FM 201 Introduction to Film Studies

Seminar Leader: Matthias Hurst
Course Times: Monday, 17.00 – 18.30 / Tuesday, 19.30 – 22.00 (film screening) / Thursday, 15.15 – 16.45
Email: m.hurst@berlin.bard.edu
Office Hours: Monday, 13.30 – 15.00, Friday, 13.30 – 15.00

Course Description
Film is a language. Like any other language it has diverse elements of organisation, different accents and different levels of meaning, and it underwent structural and lexical development since its invention in the late 19th century. Understanding the language of film implies the awareness of film history and aesthetics, of similarities between film and other narrative media and deviations of visual representation from traditional literary forms, and consequently the ability to recognize and analyze structures of filmic narration. This course is an introduction to Film Studies and provides an insight into the basic knowledge of film history and theory, film aesthetics and cinematic language. Central topics are modes and styles of filmic presentation, film analysis and different approaches to film interpretation, classical films, popular film genres and film directors. We explore and discuss the meaning of film as an art form, the elements of narration in fiction film and the representative function of film in our (post-)modern world and society, i.e. the ability of film to address important social and/or philosophical issues. The course consists of both lectures/seminars and film screenings.

Requirements
No prerequisites. Attendance is mandatory for all seminars and film screenings. Students are expected to come to seminars and film screenings punctually and prepared and to participate actively in the class discussions. They should also take advantage of the office hours to discuss any questions or concerns related to the class or their academic work.

Attendance
Attendance is mandatory for all seminars and film screenings. Absences will significantly affect the grade for the course. Absences are registered in all classes, and lateness is registered as absence. Students should notify the instructor if they are unable to attend class. Illness leading to inability to attend classes, or submit work, must be reported to the College Registrar; a medical certificate should be submitted to the Registrar in such a case. Bard College Berlin cannot offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, whether the absences are on documented medical grounds or not.

Writing Assignments
Students write two screening reports (900-1200 words each) in the first half of the semester and a final essay (3500-4000 words) due in week 15 (Monday, December 14, 2015, 18.00); the topic of this final essay will be a film interpretation. A list of film titles will be provided from which students choose one for an interpretation. Students will also do a test/quiz in week 14.
Policy on Late Submission of Papers
All assignments and written work must be submitted electronically and on time. Essays that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where an instructor agrees to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline and cannot receive a grade of higher than C. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment.

Grade Breakdown
Participation: 25 %
Screening Reports: 25 %
Quiz: 25 %
Final Essay: 25 %

Schedule

WEEK 1:
What is cinema? Film as a cultural and ‘anthropological’ phenomenon
(Suggested) Reading:

WEEK 2:
Real life vs. reel life
Different styles of filmic presentation, different styles of film language, mise-en-scène and montage (film narration from the late 19th century to the postmodern age)
Primitive Mode of Representation (PMR), Cinema of attractions
Reading:

**WEEK 3:**
Different styles of filmic presentation, different styles of film language, mise-en-scène and montage (film narration from the late 19th century to the postmodern age)
Institutional Mode of Representation (IMR), Cinema of narrative integration
Descriptive montage, montage of attractions, intellectual montage
Reading:

**WEEK 4:**
Descriptive montage, montage of attractions, intellectual montage
Sound, Color, Widescreen
Postmodern Cinema
Reading:

**WEEK 5:**
Film semiotics: Signs and codes; denotation and connotation of signs; paradigmatic and syntagmatic connotations
Reading:

**WEEK 6:**
Film analysis: Basic model
Structural analysis: The means and elements of filmic storytelling
Reading:

**WEEK 7:**
Modes of film interpretation:
Biographical interpretation; auteur theory, cinéma des auteurs
Reading:

**Fall Break: October 19 – 23**

**WEEK 8:**
Modes of film interpretation:
Sociological/socio-historical interpretation; film as manifestation of society or of societal/cultural/historical issues

**WEEK 9:**
Modes of film interpretation:
Film as part of genre tradition
Reading:

**WEEK 10:**
Modes of film interpretation:
Film as reference to (history of) literature, adaptations of literature:
Reading:
WEEK 11:
Modes of film interpretation:
Psychoanalytical interpretation; film as dream
Reading:

WEEK 12:
Modes of film interpretation:
Psychoanalytical interpretation: Feminist film theory
Reading:

WEEK 13:
Modes of film interpretation:
Conceptual approach; film as philosophy
Reading:

WEEK 14:
Final discussion, quiz, essay preparation

WEEK 15: Completion week
Final essay due Monday, December 14, 18.00

Suggested Reading / Selection:


