FMS - 387: FILM AND MEDIA STUDIES THEORY

INSTRUCTOR: ANNIE PETERSEN
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OFFICE HOURS: TUESDAY 1-4, HUNTER 204

CLASS: MONDAY/WEDNESDAY, 2:30 - 3:50
SCREENING: MONDAY 7:30 - 10:00
COURSE BLOG: HTTP://FMSTHEORY.WORDPRESS.COM

COURSE DESCRIPTION:
This course serves as an introduction to the major theoretical approaches to film, media, and popular culture from the last 150 years. From Marxist critiques of “the culture industry” to feminist understandings of the male gaze, from theories of montage to critical race theory, we’ll explore the various techniques and approaches to understanding what media is, how it works, how audiences consume it, and why it matters.

COURSE GOALS:
By the end of the course, you will be expected to:
• Understand what “theory” is -- and why and how it can be useful.
• Acquire the skills to read, annotate, process, & discuss challenging theoretical texts.
• Readily apply theory to various media objects.
• Conceive of theory as a continuum in which theorists are constantly building on and responding to the work of those who came before.

COURSE MATERIALS:
Braudy and Cohen, Film Theory & Criticism, 7th Ed.
Storey, Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction, 5th Ed.
Storey, Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader, 4th Ed.
Various readings available on CLEo

CLASS POLICIES:
• You are expected to read all material by the day it is listed on the syllabus.
• If you miss class, you are responsible for obtaining missed material, assignments, etc.
• No cell phones. If it rings, if you text, you’re out for the day.
• No laptops. We’ll discuss why.
CONTACTING ME:
The best way to communicate is through office hours. Always, always, always. If you cannot make my office hours, I am available by appointment. If you have a quick question that needs answered, you may either email me or find me on Gchat. If my dot is green, chat away. I will try to answer emails as quickly as possible, but may not be able to answer within an hour. Remember that I’m an old person and go to bed way before 2 a.m.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:
If you are a student with a disability who will need accommodations in this course, please meet with Julia Dunn in the Academic Resource Center (Mem. 205, x5213, dunnjl@whitman.edu) for assistance in developing a plan to meet your academic needs.

OTHER PERTINENT INFORMATION:
• I expect that all work submitted is the original work of the student whose name appear on it and that the work is prepared originally for this course. In other words, follow Whitman’s policies on academic honesty and plagiarism. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism or are unsure about how to properly cite sources, please come talk to me.
• This syllabus is subject to small changes in lecture topics, readings, and screenings.
• There are no incompletes in this course save an extreme circumstance.
COURSE GRADING

FINAL PAPER 40%
DISCUSSION LEADERSHIP 20%
BLOG DISCUSSION 20%
ATTENDANCE / PARTICIPATION 20%

FINAL PAPER:
For your final paper, you will apply one or more theories from the class to a media object of your choosing, evidencing your understanding of the nuances of the theory itself and its applications. The final paper will also include a pitch, annotated bibliography, first and final draft. Details will be forthcoming.

DISCUSSION LEADERSHIP:
Each of you will sign up for one “discussion leader” slots. Don’t worry; you’re not completely in charge. You’ll come up with a synopsis/explanation of the reading(s), present it to the class, and show at least one example (film, YouTube clip, song, image) of how the reading can be applied. Basically it’s tell (the theory) and show (how it works).

You’ll be expected to attack the reading ahead of time and meet with me to hash out some basic concepts, get ideas, etc. Your “leadership” should last no more than 15 minutes (I’ll cut you off) and incorporate your classmates in some way. Don’t think of this as an intimidating call to be the absolute master of the material -- it’s an opportunity to elucidate the theory and spark conversation.

BLOG DISCUSSION:
After completing the reading for each week, you will be expected to participate in a class discussion, prompted by me, on the course blog. Oftentimes, I’ll ask you to think of examples of a particular theory “in action”; other times, I’ll ask you to simply discuss the interactions between a text we’ve read and another media object.

Responses will be due by 7AM on WEDNESDAY of each week. You will then need to comment on another post by 12 NOON on WEDNESDAY. Note: on the week that you lead discussion, you do not need to post to the blog. Your responses should be concise, proof-read, provocative, respectful, compelling, and conversational. See the course blog under “Posting Guidelines” for more details and rubric.
ATTENDANCE:
Showing up. Staying awake. More than five minutes late = absent. I will give you two free absences for any reason -- excused or unexcused. After two absences, your grade begins to drop. Obviously, we can talk if there are extreme circumstances.

PARTICIPATION:
TALKING. IN CLASS. But not dominating every conversation. There’s a fine art to participation, and this course should help you refine it. This is a seminar, and that means that each one of you should be contributing, thoughtfully and often, during every class period. You’ll learn very quickly that means that you must do the reading. You don’t necessarily have to understand every word, but you must have read, annotated, and attempted to understand.

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A FINAL WORD:
Theory is difficult. It can be impenetrable, it can be confusing, it can be nonsensical. But it can also be liberating -- and make you think about the world, and the media texts it produces, in an entirely different way. But you will have to work hard: harder than you’ve probably worked in (humanities) class before. Like most difficult things, however, the rewards will be substantial. Working together, we’ll make our way through this theory -- no classmate left behind. But in order to get there, we must cultivate an atmosphere of humility and understanding. It’s okay to say you don’t understand, to ask for help, and to help others. But I must absolutely trust you to do the readings. If not, we’ll only have an atmosphere of bullshit, which isn’t worth any of our time. This could be the most important class of your Whitman career -- but you need to open yourself to it.
WK 1 HOW DO WE THEORIZE MEDIA?

WED 9/4: Introductions; Approaches to Reading Theory
• Arnold, “Culture and Anarchy” (Red 3-11)
• Leavis, “Mass Civilization and Minority Culture” (Red 12-19)

WK 2 MARXISM

MON 9/9 - The Basics
Storey: “Classical Marxism,” (Blue 59-61)
Selected Marx & Engels (Red 58-61)

SCREENING: *A Face in the Crowd* (Kazan 1957)

WED 9/11 - The Culture Industry
• Storey, “The Frankfurt School” (Blue 62-69)
• Adorno and Horkheimer, “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception” (CLEo)
• Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (B&C 665-685)

*Discussion Leader: __________________________  __________________________*

WK 3 SEMIOTICS / STRUCTURALISM

MON 9/16: The Study of Signs
• Berger, “Semiotic Analysis” (CLEo)
• Explore: “Semiotics and the Media” (CLEo)

SCREENING: *Queen Christina* (Mamoulian 1933)

WED 9/18: Structuralism
• Storey, “Roland-Barthes: Mythologies” (Blue 118-125)
• Barthes, “Myth Today” (Red 261-269)
• Barthes, “The Face of Garbo” (B&C 471-473)
WK 4 IDEOLOGY / RESISTANCE

MON 9/23 - Ideology
- Storey, “Althusserianism” (Blue 70-78)
- Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” (Red 302-312)

Discussion Leader: __________________________

SCREENING: The Matrix (Wachowski Brothers 1999)

WED 9/25 - Hegemony
- Storey, “Hegemony” (Blue 79-81)
- Gramsci, “Hegemony, Intellectuals, and the State” (Red 75-80)
- Storey, “Rockin’ Hegemony: West Coast Rock” (Red 88-97)

WK 5 MODES OF RESISTANCE

MON 9/30: Alternate Readings
- Storey, “Post-Marxism and Cultural Studies” (Blue 82-87)
- Hall, “Encoding/Decoding” (CLEo)

SCREENING: Gentlemen Prefer Blondes (Hawks 1954)

WED 10/2: Queering Pop Culture
- Doty, “What Makes Queerness Most?” “There’s Something Queer Here” (CLEo)
- Sontag, “Notes on Camp” (CLEo)

Discussion Leader: __________________________
WK 6 PSYCHOANALYSIS/FEMINIST THEORY
MON 10/7: Psychoanalysis
• Storey, “Freudian, Lacanian, Cine-Psychoanalysis” (Blue 91-106)
• Freud, “The Dream-Work” (Red 246-254)
• Lacan, “The Mirror Stage” (Storey 255-260)

SCREENING: Rear Window (Hitchcock 1954)

WED 10/9: The Male Gaze
• Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and the Narrative Cinema” (B&C 711-722)
• Modleski, “The Master’s Dollhouse: Rear Window” (B&C 723-735)

Discussion Leader: __________________________
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WK 7 FEMINISM POST-MULVEY
MON 10/14: NO CLASS - MID-SEMESTER BREAK

WED 10/16: Abjection
• Kristeva, “Approaching Abjection” (CLEo)
• Creed, “Horror and The Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection” (CLEo)

WK 8 CRITICAL RACE THEORY
MON 10/21: Racial Ideologies
• Storey, “Race and Racism” “Ideology of Racism” “Orientalism” (Blue 167-178)
• Said, “Introduction to Orientalism” (CLEo)
• Dyer, Selections from White (CLEo)

Discussion Leader: __________________________
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SCREENING: Bamboozled (Lee 2000)

WED 10/23: Race and the Media
• Hall, “Racist Ideologies and the Media” (CLEo)

Discussion Leader: __________________________
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WK 9 POSTMODERNISM

MON 10/28: Postmodernism/Postmodernities
• Malpas, “The Postmodern” (CLEo)

SCREENING: Moulin Rouge (Luhrmann 2001)

WED 10/30: Postmodern Media Culture
• Storey, “Jean Baudrillard” “Postmodern Music,” “Postmodern Television”
• Baudrillard, “The Precession of Simulacra” (Red 409 - 415)

Discussion Leader: __________________________

WK 10 THE GENIUS OF THE SYSTEM

MON 11/4: The Studio System
• Jewell, “How Howard Hawks Brought Baby Up” (B&C 515-522)
• Schatz, “The Whole Equation of Pictures” (B&C 523-528)

WED 11/6: The Star System
• McDonald, “Stardom as a System” (CLEo)
• Allen, “The Role of the Star in Film History” (CLEo)

Discussion Leader: __________________________

WK 11 GENRE THEORY

MON 11/11: Making Lists
• Altman, “A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre” (B&C 552-563)
• Schatz, “Film Genre and Genre Film” (B&C 564-575)

WED 11/13: Body Genres
• Williams, “Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess” (B&C 602-616)

Discussion Leader: __________________________
WK 12 CANONS AND TASTE FORMATION

MON 11/18: The Auteur Theory
• Sarris, “Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962” (B&C 451-454)
• Wollen, “The Auteur Theory” (B&C 455-462 (stop after Hawks))
• SCREEN ON OWN: *His Girl Friday* (Hawks 1940) or *Red River* (Hawks 1950)

WED 11/20: The Aristocracy of Culture
• Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital” (CLEo)
• Wilson, “Let’s Talk About Love” (CLEo)

Discussion Leader: ______________________________________

THANKSGIVING BREAK

WEEK 13 - CHOOSE YOUR OWN THEORY ADVENTURE

WEEK 14 - CONFERENCING

FINAL PAPER DUE: THURSDAY, DECEMBER 19TH 5 PM