The 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 doctoral 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, apart from Session 8, which will take place Wednesday October 7.

VENUES
Weeks 3-4:
Teachers College Seminar Room 427
Weeks 5-9, 11-13:
RC Mills Lecture Theatre 209

READINGS
Unless otherwise indicated, readings are accessible electronically in one of two ways:
- Through the library catalogue, marked [e] or [e-book] in the list below.
- Through the library electronic reserve site, marked [er], available at:
  The code for this reading group archive is FILM1000.

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ACADEMIC SPONSOR
Dr. Bruce Isaacs
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SESSION 1: AUGUST 10 | Teachers College Seminar Room 427
Introduction and Welcome
The Ethics of Encounter and Documentary Aesthetics (1)

Screening:

*Las Hurdes* [Land Without Bread], Dir: Luis Buñuel (1932), 30mins
*Lettre de Siberie* [Letter from Siberia], Chris Marker (1957), 57mins

SESSION 2: AUGUST 17 | Teachers College Seminar Room 427
The Ethics of Encounter and Documentary Aesthetics (2)

...if the culture of empire authorized the pleasure of seizing ephemeral glimpses of its ‘margins’ through travel and tourism, the nineteenth century invention of the photographic and later the cinematographic camera made it possible to record such glimpses.


Luis Buñuel’s *Las Hurdes* (1932) and Chris Marker’s *Lettre de Siberie* (1957) are works by outsiders, strangers in strange lands. Yet, while the two directors tip their hats to the travelogue tradition in both literature and cinema, these are films avowedly outside and perhaps even critical of that genre. In their own ways, these films reflect on the process of representing another place and people, and are particularly interested in the encounter between filmmaker and subject.

Reading:


Additional Text:

- *Night and Fog*, Alain Resnais (1955), 35mins
SESSION 3: AUGUST 24 | RC Mills Lecture Theatre 209
The Cinematic City (1)

Screening:
Oh Boy. Dir: Jan-Ole Gerster (2012)

SESSION 4: AUGUST 31 | RC Mills Lecture Theatre 209
The Cinematic City (2)

Historically, cinema has always been connected to the city. The city in film has figured both as a site of production and as a setting – often using the urban space as thematic or narrative element facilitated by the city’s modern network structures. For many films, the city’s organisational structure as a modern locale simply provides convenient backdrop against which a narrative can play out. However, for some films the city, as a cinematic place, reveals a connection to the local – to a specific geographic and historic site. In such films the city can take on a thematic, conceptual, or structural role that reconfigures ‘setting’ as a more dynamic central focus for a specific film.

Reading:
SESSION 5: SEPTEMBER 7 | RC Mills Lecture Theatre 209
Cinematic Darwinism (1)

Screening:
The Kids Are All Right. Dir. Lisa Cholodenko (2010)

SESSION 6: SEPTEMBER 14 | RC Mills Lecture Theatre 209
Cinematic Darwinism (2)

"Postmodernism takes as a given that, consciously or unconsciously, storytellers have ulterior motives. However, its assumption that self-interest varies (e.g., due to sex, race, social status) is not an explanation but rather a phenomenon to be explained. Why and in what way, for example, should we expect the interests of women narrators to differ from those of male narrators? In order to answer these and other questions related to narrative function, we must first understand the selection pressures to which the mind was subject and the means it evolved to solve them."


Readings:

Additional Text:
SESSION 7: SEPTEMBER 21 (WEDNESDAY) | RC Mills Lecture Theatre 209
Derek Jarman's Caravaggio (1)

Screening:
Caravaggio. Dir. Derek Jarman (1986)

SESSION 8: OCTOBER 7 | RC Mills Lecture Theatre 209
Derek Jarman's Caravaggio (2)

“The Church presented no problem; the fossil culture had hardly touched its permanent scarlet. A Cardinal's costume looked at first glance much it always had. Bankers? All bankers have some part of themselves in fifteenth century Florence, even though their sticky fingers are on the digital calculators of Progress... So Vincenzo Giustiniani, God's banker, appeared in the Renaissance, his hands on the golden calculator; and to underline Caravaggio's selling out to the establishment, he walks into the Vatican to paint Paul in his period velvet costume, like the court costume which in certain circumstances is worn to this day: the Edwardian topper of the garden parties at Buckingham Palace, or the veils worn at the Vatican. The policemen's costumes were the last and most difficult problem to solve. Their uniforms are in period on the streets of London; their manners, however, have changed radically. They have seen too many car chases in American pulp movies, and behave now as if they were in a crime fiction. So, in the end, I put them into the trilbys and leather coats of a 40s B-movie, which gave them a cinematic authority which they would not have possessed with pikes and halberds. Disrupting period ensures a continuing contemporaneity, and works against a film dating.”

Derek Jarman, Derek Jarman's Caravaggio: The Complete Film Script and Commentaries, Photographs by Gerald Incandela (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986)

In Caravaggio, Jarman questions the modern idea that history is a teleological narrative of progress, and he links this idea to the classical Hollywood cinema's preoccupation with diegetic narrative. His revulsion from this latter convention is unsurprising, given the investment of traditional cinematic diegeses in heterosexuality. The Elizabethan references which crowd Jarman's work serve as a means by which he can deconstruct teleological narrative in its historical and cinematic forms, and, in doing so, challenge the heterosexual, patriarchal presuppositions which such narratives support.

Reading:
SESSION 9: OCTOBER 12  |  RC Mills Lecture Theatre 209
The Political Unconscious: Insights and Limitations for Film Theory (1)

Screening:
The Wire, Season 2. Created David Simon (2003). Episodes One ("Ebb Tide") and Two ("Collateral Damage")

SESSION 10: OCTOBER 19  |  RC Mills Lecture Theatre 209
The Political Unconscious: Insights and Limitations for Film Theory (2)

In his seminal work, The Political Unconscious, Fredric Jameson reformulates a Marxist theory of narrative style. Jameson blends Lukacs's theory of narrative as social conflict, Freudian theories of desire and structuralist analytics into a framework that positions history as the ultimate ground for textual interpretation. In "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture," Jameson applies this theory to Hollywood cinema – notably to Jaws (1975) and The Godfather Part I (1972) and The Godfather, Part II (1974). To what extent does this literary paradigm yield the potential for filmic analysis? How does it allow us to sidestep a conventional Marxist critique of commodified mass culture? How has this approach evolved in Jameson's contemporary analysis of The Wire?

Readings:
- Fredric Jameson “Realism and Utopia in The Wire,” Criticism 52, No. 3 & 4 (Summer & Fall 2010): 359-372. [e]

Additional Text:
SESSION 11: OCTOBER 26 | RC Mills Lecture Theatre 209
President Reagan’s Hollywood and American Manifest ‘Density’ (1)

Screening:

SESSION 12: NOVEMBER 2 | RC Mills Lecture Theatre 209
President Reagan’s Hollywood and American Manifest ‘Density’ (2)

The 1980s in America is typically regarded as a period shaped by excess and individualism, as reflected in/promulgated by the conservative leaders of the day and, naturally, the nation’s filmic output. This session is designed to interrogate the themes that define the ‘80s Hollywood film as symptoms of both the prevailing cultural climate and contemporary technological advances. In particular, we will look at Robert Zemeckis’s 1985 smash hit Back to the Future as a potent example of what Andrew Britton terms “Reaganite entertainment.”

Readings:

Additional Text: