

Spring 2004, FILM 4004, Sec. 002
Screening: M 3:00-5:50 in HUMN 1B50
Discussion: TR 9:30-10:45 in HUMN 1B90
Instructor: Jesse Stommel
Office: 295 Denison
Office Hours: T 5:00-5:50 and W 12:00-1:50, or by appointment
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Film Theory:

Description: An intensive seminar that surveys major theoretical and critical approaches to film theory. Class work will involve film screenings and considerable reading and writing about film. The course is arranged in sections, each with assigned readings and one or more associated films, including: *The Language of Film*, *Film Image and Sound*, *Reality and Film*, *The Film Spectator*, and *Film Genre*. In the final section of the course, we will look closely at the horror film (particularly the “slasher” subgenre) in order to discuss the subject of genre more generally and to synthesize the many theories we’ve studied by applying them to a set of films. The point of the course is *not* to become an expert in any one theory or group of theories; the point is to read and/or review a large selection of theories and practice applying them to film. The films will serve two major functions in this course: they have been chosen because of their relevance to the theories for the week (often this relevance will be implicit rather than explicit); the films, though, will also be looked at *as* theories, for film theory is as much about theories of film as it is about films as incarnations of theory. Finally, another primary goal of the course is for *you* to produce your own theories of film—through discussion and through your written and creative work.

Required Texts and Materials:

Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings, ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (B&C)

Understanding Comics, Scott McCloud

Camera Lucida, Roland Barthes

Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film, Carol J. Clover

Online course packet

**You can access e-texts of these readings via this web page. The e-texts are in .pdf format, which can be read using Acrobat Reader (already installed on most computers and otherwise available for download on the Web). Additionally, some materials are on the internet and can be accessed via links from this webpage (those readings marked “.pdf” are e-texts, while the others will have a web-address link). My advice: if you make this web site your friend, you’ll have no trouble finding all the readings for the course.

Required Films: Many of these films are on [reserve](#) in the Norlin Media Library.

Run Lola Run (1999)

Punch Drunk Love (2002)

The Vanishing (1988)

La Jetee (1962)

Night and Fog (1955)

The Passion of Joan of Arc (1928)

The Piano (1993)

Microcosmos (1996)

Donnie Darko (2001)

Ma Vie En Rose (1997)

Rear Window (1954)

The Stepford Wives (1975)

Peeping Tom (1960)

Halloween (1978)

Buffy the Vampire Slayer: “Helpless” (1999)

Attendance and Class Participation: Since this is a seminar course, which will mostly involve student-generated discussion, you have a responsibility to yourself and your classmates to show up for class—on time and prepared. The class will be a cooperative learning experience, a true intellectual community. And so, *you* are, in a very real sense, the primary text for this course. In addition to determining the directions we will go in each day, all assignment topics, etc. will arise directly from your comments in class discussion. Because of this, participation will be a very large component of your final grade. Thus, it follows that more than two or three absences during the semester will directly

affect your grade. If you are going to miss class, you must let me know either in person or via e-mail in order to excuse the absence.

Office Hours: I have scheduled regular office hours and I'm also available by appointment. Please come to office hours as often as possible. This is the most effective way for me to give you individual attention and get to know you better. In general, it is best to come early in the semester, especially if you have any particular questions or concerns. I am also very easy to reach by e-mail. In fact, e-mail is (by far) the best and quickest way to contact me. You can send an e-mail with questions or comments to me at Jesse.Stommel@colorado.edu or to the e-mail discussion list for this course at filmtheory@lists.colorado.edu.

E-mail: The University now requires that every student have an active e-mail account that they check regularly. E-mail is an important component of this course. You will be required to subscribe to an e-mail list (filmtheory@lists.colorado.edu) AND you must check your e-mail regularly. I will be sending regular announcements to the list, so if you are not subscribed or do not check your e-mail, you will miss crucial information related to the course. The list can also be used for you to communicate with each other. [Click here](#) for instructions on how to subscribe and post messages to this list.

Online Content: There are numerous links on this webpage that will take you to various assignments and readings that we will be doing throughout the semester. As we proceed, I will be uploading additional content, including some course notes, activities, and assignments, so keep checking this webpage for updates.

Your grade will be based on the following factors:

- **Class Participation.** This includes your attendance, involvement in class discussion, in-class writing assignments, panels, and small-group work. As I mentioned, this is (by far) the most important component of the course.
- **Panel Discussion.** On a number of days throughout the semester, the discussion will be led by a panel, who will be responsible for choosing one or two clips which we'll analyze in class (the rest of the clips we look at will rise directly out of our discussion). Each panel member will offer some sort of response to the film being covered that day, talking for 2 or 3 minutes about one particular intersection between the film and a theory we've read. The panel will then lead the class in a discussion of the clips they chose from the film. During the panel discussion, I will be mostly silent, moderating the discussion to some degree but primarily acting as a member of the class w/ my own questions, comments, etc. The panel members will need to either talk with me in person or send me an e-mail w/ the clips they'd like to look at in class, so I can set them up in advance.
- **6 Assignments.** These assignments will include creative projects, essays, etc. Some will be more elaborate than others. There will be instructions for each of these assignments on this web site (click on the assignment in the schedule below and you'll be taken to the instructions). The due dates for these assignments will be: Jan. 22, Feb. 5, Feb. 19, Feb. 26, Mar. 18, and Apr 8.
- **Final Project.** The goal of your final project is to investigate one of the important subjects of this course. There will be two components of the final project: a creative component and an analytical component. The degree to which these two elements overlap is up to you.

The creative component can take any of a number of forms, including but not limited to fiction, film, video, photography, painting, sculpture, poetry, screenplay, etc. The idea here is for you to *do* a bit of theory yourself, investigating the nature of any aspect of film, using whatever style/form/medium *you* find best suited to the task. For example, you might respond to a theory through a series of still photographs accompanied by written captions. Or, you could make a short film/video that invents, embodies, or responds to a particular theory.

The other component of the final project will be an analytical paper. The length of this paper depends on the nature of your creative work. For example, if you do an elaborate creative project, you might write a short artist's statement, applying essays we've read to your own work. On the other hand, you might write a longer analytical paper about a particular theory we've read (or film we've watched), accompanied by a more simple creative project that helps illustrate your points.

Feel free to develop your project from one of the other assignments you complete throughout the semester, broadening its scope or reinventing it in some way. A 1-page proposal or summary of your final project will be due on Apr. 22, so

it is best to start thinking about and planning your project as early as possible. The final project is due on the last day of class, Apr. 29. The final project takes the place of a final exam.

A Note on Grading: While you will be receiving a grade at the end of the semester, I will not be putting grades on individual assignments, but rather questions and comments that truly *engage* with your work rather than simply *evaluate* it. Throughout the semester, you will also be responding to each other's work and to your own work in a similar fashion. The intention here is to help you focus on working in a more organic way, as opposed to working as you think you are *expected* to. I hope that this process will give you (and me) a partial liberation from letter grades, but if it ends up causing more anxiety than it alleviates, feel free to see me at any point to confer about your performance in the course to date. If you are worried about your grade in the class, your best strategy should be to attend class, join the discussions, do the reading, and complete all assignments.

Collaboration: I encourage collaboration on final projects and certain other projects. If you'd like to work with someone on either, just chat with me about your plan in advance.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is an extremely serious offense: this includes not only copying from a published source, and using internet materials without appropriate acknowledgment, but also presenting another student's work as your own. If you plagiarize you will: fail the assignment, the course, or both. If you have questions about citation of sources, please bring them up in class or discuss them with me individually. If you are unable to complete an assignment for any reason, it is in your best interest to discuss the situation with me, rather than turn in plagiarized work.

Please Note: If you have specific physical, psychological, or learning disabilities and require accommodations, please let me know early in the semester so that your learning needs may be appropriately met. If you have questions or concerns, you can also contact the Disability Services Office in Willard 322 (phone 303-492-8671). Also, please let me know if the observance of religious holidays conflicts in any way with class assignments, attendance, etc., and I will make appropriate accommodations.

I. The Language of Film

Week 1: Introduction to Film Theory and Close-Analysis of Film

Jan. 12: Tom Tykwer, *Run Lola Run* (1998) (80 min)

Jan. 13: *No Reading*

Jan. 15: *No Reading*

Week 2: Formalism

Jan. 19: *No Screening*

Jan. 20: Eisenstein, "Beyond the Shot" and "The Dramaturgy of Film Form" (B&C, pp. 15-42)

Assignment #1 Due

Jan. 22: Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics* (pp. 1-93)

Monaco, From *How to Read a Film* ([.pdf](#))

Week 3: Semiotics

Jan. 26: Paul Thomas Anderson, *Punch-Drunk Love* (2002) (95 min)

Jan. 27: Christian Metz, "Some Points in the Semiotics of the Cinema" (B&C, pp. 68-74)

Harman, "Semiotics and the Cinema: Metz and Wollen" (B&C, pp. 90-98)

Jan. 29: Stephen Prince, "The Discourse of Pictures: Iconicity and Film Studies" (B&C, pp. 99-117)

Week 4: The Cinematic Narrator

Feb. 2: George Sluizer, *The Vanishing* (1988) (107 min)

Feb. 3: Tom Gunning, "Narrative Discourse and the Narrator System" (B&C, pp. 461-472)

Feb. 5: Seymour Chatman, "The Cinematic Narrator" (B&C, pp. 473-486)

Assignment #2 Due

II. Film Image and Sound

Week 5: The Photographic Image

Feb. 9: Marker, *La Jetée* (1955) (30 min); Resnais, *Night and Fog* (1955) (32 min)

Feb. 10: Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*

Feb. 12: Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*

(Optional): William Rothman, "Night and Fog" ([.pdf](#))

Week 6: What Becomes of Things on Film?

Feb. 16: Dreyer, *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928) (114 min)

Feb. 17: Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" (B&C, pp. 195-199)

Stanley Cavell, "Photograph and Screen..." (B&C, pp. 334-344)

Feb. 19: Stanley Cavell, "The Acknowledgement of Silence" ([.pdf](#))

Bela Belasz, "The Close-up" and "The Face of Man" (B&C, pp. 304-311)

Assignment #3 Due

Week 7: Film Sound and the Voice in Cinema

Feb. 23: Campion, *The Piano* (1993) (121 min)

Feb. 24: Christian Metz, "Aural Objects" (B&C, pp. 356-359)

Mary Ann Doane, "The Voice in the Cinema: The Articulation of Body and Space" (B&C, pp. 362-375)

Feb. 26: Kaja Silverman, "Disembodying the Female Voice" ([.pdf](#))

Assignment #4 Due

III. Reality and Film

Week 8: Reality and the Documentary

Mar. 1: Nuridsany and Perennou, *Microcosmos* (1996) (75 min)

Mar. 2: Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (B&C, pp. 731-751)

Mar. 4: Maya Deren, "Cinematography: The Creative Use of Reality" (B&C, pp. 216-227)

(Optional): Stan Brakhage, "From *Metaphors on Vision*" (B&C, pp. 228-234)

Week 9: The Image and the Apparatus

Mar. 8: Richard Kelly, *Donnie Darko* (2001) (113 min)

Mar. 9: Jean-Louis Baudry, "The Apparatus" (B&C, pp. 760-777)

Plato, "The Allegory of the Cave" (web)

(Recommended): Robert Stam, "The Politics of Postmodernism: Introduction" ([.pdf](#))

Mar. 11: Susan Sontag, "The Image-world" ([.pdf](#))

Week 10: Simulacra and Performativity

Mar. 15: Alain Berliner, *Ma Vie En Rose* (1997) (88 min)

Mar. 16: Jean Baudrillard, "The Precession of Simulacra"

(http://www.stanford.edu/dept/HPS/Baudrillard/Baudrillard_Simulacra.html)

Mar. 18: Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" ([.pdf](#))

Assignment #5 Due

Week 11: SPRING BREAK

IV. The Film Spectator

Week 12: The Gaze

Mar. 29: Hitchcock, *Rear Window* (1954) (112 min)

Mar. 30: Metz, "The Imaginary Signifier" (B&C, pp. 800-817)

Michel Foucault, "Panopticism" (.pdf)

(Recommended): Toby Miller, "The Nature of the Gaze: Introduction" (.pdf)

Apr. 1: No Class – Reading Day

Week 13: Feminist Theory and the Gaze

Apr. 5: Bryan Forbes, *The Stepford Wives* (1975) (115 min)

Apr. 6: Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (B&C, pp. 833-844)

Apr. 8: Mary Ann Doane, "Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator" ([Course Packet](#))

Assignment #6 Due

V. Case-study in Genre: The Slasher Film

Week 14: Intro. to Horror and the Slasher Film

Apr. 12: Michael Powell, *Peeping Tom* (1960) (101 min)

Apr. 13: Rick Altman, "A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre (B&C, pp. 630-641)

Thomas Schatz, "Film Genre and the Genre Film" (B&C, pp. 642-653)

(Recommended): "Horror, the Film Reader: General Introduction" (.pdf)

Apr. 15: Carol Clover, "The Eye of Horror" (MW&C, pp. 166-230)

Week 15: Gender-Play in the Slasher Film

Apr. 19: John Carpenter, *Halloween* (1978) (91 min); *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, "Helpless" (1999) (42 min)

Apr. 20: Carol J. Clover, "Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film" (MW&C, pp. 21-64)

Holly G. Barbaccia, "Buffy in the 'Terrible House'" (*Slayage*, Issue No. 4, <http://www.slayage.tv/>)

Apr. 22: Linda Williams, "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess" (B&C, pp. 701-715)

Final Paper/Project Proposal Due

Week 16: A Critical Response to Horror

Apr. 26: TBA

Apr. 27: Tania Modleski, "The Terror of Pleasure: The Contemporary Horror Film..." (B&C, pp. 691-700)

Carol Clover, "Afterword" (MW&C, pp. 231-236)

Apr. 29: **Final Paper/Project Due**