

ENGL/ LLC 279 Winter 2023

Introduction to Film History

Term: Winter 2023

Co-Instructors: Professors Alanna Thain (English) and Daniel Schwartz (LLC – Russian/German)

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Office hours and location TBA

Description: Designed as one of the two core courses for World Cinemas Minors, this course introduces key historical moments, cinematic movements, formal styles, as well as historiographical and theoretical debates in the history of world cinema. The course maps out diverging trajectories and merging paths of exemplary filmmakers and filmmaking collectives in various nations and geo-political regions against the backdrop of the changing technological media environments. While we distinguish chronology from history, the course follows the transformation of cinema from its emergent era to the present. Students will read both historical and contemporary texts to gain a broad sense of the seminal debates in film studies, reception and criticism. This course aims to foster a critical understanding of cinema as an international, distributed and polycentric phenomenon. Note: This course also counts as one of the History requirements for the Cultural Studies major.

Required Readings:

All required readings may be found in My Courses under the “Readings” tab in Course Content.

Required Films:

All films will be screened in class and are available through the McGill library.

Evaluation:

Shot-by-Shot Analysis: Due Feb. 3

10%

- Read the entire Yale Film Analysis guide (linked below), then create a shot-by-shot analysis of a scene from a film we’ve watched in this class (this can include short films) based on the example of Rocco and His Brothers: <https://filmanalysis.yale.edu/rocco-and-his-brothers-luchino-visconti-italy-1960/>.
- Due Friday, Feb. 3rd. Submit on to the “Shot by Shot” folder in My Courses.
- Please submit a Word or PDF document as My Courses does not allow us to view Pages on their website. Your file should be titled “YOURNAME_SHOTANALYSIS”.

Rear-Views Slide-Deck DUE: rolling submissions

15%

Working in groups of two, you will create **one power-point slide** for a film-historical artifact of your choice (e.g. a camera, a movie poster, a prop, a microphone, a historical review, a magazine article, a remake of work, a figure from film history, etc.). You will also submit a **350 word discussion** of your object, according to the criteria below.

- Sign up by topic and week on My Courses. Please indicate if you already have a partner; otherwise you will be assigned one by the teaching assistants.
- Questions about the assignment/ not sure if your object is a good choice? Make use of our office hours and your week's discussion board to discuss your choice.

Constraints:

- Your choice must be related to the period and emphasis of the week. You will be sharing your slide the week after our class lecture. For example, if you are working on the 1940s and Neo-Realism (Jan 30), you will present the next week (Feb. 6).
- Your goal is to expand our working sense of film history. Your slide should address the question: what else is there to see?
- Your slide must include the following information: a) your search question b) an image of your object (or in the case of a text, a quote and the full bibliographic details) and the date c) your names d) a 2-3 sentence description of why it is relevant to our class on film history
- Along with your slide, you will submit a one page write -up that addresses a) how you developed your search question; b) what your object is and why you selected it c) what issues and questions in film history, as we are studying it in the class, this object and your approach responds to. This is an opportunity to reflect on how we do film history, and you can make reference to the class lectures and readings.
- Your submission will be assessed on: a) the originality of your choice of object b) the relevance of your research question to the class both as a whole, and to the week of your intervention c) how well your reflection integrates the methods and questions of film history that we have discussed in class. Bonus points for using class materials—note that you are welcome to use the readings from previous weeks.

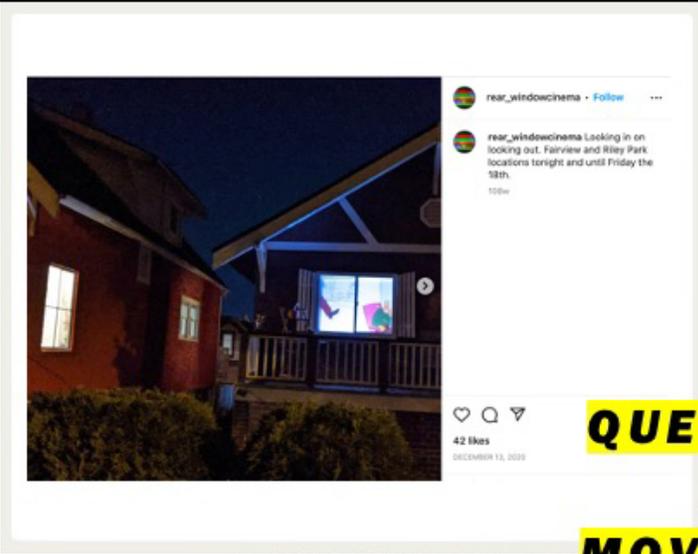
How to submit:

- Your slides are due no later than midnight the Sunday before class.
- Upload your slide to the week's "SLIDE" folder labeled with your member's last names and the date (eg. SCHWARTZ_THAIN_JAN8). Separately, submit your "RESPONSE" to that week's folder labeled with your member's last names and the date (eg. SCHWARTZ_THAIN_JAN8).

OPTION: you are welcome to work in larger groups to make a series of slides. Say you want to know: "What kind of sound did we hear in cinemas during the silent period around the world?" Or "what were the most important film festivals in certain regions of the world in the 1960s?". Start the conversation in your discussion board early!

We will start each week of class with a slide show of what you find, so make it good! Get creative in how and where you search for inspiration!

Sample:



Rear_windowcinema is an experimental cinema exhibition project. It was launched during Covid when cinemas in Vancouver were closed and there were restrictions on collective assembly. By turning the private space of the home into a scene of public display, this project tries to re-animate the shared experience of cinema-going. It makes the windows of homes and apartments into a new kind of big screen, affirming the importance of small-form cinemas like animation and experimental works who may have been especially affected by pandemic restrictions and the move to mainstream streaming media.

QUESTION: HOW DID PEOPLE WATCH MOVIES DURING THE PANDEMIC?

Source: Instagram, rear_windowcinema, dated Dec. 13, 2020
Alanna Thain

In-class midterm: Feb. 20

20%

Short (one paragraph) and multiple choice/ fill-in-the-blanks answers. This exam will test your knowledge and comprehension of the lectures, readings and films.

Attend and review (500 words) an outside film event: due March 20

15%

- Event can be part of a film festival, a Q&A with a filmmaker, a conference / presentation, a museum exhibition, etc. For example, this event with visiting artist lamathilde through the department of English: Screening and artist talk with Montreal experimental video artist Lamathilde, Jan. 30, 6:00 PM, Arts W 215 6:30-8:00pm. Short videos and experimental VR. For more information on artist see: <http://www.lamathilde.com/>
- See La lumière collective (<https://lalumierecollective.org/>), Cinema Politica (<https://www.cinemapolitica.org/local/concordia/>), The Montreal Monstrum Society's Winter courses (<https://www.monstrum-society.ca/courses--cours.html>); the CCA (<https://www.cca.qc.ca/en/>), FIFA (International Festival of Films on Art) (<https://lefifa.com/en>) and Concordia's GEM lab (<https://www.globalemergentmedia.com/>) for other options / ideas. A great online option is the screening series of e-flux (<https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/432561/screening-room/>).
- The event cannot just be a screening at a commercial theater like Cinéma du Parc (unless it is part of a special series or festival).
- Write a short (500-word max) review of the event. Please include a consideration of how the context of the event contributes to your understanding of and engagement with the event itself. Where is it taking place? Who is the audience? How is it framed? What were your expectations, and were they challenged in any way? How does this event connect to the historical contexts of film exhibition, production, reception and analysis that we have

been discussing? Make sure to reference, by way of comparison, at least one film (including shorts) that we've watched in class and one reading assigned from the course.

- Due Date: Monday, March 20th. Submit on My Courses to the assignment folder, with your file labeled "YOURNAME_REVIEW"
- Please do not start looking for an event just before the deadline!
- Not sure if your event is relevant? Ask in our office hours or before/ after class. Please do not email us to ask about your topics!

Take-Home Final Exam Due April 17 by midnight.

- Format: Short essay questions. The final take-home exam will cover the materials from both lectures and required readings for the course. It will test both your knowledge of materials, and your ability to work across individual texts and films to make arguments.
- More details will be provided in class.
- Prior to the due date for this assignment, we will offer review sessions led by TAs. Dates and locations for the review sessions will be announced.
- The final take-home exam is due on April 17th. Submit on My Courses to the assignment folder labeled "YOURNAME_FINALEXAM".

Communication Policy: We will set up MyCourses for student-student discussions but would like to encourage questions and comments in class as well as face-to-face communication. As a general policy, to assure quality of communication, we would like you to speak with us in person during our office hours. Please reserve email communication for genuine emergencies. Please e-mail one of our two TAs if you require administrative assistance (questions about grading, submissions, etc.). If need be, they will forward your requests to us Please do not send a last-minute email requesting extensions. These will be ignored.

Language of Submission: In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded. This does not apply to courses in which acquiring proficiency in a language is one of the objectives/ Conformément à la Charte des droits de l'étudiant de l'Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté (sauf dans le cas des cours dont l'un des objets est la maîtrise d'une langue).

Academic Integrity:

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures" (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information).(Approved by Senate on 29 January 2003).

Learning Accommodations:

We are happy to work with you if you require a learning accommodation; please speak with us after class or during office hours.

Power Points:

To encourage class attendance, we do not share Power Points or lectures except in specific cases (e.g. learning accommodations). If you miss a class, please ask one of your fellow students for notes.

Course Schedule

Week One, Jan. 9

Alanna Thain: Early Cinema / Cinema of Attractions

Week One: Selected short films and excerpts from early cinema

Readings:

Tom Gunning. "The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde " *Early Cinema : Space, Frame, Narrative*. Eds. Elsaesser, Thomas and Adam Barker. London: BFI Pub., 1990. 56-62.

Jean Epstein. "On Certain Characteristics of Photogenie " *French Film Theory and Criticism : A History/Anthology, 1907-1939*. Ed. Abel, Richard. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988. 314-18.

Week Two, Jan 16

Daniel Schwartz: Soviet Montage

Film

Battleship Potemkin, Sergei Eisenstein, 1926

Reading:

Sergei Eisenstein, "The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram," and Eisenstein, "A Dialectical Approach to Film Form," from *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, ed. Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich: 1977)

Read Film Analysis Guide: <https://filmanalysis.yale.edu/basic-terms/>

Week Three, Jan 23

Daniel Schwartz: The Arrival of Sound / Weimar Germany

Film: *M, A City Searches for A Murderer*, Fritz Lang, 1931

Reading:

Siegfried Kracauer, "Dialogue and Sound" from *Film Sound: Theory and Practice*

Michel Chion, Excerpts from *The Voice in Cinema*

Week Four, Jan. 30

Roberto Viviani: Italian Neorealism and its After

Film: *Rome, Open City*, Roberto Rossellini, 1945

Reading:

Cesare Zavattini, "Some Ideas on the Cinema," *Sight and Sound* 23:2, October-December 1953.

André Bazin, "An Aesthetic of Reality: Cinematic Realism and the Italian School of the Liberation" from *What is Cinema?: Volume II*.

Bonus and option for review essay assignment : Screening and artist talk with Montreal experimental video artist Lamathilde, Jan. 30, 6:00 PM, Arts W 215 6:30-8:00pm. Short videos and experimental VR. For more information on artist see: <http://www.lamathilde.com/>

Assignment #1: Shot by shot due Friday, Feb. 3

Week Five, Feb. 6

Daniel Schwartz: Global Neorealism

Film: *Pather Panchali*, Satyajit Ray, India, 1955

Reading:

Satyajit Ray, "What's Wrong with Indian Films?"

Neepa Majumdar, "Importing Neorealism, Exporting Cinema: Indian Cinema and Film Festivals in the 1950s, from *Global Neorealism*

Bonus: Guest lecture with Wendy Keys, Film Society at Lincoln Centre. Bring your questions about how to get into the world of film programming, festivals and curation!

Week Six, Feb. 13

Alanna Thain: Global New Waves

Film: *Daisies*, Věra Chytilová, 1966; *Salut Les Cubains*, Agnes Varda, 1963

Reading:

Alexandre Astruc. "The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La Caméra-Stylo " *The New Wave; Critical Landmarks*. Ed. Graham, Peter John. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1968. 31-38.

Gregory Nowell Smith, "From Polish Cinema to Czech New Waves and Beyond" from *Making Waves: New Cinemas of the 1960s* (Continuum, 2007).

Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, "Narrativizing Visual Culture: Towards a Polycentric Visual Culture," in *The Visual Culture Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2002) 37-59.

Week Seven, Feb. 20

Daniel Schwartz: Africa 1970s National Allegory to Post-Colonial Articulation

Film: *Xala*, Ousmane Sembene, 1974, 123 mins

Readings

Teshome H. Gabriel, "Towards a Critical Theory of Third World Films," in *Film and Theory: An Anthology*, 340-358.

Laura Mulvey, "The Carapace that Failed: Ousmane Sembene's *Xala*," *Fetishism and Curiosity* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1996), 118-136.

Teshome H. Gabriel, "*Xala*: A Cinema of Wax and Gold," *Third Cinema in the Third World* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982), 77-86

Feb 27 Winter Break No Class

Week Eight, Mar. 6

Alanna Thain: Third Cinema and Revolution

Special guest lecture on the films of Afro-Cuban filmmaker Sara Gomez, by Professor Susan Lord (Queens), director of the Vulnerable Media Lab.

Film: *The Hour of the Furnaces*, Part I, Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, 1968, 90 min and works by Sara Gomez

Reading:

Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, "Toward a Third Cinema," in *Film and Theory: An Anthology*, eds. Robert Stam and Toby Miller. (Malden: Blackwell, 2000), 265-286.

Julio García Espinosa, "For an Imperfect Cinema," *Film and Theory: An Anthology*, eds. Robert Stam and Toby Miller. (Malden: Blackwell, 2000), 289-297.

Week Nine, Mar. 13 1980s

Alanna Thain: Global Queer Cinema, Excess and New Internationalisms

Film: *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (Pedro Almodovar, 1988, 88 minutes)

Karl Schoonover and Rosalind Galt. "Introduction," *Queer Cinema in the World*

Mark Allinson. "Cultural Context " from *A Spanish labyrinth : the films of Pedro Almodóvar*

Raphaelle Moine,. "What Is the Purpose of Genres?"

Week Ten, Mar. 20

Alanna Thain: The Digital Turn and the Crisis of Indexicality

Moment of Innocence (Mohsan Makmahlbaf, 1996, 78 mins)

Special guest: Daniella Shreir, Founder of *Another Gaze* Journal, discussing contemporary film criticism and *Another Screen's* program of shorts, "Films for Iran from Iran". Please visit the *Another Gaze* site before class: <https://www.anothergaze.com/>

Samira Makhmalbaf. "The Digital Revolution and the Future of Cinema."

Anne Friedberg, "The End of Cinema: Multimedia and Technological Change," *Reinventing Cinema Studies*, eds. Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams (London: Arnold, 2000), 438-452.

Trier, Lars von. "'The Dogme Manifesto and 'Vow of Chastity'." *Dogme Uncut : Lars Von Trier, Thomas Vinterburg, and the Gang That Took on Hollywood*. Ed. Stevenson, Jack. Santa Monica, CA: Santa Monica Press, 2003.

Week Eleven, Mar. 27

Daniel Schwartz: Taiwanese New Wave, Musicals and Zombies

Film: *The Hole*, Tsai Ming Liang, 1998

Reading:

"Remapping Taipei," Frederic Jameson

Other Readings: TBA

Week Twelve, April 3

Alanna Thain: *Intimate Cinemas at the Edge of the Century*

Film: *Les Glaneurs et La Glaneuse*, Agnes Varda, 2000 (82 minutes)

Teresa de Lauretis "Aesthetic and Feminist Theory: Rethinking Women's Cinema" (22 pages)

cléo special issue on Varda: "The Gift of Collaboration: A Roundtable on Agnès Varda" (16 pages)

Kiva Reardon, "Mainstream Creep: Keeping Feminist Film Criticism Subversive", *Hazlitt* (6 pages)

Week Thirteen, April 12

Alanna Thain: *Resurgent Imaginations: Indigenous Cinema around the Globe*

Film and readings TBD