Cinema and History

Course Description:
This course explores the boundaries and definitions of history as a discipline through an examination of the visual representation of the past in film. It assumes that learning to read visual images is critical for history students. It also looks at such key historical issues as authenticity, dramatization, point of view, propaganda, biography. It considers debates about the word versus the image, film's romance with history, the uses of film as historical evidence, and the role of television and video in shaping notions of history.

Course Requirements:
All scheduled meetings are mandatory. More than two missed classes will result in failure.

Most weeks we will screen a film together. In addition, each week I will introduce various issues in lecture form and we will also have discussion. Each week will differ from the next. Sometimes we will discuss a movie right after seeing it, other times we will discuss it the next week. Sometimes you will read material before seeing a movie, other times you will read related materials afterwards. This means you must pay careful attention to the syllabus because the format will vary from week to week.

Required Texts:

Appleby et. al., *Telling the Truth about History*
Gianetti, *Understanding Movies*
Doctorow, *Ragtime*
Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre*
Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past*
Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*
Ferro, *Cinema and History*
Tashiro, *Pretty Pictures*
Mulvey, *Citizen Kane*
Custen, *Bio/Pics*
Score of “Ragtime” available at Campus Music Store

There is also a course packet that is available for purchase through me the second week of class. Any reading marked with an * is located in the reader.

Written Assignments and Presentations:

Each week one student will be responsible for making a "review packet" of film reviews, present a summary of how the film was reviewed, and describe its production history which should also be summarized in a hand-out. A second student will offer an analysis of the film
from any one of several potential angles — the film as a reflection of the moment in which it was produced, the film as a mode of historiography, the film as it relates to the historical moment being represented. This presentation might include relevant clips. Each of these presentations should be no more than 15 minutes long. Each student will do one of each of these presentations.

Film Review: Due: March 9. Each student will write a 5-7 page review of a film from a critical and analytical perspective that contemplates the film as historical representation.

Final Paper: Due May 3 by noon. This final project will be designed in consultation with the instructor. Possible projects include: a treatment for an historical film, a paper that explores one subject as depicted in film (ie) the French Revolution or one genre: the musical, the Western and its relationship to history or looks at the production history of a film and its relation to current modes of historiography. Students must meet with me or e-mail me on this subject within the first 4 weeks of class and a written proposal with a bibliography and filmography are due March 2.

Grading:

Presentations and Class Participation: 45%
Paper: 25%
Final Paper: 30%

Course Schedule and Reading Assignments:

Part I. Is Cinema Good for History; History Good for Cinema?

Week One: January 19: Cinema Tells Its Own History

Is film a suitable medium for historical representation?
Film: Sunset Boulevard (1950), (110 mins)
Discussion of film
Read for next week: Giannetti, Chapter 1, 2, 3
*Davis, "Any Resemblance to Persons Living or Dead" Yale Review v. 76 (Summer 1987):457-482
*Schama article from New Yorker, January 11, 1998
Rosenstone, p.1-79.
**"Historians and their Audience" from Telling the Story pp.1-43.

Week Two: January 26: Cinematic Techniques of Defining the Past : The Flashback and Allegory in the Service of the Present
Discussion of readings
Film: "The Godfather, Part II" (1974)(200 mins.)
Discussion of film

Read for next week:
Giannetti, Chapters 4, 5, 6
Appleby et.al., Telling the Truth About History
Screen at home: “Evita” or “Newsies”

**Week Three: February 2: Happy Hollywood, Gloomy History: What is Disneyfication? or “Singin’ the Revolution”**

Discussion of Appleby et. al.: Understanding Historiography
Discussion of films and Disneyfication
Screen: “American Graffiti”(1973) (120 mins.)

Read for Next Week:
Giannetti, ch. 7 & 8
Rosenstone, pp.200-246.
*Charney on Nostalgia
*White, “Remembrance of things Past: Nostalgia in Recent American Films” in *New Orleans Review*
*Jameson from *Postmodernism and the Logic of Late Capitalism*

**Week Four: February 9: Nostalgia: Another of Hollywood’s Notions of History?**

Discussion of Ferro and Rosenstone
Discussion of film and nostalgia readings

Screen: “The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari” (1920) (75 mins)
Read for next week:
Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*
*Kaes, “War Trauma and Weimar Film”

**Week Five: February 16: Film as Ideology**

Discussion of Caligari and readings
Screen in-class: “Reds” (1981) (196 mins.)

Read for Next Week:
Giannetti, ch. 9, 10, 11
*Rosenstone, "Reds as History" Reviews in American History v. 10, n. 3 (Sept. 1982)
*Grindon: "Politics and History in Contemporary Hollywood: Reds" in *Shadows of the Past*
*Stansell, "Reds" in Carnes, *Past Imperfect*
Part II. Method and Genre

Week Six: February 23: Oral History: History vs. Memory
Discussion of “Reds”
The Western and History as Mythology
Film: “The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance” (1962)
*Read for next week:
Belton, American Film/American Cinema, p. 206-230
*Furet, In the Workshop of History
Re-visit Appleby on social history, esp. 146-159
Giannetti: Ch. 12
Due in Class Next Week: Proposals for Final Paper

Week Seven: March 2: Social History: History from Below
Film: McCabe and Mrs. Miller (1971) (120 mins.)
Discuss McCabe and Mrs. Miller:
Read for Next Week:
*Kracauer, "Biography..." from The Mass Ornament
*Custen, Biopics
*Hegel, Philosophy of History pp. 29-33
Mulvey, Citizen Kane

Week Eight: March 9: Biography and the Biopic
Film: "Citizen Kane” (1941)
Discussion of readings and film

Spring Break: March 14-21
Screen one of the following epic films:
Cleopatra (1963)
The Sound of Music (1965)
The Ten Commandments (1956)
Spartacus (1960)

Read over Break:

Last Emperor (1987)
Ben-Hur (1959)
Lawrence of Arabia (1962)
1900 (1976)
Week Nine: March 23: Epic: The Big Story on the Big Screen
Clips reel and discussion of epic through readings and films screened
Screen: “The Return of Martin Guerre” (1983) (120 mins)
Read for Next Week:
Davis, “The Return of Martin Guerre”
*Benson, "Interview with Natalie Davis" in Film and History (1983)
*Guneratne, "Cinehistory and the Puzzling Case of Martin Guerre" from Film and History, v. 21, n.1 (1991)

Week Ten: March 30: Authenticity and The Spirit of the Times
Discussion of “The Return of Martin Guerre”
Screen: “Nicholas and Alexandra” (1971) and clips from “The Leopard”
Read for next week:
Tashiro, Pretty Pictures

Week Eleven: April 6: Or Is It in the Details?
Discussion of Tashiro and “Nicholas and Alexandra”
Read for next week:
Doctorow, Ragtime
*White, "The Fictions of Factual Representation" from Tropics of Discourse
Listen to the “Ragtime Soundtrack”

Part III. The Politics of Re-Presenting the Real

Week Twelve April 13: History and Fiction: A Contradiction in Terms? What is Historical Fiction?
Screen: Ragtime (1981) (150 mins.)
Discuss Film and novel and soundtrack
Read for next week:
On “World at War”
*Chambers, II and Whiteclay and Culbert,World War II, Film and History,Preface, forward, 3-12, 147-62.
Week Thirteen: April 20: Documentary
Screen: Two Episodes from “World at War” (1974)
Session directed by Stel Sandris

Readings for Next Week:
* Mosse, The Nationalization of the Masses, pp. 183-216
* Leni Riefenstahl, A Memoir
* Sontag, "Fascinating Fascism"
Screen: “The Wonderful, Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl”

Week Fourteen April 27: Propaganda

Screen: "Triumph of the Will" (1935) (75 mins.)
Citation Clips
Discussion of film, readings
Screen: “Shoah” (1985) pt. 1

Read for Next Week:
* Elsaesser, "Subject Positions..." in Sobchack
* Hansen, "Schindler's List is Not Shoah..." Critical Inquiry (Winter 1996)
* Landy, "Mourning, Melodrama and Nazism" in Cinematic Uses of the Past
* Doherty, “Representing the Holocaust: Claude Lanzmann’s Shoah” in Film and History, v. 17, n. 1, Feb. 1987
*Young, James. “Holocaust Video and Cinematic Testimony” from Writing and Re-Writing the Holocaust
Screen at home” “Schindler’s List”

Week Fifteen: DATE to be re-scheduled: Docudrama and Documentary: Representing the Unrepresentable
Screen: “Cabaret” (1972) (122 mins.)
Discussion of readings and the three films