



# Philosophy of Film: A Cognitivist Approach (Phil s24a)

**M-Th: 10am-2pm, Bates College**

**Professor William Seeley, 75 Campus Avenue, rm 202**

**Office Hours: W/Th 2-3pm**

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## 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...or not? How do films convey an illusion of reality in the theater? What is the basis for our emotional interactions with characters? Who is the film author? What is 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, theories of film and a range of alternatives.

## Course Goals:

The goals of this course are threefold: First and foremost we will try to come to an understanding of what philosophy of film is and how it differs from other approaches to studying film as an artform. In this context the course will introduce students to the basic problems and methods that define the field. The specific lens we will use to approach this material is a cognitivist theory of film. We will explore and evaluate cognitivist theories as alternatives to traditional positions in film theory. Along the way we will explore and evaluate the ways in which neuroscience has come to contribute to cognitivist approaches to film and philosophy of art more generally.

\*\* This seminar will be of interest to students with a background in philosophy of art and cognitive science. However, the course does not presuppose any prior specialized knowledge of philosophy or psychology and should be of interest to students in film studies, film production, or any student with a general interest in film.

## Text:

- Noel Carroll, *The Philosophy of Motion Pictures*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008. (required)

## Requirements:

- Four 4-page papers on assigned topics (40% of your final grade)
- One 8-10 page final paper on a topic of your choosing (50% of your final grade due no later than May 26th). All students must clear final paper topics with me before May 18.
- Class participation (10% of your final grade - see below)

***\*This is a preliminary syllabus. It will change as the semester unfolds to accommodate interests that emerge in class discussion.***

## ASSIGNMENTS:

**Class Participation – Film Screenings:** Class time will be divided between discussion and film screenings. I have set aside time for us to have, on average, six hours of discussion and five film screenings a week. As a general rule that means that we will meet for four 2-hour seminars each week and four 2-hour movie screenings. Seminars and screenings will all take place in 119 Dana Hall. The ambitious plan is to meet for seminar discussions T-Th from 10 to Noon and screen films each day Mondays from 10- Noon and Monday through Thursday from Noon to 2. In practice we will have to break for lunch every day sometime around 11:45. Our actual lunch schedule will depend on the length of the afternoon screening. The class is very large. However, I expect everyone to participate in class discussion every day. If I feel that folks aren't coming prepared I will administer a short reading quiz at the beginning of each class the average of which will replace the class participation grade.

I will set up two out of class screenings a week to screen supplemental movies. these screenings are encouraged but, unless otherwise noted, optional. Finally, I will ask folks to view a range of films and television programs from the library's collection on their own outside of class each weekend.

***You are required to attend each screening in the classroom.*** The class is too large to enable us to casually view the films on our own from the reserve list in the library. If you must miss a screening I will arrange an alternative time for you to watch the movie in the library.

**Four short Analysis Papers 1 (900-1100 words):** The purpose of these ***analysis papers*** is for you to evaluate a standard argument in the literature. This is not an *opinion paper*. The method of philosophy is critical analysis. We are interested in understanding the reasons behind the values, beliefs, or theories that we hold. These reasons, if good, ought to provide logical support for those values, beliefs, or theories. In the following paper you should: identify the theoretical problem at hand; rehearse the standard argument for the position(s) identified; & evaluate whether these reasons genuinely support that (those) position(s). The first step identifies the problem space that you are addressing. The second step should have the form of a ***rational reconstruction***. In a rational reconstruction one does their best to give an argument a fair shake. You should do your best to make the standard argument(s) as plausible as you can. The final step is to respond. Your response should identify any step(s) in the standard argument(s) that you find to be in error. The key here is that you are not analyzing the truth or falsity of the target position directly. Rather you are analyzing the reasoning offered as evidence for that position.

**Topics Distributed:** Thursday afternoons on LYCEUM

**Due Dates:** Midnight Sunday evenings on LYCEUM and in class Monday morning in hardcopy

**Final paper:** A final paper (8-10 double-spaced pages) . You must clear your topic with me by May 18<sup>th</sup>.

**Topic Discussion:** By May 18th

**Due Date:** Midnight May 26<sup>th</sup> on LYCEUM

## SCHEDULE OF READINGS:

### What Is a Cognitivist Theory of Film

#### **Realism & Illusion**

Gregory Currie (1996). "Film, reality and illusion," in eds. David Bordwell and Noel Carroll, *Post Theory* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press), 325-346.

Andre Bazin (1967). "Cinematic realism," reprinted in eds. Thomas E. Wartenberg and Angela Curran, *The Philosophy of Film* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2005), 59-69.

#### **Language of Film**

Vsevolod Pudovkin (1958). "On editing," reprinted in Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, *Film Theory and Criticism* New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 9-14.

Brian Henderson (1970). "Toward a non-bourgeoisie camera style," reprinted in Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, *Film Theory and Criticism* New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 57-67.

Gregory Currie, "The long goodbye: the imaginary language of film," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 33(3): 207-19.

#### **The Transparency Thesis**

Noel Carroll (2008). "Film as art," in *the Philosophy of Motion Pictures* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers), 7-34.

Kendall Walton, "Film, photography, and realism" reprinted in eds. Thomas E. Wartenberg and Angela Curran, *The Philosophy of Film* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2005), 70-76.

#### **A Cognitivist Approach**

Noel Carroll (2008). "The moving picture – the shot," in *the Philosophy of Motion Pictures* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers), 80-115.

Noel Carroll (2008). "Moving images – cinematic sequencing and narration," in *the Philosophy of Motion Pictures* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers), 116-146.

Noel Carroll (2008). "Affect and the moving image," in *the Philosophy of Motion Pictures* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers), 147-191.

### Some Problems in the Philosophy of Film

#### **Non-Fiction Film**

Carl Plantiga (1996)., "Moving pictures & the rhetoric of non-fiction film: Two Approaches" in eds. David Bordwell and Noel Carroll, *Post Theory* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press), 307-324.

#### **Horror & Suspense**

Noel Carroll (1990). "The nature of horror," *The Philosophy of Horror* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 12-58.

Cynthia Freeland, "Feminist frameworks for horror," in eds. David Bordwell and Noel Carroll, *Post Theory* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press), 195-218.

#### **Neuroscience of Film: attentional engagement and empathy with characters**

W. P. Seeley, "What is the neuroscience of art...and why should we care?" *The American Society for Aesthetics Newsletter*, 31(2), Fall 2011. (LYCEUM: 1-12)

Uri Hasson, Ohad Landesman, Barbara Knappmeyer, Ignacio Vallines, Nava Rubin, & David J. Heeger, "Neurocinematics of Film," *Projections*, 2(1), 2008, 1-26.

Amy Coplan, "Catching Characters' Emotions: Emotional Contagion Responses to Narrative Fiction Film," *Film Studies*, 8, Summer, 2006, 26-38.

Paula M. Niedenthal, "Embodying Emotions," *Science*, 316, 2007, 1002-1005.

Luiz Pessoa, Sabine Kastner, and Leslie G. Ungerleider (2002). Attentional control of the processing of neutral and emotional stimuli. *Cognitive Brain Research* 15(1), 2002: 31-45.

Seth Duncan and L. F. Barrett (2007). Affect is a form of cognition: a neurobiological analysis. *Cognition and Emotion* 21(6): 1184-1211.

Amy Coplan, "Empathic engagement of narrative fictions," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 62(2), 2004: 141-152.

Nicole K. Speer, Jeremy R. Reynolds, Khenia M. Swallow, and Jeffery M. Zacks, "Reading stories activates neural representations of visual and motor experiences," *Psychological Science* 20(8), 2009: 989-999.

Mary M. Hayhoe and Dana H. Ballard, "Eye movements in natural behavior," *TRENDS in Cognitive Sciences* 9(4), 2005: 188-194.

Dana H. Ballard, Mary M. Hayhoe, Polly Pook, and Rajesh P. N. Rao, "Deictic codes for the embodiment of cognition," *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 20, 1997: 723-742.

Jeffery M. Zacks and Joseph P. Magliano, "Film, narrative, and cognitive neuroscience," in eds. D. P. Melcher and F. Bacci, *Art and the Senses* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

*supplemental:*

Virginia Brooks, "Film, Perception, and Cognitive Psychology," *Millennium Film Journal* 14/15, 1984: 105-126.

### **Who is the author?**

Andrew Sarris (1962). "Auteur theory and film evaluation," reprinted in eds. Thomas E. Wartenberg and Angela Curran, *The Philosophy of Film* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2005), 99-107.

Berys Gaut (1997). "Film authorship and collaboration," in eds. Richard Allen and Murray Smith, *Film Theory and Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press), 149-172.

### **What is Cinematic Narration?**

David Bordwell (1996). "Principles of film narration," reprinted in eds. Thomas E. Wartenberg and Angela Curran, *The Philosophy of Film* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2005), 183-199.

George Wilson (1997). "Narration as showing," in eds. Thomas E. Wartenberg and Angela Curran, *The Philosophy of Film* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2005), 198-207

## **Moving Image List**

### ***Movies:***

The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (Robert Wiene, 1920)  
The Battleship Potemkin (Sergei Eisenstein, 1925)  
The Rules of the Game (Jean Renoir, 1939)  
Citizen Kane (Orson Welles, 1941)  
The Purple Rose of Cairo (Woody Allen, 1985)  
Prospero's Books (Peter Greenaway, 1991)  
    Solaris (Tarkovsky, 1972)  
    Stalker (Tarkovsky, 1979)  
Alphaville (Jean-Luc Godard, 1965)  
Weekend (Jean-Luc Godard, 1967)  
    La Chinoise (Jean-Luc Godard, 1967)  
    Breathless (Jean-Luc Godard, 1960)  
Sleeper (Woody Allen, 1973)  
The Lady from Shanghai (Orson Welles, 1947)  
Thelma and Louise (Ridley Scott, 1991)  
Atomic Café (Jayne Loader, Kevin Rafferty, 1982)  
    Sherman's March (Ross McElwee, 1986)  
    An Inconvenient Truth (Davis Guggenheim, 2006)  
    Roger and Me (Michael Moore, 1989)  
An American Werewolf in London (John Landis, 1981)  
Alien (Ridley Scott, 1979)  
The Blob (Irvin Yeaworth, 1958)  
The Fly (David Cronenberg, 1986)  
Toy Story (John Lasseter, 1995)  
Freaks (Todd Browning, 1932)  
    Invasion of the Body Snatchers (Don Siegel, 1956)  
    Scream (Wes Craven, 1996)  
Saving Private Ryan (Stephen Spielberg, 1998)  
Alien: Resurrection (Jean-Pierre Jeunet, 1997)  
Rear Window (Alfred Hitchcock, 1954)  
Memento (Christopher Nolan, 2000)  
    Spellbound (Alfred Hitchcock, 1945)  
    North By Northwest (Alfred Hitchcock, 1959)  
    The Man Who Knew Too Much (Alfred Hitchcock, 1956)  
Mulholland Drive (David Lynch, 2001)  
Apocalypse Now (Francis Ford Coppola, 1979)

### ***TV Episodes:***

Cheyenne  
The Rockford Files  
The Fugitive  
The Incredible Hulk  
MacMillan and Wife  
Veronica Mars

Date	Readings ( *supplementary reading; **screen on your own time by date)	Screening / Assignments
04/25		<i>The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari, Potemkin</i>
04/26	Screenings	<i>Purple Rose of Cairo, Prospero's Books</i>
04/27	Currie, "Film, reality and illusion" (LYCEUM: 325-346) Bazin, "Cinematic realism" (LYCEUM: 59-69)	<i>Alphaville</i>
04/28	Pudovkin, "On editing" (LYCEUM: 9-14) Henderson, "Toward a non-bourgeoisie camera style" (LYCEUM: 57-67) Currie, "The long goodbye..." (LYCEUM: 207-19) *Eco, On the contribution of film to semiotics (LYCEUM)	<i>Weekend</i> ** <i>La Chinoise</i>
05/02	Carroll, "Film as art" (PMP: 7-34) Walton, "Film, photography, and realism" (LYCEUM: 70-76)	<i>Sleeper</i> Analysis Paper 1 due
05/03	Carroll, The moving picture – the shot (PMP: 80-115)	<i>Lady from Shanghai</i>
05/04	Carroll, "Moving images – cinematic sequencing and..." (PMP: 116-146)	<i>Thelma and Louise</i>
05/05		
05/09	Carroll, "Affect and the moving image" (PMP: 147-191)	<i>Atomic Café</i>
05/10	Plantiga, "Moving pictures & the rhetoric of..." (LYCEUM: 307-324)	<i>An American Werewolf in London</i> ** <i>An Inconvenient Truth</i> Analysis Paper 2 due
05/11	Freeland, "Feminist Frameworks for Horror" (LYCEUM: 195-218)	<i>Alien</i>
05/12	NO CLASS	<i>Weekend Screening:</i> <i>The Fly</i> <i>The Blob</i> ** <i>Invasion of the Body Snatchers</i>
05/16	Carroll, "The Nature of Horror" (LYCEUM: 12-58)	<i>Toy Story (clip)</i> <i>Freaks (clip)</i>
05/17	Seeley, "What is the neuroscience of art..." (LYCEUM: 1-12) Hasson, "Neurocinematics" (LYCEUM: 1-26)	
05/18	Coplan, "Catching characters emotions..." (LYCEUM: 26-38) Neidenthal, "Embodying emotions" (LYCEUM: 1002-1005)	<i>Memento</i> Analysis Paper 3 Due
05/19	Pessoa et al, "Attentional control...emotional stimuli" (LYCEUM: 31-45) Pessoa & Adolphs, " Duncan & Barrett, "Affect is a form of cognition..." (LYCEUM: 1184-1211)	
05/23	Coplan, "Empathic engagement with narrative fiction" (LYCEUM: 141-152) Speer et al, "Reading stories activates neural..." (LYCEUM: 989-999)	
05/24	Hayhoe & Ballard, "Eye movements in..." (LYCEUM: 188-194) Ballard et al, "Deictic codes for the embodiment..." (LYCEUM: 723-742) Zacks & Magliano, " Film, Narrative, and..." (LYCEUM: 1-20)	<i>Rear Window</i>
05/25	Sarris, "Auteur theory and film evaluation" (LYCEUM: 99-107) Gaut, "Film authorship and collaboration" (LYCEUM: 149-172)	
05/26	Bordwell, "Principles of film narration" (LYCEUM: 183-189) Wilson, "Narration as showing" (LYCEUM: 198-207)	