

Academic Year	2026-27	Semester	1
Course Coordinator	Michelle Chiang		
Course Code	HL3001		
Course Title	Film Theory		
Pre-requisites	HL1001 Introduction to the Study of Literature		
No of AUs	3		
Contact Hours	39 (weekly seminars of 3 hours)		

Course Aims

This introductory course will help you acquire the skills necessary to understand how film theories are constructed. This knowledge and understanding of writings about cinema will equip you with the skills to analyse and interpret a wide range of films. Upon successful completion of the course, you will be able to apply these ideas to key questions asked throughout the history of film theory, as well as generate new ways of thinking about films, both old and new.

Intended Learning Outcomes (ILO)

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

1. Identify and interpret stylistic elements of films.
2. Discuss key writings about cinema that continue to influence film making today.
3. Evaluate critically writings about cinema and employ creatively established concepts in your analyses of films.
4. Identify significant technical advancements that ignited fierce debates in the birth and development of film theory.

Course Content

This course will introduce to you the history and key debates of film theory. You will be exposed to various ways of thinking and writing about films. The course is divided into four thematic units: Ontology (What is film?), Epistemology (How do films create meaning?), Aesthetics (What makes a film 'powerful,' 'poignant,' or 'sublime'?), and Ideology (How does a film relate to society and politics?). We will attempt to answer these questions (and many more) as we watch selected films.

AI-use policy in this course

AI generated essays may be grammatically sound and they may seem logical, but their arguments are often unsophisticated, general and/or wrong. It will evolve in time, but as of now, it is only helpful to a limited extent when it comes to developing students' critical thinking, close reading and writing skills. Therefore, I will permit the use of AI for the assignments but here's my policy:

1. Assignments entirely generated by AI will not receive a passing grade.
2. Assignments partially generated by AI must be accompanied by a separate 'Description of AI-use' form, which is available on the module's NTULearn 'Content' tab.

Assessment

Component	Course LO Tested	Related Programme LO or Graduate Attributes (See English's LOs)	Weighting	Team/Individual	Assessment Rubrics (See English's assessment rubrics)
1. Essay	3, 4	1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15	50%	Individual	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 13
2. Presentation	3, 4	4, 5, 6, 9, 12	15%	Group	1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13
3. Participation	1, 3	4, 5, 6, 8, 11, 12, 13	10%	Individual	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 14
4. Weekly Response	2, 3	2, 3	25%	Individual	1, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11
Total			100%		

Essay (50%):

You will engage critically with at least two film essays in this course and a film of your choice. Your essay must begin with a thesis statement, and all points must be structured coherently with clear topic sentences. (3000 words)

Presentation (15%):

Working in a group of no more than three, you will identify and analyze three key ideas in the essays of the week. You will be evaluated based on the content, language, analysis and structure of the whole presentation. At the end of the presentation, you will take questions from your classmates. **To do well on the team assessment, it is necessary for you to demonstrate positive interdependence and teamwork. In principle, you will receive the same marks as your team. However, your individual score may vary based on feedback about your contributions to the group project.**

Participation (10%)

Each week, at the end of your classmates' presentation, they will take questions from you and your instructor. You will be evaluated based on how well your questions and comments enrich the weekly in-class discussions.

Weekly Response (25%)

This is a two-part response. The purpose of this two-part format is to allow you to measure your learning and reflect on aspects of the essay that you might not have considered when you were reading it for the first time. Both parts must be in dialogue with each other. **Secondary resources are not required.** (350 words x 10)

Formative feedback

Feedback from peers generated during in-class discussions will be helpful to check your understanding of the film essays. Written feedback will also be given when I return your response folders to you and when you receive your final grade.

Instructor	Office Location	Phone	Email
Michelle Chiang	HSS-03-69	67906714	michellechiang@ntu.edu.sg

Planned Weekly Schedule

Week	Topic	Course LO	Readings/ Activities
1 10/8	Introduction: What is Film Theory?	2, 4	
2 17/8	Ontology: What is Film?	1, 2	Vsevolod Pudovkin, "On Editing" from <i>Film Technique</i> Sergei Eisenstein, "Beyond the Shot" and "The Dramaturgy of Film Form" Screening: <i>Battleship Potemkin</i> (1925)
3 24/8	Ontology: Image and Sound	2, 4	André Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," "The Myth of Total Cinema," and "De Sica: Metteur-en-scène" Sergei Eisenstein, Vsevolod Pudovkin, and Grigori Alexandrov, "Statement on Sound" Screening: Vittorio De Sica's <i>Bicycle Thieves</i> (1948)
4 31/8	Ontology: Film and other media	1, 2	Rudolf Arnheim, "Film and Reality" (1933, 322) Dudley Andrew "Adaptation" (1984, 461) Screening: Stan Kubrick's <i>The Shining</i> (1980)
5 7/9	Epistemology: Role of the Auteur	2, 3	Andrew Sarris "Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962" (1962, 561)

			Peter Wollen "The Auteur Theory" (1972, 565) Screening: Alfred Hitchcock's <i>Psycho</i> (1960)
6 14/9	Epistemology: Meaning Making I	2, 3	Christian Metz, "Some Points on the Semiotics of Cinema" (1968, 65) Screening: Luis Buñuel's <i>Belle du jour</i> (1967)
7 21/9	Epistemology: Meaning Making II	2, 3	Stephen Prince, "The Discourse of Pictures: Iconicity and Film Studies" (1993, 87) Screening: David Lynch's <i>Blue Velvet</i> (1986)
Recess (28 Sep to 2 Oct)			
8 5/10	Aesthetics: Judging a film	1, 3	Jean-Louis Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus" (1970, 355) Tom Gunning, "An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)Credulous Spectator" (1989, 862)
9 12/10	Aesthetics: Visual Pleasure	1, 3	Laura Mulvey. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975, 837-48) Sophie Mayer, "Uncommon Sensuality: New Queer Feminist Film/Theory" (2015, <i>Feminisms: Diversity, Difference and Multiplicity in Contemporary Film Cultures</i>)
10 19/10	The Politics of Film I	2, 3	Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1935, 791)
11 26/10	The Politics of Film II	3, 4	Robert Stam and Louise Spence, "Colonialism, Racism, and Representation: An Introduction" (1977, 877-891)
12 2/11	World Cinema	3, 4	Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, "Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media Stereotype, Realism, and the Struggle Over Representation" (1995, 840) Rey Chow, "Film and Cultural Identity" (1998, 885)

			Wimal Dissanayake, "Issues in World Cinema" (1998, 905) Screening: Abbas Kiarostami's <i>The wind will carry us</i> (1999) Essay and Response folder are due this week.	
13 9/11	Public Holiday			