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)
SCHEDULE OF READINGS:

**Topic 1:** What is a cognitivist theory of film?

- Noël Carroll, "Towards an Ontology of the Moving Image," in Freeland and Wartenberg, *Philosophy and Film*, 68-85. (eDisk)

**Films:** “The Purple Rose of Cairo”; “Solaris” (Tarkovsky)

**Topic 2:** Film, Perception, and Reality

**Realism Revised:**

- Sigfried Kracauer, “Basic Concepts (from Theory of Film),” in Brady & Cohen, *Film Theory & Criticism*, 171-182. (BC)

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

**Fiction, Non-fiction, and Film:**

- Noël Carroll, "Nonfiction Film and Postmodernist Skepticism," in *Post-Theory*, 283-306. (P)

**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, 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)
- 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:**
- Noël Carroll, “Metaphysics and Horror, or Relating to Fictions,” in *The Philosophy of Horror*, 59-96. (eDisk)
- Cynthia Freeland, “Realist Horror,” in Freeland & Wartenberg, *Philosophy and Film*, 126-142. (eDisk)

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

**Topic 4: Language of Film**


**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)
- George Wilson, “Transparency and Twist in Narrative Fiction Film,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 64:1, pp. 81-96. (E)D

**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).
- Cynthia A. Freeland and Thomas E. Wartenberg, Philosophy and Film, (New York: Routledge, 1995).

Other Texts of Interest:

- Rudolf Arnheim, Film as Art (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957).
- Sergei Eisenstein, “Beyond the Shot”, in Braudy and Cohen (eds.), Film Theory and Criticism.
- Berys Gaut, “Film Authorship and Collaboration”, in Allen and Smith (eds.), Film Theory and Philosophy.
- Kendall Walton, “Film, Photography, & Transparency,” in Wartenberg and Curran, *The Philosophy of Film*. (H)
- 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