The Postgraduate Film Studies Reading Group seeks to bring together postgraduate research students and staff who engage the object of film in their research practice. We hold fortnightly discussions built around canonical and contemporary works of film theory. It is our goal to foster an environment that encourages diverse approaches to film studies as a scholarly discipline, from studies in technology and aesthetics to performance and adaptation to ‘filmosophies’ informed by literature, images and sound. While we aim to interrogate some of the paradigm-establishing-and-shifting ideas underpinning the discipline, expertise is not a requirement of involvement in the group, and we welcome anyone who wishes to join. All readings are pre-assigned, selected by current postgraduate students to offer both new and established scholars a focused point for discussion.

In taking film as our object for analysis, we hope to engage the rich diversity of film studies, bringing together research students and staff from a range of departments and schools at the University of Sydney.
MEETINGS
Mondays 5-7pm
Note: there is no screening or reading group meeting on Monday September 26 (the semester break, and also the week of the Film Studies HDR Forum) and Monday October 3 (Labour Day).

VENUES
Sydney Nanoscience Hub (SNH) A31, Physics Road
Screenings: SNH Lecture Theatre 3003
Reading group: SNH Seminar Room 3001

READINGS
Unless otherwise indicated, readings are accessible electronically in one of three ways:
- through the library Crosssearch function or catalogue as eBook chapters or journal articles
- through the library catalogue by searching on the journal title
- through the library unit of study tab and eReadings list, search for ‘Postgraduate Film Studies Reading Group’, marked [eList] below.
Additional texts are optional.

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ACADEMIC SPONSOR
Dr. Susan Potter
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SESSION 1: AUGUST 15 | SNH Lecture Theatre 3003

Introduction and Welcome

Marilyn’s Ghost and the Disposable Actress (1)

Marilyn, an international fantasy figure, constructed her image, both public and private, from a blend of fact and self-serving fantasy…. Fantasy was part of this creature, and part of the challenge is to discover the woman who sheltered behind it.


The Industry giveth, and the Industry taketh away. Hollywood, the dream factory, had created a dream girl. Could she awaken to reality? And what was the reality? Was there a life for her outside the dream?


I used to think as I looked out on the Hollywood night, “There must be thousands of girls sitting alone like me dreaming of becoming a movie star. But I’m not going to worry about them. I’m dreaming the hardest.”


Screening:

Additional Text:
SESSION 2: AUGUST 22 | SNH Seminar Room 3001

Marilyn’s Ghost and the Disposable Actress (2)

I’ve never read anything about the Hollywood I knew in those first years…. The Hollywood I knew was the Hollywood of failure. Nearly everybody I met suffered from malnutrition or suicide impulses. It was like the line in the poem, “Water, water everywhere but not a drop to drink.” Fame, fame everywhere but not a hello for us.


You could call it Fate - if it doesn’t smile on you, there’s nothing you can do. You can have the greatest talent and the greatest ideas, but if that door doesn’t open, you’re fresh out of luck.


Richard Dyer describes Marilyn Monroe as ‘the girl’, and David Lynch spends the entirety of *Mulholland Drive* trying to find ‘the girl’. In this week’s readings and discussion, we’ll explore the way Marilyn haunts Lynch’s film, and the questions that arise around the figure of ‘the girl’ in Hollywood, in all of her great significance and ultimate disposability.

**Readings:**


(The first edition chapter is also fine, as this chapter has not changed between the two).


**Additional Text:**

Dangerous *Daisies*: an outraged, playful, gendered text or a 'witty surrealist comedy'? (1)

*Daisies* was shelved before release and Chytilová banned from making movies for six years, which successfully crippled her career and deprived the world of a wildly intelligent, poetic and unruly cinematic vision.

**Screening:**

Dangerous Daisies: An outraged, playful, gendered text or a 'witty surrealist comedy'? (2)

The function of the representation of play is ultimately to establish, not just any movement whatsoever, but rather the movement of play determined in a specific way. In the end, play is thus the self-representation of its own movement.


What is becoming more and more clear, instead, is that all the categories of our social science stand to be reformulated starting from the notion of gendered social subjects. And something of this process of reformulation - re-vision, rewriting, rereading, rethinking, "looking back at ourselves" - is what I see inscribed in the texts of women’s cinema but not yet sufficiently focused on in feminist film theory or feminist critical practice in general.

Teresa De Lauretis, “Aesthetic and Feminist Theory: Rethinking Women’s Cinema.”

Readings:


Ted: We're both stumbling around together in this unformed world, whose rules and objectives are largely unknown, seemingly indcipherable or even possibly nonexistent, always on the verge of being killed by forces that we don't understand.

Allegra: That sounds like my game, all right.

Ted: That sounds like a game that's not gonna be easy to market.

Allegra: But it's a game everybody's already playing.

eXistenZ (dir. David Cronenberg, Canada/UK, 1999).

Screening:

Additional Texts:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HgU6hlu02yl
‘Game Made Flesh’: Navigating Digital Districts Through Cronenberg’s Body-Horror Aesthetic (2)

It seemed to me that what people are really doing in computer and video games is trying to get closer and closer to fusing themselves with the game. The idea that a game would plug right into your nervous system made perfect sense to me, because putting on glasses and gloves is a crude attempt to fuse your nervous system with the game. So I went that little bit further – if I want to be the game, the game will also want to be me.


…the human has become obsolete, last year’s model. Faced with the possibility of its own extinction, or at least its new irrelevance, the human subject has produced a range of representations of itself as melded with the matrices of terminal existence. The human proudly takes up a position within the machine, but almost always from a position of mastery, so that by entering the machine, the machine becomes part of the human. The subject is, and is not, afraid to leave its body behind.


What are the positive and/or negative effects of game culture? It is simple to say that the emergence of digital technologies has altered our understanding of, and relationship with, time and space – however, to what extent has technology adjusted our acceptance of these principles? David Cronenberg’s signature body-horror flicks often establish new media technology as an alluring threat to human nature and physical existence by giving technology the agency to penetrate, modify, and dismantle the human form. This session will examine Cronenberg’s eXistenZ (1999) and the ways in which the film evaluates the idea of interchangeable realities, how the absorption of technology alters our understanding of self, and the irrelevance of the body – or the extent of formlessness made possible by virtual reality and computer/video gaming.
Readings:

McLuhan, Marshall and Quentin Fiore, The Medium is the Massage, co-ordinated by Jerome Agel, 8-41. New York: Bantam, 1967. [Note: Excerpts are also available as an electronic item on the library website with minor omissions (p116-131) – either text is suitable].

Additional Text:


BREAK
No screening September 26
No reading group October 3
The pervasive moral minimalism found in the suburbs contrasts sharply with claims that American society is particularly violent or litigious. However true such characterizations may be for other settings, they do not reflect suburban reality ... When problems occur, most people do not seriously consider recourse to legal officials, and, in fact, they generally act as if law did not exist at all. In this sense, suburbia is a kind of limited anarchy.


**Screening:**


**Additional Text:**

We were puzzled when people talked about “monocultural” outer suburbs. Most of our neighbours were migrants or the children and grandchildren of migrants. In our part of the estate, Koreans, Filipinos, Greeks, Indians, English, Dutch, Samoans and New Zealanders were mixing as neighbours, partners and friends. It was post-multicultural, in a way. And rather than abstract tolerance, it meant managing the concrete problems and opportunities that came from living with different people. It was farmers' children moving in from Gippsland who lived next door to the grown-up children of Vietnamese refugees moving out from Springvale and Clayton … There’s a difference between arguing that an outer-suburban estate manifests something that is wrong in our culture and arguing that the people who live in it are causing what is wrong in our culture.


Readings:


Additional Text:

It is not because the camera moves that Resnais’ films on painting belong first and foremost to the cinema; on the contrary, the less the camera moves the better. Rather, it is because in these films, painting is given back the time that belongs to it. Painting’s duration is no longer dictated by the time of the spectator (which is suspended time), but rather the time of the screen (which is continuous). Its charm lies in the fact that for the first time, thanks to the cinema, the painter, the work and the spectator have something in common: they experience a dynamic rapport, and are stitched together for a brief moment into the same patchwork.


Screening:


Total program runtime: 45 minutes

Additional Text:

More than a decade before the international successes of his first two feature films — *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959) and *Last Year in Marienbad* (1961) — Alain Resnais began his professional filmmaking career with three short films about major artists and artworks. Given unprecedented access to important works by various cultural institutions, Resnais chose to compose his films’ images in large part out of segments of paintings that were then reconstituted through montage into a new visual unity. An early response by André Bazin to the aesthetic dilemmas represented by Resnais’ radical visual austerity in these films focused on the issue of the frame: how could we reconcile the coexistence of cinema’s “centrifugal” frame (i.e. one that implies a reality beyond it) with the “centripetal” frame of painting, which demarcates it from the natural world and instead pushes our perception inwards? Writing around the same time, Chris Marker located the central challenge of Resnais’ films in their unique configuration of art spectatorship as duration: “[p]ainting’s duration,” he writes, “is no longer dictated by the time of the spectator… but rather by the time of the screen.” Taking these two concepts of montage and duration as starting points, this session investigates Resnais’ films on art as works of art history. How might we think of them in relationship to Benjamin and Malraux’s ideas around the presentation of art outside of the museum in the “age of mechanical reproduction”? How does Resnais’ “disarticulation and rearticulation” of the original works function to give us an understanding of painting’s form across time?

**Readings:**

