

Philosophy 21801/31801 Art History 27904/37904

Professors: James Conant and Joel Snyder
Course Assistants: Zed Adams and Kristin Boyce

Philosophy and Film

*** Syllabus ***

Course Description

The course will investigate some of the conditions and modes of visual presentation that make it possible for viewers of fictional motion pictures to become absorbed in what we experience as a fictional narrative world. This will involve exploring questions such as the following: What is the difference between an objective and a subjective camera shot? How is a subjective camera shot attached to or associated with the point of view of someone in the world of a movie? What is an objective camera shot? Is it, as some say, a point of view on the world of a movie that is no one's point of view -- a view from nowhere? What could that mean? Is it possible to construct a fictional narrative movie world entirely out of subjective camera shots? What is a point of view (and how, if at all, does it differ from a perspective)? What is a subjective (as opposed to an objective) point of view? Is the concept of an objective point of view a contradiction in terms? Along the way, some attention will be given to some specific aesthetic questions, e.g., what does it mean to say a painting or a film is "realistic"?; what difference does it make, if any, to an aesthetic medium if it has photographic basis? We will view a number of films that will help to illustrate and sharpen our discussion of the difficulties attending these issues. Some attention will be given to exploring the similarities and differences between the presentation of a fictional narrative world in film and in some of the other visual and dramatic arts, most notably painting and theatre.

Prerequisites

The only formal prerequisite for this course is at least one previous course in either Philosophy or Art History (or the equivalent thereof in Cinema and Media Studies or the Committee on Visual Arts). The course will be open to both undergraduate and graduate students.

Faculty Instructors

This course will be co-taught by Professor James Conant of the Philosophy Department and Professor Joel Snyder of the Art History Department. Their contact information is as follows:

James Conant email: jconant@uchicago.edu
 office: Wieboldt 124
 phone: 702 – 6146
 office hours: Wed. 3-5pm, or by appointment

Joel Snyder email: jsnyder@uchicago.edu
 office: CWAC 253
 phone: 702 - 9497
 office hours: Wed. 3-5pm, or by appointment

Course Credit

This course can be taken for both Philosophy and Art History course credit. This course has four different course numbers: Philosophy 21801/31801, Art History 27904/37904. Those who want Art History credit should register for it under one of its Art History numbers. Those who want Philosophy credit should register for it under one its Philosophy numbers. Graduate students who want credit for this course must register for it under one of its 300 numbers.

Course Requirements

The course requirements for undergraduates will be a short (2 page) *weekly* writing assignment and a longer (8 page) final paper. Further details concerning weekly writing assignments will be explained in the first meeting of undergraduate recitation section.

Regular attendance of all components of the course – lectures, screenings and post-screening discussions, and (for undergraduates) recitation sections – is mandatory for all students who wish to take the course for credit.

There is a chalk site for the course, listed under its Art History numbers, where announcements, undergraduate paper assignments, graduate take-home exam questions, and

other course materials will be posted. Please provide Prof. Snyder with your e-mail address so that you can access the chalk site. (The site is only accessible to those who use a U of C e-mail address.)

The breakdown of the final course grade for undergraduates will be as follows: each of the nine weekly writing assignments is worth 7% of the course grade (for a total of 63% of the grade), the final paper is worth 17% of the course grade, and class participation (in lecture, post-screening discussion, and recitation section) is worth 20% of the grade. You must receive a passing grade on every component of the course – weekly writing assignments (for graduate students: take-home exam), class participation (for undergraduates: including recitations), and final paper. If you receive a failing grade in any one of these component parts of the course, you fail the course.

The course requirements for graduate students will be a final paper (15+ pages) and a take-home final exam B each worth 50% of your final grade.

Readings

The following books are required for the course and can be purchased at the Seminary Co-Op Bookstore:

André Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, Vol. 1

André Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, Vol. 2

Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed*

Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality*

V. F. Perkins, *Film as Film*

George Wilson, *Narration in Light*

In addition to the readings from the books, there will also be assigned articles for the class. Each of these is marked below with an asterisk (*) and is available on electronic reserve at the Regenstein library web site under any of the course numbers or either of the professors' names.

Recitations

The following paragraph applies only to undergraduates taking the course for credit (therefore, *not* to undergraduates who are merely auditing the course or to graduate students of any sort):

In addition to the twice-weekly course meetings on Tuesday and Thursday from 3:00 to 4:20pm, every undergraduate taking the class for credit is also required to attend a weekly recitation section. The recitation sections will be taught by the course assistants. Sign-up for recitation sections will be during the first meeting of the course. Recitations will begin meeting the second week of the quarter. If you are an undergraduate taking the course for credit and you have not been assigned to a recitation section, you must get in touch with one or the other of the teaching assistants immediately!

The two course assistants for the course are Zed Adams and Kristin Boyce. Their contact information is as follows:

Zed Adams: zed@uchicago.edu

Kristin Boyce: keboyce@midway.uchicago.edu

Screenings

Starting the first week of the quarter, there will be a weekly screening at 7pm on Wednesday evenings in CWAC 157. After each film there will be a post-screening discussion. Students taking the course for credit are required to attend both. Students can also view most of the films at the Film Studies Center, in Cobb 306, and are encouraged to go there and treat themselves to second and third viewings of the required films for the course.

Schedule of Course Meetings

Week One

September 28	Introductory Meeting
September 29	Screening: <i>Lady in the Lake</i>
September 30	Diderot on Absorption and Theatricality

Week Two

October 5	The Paradox of the Beholder
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October 6	Screening: <i>Michael Caine on Film Acting</i>
October 7	The Dialectic of Theatricality
Week Three	
October 12	Subjective Camera
October 13	Screening: <i>Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde</i> (opening sequence); <i>Dark Passage</i>
October 14	Objective Camera
Week Four	
October 19	Pudovkin and the Montage Theory
October 20	Screening: <i>The Battle of St. Petersburg</i> <i>Psycho</i> (shower sequence)
October 21	The Limitations of the Montage Theory
Week Five	
October 26	The Holism of Cinematic Interpretation
October 27	Screening: <i>Lady from Shanghai</i>
October 28	Style and Medium in Film
Week Six	
November 2	The Ontology of the Photographic Image
November 3	Screening: <i>The Bicycle Thief</i>
November 4	The Impression of Reality
Week Seven	
November 9	What is Cinematic Realism?
November 10	Screening: <i>Diary of a Country Priest</i>
November 11	Further Dimensions of Realism

Week Eight

- November 16 The Artifice of Realism
- November 17 Screening: *Days of Heaven*
- November 18 What Happens By Itself in Cinema?

Week Nine

- November 23 Acting on Stage vs. Screen
- Thanksgiving Break

Week Ten

- November 30 The World of a Movie
- December 1 Screening: *Rear Window*
- December 2 Optional Discussion Period

Schedule of Reading Assignments

In the schedule of readings below, readings that are on electronic reserve are marked with a single asterisk. All other reading assignments are from the required texts for the course.

Week One

- September 28 Introductory Meeting
- September 29 Reviews of *Lady in the Lake**
- September 30 Denis Diderot, "Notes on Painting" *
Denis Diderot, "Salon of 1767"*
Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality*, chapter 1

Week Two

- October 5 Denis Diderot, "Conversations on *The Natural Son*" *
Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality*, chapter 2
- October 7 Michael Fried, *Courbet's Realism*, pp. 1-52, 278-283*

Week Three

- October 12 Jean Mitry, "Subjective Camera"*
- October 14 Karel Reisz, *Fundamental Principles of Film Editing* (excerpt)*
Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (excerpt)*

Week Four

- October 19 V. I. Pudovkin, "On Film Editing"*
- October 20 V. F. Perkins, *Film as Film*, pp. 105-117
(also available on e-reserve)
- October 21 V. F. Perkins, *Film as Film*, Chapter 1
(also available on e-reserve)

Week Five

- October 26 George Wilson, *Narration in Light* (selections)
- October 28 Erwin Panofsky, "Style and Medium in the Motion Pictures"*

Week Six

- November 2 André Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image"
- November 3 André Bazin, "*Bicycle Thief*"
- November 4 André Bazin, "De Sica: Metteur en Scène"
V. F. Perkins, *Film as Film*, Chapter 2 (also available on e-reserve)

Week Seven

- November 9 André Bazin, "The Myth of Total Cinema"

“The Evolution of the Language of Cinema”

November 10 André Bazin, “*The Diary of a Country Priest* and the Stylistics of Robert Bresson”

November 11 V. F. Perkins, *Film as Film*, Chapter 4

Week Eight

November 16 Maya Deren, “Cinematography: The Creative Use of Reality”*

November 17 Nestor Almendros, “*Days of Heaven*”*

November 18 Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed*, Chapters 1-3
Joel Snyder, “What Happens By Itself in Photography?”*

Week Nine

November 23 Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed*, Chapters 4-5
Leo Braudy, *The World in a Frame* (excerpt)*
André Bazin, “Theater and Cinema”

Thanksgiving Break

Week Ten

November 30 V. F. Perkins, “Where is the World?: The Horizon of Events in Movie Fiction”

V. F. Perkins, *Film as Film*, Chapter 5

December 1 V. F. Perkins, *Film as Film*, Chapter 7

December 2 Cavell, *The World Viewed*, Chapters 6-19 (optional)
V. F. Perkins, *Film as Film*, Chapter 8-9 (optional)

