

## **FLM 400 | English 820**

### **Seminar in Film History | Film and Architecture**

**Professor Justus Nieland**

**M 12:40-3:30, W 12:40-2:30, Bessey**

**Fall 2015 Office Hours: W, 2:45-4:15, Wells C641**

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#### **Course Description:**

This course explores various crossings between the arts of film and architecture to illuminate episodes in media history and theory. We will consider cinema's architectural qualities: the specific capacity of film to construct, organize, and sequence space, and to move spectators dynamically through space in time—what Elie Faure once called “the art of cineplastics.” We will examine the work of directors whose films are strongly interested in architecture, design, and transformations of the built environment, as well as the work of architects and designers who have worked in and with film, and have embedded their architecture and design practice in various cultures of the moving image. We will explore the relationship between directors, art directors, and production designers in the construction of cinematic architecture, as well as the history of the architecture of the film studio itself. We will study films that foreground important works of architecture. We will consider the role of film and multimedia in the artistic construction of immersive “environments.” And we will examine the role of film architecture in a poetics and politics of infrastructure. Methodologically, we will compare strategies and concepts for understanding film's relationship to the built environment across a variety of disciplines and fields, including film and media theory and history, urban history and planning, architectural and design history and theory, sociology, art history, and materialist ecocriticism.

**Course blog: [www.msufilmandarchitecture.wordpress.com](http://www.msufilmandarchitecture.wordpress.com)**

#### **Required Texts:**

Electronic coursepack, posted to D2L

#### **Course Requirements:**

##### **820:**

1. Active and regular participation (20%)
2. 820 session reports (two each; six total) (15%)
3. Weekly blog responses and discussion questions (20%)
4. Two conference-length papers (8-10 pages each) (20%, 25%)

##### **400:**

1. Active and regular participation (20%)
2. Weekly blog responses and discussion questions (25%)
3. Paper #1, 6-8 pages (25%)
4. Paper #2, 8-10 pages (30%)

## **Course Policies:**

**Attendance:** You are allowed three absences over the course of the semester. You should reserve these for emergencies and serious illness. Every absence after your third will drop your final grade in the course 1/4 point. For example, five absences will drop a final grade of 3.5 to 3.0. I do not excuse absences. If you become seriously ill or the victim of emergency circumstances please notify me as soon as possible. If you miss class, it is your responsibility to get the notes from a classmate.

**Laptops and Cell-phones:** Laptops can only be used for taking notes and viewing readings electronically. I require you to close your laptops and refrain from using your phones during our discussions and screenings, as these technologies distract from the texts and films at hand. Turn off the ringer on your cell-phones before entering class. Texting is not allowed during class.

**Recording:** No photography or audio-visual recording of course content (slides, lectures, discussions, etc.) is allowed without advance written permission of the instructor. You should plan, then, to take written notes on lecture and discussion.

**Tardiness:** Tardiness is disruptive. A pattern of tardiness will affect your grade. I take attendance at the beginning of class; if you're not there when I call roll, it's your responsibility to set the record straight at the end of that class period. The relatively early hour of our class is no excuse for tardiness.

**Participation:** Participation is mandatory and crucial both to your success and to the overall strength of the course. I will do some lecturing to contextualize our material, but the majority of our class time will be discussion-based. Attendance does not count towards your participation grade. I expect you to come to class with thoughtful ideas, questions, and problems provoked by our readings. I do not expect you to “get” every reading the first time around, but I require that you try. We will talk more in class about how to make our discussion as dynamic and inclusive as possible. 20% of your grade will be determined by your active participation in class.

**Papers:** You will write two formal essays in this class; you will be allowed to rewrite the first, if you choose. I have high standards (and expectations!) for your written work. I will provide topics for each paper in class, as well as stipulations for formatting and my criteria for grading.

**Late work:** No late papers will be accepted. You have the schedule for assignments now, so plan ahead.

**Plagiarism:** Academic dishonesty is absolutely unacceptable. Any student found guilty of plagiarism on any assignment will fail the course immediately, no questions asked. I will also place a letter in the offending student's record in the dean's office. Two such letters will result in expulsion. We will talk about what constitutes plagiarism in class.

**Decorum:** I expect you to treat both your classmates and your professor with respect. This means listening attentively when someone else is speaking. If you are unable to stay awake and attentive in class, you will be counted absent. Whispering, interrupting, eye-rolling, eating, and the like are both rude and disruptive. If I find your classroom behavior disruptive, I will respectfully make you aware of this. Any disruptions after the initial warning will seriously affect your grade, and you will be strongly encouraged to drop the class. Disruptions during screenings are also unacceptable and will affect your grade adversely.

**Office Hours:** I encourage you to take advantage of my office hours to talk about your writing, the reading, or any other aspect of the course.

**Screenings:** We will screen the majority of our films during class on Monday, following discussion. I will notify you of exceptions. You are required to attend these screenings; if you miss a screening, you will be counted absent. \*Screenings with asterisks are done outside of class.

**Reading Schedule (subject to change):**

**Readings are to be completed before class on the assigned day. Papers will be collected at the beginning of class.**

**UNIT ONE | On Film's Built Environments: Space, Location, Spectacle, Studio**

**Week 1 | Introduction | The Concept of Film Architecture**

**Online screening (short films and scenes)**

*Demolition of a Wall* (Dir. Louis Lumière, 1896)

*One Week* (Dir. Buster Keaton, 1920)

*Meshes of the Afternoon* (Dir. Maya Deren, 1943)

*The Girl Chewing Gum* (Dir. John Smith, 1976)

*Manhatta* (Dir. Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler, 1921)

*Spaces to Live In* (National Instructional Television Center, 1971)

*Saute ma ville / Blow Up My Town* (Dir. Chantal Ackerman, 1968)

Scene: *Repulsion* (Dir. Roman Polanski, 1965)

Scene: *The Naked City* (Dir. Jules Dassin, 1948)

9|2

In-class screening: *Safety Last!* (Dir. Fred C. Newmeyer, 1923, 70 min)

400

- Louis Aragon, "On Décor"
- Elie Faure, "The Art of Cinéplastics"
- Dziga Vertov, "WE: Variant of a Manifesto"; "The Council of Three"
- Maya Deren, "Cinematography: The Creative Uses of Actuality"
  
- Anthony Vidler, "The Explosion of Space: Architecture and the Filmic Imaginary"
- Peter Wollen, "Architecture and Film: Places and Non-Places"

820

- Anne Friedberg, "Introduction: The Virtual Window" (available as ebook through MSU library)

**Week 2 | Skyscraper Men, 1 | Harold Lloyd and Urban Modernity**

9|9

400

- Merrill Schleier, "Constructing the American Skyscraper Film"
- Merrill Schleier, "From Stumbling Blocks to Stepping Stones: Harold Lloyd's Skyscraper Films" (both in *Skyscraper Cinema*, available as ebook via MSU library)
- Louis Mumford, "The Intolerable City"

820

- William Solomon, “The Origins of Slapstick Modernism”
- Rem Koolhaas, “The Double Life of Utopia: The Skyscraper” (81-131 in *Delirious New York*)
- Rem Koolhaas, “Bigness: Or, the Problem of the Large”

### **Week 3 | Skyscraper Men, 2 | Los Angeles as Fortress and Image**

Screening: *Die Hard!* (John McTiernan, 1988, 131 min)  
*Los Angeles Plays Itself* (Thom Andersen, 2003, 169 min)

9|14

- Geoff Manaugh, [“Nakatomi Space”](#)
- Mike Davis, “Fortress Los Angeles: The Militarization of Urban Space”

820

- Eyal Weisman, “Lethal Theory”
- Thomas Elsaesser, “Classical/Post-Classical Narrative in *Die Hard*”

9|16

- Timothy Corrigan, “To Be Elsewhere: Cinematic Excursions as Essayistic Travel” (Ch. 4 of Corrigan’s *The Essay Film*, available as ebook through MSU library)
- Thom Andersen, “Get Out of the Car”

### **Week 4 | Human-Built Worlds: On Studio Architectures**

Screening: Georges Méliès program; selected clips

9|21

- Brian Jacobsen, “Studios and Systems”
- Walter Benjamin, “Artwork” essay (selected portions)
- Siegfried Kracauer, “The Cult of Distraction: On Berlin’s Picture Palaces”
- Siegfried Kracauer, “Calico World: The Ufa City in Neubabelsberg”

820:

- Thomas P. Hughes, “Complex Technology”; “Technology and Culture”

9|23

- Brian Jacobsen, “Georges Méliès’s Glass House: Cineplasticity for a Human-Built World”

820

- Jennifer Fay, “Buster Keaton’s Climate Change”

## **UNIT TWO | Film, Architecture, and Media History**

### **Week 5 | Intermediality: Interwar Avant-Gardes, Film, and the G Group**

Screening: *Rhythm 21* (Dir. Hans Richter, 1921, 3 min)  
*Rhythm 23* (Dir. Hans Richter, 1923, 2 min)  
*Diagonal Symphony* (Dir. Viking Eggeling, 1924, 5 min)  
*Opus 2* (Dir. Walter Ruttmann, 1921, 4 min)  
*Der Sieger* (Dir. Walter Ruttmann, 1922, 3 min)

*Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* (Dir. Walter Ruttmann, 1927, 65 min)

9|28

- G: *Materials for Elemental Form-Creation*, no. 1 (1923)
- G: *Materials for Elemental Form-Creation*, no. 2 (1923)
- G: *Journal for Elemental Form-Creation*, nos. 5/6 (1926)
- László Moholy-Nagy, *Painting, Photography, Film* (1925), selections
- Hans Richter, “The Badly Trained Soul” and “G” in G3

9|30

- Edward Dimendberg, “Toward an Elemental Cinema: Film Aesthetics and Practice in G
- Malcom Turvey, “Abstraction and *Rhythm 21*”
- Andres Janser, “Only Film Can Make the New Architecture Intelligible”

820

- Pepper Stetler, “The New Visual Literature: László Moholy-Nagy’s *Painting, Photography, Film*”
- Frederic Schwartz, “Distraction: Walter Benjamin and the Avant-Garde”

## **Week 6 | Imaginary Media: On Modernist Techno-utopianism**

In-class Screening: *Things to Come* (Dir. William Cameron Menzies, 1936, 117 min)

Screening in advance, via links:

- A Lightplay: Black, White, Gray* (Dir. László Moholy-Nagy, 1930, 6 min)
- The Coming of the Dial* (Dir. Stuart Legg, 1933, 14 min)
- New Architecture of the London Zoo* (Dir. László Moholy-Nagy, 1937, 16 min)
- Architectures d’aujourd’hui* (Dir. Pierre Chenal, 1930-31, 10 min)
- To New Horizons* (Jam Handy, 1940, 25 min)

10|5

- Darko Suvin, “On the Poetics of the SF Genre”
- Jussi Parikka, “Imaginary Media: Mapping Weird Objects”
- William Cameron Menzies, “Pictorial Beauty in the Photoplay” (available as link via course blog)
- Andres Janser, “Only Film Can Make the New Architecture Intelligible” (re-read)

10|7

- Le Corbusier, *Aircraft*
- László Moholy-Nagy, “New Bauhaus and Space Relationship”; “Light Architectures”
- Sandy Isenstadt, “The Future is Here: Norman Geddes and the Theater of Time”

820

- Anne Friedberg, “The ‘Age of Windows’” (available in *The Virtual Window* ebook)
- Peder Anker, “The Bauhaus of Nature” (available via ProjectMUSE)
- Giuliana Bruno, “Depth of Surface, “Screen Fabrics”

**Friday, October 9<sup>th</sup>, Paper #1 Due**

## Week 7 | Information-Propaganda: Documentary, Reconstruction, and Domesticity at War

Screening:

- London Can Take It!* (Dir. Humphrey Jennings, 1940, 8 min)
- Proud City: A Plan for London* (Dir. Ralph Keene, 1945, 24 min)
- Land of Promise* (Dir. Paul Rotha, 1946, 68 min)
- Brief City* (Dir. Richard Massingham, 1952, 19 min)
- House: After Five Years of Living* (Dir. Charles and Ray Eames, 1955, 12 min)

10|12

- Ian Aitken, “The British Documentary Film Movement”
- Nicholas Bullock, “Imagining the Post-War World: Architecture, Reconstruction, and the British Documentary Film Movement”

820

- Beatriz Colomina, “1949”

10|14

- *Arts and Architecture*, “Case Study Houses 8 and 9 by Charles Eames and Eero Saarinen, Architects”
- Peter Smithson, “Just a Few Chairs and a House: An Essay on the Eames Aesthetic”
- Beatriz Colomina, “The Eames House”

**Friday, October 16<sup>th</sup>, Paper 1 Due**

## Week 8 | Cold War Media Architecture: Exhibition Design, Film, World Communication

- Screening:
- A Communications Primer* (Dir. Charles and Ray Eames, 1953, 22 min)
  - An Introduction to Feedback* (Dir. Charles and Ray Eames, 1960, 11 min)
  - Opening in Moscow* (Dir. D.A. Pennebaker, 1959, 55 min)
  - Glimpses of the USA* (Dir. Charles and Ray Eames, 1959, 10 min)
  - IBM at the Fair* (Dir. Charles and Ray Eames, 1965, 7 min)
  - Think* (selections) (Dir. Charles and Ray Eames, 1964, 5 min)

10|19

- Herbert Bayer, “Fundamentals of Exhibition Design”
- George Nelson, “Art-X: On the Georgia Experiment”
- Fred Turner, “The Family of Man and the Politics of Attention in Cold War America”
- Stan VanDerBeek, “Culture: Intercom: A Manifesto”

820

- Barry Katz, “The Arts of War: ‘Visual Presentation’ and National Intelligence”

10|21

- Beatriz Colomina, “Enclosed by Images: The Eameses Multimedia Architecture”
- Fred Turner, “The Cold War and the Democratic Personality”
- John McHale, “The Expedable Ikon 1 and 2”

820:

- Branden Joseph, “‘My Mind Split Open’: Andy Warhol and the Exploding Plastic Inevitable”
- Justus Nieland, “The Scale is the World: Designer Pedagogy and Expanded Cinema”

### **Week 9 | Neighborhood Surveillance: The Apartment Plot**

\*Professor Nieland out of town

Screening: *Rear Window* (Dir. Alfred Hitchcock, 1954, 115 min)  
*Neighboring Sounds* (Dir. Kleber Mendonca Filho, 2012, 131 min)

10|26

- Pam Wojick, “A Philosophy of Urbanism”
- Lynn Spigel, “The Suburban Home Companion: Television and the Neighborhood Ideal in Postwar America”

820

- Jane Jacobs, “The Uses of City Neighborhoods”

10|28

- Pam Wojick, “A Primer on Urbanism: *Rear Window*’s Archetypal Apartment Plot”

### **Week 10 | Postwar Urbanism in *Playtime*: Attention, Distraction, Atmosphere**

Screening: *Playtime* (Dir. Jacques Tati, 1967, 115 min)  
 Recommended: *Mon Oncle* (Dir. Jacques Tati, 1958, 117 min)  
*Song of Styrene* (Dir. Alain Resnais)  
*Two or Three Things I Know about Her* (Dir. Jean-Luc Godard, 1967, 89 min)

11|2

- Kristin Ross, “Introduction: *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*”
- Jean Baudrillard, “Introduction” and “Structures of Atmosphere” (*System of Objects*)

11|4

- Walter Benjamin, “The Artwork in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility”
- Joan Ockman, “Architecture in a Mode of Distraction: Eight Takes on *Playtime*”

820:

- Larry Busbea, “‘Paris Sur Paris’: Spatial Urbanism and Prospective Planning Culture”

### **Week 11 | Computer Architecture: Futures, Forecasting, Control**

Screening: *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Dir. Stanley Kubrick, 1968, 141 min)  
*Powers of Ten* (Dir. Charles and Ray Eames, 1968, 9 min)  
*The Information Machine* (Dir. Charles and Ray Eames, 1957, 10 min)  
*Lapis* (Dir. James Whitney, 1966, 10 min)  
*Permutations* (Dir. John Whitney, 1968, 8 min)

11|9

- Paul Edwards, *The Closed World* (selections)

820:

- John Harwood, “Naturalizing the Computer: On IBM Spectacles”

- Reinhold Martin, “Computer Architectures”

11|11

- “Designing the Future: On Pragmatic Forecasting in *2001: A Space Odyssey*”
- Annette Michelson, “Bodies in Space”

820:

- Zabet Patterson, “From the Gun Controller to the Mandala: The Cybernetic Cinema of John and James Whitney”

## **Week 12 | Experimental Architecture: Ant Farm, Archigram, Anarchitecture**

Screening: *International Design Conference at Aspen: The First Decade* (Dir. Rhodes Patterson, 1961)  
*IDCA '70* (Dir. Eli Noyes, Jr., 1971)  
*Inflatables Illustrated* (Dir. Ant Farm, 1971)  
*Media Burn* (Dir. Ant Farm, 1975)  
*The Eternal Frame* (Dir. Ant Farm, 1975)  
*Conical Intersect* (Dir. Gordon Matta-Clark, 1975)

11|16

- Reyner Banham, “Monumental Wind Bags”
- Michael Sorkin, “Sex, Drugs, Rock and Roll, Cars, Dolphins, and Architecture”
- Caroline Maniaque, “Searching for Energy” (or “Air Art” essay)
- Archigram 8 Popular Pak

11|18

- Steve Seid, “Tunneling Through the Wasteland: Ant Farm Video”
- Patricia Mellencamp, “Video and the Counter-Culture”

820

- Felicity D. Scott, “Shouting Apocalypse”
- Pamela M. Lee, “On the Holes of History”

## **UNIT THREE | Architecture and Infrastructure**

### **Week 13 | Infrastructural Poetics: Neoliberalism and the Decline of the Public Space**

Screening: *London* (Dir. Patrick Keiller, 1994, 85 min)  
 Recommended: *Robinson in Space* (Dir. Patrick Keiller, 1997, 82 min)  
*The Dilapidated Dwelling* (Dir. Patrick Keiller, 2000, 79 min)

11|23

400/820

- Patrick Keiller, “The Poetic Experience of Townscape and Landscape and Some Ways of Experiencing Them”
- Keiller, “The Visible Surface”
- Keiller, “Architectural Cinematography”
- Roy Porter, “Thatcher’s London”

820



- Tom McDonough, “Situationist Space”
- John Durham Peters, “Understanding Media”

11|25

400

- Patrick Keiller, “London in the Early 1990s”
- Patrick Keiller, “Film as Spatial Critique”
- Christoph Asendorf, “Walter Benjamin and the Utopia of the New Architecture”

820

- Brian Larkin, “The Poetics and Politics of Infrastructure”
- Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion* (selections on landscape)

#### **Week 14 | Infrastructural Poetics: Modernization, Transience, the Anthropocene**

Screening: *Still Life* (Dir. Jia Zhang-ke, 2006, 111 min)

Recommended: *Red Desert* (Dir. Michelangelo Antonioni, 1964, 117 min)

11|30

- Jarod Rapfogel, “Still Lives in Times of Change: An Interview with Jia Zhang-ke”
- Adam Rothstein, [“How to See Infrastructure: A Guide for Seven Billion Primates”](#)

12|2

- Ackbar Abbas, “Poor Theory”
- Pheng Cheah, “World as Picture and Ruination: On Jia Zhang-ke’s *Still Life* as World Cinema”

820

- Architecture in the Anthropocene* (selections)

#### **Week 15 | Infrastructural Poetics: Digital Architecture**

Screening: *Inland Empire* (Dir. David Lynch, 2006, 160 min)

12|7

- Robin Evans, “Figures, Doors, and Passages”
- D.N. Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film* (selections)

12|9

- Justus Nieland, “Vital Media”
- Richard Martin, *The Architecture of David Lynch* (selections)

**Paper #2 Due, December 17<sup>th</sup>**