PHIL 436: AESTHETICS II (WINTER 2019)
TOPICS IN AESTHETICS – PHILOSOPHY OF FILM

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Time & Location: MW 2:35–3:55, LEA 15
Office Hours: MW 4:30–5:30, LEA 941 (or TBA)

Course Description:
From their invention in the nineteenth century onward, photography and cinema have posed distinctly philosophical challenges relating to how time and space are conceived and experienced, whether photography ‘copies’ reality or ‘captures’ it, and whether photographs and films can be artworks (or be as artistically successful as works of fine art in other media) given the mechanical nature of the processes by which they are made. Many of the pioneering filmmakers of the 1910s and 20s were also theorists who wrote reflectively on the medium, tackling questions of perception, meaning, ontology, and value. Key figures in twentieth century philosophy, such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Susanne Langer, wrote essays relating cinema to broader philosophical or aesthetic issues with which they were concerned, in the 1970s and 80s philosophers Stanley Cavell and Gilles Deleuze each wrote major works on the medium, and in the twenty-first century there has been a resurgence of interest in cinema by philosophers in both ‘analytic’ and ‘continental’ traditions.

This course will focus on central philosophical issues and questions concerning film without limiting ourselves to the usual topics covered in what has become the contemporary academic ‘philosophy of film’ canon, looking beyond these to the writings of film theorists and filmmakers, and to work in other ‘areas’ of philosophy that bears on issues relating to cinema. The main issues and questions that we will consider concern:

- the ontology and nature of the photographic/cinematic image;
- the ontology and nature of photographic/cinematic artworks;
- whether photography and cinema can be legitimately artistic media;
- the roles of space and time in cinematic experience;
- the roles of visual and auditory perception in cinematic experience;
- the relation of style to meaning, and how style/form can reflect metaphysical presuppositions.

As should be clear from the above description, this course won’t be on what might be called ‘philosophy in film’, i.e. looking at particular films as examples of philosophical ideas (e.g. how The Matrix relates to Plato’s cave, how fictional characters’ actions raise ethical questions, etc.). Rather, we will be concerned with philosophical questions about the nature of the cinematic medium itself, and about our experience of artworks in this medium.

Evaluation:
Your final grade will be composed of:

Five Screening Responses (1–2 pages each) .............................................. 25%
A Mid-Term Essay (6–8 pages) ............................................................... 25%
A Term Paper (12–16 pages) ................................................................. 50%

A Note on Participation:
No specific portion of the grade is assigned to participation; it is expected that everyone enrolled in the course will attend class regularly, listen actively to the contributions of others, and contribute to discussion as and when appropriate. A bonus of up to 5% may be added to a student’s final grade to reward exceptional engagement, including consistently fruitful contributions to discussion. Likewise, up to 5% may be deducted from a student’s final grade for a significant number of unexplained absences, a demonstrable lack of engagement (e.g. the use of technological devices for purposes not directly related to the course), distracting or un-constructive behaviour (possibly including dominating class discussion by speaking too much and not listening to others), etc.
Readings:
Required readings are contained in a course-pack available from the McGill bookstore, except for the reading from *Film as Art* by Rudolph Arnheim (University of California Press, 1957), which is available as an e-book through McGill’s library catalogue.

Screenings:
During the term, several films will be screened to compliment the readings and lectures and serve as examples of the topics we will cover. Screenings will take place outside of class time and so attendance is optional, but is highly recommended for everyone who is able to come at the scheduled times. Students who can’t come to the screenings are expected to locate and watch the films on their own at some point during the course, although this could be difficult for some of the films, which have limited availability. Fortunately, most of the films are available from the MacLennan library or the Grand Bibliothèque (BANQ) located at Berri and de Maisonneuve.

Unless otherwise announced, screenings will be held starting in Week 2 on Mondays at 6:30 p.m. in the screening room on the first floor of 3475 Peel. (The room will be on your left as you come in the front door.)

Screening Responses:
For five (5) of the films screened, you will submit a short response (max. 2 pages) in which you make a concise, well-formulated point about a way in which the film relates to a relevant philosophical issue discussed in the readings and lectures. Usually these will be the issues that are discussed in the readings and lectures of the week in which the film is shown; however, in some weeks the timing will be slightly off in this respect (e.g. the screening for Week 2 relates most directly to the readings from Week 1). It should be clear when this is the case. You may choose to hand in up to eight (8) reports if you wish, in which case the highest five marks will count towards your grade.

A screening response might, for example, involve discussing how an idea from the readings can be applied to an aspect of the film, or how something about the film provides a counter-example to an idea from the readings. In weeks where the topic concerns elements of the cinematic experience, it might be appropriate to reflect on and analyze your experience viewing the film (e.g. reflecting on what *Jeanne Dielman* does to the way you experience time as you watch it). While these responses aren’t meant to be essays, and so don’t require you to present an argument or have a thesis statement or conclusion, you should still be making and exploring a single, focused point, and it should be clear how this point relates to what we’re discussing in class.

Essay and Term Paper:
You will write two essays: a shorter mid-term essay (6–8 pages), and a longer term paper (12–16 pages) due at the end of the course. For the shorter essay, you will be given two questions from which to choose, where each will relate to a substantial theme covered in Weeks 2–5. For the term paper, you are encouraged to come up with your own topic, which you can use to explore an idea we covered in the course in greater depth. You are strongly advised to consult with me in advance on your term paper topic, both so I can make sure that your topic will be manageable and appropriate for this course and so I can recommend any additional readings that might be useful.

Assignment Submissions and Policy on Lateness:
Screening responses are to be submitted in class on the Wednesday of the week following the screening (even if you didn’t attend but instead watched the film on your own), unless announced otherwise. Responses submitted later than this will be accepted only by prior arrangement or with a legitimate, documented reason (e.g. illness).

The mid-term essay will be due, in hard copy, at the beginning of class on Feb. 20th. The term paper will be due, also in hard copy, on April 10th during our last scheduled class. In both cases, work submitted after the relevant deadline without prior arrangement or a legitimate, documented reason (e.g. illness) will be subject to a penalty of -5% per calendar day late. I am happy to grant brief extensions when warranted, provided they are requested 48 hours or more in advance of the official deadline.
**Policy on Electronic Devices:**

Students are strongly discouraged from using electronic devices, including laptops, during class time, if only because the use of such devices is proven to be a distraction to others (though numerous studies are also repeatedly showing the disadvantages of taking notes on a laptop vs. by hand). Those with a legitimate reason for using a laptop to take notes may do so only with the instructor’s approval, and with the promise to use them only for note-taking. Students taking notes on a laptop with permission may be requested to sit where their screens will not disturb their classmates, e.g. in the back row of the class. Mobile phones should never be used during class time (including for text messaging), except in cases of emergency. For clarification on the reasons for this policy, feel free to see me during office hours; please also consult McGill’s policy regarding computing and communication devices in class (www.mcgill.ca/tls/teaching/policies).

**General Policies:**

I hope to make this course accessible for those who may need some form of accommodation in order to engage fully with the course. If you are in need of an accommodation, please let me know as soon as possible so I can endeavour to accommodate your needs. In cases where the need/accommodation warrants, students should also have contacted the Office for Students with Disabilities (disabilities.students@mcgill.ca) beforehand.

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/students/studentconduct/disciplinaryprocedures for more information).

In accord with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University’s control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

**WEEKLY SCHEDULE**

**Week 1**

Jan. 7 – Introduction & Overview of the Early Development of Cinema  
Readings: Tom Gunning, “Never Seen This Picture Before: Muybridge in Multiplicity”  
Constance Penley, “The Imaginary of the Photograph in Film Theory”

Jan. 9 – Photography and Cinema  
Readings: Catherine David, “Photography and Cinema”  
Peter Wollen, “Fire and Ice”  

**Week 2**

Jan. 14 – The Ontology of Photographic/Cinematic Images  
Readings: André Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image”  
Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed* (excerpts)

Screening: selected short films, including *La Jetée* (dir: Chris Marker, 1963, 27 min.)

Jan. 16 – The Ontology of Photographic/Cinematic Works  
Reading: David Davies, “Ontology”

**Week 3**

Jan. 21 – Against Distinctly Photographic/Cinematic Art  
Reading: Roger Scruton, “Photography and Representation”


Jan. 23 – Photography as an Artform  
Readings: David Davies, “Scruton on the Inscrutability of Photographs”  
Henri Cartier-Bresson, *Images à la Sauvette* (excerpts)
Week 4
Jan. 28 – Cinema as an Artform
Readings: Susanne Langer, “A Note on the Film”
Rudolph Arnheim, Film as Art, pp. 8–134 [e-book available through McGill Library]
Screening: The Passion of Joan of Arc (dir: Carl Theodor Dreyer, 1928, 82 min.)

Jan. 30 – Photographic Transparency
Reading: Kendall Walton, “Transparent Pictures: On the Nature of Photographic Realism”

Week 5
Feb. 4 – Arguing about Photographic Transparency I
Readings: Gregory Currie, “The Imprint of Nature”
Jonathan Friday, “Transparency and the Photographic Image”
Screening: The Rules of the Game (dir: Jean Renoir, 1939, 106 min.)

Feb. 6 – Arguing about Photographic Transparency II
Dominic McIver Lopes, “The Aesthetics of Photographic Transparency”

Week 6
Feb. 11 – The Long Take (Realism) vs. Montage (Formalism)
Wim Wenders, “Time Sequences, Continuity of Movement”
Pier Paolo Passolini, “Observations on the Long Take”
Screening: The Battleship Potemkin (dir: Sergei Eisenstein, 1925, 75 min.)

Feb. 13 – Montage: Constructing Space, Time, and Meaning
Readings: Sergei Eisenstein, Film Form (excerpts)
V. I. Pudovkin, Film Technique (excerpts)

Week 7
Feb. 18 – Space and Time as Conditions of Experience
Readings: Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason (excerpts)
Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Remarks (excerpts)
Recommended: Gary Hatfield, “Kant on the Perception of Space (and Time)”
Screening: Last Year at Marienbad (dir: Alain Resnais, 1961, 94 min.)

Feb. 20 – Are ‘Incoherent’ Spatio-Temporal Experiences Possible Through Cinema?
Reading: Francis Sparshott, “Vision and Dream in the Cinema”

Week 8
Feb. 25 – Cinematic Space I
Readings: Alexander Sesonske, “Cinema Space”
David Bordwell, “Narration and Space”
Screening: Play Time (dir: Jacques Tati, 1967, 120 min.)

Feb. 27 – Cinematic Space II
Reading: David Bordwell, “Narration and Space” (cont’d)

~ Reading Week: no classes March 4th–8th ~
Week 9
Mar. 11 – Time and Experience
Henri Bergson, “Time as Lived Duration”
Screening: Nostalgia (dir: Andrei Tarkovsky, 1983, 125 min.)

Mar. 13 – Cinematic Time I
Readings: Alexander Sesonske, “Time and Tense in Cinema”
Michael Tarantino, “A Few Brief Moments of Cinematic Time”
Chantal Akerman, “In Her Own Time: Interview with Miriam Rosen”

Week 10
Mar. 18 – Cinematic Time II
Reading: David Bordwell, “Narration and Time”
Screening: Jeanne Dielman 23 Quai du Commerce 1080 Bruxelles (dir: Chantal Akerman, 1975, 201 min.)

Mar. 20 – Sound and Image
Readings: Noël Burch, “On the Structural Use of Sound”
Robert Bresson, “Notes on Sound”
V. I. Pudovkin, “Asynchronism as a Principle of Sound Film”

Week 11
Mar. 25 – Objections to Cognitivist Theories of Cinematic Experience
Reading: Richard Allen, “Cognitive Film Theory”
Screening: Distant Voices, Still Lives (dir: Terence Davies, 1988, 80 min.)

Mar. 27 – A Holistic/Gestalt Approach to Experience and Meaning
Readings: Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “The Film and the New Psychology”
Susan Sontag, “Against Interpretation”

Week 12
Apr. 1 – Three Approaches to Style and Meaning
Readings: Ray Carney, “The Active Soul: Approaches to Dreyer’s Style”
Screening: Day of Wrath (dir: Carl Theodor Dreyer, 1943, 110 min.)

Apr. 3 – Idealist Style and Abstract Meaning
Reading: Ray Carney, “Two Forms of Cinematic Modernism”, pp. 357-382

Week 13
Apr. 8 – Pragmatist Style and Concrete Meaning
Reading: Ray Carney, “Two Forms of Cinematic Modernism” pp. 383-415
Screening: Faces (dir: John Cassavetes, 1968, 130 min.)
Recommended: William James, “Percept and Concept – The Import of Concepts/The Abuse of Concepts”
John Dewey, “The Live Creature and ‘Ethereal Things’”

Apr. 10 – Course Wrap-Up
Reading: none, unless catch-up is needed