Course Outline

FILM3260

Film Authorship:
Writing the Film Director

Semester 2, 2010

Course Coordinator:  Dr Hamish Ford
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Fax:  02 49216933
Email:  hamish.ford@newcastle.edu.au
Consultation hours:  By appointment – Mondays Tuesdays Thursdays
Semester 2 - 2010
Unit Weighting 10
Teaching Methods Laboratory (screening); Seminar

Brief Course Description
Examines the concept of the director as a film’s author from a range of different theoretical, cultural and historical perspectives and how such figuration has been ‘written’ both on-screen and off. Important directors, films and scholarship in this area will be considered via some select ‘case studies’ in which to consider different aesthetic approaches through which we can trace divergent notions of authorship and its various problematisations.

Contact Hours
Seminar for 2 Hours per Week for the Full Term
Laboratory (film screening) for 2 Hours per Week for the Full Term

Learning Materials/Texts Course Reader (essential)

Course Objectives
Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to demonstrate:

(1) a detailed engagement with the critical and theoretical debates about authorship in the cinema across different historical and cultural contexts;
(2) a well-developed ability to apply a range of authorship approaches to the work of particular film directors; and
(3) high-level skills in textual, historical and cultural analysis of films with a depth and focus appropriate to upper-level postgraduate study.

Course Content
This course examines:

* films by a select group of directors making up ‘case studies’ by which to examine and assess different debates about authorship in the cinema
* the notion of cinema authorship as personified in the figure of the director, ranging from its influence as a critical approach in regards to the textual analysis of films to the ways that different films themselves construct or problematise various understandings of the author
* the implications of applying a category such as directorial authorship to films in terms of production, interpretation, and cultural debate.

Assessment Items

| Essays / Written Assignments | A minor essay of 1,500 words analysing in depth a film from the course due mid-term, worth 30% |
| Essays / Written Assignments | A research exercise of 1,000 words, due in the second half of semester, 20% |
| Essays / Written Assignments | A Major Essay of 2,500-3,000 words, due during examination period, worth 50% |

Assumed Knowledge
20 units of 1000-level FILM courses.

Callaghan Campus Timetable
FILM3260 CINEMATIC AUTHORSHIP
Enquiries: School of Humanities and Social Science
~ PLEASE NOTE: All of the below start in week 1 ~

| Semester 2 - 2010 | Film Screen: Tuesday 9:00 - 11:00 [MC132] | and Seminar: Tuesday 11:00 - 13:00 [MC132] |

Online Tutorial Registration:
Students are required to enrol in the Lecture and a specific Tutorial time for this course via the Online Registration system. Refer - [http://www.newcastle.edu.au/study/enrolment/regdates.html](http://www.newcastle.edu.au/study/enrolment/regdates.html)

NB: Registrations close at the end of week 2 of semester.

Studentmail and Blackboard: Refer - [www.blackboard.newcastle.edu.au/](http://www.blackboard.newcastle.edu.au/)

This course uses Blackboard and studentmail to contact students, so you are advised to keep your email accounts within the quota to ensure you receive essential messages. To receive an expedited response to queries, post questions on the Blackboard discussion forum if there is one, or if emailing staff directly use the course code in the subject line of your email. Students are advised to check their studentmail and the course Blackboard site on a weekly basis.

Important Additional Information
Details about the following topics are available on your course Blackboard site (where relevant). Refer - [www.blackboard.newcastle.edu.au/](http://www.blackboard.newcastle.edu.au/)

- Written Assignment Presentation and Submission Details
- Online copy submission to Turnitin
- Penalties for Late Assignments
- Special Circumstances
- No Assignment Re-submission
- Re-marks & Moderations
- Return of Assignments
- Preferred Referencing Style
- Student Representatives
- Student Communication
- Essential Online Information for Students

### Grading guide

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<td>49% or less</td>
<td>Fail (FF) An unacceptable effort, including non-completion. The student has not understood the basic principles of the subject matter and/or has been unable to express their understanding in a comprehensible way. Deficient in terms of answering the quest research, referencing and correct presentation (spelling, grammar etc). May include extensive plagiarism.</td>
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<td>50% to 64%</td>
<td>Pass (P) The work demonstrates a reasonable attempt to answer the question, shows some grasp of the basic principles of the subject matter and a basic knowledge of the required readings, is comprehensible, accurate and adequately referenced.</td>
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<td>65% to 74%</td>
<td>Credit (C) The work demonstrates a clear understanding of the question, a capacity to integrate research into the discussion, and a critical appreciation of a range of different theoretical perspectives. A deficiency in any of the above may be compensated by evidence of independent thought. The work is coherent and accurate.</td>
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<tr>
<td>75% to 84%</td>
<td>Distinction (D) Evidence of substantial additional reading and/or research, and evidence of the ability to generalise from the theoretical content to develop an argument in an informed and original manner. The work is well organised, clearly expressed and shows a capacity for critical analysis.</td>
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<td>85% upwards</td>
<td>High Distinction (HD) All of the above, plus a thorough understanding of the subject matter based on substantial additional reading and/or research. The work shows a high level of independent thought, presents informed and insightful discussion of the topic, particularly the theoretical issues involved, and demonstrates a well-developed capacity for critical analysis.</td>
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Welcome to Cinematic Authorship: Writing the Film Director, an upper-level course in the Film, Media and Cultural Studies Major that builds upon your initial study in FILM1010 and other courses. This course will look in closer detail at cinema and film theory/criticism that tackles the thorny issue of authorship – in particular, that of the director.

The course’s title is mean to evoke both the way that the director writes him/herself (unfortunately it is still very likely indeed it will be a ‘he’) into a film through characteristic formal and thematic choices, but also the process by which we as viewers and writers on cinema ‘write’ the film director into our appreciation of it/them – in other words, how we claim and ‘detect’ the author through his/her choices of camera angle, thematic predilection, etc. This dual meaning is very important. We will be exploring in detail the Romantic heritage of auteurism and the (filmic and literary) articulation of individual artistic accomplishment, which key moments of auteurist writing have articulated, within the ‘machinery’ of an industrial medium. But we will also examine the way in which the auteur has, since its critical 1950s inception in France, been ‘written’ – called into being or constructed through critical language. This rather more self-conscious understanding of film authorship that privileges the critic and by extension the viewer to a very large extent reaches a sceptical apogee with wholesale critiques/deconstructions of the very notion of both authorship per se and as enacted the cinema following the initial auteurist moment.

The founding auteurist gesture in France, and since exported to film criticism the world over, notably in the USA, had importantly precise historical motivations (often forgotten today). This was to both polemically encourage a more authorially bold cinema in France, and – more importantly perhaps – to argue for some Hollywood directors as being ‘artists’ within the seeming antithetical Hollywood ‘machine’. While in terms of their critical ambitions these aims were
achieved quite quickly (one of auteurism’s earliest exponents, François Truffaut, argued is need had been exhausted by the early 1960s), the ball was sure set rolling... And although the notion of the auteur would become heavily critiqued within film theory from the late 1960s on, within mainstream film reviewing and culture it has persisted with remarkable resilience irrespective of its conceptual leaps.

More than your other courses perhaps, this version of Cinematic Authorship is very much historically focussed. Rather than looking at a number of films and directors across film history, we instead (excepting two recent films that ‘bookend’ the course) concentrate on the period in which issues of authorship were at a peak of filmic and critical-theoretical articulation and import: from the 1950s through to the late ’70s. This allows an unusual opportunity not only to look closely at some key output of serious, sustained critical and theoretical writing committed to the discourses and debates around authorship in the cinema, but also more recent pieces reflecting on those films and debates. We will also, of course, be addressing examples of writing that exemplify close authorial analysis of a film offered as at the very heart of a given director/s characteristic work. All this is designed to enable access and working through key examples of films from around the world that exemplify film authorship at its most expressive, lauded and debated.

The nature of the films in this course are often pushing cinematic authorship to its limits in different ways, and all of the selections represent well-regarded directors at their most expressive, idiosyncratic, and ‘personal’. Such work, for many (including myself) represents some of the most special, but also challenging, films ever made. Some of them might at first seem almost ‘perverse’ in their negation of the basic ‘values’ of feature films as handed down from Hollywood studios, and therefore for some of you may be difficult to come to terms with at first. However, these are key examples of how far feature films can go in generating a very creative response to the famous question asked by the easily greatest and most influential of all film critics and scholars fifty years ago (and who we will be reading in the course), André Bazin: “What is cinema?”… So, if you don’t at first enjoy a film, don’t worry: not only is there no ‘obligation’ on you in this regard (and when you think about it, a film not desperately and narcissistically demanding that you “love me!” can be quite liberating, if you think about films as if they are people). This also allows you to slowly ‘negotiate’ a relationship to a given film or type of filmmaking over time on ‘equal’ (and thereby definitively ‘adult’) terms. One thing I can guarantee though: While some of these films might be confusing or even ‘boring’ on the level of narrative action, they are anything but on other levels. For one thing, these are some of the most aesthetically ravishing films ever made by directors whose authorial reflexivity and audacity was at its absolute zenith. They are also packed with fascinating ideas about authorship – in fact, self-conscious to the point of vertiginous crisis – and by extension the human subject itself (amongst other things).

We have a broad array of literature at hand, including much seminal examples of critical and theoretical writing on the issue of film authorship. Each week there will be a series of articles – some of which relate directly to the film and its maker, and others that are more purely theoretical in regards to either film authorship or authorship per se. There is quite a lot of reading, some of it fairly challenging. But there is no lecture for this course, and it is best to think of the reading as – in addition to its normal role in your preparation – providing a kind of lecture-replacement in terms of your time-management and overall study. So, DO NOT try and read all the essential material the night – or afternoon – before class. Rather, break it up – and leave the most difficult reading (length-wise, but also in terms of theoretical dimension) for a separate sitting. One of the objects of this course is to try and introduce some seminal film theory.

Do not expect to ‘understand’ some of the more theory-oriented articles right away, or in total – that is being unrealistic and unfair. We will, in class, try and get our heads around the important basic points contained therein – but it is important to give both yourself and the given author and idea a chance. When it comes to filmic and critical/theoretical work, we cannot expect to ‘click’ with something straight away if it derives from an environment or context alien to us. And this is before we even get to the point of asking if we ‘like’ or ‘agree’ with a given film or text. Again, I encourage you to ‘go slow’: don’t rush to judgement. This issue will become acute and
perhaps quite personal when it comes to a couple of the films, which contain images and ideas that are still debated decades later. Some of these films you might find variously ‘extreme’. This we should in principle really greet as evidence of the strikingly ‘free’ character of cinema at its most ambitious: where the question, ‘What is cinema?’, is not answered but rather asked again and again as a means to renewal and innovation, and leading onto other questioning – including, perhaps, of a given culture’s grounding assumptions. Here, this especially has implications for our tenacious mythic investment in the Renaissance-inherited God-replacement author, but perhaps also for our very selves.

One of the founding ironies when it comes to the specific focus of this course is that these films both affirm the power and importance of their ‘maker’ while also undermining that very authorship in the process. The moment of these directors’ greatest achievement and self-reflexivity is also that in which they do most damage to themselves and the idea of the author per se. This process involves, I think, incredible violence but also great liberation, productive critique and creativity – of the author themselves, the culture from and in which the film exists, and the individual entities (us) watching and ‘co-authoring’ it. Again, we have a founding paradox, expanded out from the author figure themselves, or, taken as a point of emblematic or iconographic departure. The films seem to extol and ‘prove’ the individual or sacred modern subject when it comes to authorship, and by extension spectatorship, yet they offer a concurrent ‘auto-critique’ that affects or subverts the confidence of the subject itself, notably that which is in confronting intimate engagement, enabling the whole process to occur: the viewer.

I really look forward to your responses to the films, and your active contribution to the course.

Hamish Ford.

**Weekly Course Participation**

Each week, you are expected to **attend the film screening and do the set readings** from the Course Reader in time to **attend the seminar**. All written work must show genuine, consistent engagement with the course material, and show regular attendance. If you do attend and engage regularly, your work will show this as a matter of course; if you do not, your work will show it, and will suffer accordingly. This is a participatory process: inquire away with a spirit of ‘leave your pride at the door’, because any questions and comments you have about a film, readings, theoretical paradigm, assessment item, etc., will undoubtedly be shared by many others in the room. In fact, the ‘smartest’ students (including postgraduates, and even Course Co-ordinators!) – the ones who learn the most, and get the best results – are those who readily admit what they don’t know.

It is essential for your participation in the course that you see the films each week. Many of them are commercially unavailable in Australia (you will only find one or two at your local video store, and only if it is a very good one with a decent ‘foreign’ section). The films are all available on DVD through Short Loans in Auchmuty Library – very important for your written assignments as you’ll want to watch these films more than once, many of them gaining immeasurably on subsequent viewings (not to mention sometimes valuable supplementary DVD extras). However, it will be a problem on a weekly basis for students to individually watch the films in the library instead of attending the official screening time. Most importantly though, some of these films are remarkable aesthetic experiences: to watch them as projected on a big screen is the way to see such movies, rather than on a small monitor in the library or on a laptop. So come to the screening, but turn your phones – and any compulsive desire to talk during the film – off!...

It is also essential to keep up to date with the set readings contained in the Course Reader (available from UPrint). As with the screenings and seminars, if you fall behind you
will find the course very dull indeed and your grades will plummet. Make sure to allow enough time to read each week in preparation for the seminar, as there are some lengthy and challenging readings, which may also require some re-reading. In the Weekly Screening and Reading Program below, I have also included some recommended suggestions for further viewing, and reading. This optional material can be utilised when your interest leads you on to further investigation; or where you are struggling with the concepts in the primary readings and need some more background coverage; and certainly when it comes to writing your Film Analysis and Major Research Essay.

**Assessment Details**

* All assignments to be submitted in hard copy and concurrently through Turnitin *

**Leading the Reading and Minor Essay:**

This involves two steps, both of which are essential to complete the assessment task:

1) Each week one or two students will be responsible for generating some discussion and analysis of the week’s film and reading. In week 1 we will assign weeks for this process.

2) The following week, you must hand in a written essay-style analysis on the film in question, informed by the set readings and class discussion. No extra research is required for this assignment. It is up to you as to how you focus your discussion, and forge a title and argument in the essay form.

**Length** – 1,500 words  
**Weighting** – 30%  
**Due** – In class, the week following your leading of class discussion

~ NB: Your Minor and Major Essays cannot be on the same film/topic ~

**Research Exercise:**

By mid-way through semester, you should be developing a general sense of which week and topic interests you most in terms putting together a substantial research-based project incorporating both a Research Exercise and – the ultimate purpose of this work – the Major Research Essay, questions for which will be distributed mid-way through the course. By week 8 you should commence the reading that will make up the substantive content of your Research Project. Even if you cannot narrow your area of interest down to a specific essay question quite yet, start reading once you have decided on a general subject area.  

Upon doing this research, you are required to hand in a written Research Exercise in the form of an annotated bibliography. This is composed of the listing of your reading material (with complete bibliographical details), each followed by approximately 300-400 words in which you summarise the main argument within the book or article. The final product should include at least one example of each of the following sources: a published book, and a refereed journal article. **Summarising material read and discussed in class will not be counted.** Also list any Internet sites, magazines, informational videos, non-refereed journal articles, ejournals, and film encyclopaedias you consult – but do not include summaries for these. Only provide the annotated summary descriptions for the major research and academic material you read. We will discuss in more details how to differentiate between different kinds of research materials, but the main thing is that the source is a refereed article of book of serious scholarly nature. When it comes to good scholarly articles available online, you have to be very careful. In most cases, articles gleaned through a Google
search will not be academic peer-reviewed scholarly work. However, you are able to access many academic journal articles in digital form through online databases that the University enables you to access through the Library webpage. So do so, simply click the ‘databases’ link in the top blue bar of the NewCat page, then you can select a database by title or subject area. Hit the link to the database you want to use (for example, ‘Project Muse’ or ‘JSTOR’, both handy search mechanisms for humanities and Film Studies subjects, the latter of which always includes the complete text), and then hit ‘connect’. You’ll be asked to submit your library access details, following which you will be able to search and find the article you want.

The Research Exercise a review of relevant literature for the Major Essay. You are therefore not required to mount any analytic or argument-style writing (that comes later), but any comments about the specific relevance of the reading to your future essay project will be useful.

**Length** – 1,000 words  
**Weighting** – 20%  
**Due** – In class, week 10

**Major Research Essay:**

This is your major research-based project for the course, with substantial research contributing to a piece of writing with a clear argument – as opposed to bald assertion of opinion – at its core, communicated and developed via sustained, rigorous analysis. Though we will have discussed this in relation to the Research Exercise, let be said straight up here substantial research involves more than a quick Google search, and there will be a ban on using Wikipedia as a quoted source.

**For this assignment it is essential to do substantial research beyond each week’s set readings.**

Certainly utilize material in the Course Reader (to ignore these readings is silly, and shows lack of engagement with the course per se), plus the further reading recommendations for each week’s topic listed later in this Outline certainly – but do not rely exclusively on such sources for your essay. In addition to extensive reading, you should also watch other films relevant to your topic where possible. There will be one essay question for each week/film/topic, as well as some more generally framed questions around the issue/s of teen cinema. Marking the essays, I will take into account the standard of writing, sophistication of argumentation; correct citing of sources, as well as substantive content. You should re-read and proofread your work many times to ensure you are not marked down for careless mistakes. (See the section at the end of this Outline for some useful essay writing guidelines.)

**Length** – 2,500-3,000 words  
**Weighting** – 50%  
**Due** – 5 pm. Friday, week 14
## The Course at a Glance

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<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Date Commencing</th>
<th>Topic /Screening</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>27/07/2010</td>
<td><em>Sherlock Jr.</em> (Buster Keaton, USA, 1924); and <em>The Five Obstructions</em> (Lars von Trier &amp; Jorgen Leth, Denmark/Switzerland/Belgium/France, 2003)</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>03/07/2010</td>
<td><em>Ugetsu monogatari</em> (Mizoguchi Kenji, Japan, 1953)</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>10/08/2010</td>
<td><em>All That Heaven Allows</em> (Douglas Sirk, USA, 1955)</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>17/08/2010</td>
<td><em>Vertigo</em> (Alfred Hitchcock, USA, 1958)</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>24/08/2010</td>
<td><em>L’avventura</em> (Michelangelo Antonioni, Italy/France, 1960)</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>31/08/2010</td>
<td>81/2 (Federico Fellini, Italy/France, 1962)</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>07/09/2010</td>
<td><em>Pierrot le fou</em> (Jean-Luc Godard, France, 1965)</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>14/09/2010</td>
<td><em>Persona</em> (Ingmar Bergman, Sweden, 1966)</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>21/09/2010</td>
<td><em>Mesches of the Afternoon</em> (Maya Deren, USA, 1943); <em>At Land</em> (Deren, USA, 1944); <em>Blow up My Town</em> (Chantal Akerman, Belgium, 1968); <em>I, You, He, She</em> (Akerman, Belgium, 1976)</td>
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<td><strong>~ SEMESTER RECESS ~</strong> (Monday 27 September – Friday 8 October)</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>19/10/2010</td>
<td><em>In a Year with 13 Moons</em> (Rainer Werner Fassbinder, West Germany, 1978)</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>26/10/2010</td>
<td><em>Camera Buff</em> (Krzysztof Kieślowski, Poland, 1979)</td>
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### Weekly Screenings and Readings: Details

**WEEK 1 ~** Screening: *Sherlock Jr.* (Buster Keaton, USA, 1924); *De fem benspænd/The Five Obstructions* (Lars von Trier & Jorgen Leth, Denmark/Switzerland/Belgium/France, 2003)

**Reading:**
WEEK 2 ~ Ugetsu monogatari/Tales of Ugetsu (Mizoguchi Kenji, Japan, 1953)

WEEK 3 ~ All That Heaven Allows (Douglas Sirk, USA, 1955)

WEEK 4 ~ Vertigo (Alfred Hitchcock, USA, 1958)

WEEK 5 ~ L’avventura/The Adventure (Michelangelo Antonioni, Italy/France, 1960)

WEEK 6 ~ 81/2 (Federico Fellini, Italy/France, 1962)

WEEK 7 ~ Pierrot le fou (Jean-Luc Godard, France, 1965)


WEEK 8 ~ Persona (Ingmar Bergman, Sweden, 1966)

*** [NB: The first article this week is not in the Reader - you will need to read it online]

WEEK 9 ~ Meshes of the Afternoon (Maya Deren, USA, 1943); At Land (Deren, USA, 1944); Saute ma ville/Blow up My Town (Chantal Akerman, Belgium, 1968); je, tu, il, elle/I, You, He, She (Akerman, Belgium, 1976)


WEEK 10 ~ The Killing of a Chinese Bookie (John Cassavetes, USA, 1976)

WEEK 11 ~ In einem Jahr mit 13 Monden / In a Year with 13 Moons
(Rainer Werner Fassbinder, West Germany, 1978)


WEEK 12 ~ Amator/ Camera Buff (Krzysztof Kieślowski, Poland, 1979)


WEEK 13 ~ Sang Sattawat/ Syndromes of a Century (Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Thailand/France/Austria, 2006)


Useful Books in the Library – General Film Studies

- Joanne Hollows, Peter Hutchings, Peter Hutchings & Mark Jancovich (des.), The Film Studies Reader, Oxford University Press, 2000.


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