

Philosophy of Film

Syllabus Précis
(Temple, Fall 2008)

Instructor: Dr. Aaron Smuts

Description

This course focuses on as a set of philosophical problems having to do with the nature of film and our experiences of it. We will address questions such as: Can movies be art? What is film? What distinguishes narrative fiction films from documentaries? How do films move us? Why do people watch melodrama and horror if such movies depress and disgust audiences? Do films have authors whose artistic intentions matter? Can ethical flaws detract from the aesthetic value of a film? Can films instruct or corrupt us morally? What makes a good critic? Are some better than others? Can films “do philosophy”?

Texts

- 1.Noël Carroll and Jinhee Choi, eds. *Philosophy of Film and Motion Pictures* (Blackwell, 2006). [PFMP]
- 2.Noël Carroll. *The Philosophy of Motion Pictures* (Blackwell, 2008). [PMP]
- 3.Noël Carroll. *The Philosophy of Horror: Or, Paradoxes of the Heart* (Routledge, 1990) [PH]
4. Numerous articles posted on Blackboard. [BB]

Schedule

Week 1: Introduction — “The Blade” (Tsui Hark, 1995) [selections] | Carroll, “Prospects for Film Theory: A Personal Assessment” [BB] | Wartenberg, “Philosophy of Film” [SEP]

Topic 1: The Nature of Cinema

Week 2: Film as Art — “Sunrise” (Murnau, 1927) | Carroll, PMP Ch. 1 | Arnheim, “Film and Reality” and “The Complete Film” [BB] | Scruton, “Photography and Representation” [PFMP]

Week 3: Medium Specificity — “The Rules of the Game” (Renoir, 1939) | “Touch of Evil” (Welles, 1958) [selections] | “Prince of Darkness” (Carpenter, 1987) [selections] | Carroll, PMP Ch. 2 | Carroll, “Medium Specificity Arguments” [BB] | Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” “The Myth of Total Cinema,” “The Evolution of the Language of Cinema,” and “Cinema and Exploration” [BB]

Week 4: What is Cinema? — “La Jetée” (Marker, 1962) | Carroll, PMP Ch. 3, “Defining the Moving Image”, and “Monsters and the Moving Image” [BB] | Yanal, “Defining the Moving Image” [BB]

Week 5: Documentary — “Grizzly Man” (Herzog, 2005) | “Sans Soleil” (Marker, 1983) [selections] | Carroll, “The Film of Presumptive Assertion” [PFMP] | Currie, “Visible Traces” [PFMP]

Topic 2: Film and Philosophy

Week 6: Film as Philosophy — “Modern Times” (Chaplin, 1936) | Livingston, “Theses on Cinema as Philosophy” [BB] | Wartenburg, “Beyond Mere Illustration” [BB] | Frampton, *Filmosophy* (ch.10) [BB] | Deleuze, *Cinema 2* (selections) [BB]

Week 7: Film as Philosophy, cont. — “Wings of Desire” (Wenders, 1987) | “The Little People” [in class] | “October” (Eisenstein, 1928) [selections] | Livingston, “Theses on Cinema as Philosophy” [BB] | Smuts, “Film as Philosophy: In Defense of the Bold Thesis” [BB]

Topic 3: Film and Affect

Week 8: Cinema and Dream — “Spellbound” (Hitchcock, 1945) | Sparshott, “Vision and Dream in Cinema” [PFMP] | McGinn, (chs.4 and 5) from *The Power of Movies* [BB] | Carroll, (ch.1) from *Mystifying Movies* [BB] | Baudry, “The Apparatus” [BB]

Week 9: The Paradox of Fiction — “Point Blank” (Boorman, 1967) | Carroll, PMP Ch. 6 | Carroll, PH Ch. 2 (pp. 59-88) | Walton, “Fearing Fictions” [PFMP]

Week 10: Horror — “Carnival of Souls” (Harvey, 1962) | “Suspiria” (Argento, 1977) [selections] | Carroll, PH Ch. 1 | Shaw, “Power, Horror, and Ambivalence” [BB] | Smuts, “Horror”, and “The Ghost is the Thing” [BB] | Yanal, “Two Monsters in Search of a Concept” [BB]

Week 11: Painful Art — “Au Hasard Balthazar” (Bresson, 1966) | “Scenes From a Marriage” (Bergman, 1973) | Carroll, PH Ch. 4 | Hume, “Of Tragedy” [BB] | Smuts, “The Paradox of Painful Art” [BB]

Week 12: Suspense — “Rear Window” (Hitchcock, 1954) | Carroll, “The Paradox of Suspense” [BB] | Yanal, “The Paradox of Suspense” [BB] | Smuts, “The Desire-Frustration Theory of Suspense” [BB]

Topic 4: Evaluation

Week 13: Evaluation — “Stroszek” (Herzog, 1977) | Carroll, PMP Ch. 7 | Hume, “Of the Standard of Taste” [BB] | Daniel Kaufman, “Normative Criticism” [BB]

Week 14: Art and Morality — “In the Company of Men” (LaBute, 1997) | Carroll, “Sympathy for Soprano” [BB] | Carroll, “Moderate Moralism” [BB] | Smuts, “Aesthetic Properties and Moralism” [BB]