

CIMS 1004: WORLD FILM HISTORY

Summer 2025

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Sector II: History and Traditions

Office Hours: by appointment

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Tue & Thurs 5:15pm-7:55pm

Online

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Course Description

Focusing on various cinematic movements, trends, and regional/national cinemas throughout film history, this course allows students to examine from various angles the connection between history, theory, and cinema. From early cinema, the Golden Age of Hollywood, Soviet Montage, Italian neorealism, Third Cinema, to contemporary film movements, we will explore diverse cinematic trajectories from around the globe, along with their interconnectedness. The goal is to cover a broad historical, cultural, thematic and stylistic range, but also to explore longer, pre-cinematic histories of regional and national traditions, and their connection to other artforms that had profound influence on the evolution of the cinematic. The history of cinema will thus blur the divides between old and new media, foreign and national styles, conceiving of art in its hybrid and “impure” manifestation. In our study, we will engage with various writings on cinema from significant figures throughout film history. We will also explore numerous ways the medium of film has played an active role in, narrated, and shaped history. Finally, we will examine how the concept of “world,” “film,” and “history” is shaped and understood across places and time. By tracing both dominant and peripheral trajectories and cinemas, we will see how “placing the film on the map” accounts for structural (in)equality and reveals gendered, racial, ethnic, economic and political nature of transnational processes in world cinema.

Learning Objectives

- To map important trends, movements, connections, and stylistic changes in world film history.
- To develop tools and methods to support building knowledge about historically and culturally situated cinematic developments, histories, and both local and global styles and formations.
- To develop skills and conceptual frames for film analysis.
- To consider how film historians and theorists have understood film at different times and places
- To develop an understanding of how cinematic evolution is connected to historical and cultural context, but also how cinema has played an active role in shaping and narrating history.
- To develop an understanding of key debates surrounding the writing of history, and how these debates shape both major and minor cinematic flows.
- To empower students to understand and contribute to some of the lively and ongoing debates about what cinema is and does, how it changes and remains the same, and how/why it matters in different times and places.

Screenings

Please view each film carefully and in its entirety prior to each lecture. Films will be available in a variety of formats: some through library streaming (Kanopy, Alexander Street, FilmsOnDemand, etc.), some through password protected Vimeo. There will be some shorter screenings that will be held during class, but any feature length lengths must be watched on your own.

Attendance and Participation

Participation is a substantial part of your grade and is extremely important to your success. You are required to keep track of our Canvas site and review the week's course material. View the film, read the assigned material, and complete assignments in a timely fashion. You should complete the films before our Thursday sessions, and be ready to participate in these sessions with responses to the readings and the film. Two missed

classes will not affect your final participation grade, even though they will be registered on Canvas. If you need to miss two or more classes for any reason, please notify us in advance and reach out to discuss the next steps. If you miss more than five classes regardless of the reason, you should contact **CaseNet** (<https://www.college.upenn.edu/casenet>).

Class etiquette:

Please come to class on time, and do not leave the classroom while class is in progress, unless necessary.

If you are more than 20 mins late, you will be marked absent.

Please treat your peers and the instructor with respect in your emails and other forms of communication. A certain level of formality and full sentences are expected in your communication.

Stay present, actively contribute, and participate fully!

Assignments and Grading

Attendance and Participation (10% of grade)

Every student will be expected to participate in the class discussion. Getting full credit for participation in the class includes raising questions during class, answering questions pertaining to the films and readings, and contributing to discussions during group work. If you feel unable to participate fully in discussions for any reason, please let me know in class, during office hours, or via email.

Canvas Posts (20% of grade)

Once a week, post a response on the discussion board on Canvas to the readings and screenings for the week. Include specific references to the film or assigned texts. Proof read your posts before submitting them. Late responses will not be counted towards your Canvas Posts grade. Support your answers through specific references to the films or assigned texts.

Presentation (20% of grade)

Once during the semester you will, in groups, present the historical context of the film that is assigned for the week. This involves exploring the major regional, national, and transnational historical events that surround the film, the local film industry and the nation. Central to this presentation is an attempt to answer how the medium of film is entwined with the narration of history. You can go about your presentation in multiple ways, and it will be your job to decide on a methodology with your group. For example, it can be done any number of ways, through a close reading of legal documents, or through a more broad timeline approach to film history.

This presentation should be roughly 15 - 20 minutes.

Historiography paper (25% of grade)

This assignment will deepen students' historiographical understanding of any film period covered so far. You will analyze two accounts of film history in order to understand the various approaches to narrating and constructing a film history. You will start by picking a historical period and national cinema that has been covered. Then, you will read the corresponding chapter of said cinema in Bordwell and Thompson's *Film History*. You will compare Bordwell and Thompson's account with a second account of film history. This can be from any source of your choosing, as long as it covers the same historical period as *Film History*. I recommend comparing Bordwell and Thompson's account of history to David A. Cook's in *A History of Narrative Film*. A

successful assignment will show both the similarities and differences in these two accounts of a historical period of a national cinema, as well as the ways in which both texts construct a history.

1000 words maximum.

Final exam (25% of grade)

This will be a take-home exam featuring long-answer questions, for which you will have approximately one week to complete. Each response should be around 350 words. As this is an open-book exam, you are encouraged to utilize course materials to craft thoughtful and well-supported answers.

Required Text

Thompson, Kristin & David Bordwell. *Film History: An Introduction*. 5th edition. McGraw Hill Higher Education, 2022.

Additional articles

Suggested:

What Is Cinema, André Bazin

Film Form, Sergei Eisenstein

*All readings will be available on Canvas.

Course content, stressors, and student wellness

Cinema draws on the vast world for its material, and the films in this course contain the full range of that world. I am sensitive to the possibility that certain types of images may be upsetting to people, but as this is different for each person, I encourage anyone in the class who is aware of being triggered by specific things to communicate with me so that

we can try to make a plan together. Please also know that in this, as well as in other stressful situations, Penn has a wide range of support systems to help you navigate the challenges of student life. Penn has a wide range of support systems to help you navigate the challenges of student life. Many of them are listed here:

<http://www.pennparents.upenn.edu/wellness-mental-health-resources>. While I am not a trained mental health professional, I am happy to help you work out how to find the best help for yourself. For academic-related stress, I strongly encourage you to come to office hours early in the semester and as often as you need.

Academic Integrity

Students participating in this course agree to abide by Penn's Code of Academic Integrity: http://www.upenn.edu/academicintegrity/ai_codeofacademicintegrity.html. Please read this document carefully. Students violating this code will be reported to the Center for Community Standards and Accountability. Plagiarism most often happens when students are struggling in a course. If you are struggling, please come to office hours early and often so that we can help you.

Use of AI

As film scholars, we are always watching, thinking about, and studying about the promise and pitfalls of new technologies for ourselves and wider society. Whether we like it or not, AI has become a part of our lives and is here to stay. We recognize that you will use it regardless of whether it is allowed or not. While it is okay to use it, remember its limitations: it will not write a good paper for you; it will not be a reliable source of information; it will not think for you; it is full of factual errors, fake citations, fake sources, and hallucinations; it makes things up, and makes it all sound credible. For these reasons, it is still easy to see through AI generated work.

You **may not** submit any work generated by an AI program as your own. If you do, it will be treated like any other plagiarism case or form of cheating, and will be subject to relevant Penn policies on academic integrity.

Academic Support:

Weingarten Center

The Weingarten Center offers a variety of resources to support all Penn students in reaching their academic goals. All services are free and confidential. **To contact the Weingarten Center, call 215-573-9235.** The office is located in Hamilton Village at 220 S. 40th Street, Suite 260. Learning consultations and learning strategies workshops support students in developing more efficient and effective study skills and learning strategies. Learning specialists work with students to address time and project management, academic reading and writing, note-taking, problem-solving, exam preparation, test-taking, self-regulation, and flexibility.

Students can take advantage of free on-campus tutoring for many Penn courses in both drop-in and weekly contract format. Tutoring may be individual or in small groups. Tutors will assist with applying course information, understanding key concepts, and developing course-specific strategies. Tutoring support is available throughout the term but is best accessed early in the semester. First-time users must meet with a staff member; returning users may submit their requests online.

Disability Services

The University of Pennsylvania provides reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities who have self-identified and received approval from Disability Services. Students can contact Disability Services and make appointments to discuss and/or request accommodations by calling 215-573-9235. More information can also be found here: <https://weingartencenter.universitylife.upenn.edu/disability-services/>.

Statement on Academic Freedom

The policies of the University of Pennsylvania protect academic freedom, as defined in the **AAUP's 1940 Statement of Principles**. This statement has been endorsed by over

250 scholarly and educational organizations in the United States, and its principles are written into faculty handbooks nationwide, including **Penn's** (<https://catalog.upenn.edu/faculty-handbook/ii/ii-a/>). They are founded on the idea that a university's purpose is to generate new knowledge that can serve the common good in a democratic society, and that generating new knowledge requires free and open inquiry. To safeguard the university's public mission, academic freedom entails the following rights for all faculty members—whether tenure-track or non-tenure track, and including graduate research and teaching assistants—and for students:

The right of faculty members to full freedom in research, teaching, extramural speech (public speech on issues of general concern) and intramural speech (speech about the university itself, including criticism of it).

The right of students to freedom in learning, which includes freedom of association and expression and freedom of inquiry in the classroom.

Schedule

Week 1: Introductions

T (May 27): “World,” “Film,” “History”?

- **Screening:** *The Joy Luck Club* (Wayne Wang, 1993, 2h 19m)

Reading:

Lisa Lowe, Selections from *Intimacies of the Four Continents*

André Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image”

Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History”

R (May 29): The Invention of Cinema

- **Screening:** (To view in class) Short films by Thomas Edison, Lumière brothers, Alice Guy-Blaché, selections from *Once Upon a Time, Cinema* (Mohsen Makhmalbaf, 1992), *Something Good* (William Selig, 1898, 35s)

Reading:

“The Invention and Early Years of the Cinema” (FH, Ch 1)

Tom Gunning, “The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator, and the Avant-Garde”

Week 2: Golden Age of Hollywood?

T (June 3): A Cinema of Méconnaissance

- **Screening:** *Broken Blossoms* (D. W. Griffith, 1919, 1h 30m)

Reading:

“National Cinema, Hollywood Classicism and World War I” (FH, Ch 3)

Jean-Louis Comolli and Paul Narboni, “Cinema/Ideology/Criticism,” trans. Susan Bennett, *Screen* 12.1 (1971): 22-36.

Louis Althusser, excerpt from “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes Toward an Investigation,”

The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 (Selections)

R (June 5): Writing in light, writing in movement

- **Screening:** *City Lights* (Charlie Chaplin, 1931, 1h 27m)

Reading:

“The Hollywood Studio System, 1930-1945” (FH, Ch 10)

David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, “An excessively obvious cinema” and “The formulation of the classical narrative” (*The Classical Hollywood Cinema*)
Rudolf Arnheim, Selections from *Film as Art*

Week 3: Two Trends in Cinema

T (June 10): Faith in the Image: Can dialectics break bricks?

- Screening: *Battleship Potemkin* (Sergei Eisenstein, 1925, 1h 6m)

Reading:

“Soviet Cinema in the 1920s” (FH, Ch 6)

Sergei Eisenstein, “Methods of Montage” in *Film Form*

Sergei Eisenstein, “A Dialectical Approach to Film” in *Film Form*

R (June 12): Faith in Reality: Neo-realism and the start of the new waves

- Screening: *Rome, Open City* (Roberto Rossellini, 1945, 1h 25m)

Reading:

Cesare Zavattini, “Some Ideas on the Cinema”

Andre Bazin, “The Evolution of Film Language”

Week 4: Third Cinema

T (June 17): The Revolution Will Not Be Televised

- Screening: *The Battle of Algiers* (Gillo Pontecorvo, 1966, 2h 1m)

Reading:

Julio García Espinosa, “For an imperfect cinema”

Édouard Glissant, “On opacity”

R (June 19): No Class, School Holiday

Week 5: Feminist Cinema and Globalization

T (June 24): The master’s tool will never dismantle the master’s house

- Screening: *Je Tu Il Elle* (Chantal Akerman, 1974, 1h 30m)

Reading:

Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”

bell hooks, “The Oppositional Gaze”

R (June 26): Anime and Postmodern Globalization

- Screening: Select Episodes of *Cowboy Bepop* (Shinichirō Watanabe, 2001, 23m*4 = 1h, 32m)

Reading:

Thomas Lamarre, “Introduction” from *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation*

Jonathan Beller, “The Cinematic Mode of Production: Towards a Political Economy of the Postmodern”

Week 5.5: The Nation

R (July 3): Nation and Cinema: A Case of Canada

- Screenings: *The Hart of London* (Jack Chambers, 1970; 1h 20m); *Begone Dull Care* (Norman McLaren, 1949, 8 min.); *Very Nice, Very Nice* (Arthur Lipsett, 1961, 7 min.); *The Ballad of Crowfoot* (Willie Dunn, 1968, 6 min.)

In class excerpts from: *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner* (Zacharias Kunuk, 2001); *Mon oncle Antoine* (Claude Jutra, 1971); *Pierre Vallières* (Joyce Wieland, 1972); *Blue* (Joni Mitchell, 1971); *Dune: Part Two* (Denis Villeneuve, 2024)

Reading:

Selections from Stephen Broomer, *Codes for North: Foundations of the Canadian Avant-Garde Film*

John Grierson, "A Film Policy for Canada" (skim)

Peter Harcourt, "Speculations on Canadian Cinema"