The Cinematic City - PPS 253

Required Reading Texts


Recommended:

James Donaldson, Imagining the Modern City, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.

---

Additional reading materials will be distributed in class.

---

Dr. F. Demissie
Office 2352 N. Clifton Ave, Rm. 150.1
Office Hours, TTH 10-12 pm and by appointment
Phone: 325-7356
E-mail: fdemissi@depaul.edu
Course Web Page: http://condor.depaul.edu/~fdemissi/pps350.html
Course Description

After his visit to the America, the French social and cultural critic Jean Buadrillard (1988) noted: "The America city seems to have stepped right out of the movies ...To grasp its secret, you should not, then, begin with the city and move inwards towards the screen; you should begin with the screen and move onwards towards, the city."

Since the beginning of the 20th century, the history of cities and cinema were inextricably linked by the same historical process of social and industrial transformation. The genealogy of twentieth century cities layered with stone, brick, concrete, steel and glass, cataloging both the discourses and the social forces that structured their histories over time were powerfully mirrored in cinema. Equally, cinema also represented the social and architectural distinctiveness, diversity, and dynamism of cities.

Issues to be explored and examined will include the following:

- What cinematic assumptions are made about contemporary cities and how are they imagined in cinema?
- What historical, cultural and political currents influence the particular way cities are represented in cinema and what is the nature of these images shown on the screen?
- What discursive practices regarding cities and urban life are articulated in cinematic spaces?
- How do notions of gender, race, and ethnicity and sexual orientation figure in the way cinema depicts cities? In what ways did film depict social inequalities I cities.
- In what ways do marginalized communities write back their own imaginations of cities in cinema?
- In what ways do narrative and cinematic techniques -- episodic structure, lightening techniques, angles of vision, uses of color etc. participate in the construction of meaning about cities?

Throughout the quarter, a number of films drawn from the US and Europe will be screened in class. These films explore directly or indirectly the makings contemporary cities, both real and ideal from various vantage points. Readings will consider urban history, urban planning and architecture as well as cinema's relationship to the built environment.

COURSE OUTCOME

- Develop an understanding of the relationship between cities and film
- Develop an understanding of systems of representation, meanings, ideologies and power relations are embedded in films and cities

CLASS FORMAT

The course is structured as a seminar and as such it is a collaborative enterprise. In a seminar format students take the responsibility of actively participating in discussions and reflecting critically on issues in assignments and projects related to assigned readings. In a seminar, students are required to complete readings in preparation for weekly open format discussions. This means that readings must be finished before the class meeting. Without active participation, the seminar will not be effective. Engagement with issues and ideas examined in the course will depend on your willingness to come prepared and participate actively. Read carefully, record your impressions, jot down notes, mark interesting or
irritating passages; engage with the author (s) and come to class ready to contribute your thoughts about their work and issues they raise.

**DISCUSSIONS AND CRITICAL READING**

A primary responsibility of students is to complete the weekly reading before the date of the scheduled class meeting and contribute their thoughtful, reflective opinions in class discussion. Students should allocate enough time to complete the required readings. The readings can be interpreted in a variety of ways and students should formulate some initial questions to offer in the class discussion as well as critical responses. For each class, each student must be prepared to explicate the main arguments of that day’s reading and relate it to our previous discussions. Students are expected to voluntarily participate in discussions and should also expect to be called upon.

The best ways to prepare for and contribute to active class discussion are the following: 1) complete the reading on time, and 2) critically analyze the reading. The primary goal of critical reading is to understand the author's argument, identify key assumptions, and evaluate the evidence and influences leading to that conclusion. Never assume a "passive" position when reading a text. To fully comprehend and understand any reading, ask the following questions:

- What is the author’s thesis?
- Does the author have a stated or unstated point of view? How does the author construct his/her argument? Are the author's goals, viewpoints, or agendas revealed in the introduction or preface? Does the author provide evidence to support the argument? What kind of evidence is provided and is it persuasive? In the final analysis, do you think the author proves the argument or does the author rely on preconceived ideas or personal ideology? Why do you think that?
- Does the author take a moral or political stand? Is it made explicit or implicit in the way the issues are treated and examined?
- What assumptions does the author make about society? Does the author see society as hierarchical, pluralistic, democratic or elitist? Does the author present convincing evidence to support his/her views?
- How is the narrative constructed or organized? Why does the author begin and end at certain points? Does the author present the analysis from the viewpoint of a certain perspective or group? How does this affect the outcome of the analysis?
- What issues and events does the author omit or ignore? Can you think of alternative interpretations or stories that might present a different interpretation of the issues? What would be some of the implications of looking at the issues differently?

**Classroom Discussions and Expectations**

The required readings form the heart of the seminar and provide a common ground for class discussions. The common readings are selected not because they constitute some essential "truth" or in any way constitute the final word on the subject. Nor are these books chosen because I agree with all of the views and propositions of the authors. Rather, the common readings represent detailed historical and contemporary perspectives of noted scholars in the field. By carefully reading the assigned books and reflecting upon them critically you will develop analytical and critical skills in reasoning and argumentation, which are essential for any intellectual pursuit.
Classroom review and discussion of reading materials are designed to clarify the main ideas, arguments, and major assumptions. In order for discussions to be meaningful, enjoyable and engaging, students must come to class prepared to critically examine the issues addressed in the reading material. The importance of preparing for informed discussion and exchange of ideas is to allow each student to demonstrate his/her understanding of the material and to provide opportunities for a critical analysis of ideas, assumptions, and various points of view expressed in the readings. It is my expectation that all students will have read the assigned material for the class and come prepared for and in-depth discussion. It is only through critical discussion that the value of the reading materials can be appreciated. **For each class, each student must be prepared to explicate the main arguments of that day’s reading and relate it to our previous discussions. Students are expected to voluntarily participate in discussions and should also expect to be called upon.**

The long tradition of academic freedom in higher education promotes free and open exchange of ideas. My role as the instructor of the course is to insure that this openness prevails. I will make every effort to honor differences of opinion and multiple perspectives, while at the same time encouraging critical analysis and reflection that is informed by readings and related to the course materials.

**Grades and Evaluation**

Student’s final grade will be determined taking into consideration the following: attendance, consistence in active participation in class discussions, quality or work submitted, and performance on examinations. The weight of assignments and examinations is indicated below:

| Class Attendance and Class Discussion | 15 percent |
| Online Discussion | 20 Percent |
| Film Reviews | 30 Percent |
| Final Examination | 35 percent |

All students should be mindful of the following framework regarding grades for all assignments and exams. Letter grades will be used in all evaluation of student work. In the determination of grade on assignments, the **issue of quality will prevail.**

**A** - Indicates work of extraordinarily high quality and reflects unusual thoroughness, comprehensiveness, cogency or arguments, treatment and development of ideas, and creativity in meeting stated requirements of assignments. Work is also characterized by exceptional writing ability: virtually free of serious grammatical, spelling, and syntactical errors.

**B** – Designates work of high quality regarding the organization and development of ideas. Work substantively addresses issues/topics and the like as stated in the guidelines for assignment(s). Writing is relatively free of serious grammatical and spelling as well as syntactical errors.

**C** - Designates work which minimally meets acceptable requirements as stated in guidelines for assignment(s). Writing skills reflect weaknesses in organization and development of ideas; may demonstrate serious grammatical and spelling, as well as syntactical errors and the like. Treatment of ideas and issues often characterized as superficial and simplistic. Work may only address a part of assignment, and not the complex of issues stated in guidelines,
**D** - Designates work which does not meet the minimum acceptable requirements of the assignment(s). Very poorly written in terms of organization and development of ideas, grammar and spelling, and syntax. May indicate that students have not followed direction.

**F** - Indicates that assignment has not been submitted at all, has not addressed topics or issues assigned whatsoever, or where relevant, has been turned in later than agreed upon extension. This grade will also be affixed to assignment(s) in which work has been plagiarized or in any way violates academic integrity.

**I** - An incomplete is not lightly given. It is designed for the rare occasion when the student has been seriously ill or suffered some other hardship beyond one's control. Permission to receive an "I" must be requested in writing by the student no later than the last regularly scheduled day of class. If the "I" is not removed by the student with one academic year from the date of enrollment in the course, it becomes an "F". The student will then need to repeat the course.

**Letter Grade Value**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Late Assignments**: papers will be marked down one half grade for each day late. make-up exams will only be given with doctor's excuse. **Papers more than two days will not be accepted, resulting in a grade of F.**

Students who miss more than two class sessions without permission will have their final grade lowered by a full grade.

- Faxed or e-mailed film reviews and other assignments will **NOT be accepted**

**Code of Academic Integrity**

**CODE OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

Violations of academic integrity, particularly plagiarism, are not tolerated. Plagiarism is defined by the university as: "..a major form of academic dishonesty involving the presentation of the work of another as one's own. Plagiarism includes but is not limited to the following:

- The direct copying of any source, such as written and verbal material, computer files, audio disks, video programs or musical scores, whether published or unpublished, in whole or part, without proper acknowledgement that it is someone else's.
- b. Copying of any source in whole or part with only minor changes in wording or syntax, even with acknowledgement.
- c. Submitting as one's own work a report, examination paper, computer file, lab report or other assignment that has been prepared by someone else. This includes research papers purchased from any other person or agency.
- d. The paraphrasing of another's work or ideas without proper acknowledgement.
Students with Disability

Please identify yourself after class to the instructor early in the quarter. Appropriate arrangements will be made for you to take all examinations at the Office of Disable Student Services.

Film Review

As part of the requirements of the course, you are required to review three films from those scheduled to be screened in class. In reviewing the films students should be careful not to offer a mere description of films you have selected to review. The best review papers will be those that define, analyze and critically address the issues addressed in the films.

Student are strongly urged to develop their review in consultation with the instructor. You must provide scrupulous documentation for factual assertions, provide references for opinions attributed to others, whether through direct quotation or paraphrasing. Any form of plagiarism will result in receiving an F for the review.

Criteria of Grading

The review paper will be graded according to the following criteria:

- How well does the review paper state and develop an argument regarding the subject?
- How is the review paper organized and how persuasively is it argued?
- Does the review paper demonstrate originality and creativity?
- Does the review paper observe the conventions of a film review, are citations complete, does the review paper reflect care in proof-reading regarding language use and grammar?

Format

The review paper must be double-spaced, type written in either 11 or 12 point font on 8.5” X 11” paper, observing a minimum of one-inch margins all around. Pages must be numbered. For the documentation of sources, I strongly recommend that you locate them as endnotes at the end of the paper on separate sheets of paper in the format specified by The Chicago Manual of Style. However, you may choose to follow the MLA format of textual citations. The body of the review paper must be no more than 3 pages in length. Notes and bibliography should follow and be numbered as well.

The film review must have a separate title page consisting of: the title of the review paper; the student’s name and current e-mail address; the name of the course; and the name of the instructor.
Weekly Reading Assignments and Film Screening

Week 1 (September 6, 2006)

Course Introduction to the course

Week 2 (September 11, 2006)

Introducing the Metropolis

- Mark Shiel, "Cinema and the City" in Cinema and the City, pp. 1-18
- Tony Fitzmaurice "Film and Urban Societies" in Cinema and the City, pp. 19-30
- David B. Clark, "Introduction: Previewing the Cinematic City" in The Cinematic City, pp. 1-18

Metropolis - 1927

Week 3 (September 18, 2006)

Urban America Part I -- Community of Newcomers

- Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, "Cities: Real and Imagined" in Cinema and the City, pp 99-108.

La Ciudad, 1999

Week 4 (September 25, 2006)

Urban America Part II -- Paranoid Place and Vigilantism

- Elizabeth Mahoney, "'The People in Parentheses': Space Under Pressure in the Post-Modern City" in The Cinematic City, pp.168-185.

Falling Down, 1993
Week 5 (October 2, 2006)

The Hood


Do the Right Thing, 1989

Week 6 (October 9, 2006)

Lurid Cities and Moral Crusade

- John Watson, "Film Mystery as Urban History" in Cinema and the City, pp46-59
- Chinatown, 1974

Week 7 (October 16, 2006)

- Mike Davis, 'The Urbanization of Empire: Mega Cities and the Laws of Chaos"

City of God  Directed by Fernando Meirelles and Kátia Lund

Week 8 (October 23, 2006)

- No reading assignment for this week

Salaam Bombay

Directed by Mira Nair
Week 9 (October 30, 2006)

- Mark Neuman "Emigrating to New York in 3-D: Stereoscopic Vision in IMAX's Cinematic City" in *Cinema and the City*, pp. 109-212.

*Taxi Driver*, 1976

Week 10 (November 6, 2006)

History and Erasure


*Wings of Desire*

Week 10 November 13, 2006

Futurist Cities and Dystopian Visions


*Dark City*, 1998