

## **Textual Analysis and Film Studies: Criticism, Interpretation, Evaluation**

The vibrancy of contemporary film studies is evident in the wide range of methodologies it offers. Film Studies' many specialist journals, conferences, special interest groups and associations are the home of healthy debate about how precisely the discipline's object of study should be approached, yet it remains perhaps surprising that, as Richard Dyer has remarked, there is often relatively little "film" in much film studies research. This 6 lecture course will take the students through many key historical debates about how "textual analysis" should be undertaken and examine some of the most important film texts around which these debates have raged. The course also considers the recent, contested (re)turn towards "criticism" and the claims being made for video essays and videographic film criticism in recent years. As well as exploring urgent meta-critical issues, the module will look at case studies whereby traditions of "close reading" are brought to bear on aesthetic categories normally anathema to such an approach (i.e. the middlebrow and the spectacular).

### Lecture 1 – The place of "textual analysis" within Film Studies

Screening: *Meet me in St. Louis* (Minnelli, 1944)

Reading: Dyer, Richard (1998): "Introduction to Film Studies" in John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson (eds), *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies* (Oxford University Press), 3-10.

& Wood, Robin (2006): "Criticism" in Barry Keith Grant (ed.), *Schirmer Encyclopedia of Film. Volume 2: Criticism-Ideology*, 1-10 (please also read boxes on Andrew Britton and Andrew Sarris).

### Lecture 2 – Interpretation and its discontents

Screening: *Psycho* (Hitchcock, 1960)

Reading: Perkins, V.F. (1990): "Must We Say What They mean? Film Criticism and Interpretation", *Movie* (1990), 34/5, 1-6

& Bordwell, David (1989): "Rhetoric in Action: Seven Models of *Psycho*", *Making Meaning. Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* (London: Harvard University Press), 224-248.

### Lecture 3 – Academic film criticism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

Screening: *The Magnificent Ambersons* (Welles, 1942)

Reading: Klevan, Andrew (2011): "Description" in Alex Clayton and Andrew Klevan (eds), *The Language and Style of Film Criticism* (London: Routledge), 70-86

& Buckland, Warren (2012): "Solipsistic film criticism. Review of The Language and Style of Film Criticism", *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, 10: 2, 288-298.

### Lecture 4 – The Middlebrow: aesthetic and political evaluations

Screening: *Amazing Grace* (Apted, 2006)

Reading: Brown, Tom (2013), "Consensual pleasures: *Amazing Grace*, oratory and the middlebrow biopic" in Tom Brown & Belén Vidal (eds), *The Biopic in Contemporary Film Culture* (New York: Routledge), 118-139.

#### Lecture 5 – Evaluating film spectacle

Screening: *Gone with the Wind* (Fleming, 1939)

Reading: Brown, Tom (2011), "Spectacle and Value in Classical Hollywood Cinema" in Laura Hubner (ed.) *Valuing Films: Shifting Perceptions of Worth* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan), 49-67.

#### Lecture 6 – Videographic Film Criticism

Screening: A selection of "video essays" (TBC)

Reading: Keathley, Christian (2011): "La caméra-stylo: notes on video criticism and cinephilia" in Alex Clayton and Andrew Klevan (eds), *The Language and Style of Film Criticism*, 176-191.