

PCC 120. French Cinema

Prof. Marc Cerisuelo

Office Hours

By appointment

Lecture

12-3 pm

Section/Screening

Monday 3:45-5:45pm

French Cinema has always been Hollywood's only serious competitor. Before the First World War the names of Lumière, Pathé et Gaumont are associated with the good financial and artistic health of an industry which dominated the film world since the invention of the medium. After 1918 Hollywood took the lead and never abandoned its dominance of the film industry. But after the 1930s French Cinema, both artistic and popular, a cinema associated with film "auteurs" but also with its own star system, has maintained both a significant share of the market and a high level of artistic quality.

In this course we will study the endurance and resilience of French cinema, the causes and effects of film as a "French passion." We will pay special attention to strong directorial personalities (Carné, Bresson, Tati, Godard, etc.); the French star system; the popular love of cinema; French critical approaches to cinema; and the role of the state in promoting French cinema. We will cast a wide net over cinema to understand the secrets of the privileged relationship between a nation, an art, and a social practice.

COURSE MATERIALS

- A Course Reader ([CR] hereafter)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Students are expected to do each week's readings before the first week's session, and to attend the mandatory site visits.

- **Class participation** (including several short written exercises throughout the term) will be worth **25%** of the grade.
- There will also be a **short in-class test** during Week 4 for 25% of the grade.
- a **midterm 25%**
- a **final 25%**

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1.

Introduction

The specificity of French cinema. The only serious competitor to Hollywood. Cinema: its history from a franco-american perspective. The importance of talking pictures and the notion of a national cinema. The 1930s: the birth of a cinema of "auteurs" and the "star system" in France.

Screening: *Le Jour se lève* (Marcel Carné, 1939)

Week 2.

Second World War

A great era for the cinematic production in France. Artisans of the studio and innovators. French inventiveness (Part 1) : Pagnol, Guitry, Bresson.

Screening: *Les Dames du bois de Boulogne* (Robert Bresson, 1945)

Week 3.

The post-war era

Effervescence of France's passion for cinema. The rediscovery of American film. André Bazin and two key journals : Cahiers du cinéma and Positif. French inventiveness (Part 2) : Becker, Cocteau, Tati

Screening: *Orphée* (Jean Cocteau, 1950)

Week 4. SHORT TEST

The idea of « caméra-stylo » (Alexandre Astruc)

The significance of the notions of « auteur » and “mise en scène.”

Screening: *Les Vacances de Monsieur Hulot* (Jacques Tati, 1952) [or *Mon Oncle*, 1958]

Week 5.

Towards the New Wave

The antecedents to the New Wave of French Cinema in the columns of the journal Cahiers du cinéma. François Truffaut's seminal article : « A Certain Tendency of French Cinema. » (Cahiers du cinéma, n° 31, January 1954).

La critique du cinéma « de qualité ».

Screening: *Les 400 Coups* (François Truffaut, 1959).

Week 6.

The New Wave of French Cinema

Esthetics and economics; consequences of the crisis at the box office and the renewal of a cinematographic language. Godard, Rivette, Rohmer, Chabrol.

Screening: *Le Mépris* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1963)

Week 7.

MID TERM TEST

Week 8.

Other forms of French modernity. Resnais, Demy, Varda.

Screening: *Les Demoiselles de Rochefort* (Jacques Demy, 1967)

Week 9.

The renewal of a classical style

The French version of the detective thriller. Melville, Lautner.

Screening: *Le Cercle Rouge* (Jean-Pierre Melville, 1970)

Week 10.

Cinema and Politics

Readings of French History. The situation of 1970-80.

Screening: *Lacombe Lucien* (Louis Malle, 1975)

Week 11.

French cinema and its attitude towards reality

Documentaries and documentary makers. Depardon, Carrère, Philibert. La « nouvelle » nouvelle vague : Desfpechin et Assayas.

Screening: *L'eau froide* (Olivier Assayas, 1995)

Week 12.

Contemporary French Cinema

The persistence of « commercial » and « auteur ». The French specificity in the context of globalization.

Screening: Recent film available on DVD.

Week 13.

REVIEW AND FINAL EXAMINATIONS