

HUMA4351/5351

CRITICAL FILM AND MEDIA THEORY

Spring 2026

Mondays/Wednesdays: 12:00 – 1:20pm

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

Baryon Tensor Posadas

Room 2355

Office Hours: by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This joint course is intended to provide critical and theoretical foundations for both undergraduate and postgraduate students with an interest in film and media studies while also addressing broader issues in cultural studies that would be of interest to students in other disciplines in the Humanities and Social Sciences. While it is not a core requirement for students in the humanities, as a course that takes up both essential classics in media and cultural studies, and more recent critical interventions, it is potentially of interest not only to students specializing in media studies, but those from outside of the field with a general interest in issues of contemporary cultural theory as well. The aim of this course will be to generate discussions of theories of the moving image from apparatus theory and classical film studies to contemporary critical approaches to new media. We will take up a range of questions revolving around debates around technology and history, gender and affect, national and transnational cinema, and animation and new media.

Each week's discussion will center on a film and a set of articles. We will take up the major features of the texts' key theoretical approaches and conceptual frameworks in the context of our own areas of interest. Seminar time will alternate between a focused review of the readings and the critical stakes and implications of the materials for students' own research projects. At the end of the semester, students will produce a short presentation of one aspect of a research project of their choosing that engages with the issues and questions raised during the course.

COURSE EVALUATION

Attendance and participation	20%
Discussion board	20%
Individual Class Presentation	10%
Conference paper	25%
Final paper	25%

Attendance and Participation

Attendance at class sessions and active participation in the discussions are mandatory. Please come to class having already read materials assigned for that session and be prepared to critically discuss them in class.

Presentation

From week 2 onwards, one student will lead the discussion, beginning by first briefly (maximum 20 minutes) presenting their review of the assigned readings and bringing it into conversation with the existing discussions in class thus far. These presentations will serve to open the discussion by raising further questions and points of discussion. During the first week of class, students are asked to sign up for the session they wish to lead. Students may sign up for any session of their choosing, with every student leading the discussion once during the semester.

Discussion Board

Every week, except for those weeks wherein they are performing a presentation, students are required to electronically circulate a short response to be posted on the discussion board of the course website. In these responses, students are asked to identify a key passage or paragraph from one of the assigned readings and articulate its significance to the larger ongoing discussions taking place in class. Upon setting up the concepts and arguments from this passage, students are then asked to take it up as a point of departure to formulate a discussion question, with the goal of provoking further conversation in mind. These should go beyond simple factual questions to instead raise open-ended issues that get at the larger critical context of the reading's discussion, the stakes of its claims and contentions, potential implications and applications, etc. A total of eight such responses are expected.

(Due weekly, on the day before each Monday class session)

Conference Paper

In the final weeks of the semester, each student will present a conference paper based on their own research project while at once reflecting on the issues and challenges raised in the discussions throughout the semester. Presentations should be about 15-20 minutes in length (approximately 1500-2000 words). The topic and content of the conference paper will form the basis of the final paper, discussed in greater detail below.

(Drafts due April 27)

Final Paper

Using one or more films as a focal point, produce an analysis of the text in relation to one of the key issues of debate within the field of film and media studies covered in the course. Topics can include (but are not restricted to) any of the themes discussed in class, e.g., gender, affect, and apparatus theory, national cinema, animation and new media, approaches to early film, etc. While students are expected to make use of the relevant theoretical and critical materials covered in class, the specific focus of the paper and choice of text is for the student to determine in consultation with the instructor. For UG students, a set of prompts/questions will be provided ahead of time; in contrast, PG students are expected to present a paper drawn from their own individual research projects.

Final papers should be between 1500-2000 words (4-6 pages) in length for UG and MA/MSc students and 5000-6000 words (16-20 pages) for MPhil and PhD students.

(Due May 20)

SCHEDULE

PART 1: MEDIA AND SPECTATOR

Week 1 Introduction

Feb 2 Orientation

Feb 4 Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility – Second Version" in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, Vol. 3 (Belknap Press, 2006), 101-33.

Carroll, Noël. "The Specificity of Media in the Arts." *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, vol. 19, no. 4, 1985, pp. 5-20.

Week 2 Classical Hollywood Film

Feb 9 *Vertigo* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958)

David Bordwell, "Classical Hollywood Cinema: Narrational Principles and Procedures," in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*, ed. Philip Rosen (Columbia UP, 1986), 17-34.

Feb 11 Miriam Bratu Hansen, "The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism," in *Reinventing Film Studies*, ed. Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams (London: Arnold, 2000), 332-350.

Ravetto-Biagioli, Kriss. "Vertigo and the Vertiginous History of Film Theory." *Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies* 25, no. 3 (75) (2011): 101-41.

Week 3 Apparatus Theory

Feb 16 *Rear Window* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1954)

Althusser, Louis. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." Trans. Ben Brewster. *Critical Theory since 1965*. Ed. Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle. Tallahassee: UP of Florida and Florida State UP, 239-50.

Feb 18 Jean-Louis Baudry and Alan Williams, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," *Film Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (1974): 39-47.

Jonathan Beller, "The Cinematic Mode of Production: Towards a Political Economy of the Postmodern," *Culture, Theory and Critique* 44, no. 1 (April 1, 2003): 91-106.

Week 4 Feminist Film Criticism

Feb 23 *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (Alain Resnais, 1959)

Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Visual and Other Pleasures*, Language, Discourse, Society (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1989), 14-26.

Feb 25 Anne Friedberg, "The Mobilized and the Virtual Gaze." *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993. 11-38.

Earl Jackson, Jr. "Desire at Cross(-Cultural) Purposes: *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* and *Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence*," *positions: east asia cultures critique* 2.1 (1994): 133-174.

PART 2: TRANSNATIONAL MOVEMENTS OF GENRE

Week 5 Gaze and Fetishism Revisited

Mar 2 NO CLASS

Mar 4 *In the Mood for Love* (2004)

Chow, Rey. *Sentimental Fabulations, Contemporary Chinese Films: Attachment in the Age of Global Visibility*. Columbia University Press, 2007. 1-28.

Week 6 Geopolitical Aesthetic

Mar 9 *The World* (Jia Zhangke, 2004)

Bhaskar Sarkar, "Tracking 'Global Media' in the Outposts of Globalization," in Natasa Đurovičová and Kathleen E Newman, *World Cinemas, Transnational Perspectives*, AFI Film Readers (New York: Routledge, 2010), 34-58.

Mar 11 Hui, Calvin. "The Geopolitical Aesthetics: The Migrant Workers, Performance, and Globalization in Jia Zhangke's Film *The World* (2004)." *Prism: Theory and Modern Chinese Literature* 18.1 (2021): 170-187.

Jonathan L. Beller, "Third Cinema in a Global Frame: Curacha, Yahoo!, And Manila by Night," *Positions* 9, no. 2 (September 21, 2001): 331-67.

Week 7 Transnational Circulations of Genre

Mar 16 *The Host* (Bong Joon Ho, 2006)

Rick Altman, "A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre," *Cinema Journal* 23, no. 3 (1984): 6-18.

Steve Neale, "Questions of Genre," *Screen* 31, no. 1 (March 1, 1990): 45-66.

Mar 18 Chung, Hye Seung, and David Scott Diffrient. "From Gojira to Goemul: 'Host' Cities and 'Post' Histories in East Asian Monster Movies." *Movie Migrations: Transnational Genre Flows and South Korean Cinema*, Rutgers University Press, 2015, pp. 148-76.

PART 3: ANIMATION AND NEW MEDIA

Week 8 Genre, Affect, and Media

Mar 23 *Strange Days* (Kathryn Bigelow, 1995)

Linda Williams, "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess," *Film Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (1991): 2-13.

Mar 35 Shaviro, Steven. "Film Theory and Visual Fascination." *The Cinematic Body*, University of Minnesota Press, 1993, pp. 1-82.

Withers, Emma J. "Binary, Coded: On the 'absence' of the digital in *Strange Days*." *Science Fiction Film & Television* 11, no. 2 (2018): 277-302.

Week 9 Animation and New Media

Mar 30 *Metropolis* (Rintaro, 2001)

Thomas Lamarre, "The Multiplanar Image," *Mechademia* 1, no. 1 (2006): 120-43.

Apr 1 Philip Rosen, 'Old and New: Image, Indexicality, and Historicity in the Digital Utopia,' from *Change Mummified: Cinema, Historicity, Theory* (University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 301-349.

Thomas LaMarre, "The First Time as Farce: Digital Animation and the Repetition of Cinema," in *Cinema Anime: Critical Engagements with Japanese Animation*, ed. Steven T. Brown (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

MID-SEMESTER BREAK

Week 10 Media Mix

Apr 13 *The Sky Crawlers* (2008)

Eiji Ōtsuka, "World and Variation: The Reproduction and Consumption of Narrative," trans. Marc Steinberg, *Mechademia* 5 (2010): 99–116.

Marc Steinberg, "Media Mixes, Media Transformations." *Anime's Media Mix: Franchising Toys and Characters in Japan*. University of Minnesota Press, 2012. 135-169.

Apr 15 Posadas, Baryon Tensor. "The Sky Crawlers and the Transmediation of Science Fictional Worlds." *Poetica: An International Journal of Linguistic-Literary Studies*, no. 78 (2012): 113–30.

Week 11 Remediation

Apr 20 *The Matrix Reloaded* (Lana and Lilly Wachowski, 2003)

Jenkins, Henry. "Searching for the Origami Unicorn: *The Matrix* and Transmedia Storytelling." *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. NYU Press, 2006. 93-130.

Apr 22 Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, "Immediacy, Hypermediacy, and Remediation," in Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1999), 20-50.

Friedberg, Anne (2010). The end of cinema: multimedia and technological Change. In Marc Furstenau (ed.), *The Film Theory Reader: Debates and Arguments*. Routledge. 270-281.

Week 12-13 Conference Presentation

Apr 27 – May 6

FINAL PAPER DUE: May 20

COURSE POLICIES

Statement on Assessment and Grading

This course will be assessed using criterion-referencing, and grades will not be assigned using a curve. Numeric percentile grades will be converted to letter grades using the following standard:

A+	97-100	Excellent Performance
A	93-96	
A-	90-92	
B+	87-89	Good Performance
B	83-86	

B-	80-82	
C+	77-79	
C	73-76	Satisfactory Performance
C-	70-72	
D	60-69	Marginal Pass
F	0-59	Fail

Academic Integrity

The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology is a community designed for scholarship - for teaching, learning, and research. Academic integrity and honesty are critical values in upholding HKUST's reputation as a community of scholars and its claim to the "intellectual property" created by staff and students. All students who join HKUST are therefore committed to an [Academic Honor Code](#).

Course AI Policy

The use of generative AI tools is not permitted in any aspect of this course.

Communication and Feedback

Under normal circumstances, assessment marks for individual assessed tasks will be communicated via Canvas within two weeks of submission. Students who have further questions about the feedback (including marks) should consult the instructor within five working days after the feedback is received.

Special Educational Needs

The University takes a proactive role in ensuring and cultivating a positive learning environment for students, where equal opportunities in academic and non-academic pursuits for each student are guaranteed.

The SEN Support under the Counseling and Wellness Center provides a wide range of support services and resources to ensure that all students have equality of opportunity, that they benefit equally from university life, and to cultivate a campus culture of inclusion.

If a student is diagnosed or suspects his/her difficulties are related to any type of SEN, he or she is strongly advised to self-identify and provide recent documentation of his or her SEN to SEN Support. Reasonable accommodations or adjustments will be worked out amongst student, instructor(s) and SEN Support. If SEN Support is not aware of a student's needs, please contact sen@ust.hk to arrange a confidential discussion. All information is handled in the strictest confidence.