



Philosophy of Film: Advanced Topics Seminar in Philosophy

Phil 75.1, T 3:30 – 6, Brooklyn College

Professor Seeley, pseeley@msn.com

Office Hours, Tuesday, 2:30 – 3:15

Course Description:

In this course we will examine several philosophical problems surrounding film as both a form of fine art and a medium of popular entertainment. What makes film a unique artform? How are movies different from television and documentaries? How do films convey an illusion of reality in the theater? What is the basis for our emotional interactions with characters? How do the answers to these questions bear on question of film authorship and the nature of cinematic narration? The course will take a cognitivist approach. Cognitivist theories attempt to explain spectator engagement with film as an extension of ordinary perceptual and emotional experiences. But this is not the only approach to the philosophy of film, and over the course of the semester we will also discuss the differences between cognitivist, Marxist, psychoanalytic, and semiotic theories of film.

Course Goals:

- 1) Introduce students to the problems and methods of the philosophy of film.
- 2) Evaluate *Cognitivism* as an alternative to traditional positions in film theory.
- 3) Introduce students to a growing field of interdisciplinary work in aesthetics and cognitive science.

Requirements:

A 6 page mid-term paper on an assigned topic designed to synthesize the course material covered prior to the midterm.

You will also be asked to screen films on your own as part of your regular homework assignments. these films will be placed on reserve in the ATS Library in the basement of Stager Hall.

We will also meet once a month outside of class in the Philosophy Seminar Room to screen and discuss clips from the films listed on the syllabus. I will ask you to write 3 short (3- 4 page) papers on the films we screen together outside of class. The purpose of these assignments is to evaluate the success of cognitivist theories of film.

An 8-12 page final paper. Your final papers should use some film(s) we have screened in class to illustrate and evaluate the cognitivist approach to one of the philosophical issues covered on the syllabus.

Texts:

- *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*, eds. David Bordwell & Noël Carroll (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996). **(P)**
- *Film Theory and Philosophy*, eds. Richard Allen & Murray Smith (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). **(AS)**
- *Film Theory and Criticism*, eds. Leo Braudy & Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). **(BC)**

SCHEDULE OF READINGS:

Topic 1: What is a cognitivist theory of film?

- Virginia Brooks, "Film, Perception, and Cognitive Psychology," *Millennium Film Journal* 14/15, 1984, 105-126. **(eDisk)**
- Gregory Currie, "The Film Theory That Never Was: A Nervous Manifesto," in Allen & Smith, *Film Theory and Philosophy*, 42-59. **(AS)**
- Noël Carroll, "Towards an Ontology of the Moving Image," in Freeland and Wartenberg, *Philosophy and Film*, 68-85. **(eDisk)**
- Virginia Brooks and Julian Hochberg, "The Perception of Motion Pictures", in Edward Carterette and Morton Friedman (eds.), *Handbook of Perception*, vol. 10 (New York: Academic Press, 1978), 259-304. **(eDisk)**

Films: "The Purple Rose of Cairo"; "Solaris" (Tarkovsky)

Topic 2: Film, Perception, and Reality

Realism Revised:

- Andre Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," in Brady and Cohen, *Film Theory and Criticism*, 195-199. **(BC)**
- Sigfried Kracauer, "Basic Concepts (from *Theory of Film*)," in Brady & Cohen, *Film Theory & Criticism*, 171-182. **(BC)**
- Kendall Walton, "Transparent Pictures", *Critical Inquiry*, 11, 1984, 256-277. **(eDisk)**
- Gregory Currie, "Photography, Painting, and Perception," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 49(1), 23-29. **(edisk)**
- Gregory Currie, "Film, Reality, and Illusion," in Bordwell & Carroll, *Post-Theory*, 325-344. **(P)**
- Noël Carroll, "The Power of Movies," in Carroll, *Theorizing the Moving Image*, 78-93. **(eDisk)**
- Richard Allen, "Looking at Motion Pictures," in Allen and Smith, *Film Theory & Philosophy*, 76-94. **(AS)**
- Kendall Walton, "On Pictures and Photographs: Objections Answered," in Allen & Smith, *Film Theory and Philosophy*, 60-75. **(AS)**
- David Bordwell, "Convention, Construction, and Cinematic Vision," in Bordwell & Carroll, *Post-Theory*, 87-107. **(P)**

Films: "The Rules of the Game"; "Citizen Kane"; "The Lady from Shanghai"; "Alphaville"; "Stalker" (Tarkovsky)

Fiction, Non-fiction, and Film:

- Gregory Currie, "Visible Traces: Documentary and the Contents of Photographs," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 57(3), 1999, 285-297. **(eDisk)**
- Trevor Ponech, "What is Non-Fiction Cinema," in Allen and Smith, *Film Theory and Philosophy*, 203-220. **(AS)**
- Carl Plantinga, "Moving Pictures and the Rhetoric of Nonfiction Film," in *Post-Theory*, 307-324. **(P)**
- Noël Carroll, "Nonfiction Film and Postmodernist Skepticism," in *Post-Theory*, 283-306. **(P)**
- Trevor Ponech, "Non-Fictional Cinematic Artworks and Knowledge," in Wartenberg and Curran, *The Philosophy of Film*, 77-90. **(eDisk)**

Films: "The Thin Blue Line; Roger and Me; Sherman's March; Atomic Cafe

Topic 3: Film, Fiction, and Emotion

Emotions and Characters

- Gregory Currie, "Imagination and Simulation: Aesthetics Meets Cognitive Science," in Davies and Stone, *Mental Simulation* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1995), 151-169. **(eDisk)**
- Gregory Currie, "Imagination, The General Theory," in *Image and Mind*, 141-163. **(eDisk)**
- Gregory Currie, "Imagination, Personal and Impersonal," in *Image and Mind*, 164-197. **(eDisk)**
- Alex Neill, "Empathy in (Film) Fiction," in *Post-Theory*, 175-194. **(P)**
- Murray Smith, "Imagining from the Inside," in Allen and Smith, *Film Theory and Philosophy*, 412-430. **(AS)**
- Noël Carroll, "Simulation, Emotions, and Morality," in *Beyond Aesthetics*, pp. 306-317. **(eDisk)**
- Matthew Kieran, "In Search of a Narrative," in Kieran and Lopes, *Imagination, Philosophy, & the Arts*. **(eDisk)**

Films: Terms of Endearment; Thelma and Louise; Spellbound; Homicide; Dead Calm (Polanski)

Realistic Horror:

- Kendall Walton, "Fearing Fictions," *The Journal of Philosophy*, 75(1), 1978, 5-27. **(eDisk)**
- Noël Carroll, "Metaphysics and Horror, or Relating to Fictions," in *The Philosophy of Horror*, 59-96. **(eDisk)**
- Noël Carroll, "The Paradox of Horror," in *The Philosophy of Horror*, 159-194. **(eDisk)**
- Cynthia Freeland, "Realist Horror," in Freeland & Wartenberg, *Philosophy and Film*, 126-142. **(eDisk)**
- Cynthia Freeland, "Feminist Frameworks for Horror Films," in *Post-Theory*, 195-218. **(P)**

Films: Jurassic Park; The Fly; Repulsion; Scream; The Man Who Knew Too Much; Alien; An American Werewolf in London

Topic 4: Language of Film

- Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier* (excerpts), in Brady and Cohen, *Film Theory and Criticism*, 68-89. **(BC)**
- Gilbert Harman, "Semiotics and Cinema: Metz and Wollen," in Brady and Cohen, *Film Theory and Criticism*, 90-98. **(BC)**
- Stephen Prince, "The Discourse of Pictures," in Brady and Cohen, *Film Theory and Criticism*, 99-117. **(BC)**
- Gregory Currie, "The Long Goodbye: The Imaginary Language of Film," *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 33(3), July 1993: 207-19. **(eDisk)**

Topic 5: Film Narrative

Film Narrative

- David Bordwell, "Principles of Film Narration," in Freeland & Wartenberg, *Philosophy and Film*, 183-199. **(edisk)**
- Seymour Chapman, "The Cinematic Narrator," in Freeland & Wartenberg, *Philosophy and Film*, 190-197. **(eDisk)**
- George Wilson, "On Film Narrative and Narrative Meaning", in Allen and Smith, *Film Theory and Philosophy*, 221-238. **(AS)**
- Todd McGowan, "Lost on Mulholland Drive: Navigating David Lynch's Panegyric to Hollywood," *Cinema Journal* 43.2 (2004): 67-89. **(eDisk)**
- George Wilson, "Transparency and Twist in Narrative Fiction Film," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 64:1, pp. 81-96. **(eDisk)**
- Berys Gaut, "The Philosophy of the Movies: Cinematic Narration," ed. Peter Kivy, *Blackwell Guide to Aesthetics* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2003), 230-253 **(eDisk)**
- Gregory Currie, "Unreliability Reconfigured: Narrative in Literature and Film" *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 53(1), 1995, 19-29. **(eDisk)**

Films: Mulholland Drive; Rear Window

Topic 6: Film Authorship

- Andrew Sarris, "Notes on Auteur Theory," in Braudy and Cohen, *Film Theory and Criticism*. (BC)
- Paisley Livingstone, "Cinematic Authorship," in Allen and Smith, *Film Theory and Philosophy*. (AS)
- Berys Gaut, "Film Authorship and Collaboration," in Allen and Smith, *Film Theory and Philosophy*. (AS)
- Stephen Heath, "Against Authorship," in Wartenberg and Curran, *The Philosophy of Film*. (eDisk)

Syllabus Bibliography:

- David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (New York: Routledge, 1997).
- Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror or Paradoxes of the Heart* (New York: Routledge, 1990).
- Noël Carroll, *A Philosophy of Mass Art*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).
- Noël Carroll, *Theorizing The Moving Image*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
- Noël Carroll, *Beyond Aesthetics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
- Gregory Currie, *Image and Mind: Film, Philosophy, and Cognitive Science* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
- Cynthia A. Freeland and Thomas E. Wartenberg, *Philosophy and Film*, (New York: Routledge, 1995).
- Matthew Kieran & Dominic Mclver Lopes, *Imagination, Philosophy, & the Arts* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

Other Texts of Interest:

- Rudolf Arnheim, *Film as Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957).
- Rudolf Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974).
- David Bordwell, *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).
- David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson (eds.), *Film Art: An Introduction and Film Viewer's Guide* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2003).
- Warren Buckland, "Film Semiotics", in Toby Miller and Robert Stam (eds.), *A Companion to Film Theory* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004).
- Noel Carroll, *Philosophical Problems of Classical Film Theory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988).
- Noel Carroll, *Mystifying Movies: Fads and Fallacies in Contemporary Film Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).
- Noel Carroll, *A Philosophy of Mass Art*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).
- Noel Carroll, *Interpreting the Moving Image*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
- Noel Carroll, *Engaging the Moving Image* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).
- Seymour Chatman, *Coming to Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990).
- Seymour Chatman, "What Novels Can Do that Films Can't (and Vice Versa)", in Braudy and Cohen (eds.), *Film Theory and Criticism*.
- Seymour Chatman, "The Cinematic Narrator", in Braudy and Cohen (eds.), *Film Theory and Criticism*.
- Gregory Currie, "Photography, Painting, and Perception", *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 49 (1991).
- Mark Edmundson, *Nightmare on Main Street: Angels, Sodomasochism, and the Culture of the Gothic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).
- Sergei Eisenstein, "Beyond the Shot", in Braudy and Cohen (eds.), *Film Theory and Criticism*.
- Berys Gaut, "The Paradox of Horror", in Alex Neill and Aaron Ridley (eds.), *Arguing About Art* (New York: Routledge, 2002).
- Berys Gaut, "Film Authorship and Collaboration", in Allen and Smith (eds.), *Film Theory and Philosophy*.
- Berys Gaut, "Making Sense of Films: Neoformalism and its Limits", *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 1995.
- Berys Gaut, "Cinematic Art", *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 60 (2002).
- Berys Gaut, "Identification and Emotion in Narrative Fiction", in Carl Plantinga and Greg Smith (eds.), *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition, and Emotion*.
- Chris Grau (ed.), *Philosophy and the Matrix*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).
- Torben Grodal, *Moving Pictures: A New Theory of Film, Genres, Feeling, and Cognition*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

- Alfred Guzzetti, "Christian Metz and the Semiology of the Cinema", in Braudy and Cohen (eds.), *Film Theory and Criticism*.
- John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson (eds.), *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).
- Richard Joyce, "Rational Fear of Monsters", *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 40, 2000.
- William King, "Scruton and Reasons for Looking at a Photograph", in Alex Neill and Aaron Ridley (eds.), *Arguing About Art* (New York: Routledge, 2002).
- Andrew Light, *Reel Arguments: Film, Philosophy, and Social Criticism*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2003).
- James Monaco, *How to Read a Film*, Oxford University P., 2000.
- John Morreall, "Enjoying Negative Emotions in Fictions", *Philosophy and Literature*, 9, 1985, 95-102.
- Alexander Nehamas, "Writer, Text, Work, Author", in Anthony Cascardi (ed.), *Literature and the Question of Philosophy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).
- Carl Plantinga and Greg Smith (eds.), *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition, and Emotion* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press,, 1999).
- Roger Scruton, "Photography and Representation", in *The Aesthetic Understanding* (New York: St. Augustine, 1998).
- Irving Singer, *Reality Transformed: Film as Meaning and Technique* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998).
- Irving Singer, *Three Philosophical Filmmakers: Hitchcock, Welles, Renoir* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004).
- Murray Smith, *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion, and the Cinema* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).
- Murray Smith, "Film Spectatorship and the Institution of Fiction", *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 53 (1995): 113-27.
- Kendall Walton, "Film, Photography, & Transparency," in Wartenberg and Curran, *The Philosophy of Film. (H)*
- Kendall Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990).
- Nigel Warburton, "Individual Style in Photographic Art", in Alex Neill and Aaron Ridley (eds.), *Arguing About Art*, (New York: Routledge, 2002).
- Tom Wartenberg, *Unlikely Couples: Movie Romance as Social Criticism* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999).
- George Wilson, *Narration in Light: Studies in Cinematic Point of View* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).
- Peter Wollen, "The Auteur Theory", in Braudy and Cohen (eds.), *Film Theory and Criticism*.

Seminar in the Problems in Philosophy: Philosophy of Film
Philosophy 75.1
Midterm Paper Assignment, Spring 2003
Brooklyn College
Professor Seeley

Paper Topics: Midterm Paper Assignment

Write a concise 6 (1500– 1800 words) page paper on one of the following two topics:

- 1) Is it inconsistent for Gregory Currie to assert both that cinematic motion is a "response dependent" property of film images and that cinematic motion is "real motion?" Can a constructivist theory of vision be used to resolve the putative tension between these two claims.
- 2) Is natural dependence sufficient to demonstrate that photographs are transparent?
- 3) Cognitivist theories of film argue that film images are realistic because they are the product of our natural visual recognition capacities. Nonetheless cognitivists like Noël Carroll and Gregory Currie argue against realism in film theory. Explain the cognitivist position and evaluate Carroll and Currie's arguments against the traditional conceptions of realism in film theory.

This paper serves as the mid-term evaluation of your work. It is designed to evaluate your understanding of the basic principles of cognitivist theories of film. The critical feature of the assignment is your analysis of cognitivist film theory as a means to evaluate theories and resolve problems in the philosophy of film.

Good Luck,

Bill