

Lingnan University
Department of Visual Studies

Course Title	: Film Theory and Criticism
Course Code	: VIS4352
Recommended Study Year	: 3 rd and 4 th years
No. of Credits/Term	: 3
Mode of Tuition	: Lecture and tutorial
Class Contact Hours	: 2 hours lecture per week 1 hour tutorial per week
Category in Major Programme	: Programme Elective
Prerequisite(s)	: N/A
Co-requisite(s)	: N/A
Exclusion(s)	: N/A
Exemption Requirement(s)	: N/A

Brief Course Description

An exploration of critical and theoretical writings about the cinema, focusing on major theoreticians as well as central topics and problems pertaining to the cinematic medium and art form. The course emphasizes so-called ‘classical’ film theory rather than ‘contemporary’ film theory, and should be viewed as complementing the Visual Studies ‘Film and Philosophy’ course, where the focus is on contemporary debates. Students will be introduced to the writings on cinema of such key figures as Ricciotto Canudo, Germaine Dulac, Antonin Artaud, Jean Epstein, Hugo Münsterberg, Béla Balazs, Siegfried Kracauer, Yury Tynyanov, Dziga Vertov, André Bazin, Sergei Eisenstein, Lev Kuleshov, V.I. Pudovkin, and Alexander Bakshy.

Aims

To enhance understanding of cinema and the issues it raises through acquaintance with some of the earliest attempts to understand the nature and implications of the cinematic medium.

To familiarize students with the classical texts of film theory.

To introduce students to the central debates prompted by film during the first decades of its existence.

To ensure students’ understanding of the arguments and positions with which Bazin, Kracauer, Eisenstein and others have come to be associated over the years.

Learning Outcomes

Knowledge and understanding of some of the more influential arguments to have been articulated about film by some of its earliest theorists.

A clear grasp of some of the enduring tendencies in theoretical thinking about film.

Familiarity with the writings of key theorists, and an awareness of where these theorists tend to be situated on a spectrum of arguments regarding film and its specificities.

Background knowledge with regard to contemporary debates in film theory

Indicative Content

1. The nature of the cinematic medium and filmic representations.

2. Film as art
3. Film and its relation to the other arts
4. Contrasting realist, anti-realist, and illusionist theses concerning cinematic representations.
5. On film technique: montage, framing, cinematic blocking, camera movement, special effects, mise-en-scene etc.
6. Screen acting: challenges and opportunities

Teaching Method

Lectures, presentations, group work and discussions

Measurement of Learning Outcomes

Assessment of the students will focus on their active engagement with the readings and issues, and on their ability to develop articulate critical responses to the arguments of classical film theory. Students will be expected to demonstrate an ability:

- accurately to reconstruct influential theoretical arguments about film
- to identify the theorists responsible for articulating these arguments, and their continued influence on thinking about film
- to assess the strengths and weaknesses of classical arguments about film

Students' learning will be assessed through continuous assessment involving formal debates, a short paper (5-6 pages, double spaced) focused on the strengths and weaknesses of a key theoretical text, and a final research paper (10 pages, double spaced).

Assessment

20% Participation,

30% Short Paper

50% Research Paper

Required Readings

Selections from:

Abel, Richard, ed. *French Film Theory and Criticism: A History/Anthology, 1907-1939*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988.

Arnheim, Rudolf. *Film as Art*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957.

Bazin, André. *What is Cinema?* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.

Braudy, Leo and Marshall Cohen, eds. *Film*

Theory and Criticism. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Kracauer, Siegfried. *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997.

Langdale, Allan, ed. *Hugo Münsterberg on Film*. New York: Routledge, 2002.

Michelson, Annette. *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*. Berkeley: University of California

Press, 1984.

Pudovkin, V.I. *Film Technique and Film Acting*. New York: Lear Publishers, 1949.

Taylor, Richard, ed. *The Eisenstein Reader*. London: British Film Institute, 1998.

Supplementary Readings

Dalle Vacche, Angela, ed. *The Visual Turn: Classical Film Theory and Art History*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003.

Carroll, Noël. *Philosophical Problems of Classical Film Theory*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988.

Important Notes:

- (1) Students are expected to spend a total of 9 hours (i.e. 3* hours of class contact and 6* hours of personal study) per week to achieve the course learning outcomes.
- (2) Students shall be aware of the University regulations about dishonest practice in course work, tests and examinations, and the possible consequences as stipulated in the Regulations Governing University Examinations. In particular, plagiarism, being a kind of dishonest practice, is “the presentation of another person’s work without proper acknowledgement of the source, including exact phrases, or summarised ideas, or even footnotes/citations, whether protected by copyright or not, as the student’s own work”. Students are required to strictly follow university regulations governing academic integrity and honesty.
- (3) Students are required to submit writing assignment(s) using Turnitin.
- (4) To enhance students’ understanding of plagiarism, a mini-course “Online Tutorial on Plagiarism Awareness” is available on <https://pla.ln.edu.hk/>.

* Numbers of hours are subject to adjustment for individual courses.