



Course Guide: *Cinematic City*, Research Seminar, MA Film Studies, 2013-2014

contact information

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language

English

brief description of the subject

Since the invention of cinema, a close relationship has existed with the city. Attention has been paid to it by both filmmakers and academics, throughout the 20th century, which got an impetus in the 1990s. The focus has been on representation and aesthetics, but recent work has shown the far more complicated role that film has played in urban development and modern society at large.

description of the subject

Worldwide urbanisation and the proliferation of the moving image are emblematic for modern culture. Various scholars, from different disciplines, assume that these processes are interlinked. Numerous studies have been carried out regarding the metropolis in connection to fiction film and avant-garde experiments (e.g. city-symphonies). Visions upon urban life and culture have been analysed, how filmmakers have informed a.o. writers, artists, architects, and vice versa, and how cinema has provided a mode of perception. More recently, attention is also paid to different urban configurations (e.g. networks of small and medium cities, company towns, tourist destinations) and other media productions (e.g. news programmes, documentaries, industrial and educational films, commercials, television shows). Issues of city branding have been tackled (e.g. city promotion through media, stimulation of media production and creative industries, film festivals, media events etc.), and various other roles that media have played within the city, in different settings and for different groups of people. An important strand within the discourse on cinema and the city is the study of the relationship between on the one hand media and on the other architecture and urban design. It varies from analysis of space in films to the use of media as design tools, from the simulation of urban plans to media displays in public space and smart architecture. Such studies touch upon issues of time and space, image and object, as well as identity and structure.

aims of the course

The aim of this course is *to understand the multidimensional relationship between cinema and the city* in terms of film themes (representation), film form (aesthetics), thinking about the role of media in modern society, and the place of the film industry. Having successfully completed this course, students can: (1) recognize and apply key concepts pertaining to the cinematic city; (2) recapitulate central debates and controversies that emerge in the encounter of film studies and urban studies; (3) observe and articulate new research problems; (4) propose new ways to approach and to engage with them; and (5) critically review studies dealing with the subjects under consideration.

contents of the course

well-known and unknown films and genres dealing with urban issues
cutting-edge research
individual observations
new ways to engage with cinema and the city
critical reviews of current research and discussions



To achieve the aims of the course, there will be a viewing of both well-known and rather unknown films and genres, next to 'field trips', and experiments to explore theoretical concepts. To prepare the experiments, which can take various forms, students are invited to keep a diary with 'field notes' regarding both cinema and the city. Notes and experiments will be discussed in respect of current academic debates. While seminal texts will be studied, to provide a framework, some overlooked texts will be read as well. Moreover, students are asked to review and to present articles of their own choice, to prepare for the final assignment, which is an extensive review of a recently published book in the field. Book reviews help to set agendas and channel discussions and criteria for reviews will therefore be observed. Students are challenged to publish their reviews.

study load and time investment (credits = 6 EC, 28 hours per EC)

Besides the weekly seminars and viewings, students need to prepare for each meeting by studying the literature. In addition, each student is expected to give three short presentations on texts of his/her own choice, to conduct an experiment based on diary notes, and to write and present a book review.

activities	time
seminar (7 x 3 hr)	021 hr
viewing (7 x 2 hr)	014 hr
reading (220 pages <i>ad</i> 5 pp/hr)	044 hr
presentation (preparation 3 x 3 hr)	009 hr
diary notes, experiment, presentation (preparation)	012 hr
Final assignment: reading (app. 215 pages <i>ad</i> 5 pp/hr)	043 hr
Final assignment: writing a review & presentation (preparation)	020 hr
total	168 hr

assessment

- 3 presentations of articles: requirements met (AVV) or not met (NAV)
- 1 experiment and presentation: 25% of total mark (scale 1-10)
- 1 final review presentation: 20% of total mark (scale 1-10)
- Final assignment: book review: 55% of total mark (scale 1-10) – deadline: 17 Dec., 3pm.

requirements

- For a, b, c it is necessary to post a Powerpoint (or equivalent) 24h before class starts: Blackboard: Forum.
- The final assignment (d) can only be made after the presentations (a, b, c) have been done.
- If circumstances inhibit a presentation (for acceptable reasons), it can be compensated, within a week, by posting a report of 750 words ($\pm 10\%$), next to the submitted Powerpoint (or eq.).
- A sufficient mark is a *total* of 5.5 or higher.

retake

- If the *total mark* is < 5.5 , a retake of the assignment(s) with an insufficient mark is possible.
- A retake of b. encompasses a new experiment, presented as a Powerpoint (or eq.) and a report of 750 words ($\pm 10\%$).
- A retake of c. is only possible in combination with d: a retake of the book review will count for 75%, which comes instead of the marks for c. and d.
- deadline retake: 14 January 2014, 3pm.

feedback

Feedback on presentations takes the form of discussions and comments by peers and teacher; written feedback (either through a form or notes) will be given on assignments for grades.



ASSIGNMENTS

Weekly assignments

reading the literature

Regarding each article, the student should be prepared to present and comment upon the research question, main arguments and theoretical references. The critical reading of these articles are exercises for the final assignment (book review) and its criteria should therefore be kept in mind.

reading a review

A part of the required literature consists of reviews that should be critically read.

- Is it clear what the book is about?
- What is the explicit or implicit theoretical perspective applied to evaluate; what's emphasized and what's left behind, and why?
- Is there mainly an evaluation of theory, methodology, actuality, discourse or a focus on the book's analysis of particular films?
- How does the reviewer relate the book to other publications/references or academic fields?
- How is it linked to the references / discussions we have dealt with in class?
- To what extent is there a personal view / motivation of the reviewer?
- What's the background of the reviewer and the book's author and what does that say about the review (do they know each other or share particular interests and is it transparent?).

presentations

The student should explain why the chosen text/object is of any significance (personal interest, relevance to academic discussions and broader perspective). One has to articulate and comment upon questions that the text/object raises, its arguments or features, and main (theoretical/conceptual) references or paradigms. The text/object has to be presented to the group, with the help of Powerpoint or any other support (e.g. handout, word document, whiteboard). Additional criteria are: outline of the presentation, articulation of principle issues, visual support, clear communication, open to evaluation, time constraints (see for details: Final assignment > review presentation).

- Presentation 1 (max. 10'): present a film (fragment of max. 5') related to the topic, based on one's own (research) interests, which should be briefly explained.
- Presentation 2 (max. 10'): present a book already read, which comes closest to the topic of the course; explain why you think it is of interest, and discuss a review (app. 3pp) about it.
- Presentation 3 (max. 10'): present an article from *Cinema and the City* (app. 12pp). The division of articles (chapters) will be discussed in class.
- Presentation 4 (max. 15'): experiment (see below).
- Presentation 5 (max. 15'): book review (see below).



Experiment

Starting from the first meeting: keep a diary with your observations regarding cinema and the city, or anything related (media, architecture, urban planning...). Based on or triggered by (a selection of) these observations, assumptions should be noted down, or ideas regarding possible developments. These notes should be converted into an 'experiment', which can take any form. Below you find a list with 10 examples (any other approach could be chosen!).

10 examples of experiments

- *how film genres are embedded in everyday urban life, noting down particular references in a particular place, and who can be associated with them.*
- *a comparison of sounds in a number of films about a city and the actual sounds to be heard in (a representative selection of locations) in that city*
- *noting down the media uses in a selection of bars, theatres, museums, shops etc. and how these places make use of them in different ways*
- *tracing links between the composition and behaviour of an audience attending a particular film*
- *the search for film history locations, e.g. where cinemas used to be and what one can find there today and what this change implies*
- *a film essay or photographic report mapping a psychogeographical journey of your own cinematic experience of the city*
- *a 'poetic' treatment of urban media reality*
- *how a detailed written description of a cinematic 'fact' is decoded/imagined by someone else*
- *to recognise another cinematic city (London, Paris, NY...) in Amsterdam*
- *statistical account of a film set in a particular city or media database statistics of urban issues*

criteria

- an 'experiment': to try something out
- a creative approach to observe the city and to engage with it
- an original idea how knowledge of cinema can be tested in everyday life
- a conversion of theoretical debates into an actual statement, or vice versa
- an innovative or a fresh way to experience film theory and/or history

The basic idea of the experiment can be identified through its principle concern or aim, its body of observations, and the presented set of relations between elements. If this is a common idea, or if it follows a common template, the grade will be < 5.5. If the basic idea is common, but some aspects are still different and hence new relationships are drawn that could be developed, or questions are raised that may trigger discussion, reflection or exploration, the grade will be > 5.5. If the experiment itself follows a common template, but its presentation is exceptional, the grade will be 5.5 or just above.

Common should be understood as 'self-evident' (commonplaces), 'often heard' in the academic discourse/required literature, or otherwise 'easy to find' (through common means, quick associations, minimal search activity). A common template appears if little search effort results in a substantial number of references to similar projects of a comparable size and scope, carried out in a similar way, which are neither acknowledged as examples, nor subjected to a comparative evaluation. Substantial numbers are quantities to which another added sample makes no difference to interested peers.

presentation of the experiment (10-15 minutes)

Make use of Powerpoint or any other support (e.g. handout, storyboard, flip book, notes etc.); think of an appropriate (attractive, challenging) way to present your findings. The presentation should include: a report of your initial observations and considerations (theoretical, conceptual, hypothetical etc.), an idea of the steps that you have followed and what you consider to be its 'results'. What questions does the experiment raise?



Final assignment: Book review – to be posted on Blackboard > Ephorus

selection of the book

- on the subject of cinema (or media) and the city (or urban society, geography, architecture)
- published in the last five years (since 2008)
- 200-250 pages (if less, additional texts are needed; if more, certain chapters can be skipped)
- chosen title needs an approval of the teacher; deadline for book proposal is 12 November
- select an existing review about it (if lacking: other information) and post it on BB > Forum

book review (paper): aspects and criteria

- formal requirements: 3000-3500 words, approved title, appropriate use of language and style
- explanation of relevance: why you pay attention to this book (personal, academic, social)
- perspective: your approach to evaluate the book (e.g. links to references not necessarily mentioned in the book); your view/motivation/interest explained to follow your evaluation
- brief summary: an appropriate representation of the book's main concern and questions, key arguments and samples of its (film) analyses
- framing: positioning the book in discussions on cinema and the city and broader academic fields
- account of existing reviews: what you think has been overlooked or not considered well enough
- assessment: evaluation of the book's (implicit) theory, methodology, analysis, corpus, discourse
- note on attitude (to research object): how the book establishes connections with its films (and/or works of art, architecture, communities etc.), in terms of *looking at* them or *thinking with* them (an involvement in common concerns or a divergence of interests)
- critical view: address possible inconsistencies, obscurities, omissions etc. (e.g. of relevant literature, paradigms, films...).
- recognition: address refreshing observations, new insights, achievements, perspectives, productive models, original conclusions etc.
- personal observations: related observations to or because of the book, which make it of interest
- conclusion: an evaluation ('value of the book') contracting your previous points, a recommendation, a refinement of issues and possible ways for elaboration
- list of references: works used to position and comment upon the book

To gain a sufficient mark (5.5) the formal requirements must be met; all criteria must be substantiated with appropriate arguments and observations, but internal compensation is possible. There should be an overall consistency and balance. The caesura is furthermore defined by comparing the result to available reviews: repetition with only slightly different observations, views and arguments = 5.5.

review presentation (preceding the paper)

- outline: show the outline of the review
- articulation of principle issues/features: present the book's most striking features, insights or possibilities and your arguments to that
- visual support: use diagrams, drawings or other graphics to emphasize important elements and relations in the book; use images, from the book or other sources, to exemplify certain claims.
- clear communication (oral address): no 'reading'
- open to (peer) evaluation: this presentation should not be 'definitive'. Mention your hesitations, unsolved issues, self-critical observations, and issues for discussion; this presentation is a way to get feedback to be used for the paper review. time constraints: 10-15 minutes

Caesura is defined by criteria for book review (see above) i.c.w. clarity of communication (actual overview, well-explained choices/arguments), complexity and mastering of the subject; the assessment is partly based on peer review (kinds of questions and established connections),



Week schedule

Week 1 (29-10-2013) – introduction (38)

overview article:

Brunsdon, Charlotte. "The Attractions of the Cinematic City." *Screen* 53.3 (Autumn 2012). 209-227. (18pp)

foundational theory: cinema, space and the city

Kracauer, Siegfried. "(Ch. 4) Inherent Affinities." *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1960. 60-74. (15pp)

Benjamin, Walter. *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility* [First Version, 1936; translated by Michael W. Jennings], published by MIT, in: *Grey Room* 39 (Spring 2010): 11–37.

Required reading: § 16-18, pp30-34. (5pp)

Presentation 1 – film fragment

Week 2 (5-11-2013) – approaching the cinematic city (33)

Schreiber, Flora Rheta. "New York: A Cinema Capital." *The Quarterly of Film, Radio and Television* 7.3 (Spring 1953). 264-273. (10pp)

Weiner, Howard R. "The Cinema and the City." *Journal of Popular Culture* 3.4 (Spring 1970): 825-831. (7pp)

Uricchio, William. "The City Reviewed: Berlin's Film Image on the Occasion of its 750th Anniversary."

Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies 18.1. (February 1988): 16-24. (9pp)

review article

Forbes, Jill. "Paris Paris" [review of exhibition 'Cités-Cinés']. *Monthly Film Bulletin* 57.2 (Spring 1988): 111-114. (4pp)

Presentation 2 – presenting a book + review (app 3pp)

Week 3 (12-11-2013) – mapping out discourses: film & architecture; the cinematic city (41) + field trip

film & architecture

Vidler, Anthony. "The Explosion of Space: Architecture and the Filmic Imaginary." *Assemblage* 21 (August 1993): 44-59. (13pp)

review article

Goldberger, Paul. "Film View: Architectural Visions, Celluloid Frames" [review of exhibition 'Film Architecture' by Dietrich Neumann]. *The New York Times* (section 2, p11). 7 January 1996. (3pp)

cinematic city

Bruno, Giuliana. "Mapping out Discourse: An Introduction." *Streetwalking on a Ruined Map: Cultural Theory and the City Films of Elvira Notari*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993. 3-8. (6pp)

Clarke, David B. "Introduction: Previewing the Cinematic city." *The Cinematic City*. ed. David Clarke. London: Routledge, 1997. 1-18. (13pp)

review articles

Parsons, Deborah L. "Urban Montage" [review of *The Cinematic City*, Clarke ed., 1997]. *Film-Philosophy* 3.39 (September 1999). (3pp)

Clarke, David B. "Cinecity Confidential: A Reply to Parsons." *Film-Philosophy* 3.40 (October 1999). (3pp)



Week 4 (19-11-2013) – from image to society (39)

Shiel, Mark. "Cinema and the City in History and Theory." *Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Society In A Global Context*. Eds. Mark Shiel & Tony Fitzmaurice. Oxford: Blackwell, 2001. 1-18. (14pp)

Fitzmaurice, Tony. "Film and Urban Societies in a Global Context." *Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Society In A Global Context*. Eds. Mark Shiel & Tony Fitzmaurice. Oxford: Blackwell, 2001. 19-30. (10pp)

review article:

Zonn, Leo. Review of: *Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Society in a Global Context* (Shiel & Fitzmaurice, eds.), in: *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 93.1 (2003): 243-245. (3pp)

Presentation 3 – article from *Cinema and the City* (app. 12pp)

Week 5 (26-11-2013) – IDFA excursion (19)

Bordwell, David. "Big Appetites, Small Portions." *Film History: An International Journal* 22.3 (2010): 257-264. (8pp)

review articles

Willet, Ralph. Review of: *Celluloid Skyline: New York and the Movies* (James Sanders), in: *Journal of American Studies* 37.3 (December 2003): 513-514. (2pp) See also: <http://www.celluloidskyline.com> (app. 4pp)

Christie, Ian. Review of: *London in Cinema and London Eyes* (Brunsdon and Cunningham & Barber), in: *Screen* 51.3 (Autumn 2010): 281-285. (5pp)

Week 6 (3 -12-2013) – ontology of the cinematic city & experiment presentation (20)

Hallam, Julia. "Film, Space and Place: Researching a City in Film." *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 8.3 (2010): 277–296. (17pp)

review article

Vries, Tity de. Review of: *Cinematic Rotterdam. The Times and Tides of a Modern City* (Floris Paalman). In: *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 32.4 (2012): 644-646. (3pp)

Presentation 4 – experiment presentation.

Week 7 (10-12-2013) – review presentation (30)

review articles (t.b.a.) (app. 30 pp)

Presentation 5 – presentation of book review.

Week 8 (17-12-2013) – deadline book review

14 January 2014 – deadline retake