter Benjamin: Experience, Modernity, Aesthetics

February 4: Modernity and The Transformation of Experience

Walter Benjamin, “Experience and Poverty.”

Walter Benjamin, “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire.”

February 6: The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility

From *The Work of Art*: “The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility, Second Version.”

Susan Buck-Morss, “Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin’s Artwork Essay Reconsidered.”

Week 6: Walter Benjamin, cont’d.

February 11: Benjamin on Soviet Cinema

Screening: *Man With a Movie Camera* (dir. Dziga Vertov, USSR, 1929, 68 min.)

From *The Work of Art*: “On the Present Situation in Russian Film” and “Reply to Oskar A. H. Schmitz.”

February 13: Benjamin on the 19th Century

From *The Work of Art*: “Dream Kitsch,” “To the Planetarium,” and “Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century.”

Week 7: Horkheimer and Adorno: The Culture Industry

February 18: The Concept of Enlightenment

From *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: “The Concept of Enlightenment.”

February 20: The Culture Industry

From *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: “Enlightenment as Mass Deception: The Culture Industry.”
Selected correspondence between Benjamin and Adorno.

Unit 3: “Contemporary” Film Theory: Semiotics and Psychoanalysis

Week 8: Structuralism, Semiotics, Psychoanalysis

February 25: (NB: Class may or may not be held this day. More information TBA.)

Sigmund Freud, “On Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes” and “Fetishism.”

Jacques Lacan, “The Mirror Stage...” from *Écrits*.

Emile Benveniste, “Subjectivity in Language.”

February 27:

Screening: *Rear Window* (dir. Alfred Hitchcock, USA, 1954, 112 min.)

March 1: 2nd Paper (“Conceptual Adjudication”) due by 11:59pm.

Week 9: Christian Metz: From Psychoanalysis to the Cinema

March 4:

Christian Metz, “Identification, Mirror,” “The Passion for Perceiving,” and “Fetishism/Disavowal” from *The Imaginary Signifier*.

March 6—No class, Scott is out of town for SCMS

March 11/13—No class, Spring Break

Week 10: Feminism and Psychoanalysis

March 18:

Screening: *Vertigo* (Alfred Hitchcock, USA, 1958, 128 min.)

March 20:

Joan Rivière, “Womanliness as Masquerade.”

Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.”

Mary Ann Doane, “Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator.”

Week 11: Against Psychoanalysis: Cinema and Embodiment

March 25:

Screening: *Quantum of Solace* (dir. Marc Forster, USA, 2008, 106 min.)

Roland Barthes, “Leaving the Movie Theater.”

March 27:

Steven Shaviro, “Film Theory and Visual Fascination” from *The Cinematic Body*.

Vivian Sobchack, “What My Fingers Knew,” from *Carnal Thoughts*.

Unit 4: Cinema and/as Media

Week 12: The Cinema as Perceptual Technology, or Expanded Cinema

April 1: (NB: This screening will take place off-campus, possibly in the evening, likely at Kunsthalle Detroit. More information TBA.)

Screening: *The Flicker* (Tony Conrad, USA, 1965, 30 min.) and *Line Describing a Cone* (Anthony McCall, USA, 1973, 30 min.).

April 3:

From *Screens*: Introduction, Chapters 1, 2, and 5.

Gene Youngblood, “Part One: The Audience and the Myth of Entertainment” and “Part Two: Synaesthetic Cinema: The end of Drama,” from *Expanded Cinema*.

Week 13: The Virtual Life of Film

April 8:

Screening: *Playing: Portal* and *Portal 2* (Valve, 2007 and 2010). Screening: Experimental film and media, including (but possibly not limited to): *Super Mario Clouds* (Cory Arcangel, USA, 2005, 15 min.), *Memory of a Landscape* (Tatjana Marusic, Germany, 2004, 12 min.), *Optical De-Dramatization Engine Applied in 40-Hour Cycles to Thomas Ince’s “The Invaders”, 1912* (Barbara Lattanzi, USA, 2006, 40 hours), *Capitalism: Slavery* (Ken Jacobs, USA, 2007, 3 min.), *Light is Calling* (Bill Morrison, USA, 2004, 8 min.)

April 10:

From *The Virtual Life of Film*: Parts I & III.

April 12: Final paper proposal due by 11:59pm.

Week 14: *The Post/Cinematic Mode of Production, or the Attention Economy*

April 15:

Screening: *Gamer* (dir. Nevelndine/Taylor, USA, 2009, 95 min.)

Presentations of final paper topics.

April 17:

Jonathan Beller, “Introduction: The Political Economy of the Postmodern,” from *The Cinematic Mode of Production*.

From *Post-Cinematic Affect*: introduction, and on *Gamer*.

Alexander Galloway, “Origin of the First Person Shooter.”

Week 15: *Control—Protocol*

April 22:

Gilles Deleuze, “Postscript on Societies of Control.”

Alexander Galloway, “Introduction” and “Power,” from *Protocol: How Control Exists after Decentralization*.

April 29: Final Paper due by 11:59pm.