

Fall 2014

ENGL 257A: Visual Culture

"Love Letters to Cinema: Cinephilia & Global Modernity"

Instructor: Samhita Sunya

Course Meetings: MWF, 11:00 - 11:50 a.m., Fisk 204A

Office Hours: MWF, 12:00 - 1:00 p.m. & by appointment, Fisk 231

"When I get together with writers I know, we don't talk about books, we talk about movies. This is not because we see the mechanism of the novel operating in certain films, work ranging from Kieslowski to Malick. It's because film is our second self, a major narrative force in the culture, an aspect of consciousness connected at some level to sleep and dreams, as the novel is the long hard slog of waking life."

-Don DeLillo

"But the cinephile is... a neurotic!"

-François Truffaut

Course Description:

This course is scaffolded by a set of primary and secondary works that cumulatively narrate a genealogy of cinephilia, moving from the turn of the twentieth-century through the contemporary moment. Class discussions and written assignments will revolve around how considerations of cinephilia - intense, passionate, affective modes of relating to cinematic media - enable a critical understanding of the medium's history, from its celluloid beginnings through its contemporary digital avatars.

Through reading and writing assignments, students will discover the wide range of impulses that constitute cinephilia, the critical debates that have been spawned by cinephilic writings, and the myriad insights that can emerge from discussing and analyzing such instances. Students will simultaneously develop their analytical reading and writing abilities through a semester-long engagement with several texts, in addition to acquiring a set of basic vocabulary and methods with which to analyze film.

Aims and Objectives:

The aims of this course are:

1. To understand the concepts of cinephilia and modernity in relation to one another.
2. To trace examples of cinephilia and cinephilic writing through a history of film.
3. To discuss these works in relation to their contexts and in relation to one another.
4. To underscore the relevance of cinephilia to history and politics, and to encourage a consciousness of one's own relationship to the above.

Upon completion of this course, students should be able:

1. To discuss cinephilia in complex and creative ways, as having a comprehensive, global history and as being many things at once - phenomenon, concept, desire, etc.
2. To appreciate the breadth of cinephilic writing, as intertwined through the history of film.
3. To understand cinema as both an aesthetic object that can be appreciated for its creative and imaginative dimensions, and as an artifact of various historical contexts.
4. To formulate concise arguments in an eloquent fashion through the exercise of written analyses.

Assignments:

Writing Exercises

These are a series of mini-assignments that will improve various aspects of not only your writing, but also your analytical, presentation, and reading skills. These will be graded for completion.

Film Viewing Worksheets

Due on any day (Week 4 and after) that a film has been assigned, marked on schedule (below) as **WS**. Consider these journal entries in which you are sharing your impressions and observations. These will be graded for completion, and they will allow me an opportunity to give you feedback on your writing through the term.

Close Analysis of a Film Clip - 2-3 pages double-spaced

Due Week 4

Paper 1 - 4-5 pages double-spaced

Draft for In-Class Writing Workshop - Due Week 7

Paper 1 - Due Week 8

Paper 2 - 4-5 pages double-spaced

Draft for In-Class Writing Workshop - Due Week 13

Paper 2 - Due Week 15

Grading:

- (20%) In-Class Participation
- (10%) Writing Exercises
- (10%) Film Viewing Worksheets
- (10%) Close Analysis of Film Clip
- (25%) Paper 1
- (25%) Paper 2

Attendance:

Each student will be allowed 1 unexcused absence. Each additional unexcused absence without prior consent will result in a deduction of 1/3 a letter grade from your final mark.

Participation:

100% participation entails: coming to class on time with film and reading assignments complete; remaining attentive and engaged during in-class film screenings as well as group discussions; contributing to discussions with questions, comments, and responses to others' remarks; participating in class activities; bringing a complete draft of to peer writing workshops; giving thorough feedback on peers' drafts during writing workshops.

Late Work:

I allow ample time and resources (including my office hours) to complete assignments, which allows you to successfully meet deadlines. If you anticipate an excused absence on the day of an in-class writing workshop, you must give me at least a week's notice so that your participation grade is not adversely

affected. Your grade on a late paper will drop by 1 letter grade for every day that it is late.

E-mail: samhita.sunya@aub.edu.lb

I will check my e-mail at least once a day between Monday and Friday with the exception of holidays, and students must do the same.

Technology Policy:

Phone/tablet/laptop usage that is unconnected with taking notes or referring to class materials will adversely affect a user's participation and may also constitute a distraction for others. I strongly recommend bringing hard copies of all reading material. I will allow students the option of bringing laptops to class in order to refer to readings posted on the course website and for in-class writing activities. However, even then, if laptops and other devices become a distraction, I will not hesitate to implement a no-device policy.

Plagiarism and Academic Integrity:

Please be aware of the University's plagiarism policy. Any work turned in must be original, and it is the student's responsibility to clarify any doubts and ensure that any external sources are cited so that (s)he will not be penalized for attempted plagiarism. In the event of plagiarism, the student will be reported immediately and/or given an F on the assignment.

Disability Policy:

Any student with a documented disability needing academic adjustments or accommodations is requested to speak with me during the first two weeks of class. All discussions will remain confidential. Students with disabilities should also contact University support services.

Pronunciation and Address:

Samhita Sunya = "SUM-hith-aa SHOON-yaa"

You are welcome to call me either Samhita or Dr. Sunya. Please do not address me as Miss/Mrs./Ms. Samhita/Sunya.

SCHEDULE

(For any updates/changes: refer to syllabus/schedule on Moodle)

WEEK 1: September 1 - 5 - Introduction

Sept 3 - Introduction: What is Cinephilia? - In-Class Video: "Cinephilia: [Cherish, Don't Chisel!]"

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vz7b66ufLtU>

Sept 5 - Cinema, Cinephilia, and Modernity - "The Decay of Cinema" (Susan Sontag, 1996); In-Class Short Film: "Where's My Romeo?" (Abbas Kiarostami, 2007)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_pFhoe7tfeA&html5=1; **Writing Exercise Due:** "Dear Cinema" Letter

WEEK 2: September 8 - 12

Sept 8 - Early Cinema (of Attractions): Proto-Cinema, Actualities, and Trick Films - "The Cinema of Attractions" (Tom Gunning, 1986); In-Class Clips: Muybridge Photo Experiments, Lumière Actualities, and *A Trip to the Moon* (Georges Méliès, 1902)

Sept 10 - Cinephilia, Nostalgia, and Spectacle - *Hugo* (Martin Scorsese, 2011, 126 min); "The Face of Garbo" (Roland Barthes, 1957)

Sept 12 - Basics of Film Analysis 1 - Ch 1, 2, & 3 from *Film Studies* (Sikov, pg. 1-54); **Writing Exercise Due:** 1-Paragraph Summary of "The Cinema of Attractions"

WEEK 3: September 15 - 19

Sept 15 - World Cinema Before World Cinema: The Silent Era - *Harishchandradi Factory* (Paresh Mokashi, 2009, 96 min); In-class Clip: "The Danger of a Single Story"

Sept 17 - Basics of Film Analysis 2 - Ch 4, 5, & 6 from *Film Studies* (Sikov, pg. 55 - 102); Discuss Close-Analysis of a Film Clip

Sept 19 - In-Class Writing Workshop - Close-Analysis of a Film Clip; Bring laptop/notebook to work on this in class

WEEK 4: September 22 - 26

Sept 22 - Transitions: "Silence" to Sound - *The Artist* (Michel Hazanavicius, 2011, 100 min; **WS**)

Sept 24 - Old and New Media + Participatory Cultures - "Work and Entertainment" from *The American Film Musical*, Rick Altman, 1987; Excerpt from "Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture," Henry Jenkins, 2006 (pp. 1-11)

Sept 16 - Modernity, Movement, and the Moving Image - In-Class Clips: Busby Berkeley, Charlie Chaplin, Dziga Vertov; **Close Analysis of Film Clip Due**

WEEK 5: September 29 - October 3

Sept 29 - Neorealism - *Bicycle Thieves* (Vittorio De Sica, 1948; **WS**; Discuss Paper 1 Prompt)

Oct 1 - Post-War Cinemas and Film Festivals - "Introduction" from *Global Art Cinema* (Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover, 2010)

Oct 3 - Art/Auteur Cinema - In-class Discussion; **Writing Exercise Due**: Review of *Bicycle Thieves*

WEEK 6: October 6 - 10

Oct 6 - HOLIDAY

Oct 8 - Cult Cinema and Cinephilia - *Harold and Maude* (Hal Ashby, 1971, 91 min); **WS**

Oct 10 - **Writing Exercise Due:** Oral presentations summarizing an assigned critic's position: "Cult Film: A Critical Symposium"
<http://www.cineaste.com/articles/cult-film-a-critical-symposium>

WEEK 7: October 13 - 17

Oct 13 - Independent and Minority Cinemas - *Baadasssss Cinema - A Bold Look at 70's Blaxploitation Films* (Isaac Julien, 2002, 58 min); **WS**

Oct 15 - Race and Representation in Cinema - In-class Discussion

Oct 17 - In-class Peer-Review Workshop - **Paper 1 Draft Due**

WEEK 8: October 20 - 24

Oct 20 - Romantic Projections and Post-Classical Cinemas - *Cinema Paradiso* (Giuseppe Tornatore, 1988); **WS**

Oct 22 - Cinema as Industry: Production, Exhibition, Distribution - In-class discussion

Oct 24 - Cinephilia and the Era of Celluloid - In-class discussion; **Paper 1 Due**

WEEK 9: October 27 - 31

Oct 27 - Third Cinema and "New" Cinemas: *Gabbeh* (Mohsen Makhmalbaf, 1996, 75 min); **WS**

Oct 29 - Politics of Aesthetics - Selections from *Questions of Third Cinema*, ed. Jim Pines & Paul Willimen, 1990; **Writing Exercise Due:** Annotated Copy of Reading

Oct 31 - Medium-Specificity: Cinema and Other Arts - In-class discussion; Discuss Paper 2 Prompt

WEEK 10: November 3 - 7

Nov 3 - HOLIDAY

Nov 5 - Film Noir and the Cinematic City - *Los Abrazos Rotos/Broken Embraces* (Pedro Almodovar, 2009, 127 min); **WS**

Nov 7 - Dystopian Modernities - "Imagining the Modern City, Darkly," Gyan Prakash, 2010

WEEK 11: November 10 - 14

Nov 10 - Hollywood, Bollywood, Nollywood, and its Others - *Supermen of Malegaon* (Faiza Ahmad Khan, 2008, 52 min); **WS**

Nov 12 - Global Travels of B-Films - "Hong Kong Action Films in the Indian B Circuit," S.V. Srinivas, 2003

Nov 14 - (Anglophone) Cinema and Modernity - "Cameroon Video Film in English," Joyce Ashuntantang, 2010

WEEK 12: November 17 - 21

Nov 17 - Independent Cinema in the Digital Era - *Be Kind Rewind* (Michel Gondry, 2008, 102 min); **WS**

Nov 19 - (Audio-)Visual Culture and (Post)Modernity - In-class discussion

Nov 21 - Cinephilia and the Digital - Editor's Introduction + "Reflections on the Recent Cinephilia Debates," Marijke de Valck, 2010, pp. 130-139

WEEK 13: November 24 - 28

Nov 24 - Poetic Documentary - *Nostalgia de la Luz* (Patricio Guzmán, 2011, 90 min); **WS**

Nov 26 - Accented Cinemas and Co-productions - In-class discussion

Nov 28 - In-class Peer-Review Workshop - **Paper 2 Draft Due**

WEEK 14: December 1 - 5

Dec 1 - Contemporary Cinephilia & Critical Possibilities: Imagined Pasts, Imagined Futures - *Inglorious Basterds* (Quentin Tarantino, 2009, 153 min)

Dec 3 - No class - work on final papers

Dec 5 - No class - work on final papers

WEEK 15: December 8 - 10

Dec 8 - No class - work on final papers

Dec 10 - **Paper 2 Due by E-mail**