

Early Film Theory and Modernity

FILM 333 01 / HUMS 375 01 / LITR 351 01

T Th 10.30-11.20

Instructor: Francesco Casetti

While this course satisfies the "Film Theory" requirement for Film Studies Majors, it is meant for all humanities students as a way of looking at the development of the 20th century in light of its major media.

For a long time, early film theories have been overlooked and underestimated. Their recent rediscovery has, however, highlighted their crucial role in framing film as a "modern" invention. The main point of interest in early film theories is based on their capacity to highlight and focus some of the characteristics of modern life: speed, economy, contingency, excitation, etc. Prioritizing the filmic experience, they focalized attention on the spectator. But the idea of a "modern" art, as well as the research for a "modern" language, were also an important issue. On the background of this interest for modernity, early film theory was not uniform. Ideological differences and national identities played a major role in defining the perspective of theoretical research. In this respect, it is useful to compare the debate in the USA and in Europe and to acknowledge the very different traditions which they represented. The course will accordingly take into account theories in France (Delluc, Epstein), Germany (Arnheim, Kracauer), Middle-Europe (Báñez, Lukács, Tille), Italy (Papini, Thovez), Soviet Union (Eisenstein, Vertov, Pudovkin) and USA (Lindsay, Freeburg, Münsterberg).

Week 1. Film and its time

Francesco Casetti, *Eye of the Century*, New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2008, Introduction and Chapter 1, pp. 1-25

Giovanni Papini, "Philosophical observations on the motion picture," *La Stampa*, Turin, May 18th, 1907, pp. 1-2.

Enrico Thovez, "The Art of Celluloid," *La Stampa*, Turin, July 29, 1908, p. 3

Week 2. Film and its time (a new art?)

Ricciotto Canudo, "The Birth of Sixth Art," (1911) in Richard Abel, *French Film Theory and Criticism: a History/Anthology, 1907-1939* (Princeton, N.J. : Princeton University Press, 1988), vol.1, pp. 58-66

Karel Teige, "The Aesthetics of Film and Cinégraphie," (1924) in Jaroslav Andel, Petr Szczepanik, eds., *Cinema all the Time. An Anthology of Czech Film Theory and Criticism* (Prague, National Film Archive, 2008) pp. 145-154

Blaise Cendrars, "The Modern: A New Art, the Cinema", (1918), in Abel, vol. 1, pp. 182-183

Week 3. Reality on the screen

Francesco Casetti, *Eye of the Century*, Chapter 2, pp. 27-54

Béla Balász, *The Visible Human*, 1924 (excerpts), in Richard W. McCormick, Alison Guenther-Pal, eds. *German Essays on Film* (New York, London: Continuum, 2004), pp. 69-98

Week 4. Reality on the screen (the close up)

Jean Epstein, "Magnification," (1921) in Abel, vol. 1, pp. 235-241

Hugo Münsterberg, "Attention," in *Photoplay; a psychological study* (New York: D. Appleton and company, 1916. Reprint as *Film: a Psychological study; the Silent Photoplay in 1916*. New York: Dover Publications, 1970), pp. 31-39

Vsevolod Pudovkin, "Time in close-up," (1931) in *Selected Essays*, ed. by Richard Taylor (Oxford: Seagull Books, 2006), pp. 184-191

Week 5. Objective, Subjective

Francesco Casetti, *Eye of the Century*, Chapter 3

Jean Epstein, "The Senses I(b)," (1921) in Abel, vol. 1, pp. 241-246

Jean Epstein, "On Certain Characteristics of Photogénie", (1924) in Abel, vol. 1, pp. 314-318

Week 6. Objective, Subjective (real/possible; real/representation)

Georg Lukács, "Thoughts on an Aesthetics of Cinema," (1913), in McCormick, Guenther-Pal, pp. 11-16
Rudolf Arnheim, "Fundamental Aesthetic Concepts" and "Summary of the Formative Media of Camera and Celluloid" in *Film* (London: Faber and Faber, 1933), pp. 41-46 ad 129-136

Week 7: A mechanical eye

Francesco Casetti, *Eye*, Chapter 4

Luigi Pirandello, *The Notebooks of Serafino Gubbio*, Cambridge, Dedalus, 1990, pp. 3-33; 77-116

Week 8: A mechanical eye (art and medium)

Dziga Vertov, "We: variant of a manifesto" (1922) and "Kinoks: a Revolution" (1923) in *Kino.Eye: the Writings of Dziga Vertov*, Berkeley-Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1984;

Erwin Panofski, "Style and medium in the Motion Pictures," *Bulletin of the Department of Art and Archaeology*. Princeton University, 1934. Reprinted in *Critique* 3 (1947), then in Daniel Talbot, ed., *Film: An Anthology* (1966), pp. 15-32

Week 9: Excited senses

Casetti, *Eye of the Century*, Ch. 5

Sergei Eisenstein, "The Montage of attraction" (1923) and "The montage of Film attraction," in *The Eisenstein Reader*, ed. by Richard Taylor (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 1998), pp. 29-52

Week 10: Excited senses (the splendour of the spectacle)

Walter Serzner, "Cinema and the Desire to Watch," (1913), in Richard W. McCormick, Alison Guenther-Pal, eds. *German Essays on Film*, New York, London: Continuum, 2004, pp. 17-22

Sigfried Kracauer, "Cult of Distraction," (1926), *The Mass Ornament* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 323-328

Week 11: Watching a film

Casetti, *Eye of the Century*, Chapter 6

Jean Epstein, *Le cinématographe vue de l'Etna* (Paris :Les Ecrivains reunies, 1926)

Week 12: Watching a film (a new audience)

Jules Romains, "The crowd at the Cinematograph", (1911) in Abel, vol.1: 53-54

Matilde Serao, "A Spectatrix is speaking to you" (1916) in Antonia Lant (with Ingrid Periz) ed. *The Red Velvet Seat: Women's Writings on the Cinema. The First Fifty Years* (London: Verso, 2006), pp. 97-99.

Louis Delluc, "The Crowd," (1918) in Abel, vol. 1, pp. 159-164

Emilie Altenloh, "On Sociology of Cinema," (1913) in Lant, pp. 117-123

Oscar Freeburg, "The Psychology of the Cinema Audience," from *The Art of Photoplay Making* (New York, Macmillan, 1918), pp. 7-25

Bibliography

Textbook: Francesco Casetti, *Eye of the Century. Film, Experience, Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008)

Essays available in V2 system

Course requirements:

The attendance is mandatory. No attendance, no grade.

First paper due by the 6th week; length 1,000-1,500 words; a commentary on some quotations from the mandatory readings

Second Paper due before the last week; length 1,500-2,000 words; topic assigned by the instructor.

Final exam: submitted electronically: a commentary on one or more topics discussed in class, length 1000-1,500 words

Active participation in discussion groups: 20%

First paper: 30%

Second paper: 30%

Final Exam: 20%