

FRENCH CINEMA

Course Description

Ever since the Lumière brothers introduced the medium, France has been in love with the cinema. From world domination in the industry during the silent era to major player in transnational production, French cinema culture has produced films, filmmakers, and stars recognized around the world.

This course explores the history of French cinema from its birth in 1895 to the present. It covers significant movements, technical innovations, and topics such as style and meaning, elements of film narrative, and techniques of film production. The films selected will illustrate the breadth of French cinema throughout history while providing insight into the evolving political and cultural contexts of filmmaking in France.

The course will also introduce the key elements of film analysis with an aim to examine aesthetic and stylistic features of movies.

About the instructors

Ahmet Gürata is the chair of the Department of Communication and Design, Bilkent University. He holds a PhD from the London Consortium, which examined remakes and cross-cultural reception in Turkish cinema. His research focuses on world cinema, transnational cinema, reception, film history and documentary. He contributes to a number of publications.

Colleen Kennedy-Karpat holds a PhD in French from Rutgers University and currently teaches film and media studies in the Department of Communication and Design at Bilkent University. She is the author of *Rogues, Romance, and Exoticism in French Cinema of the 1930s* (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2013), winner of the Northeast Modern Language Association Book Award. Beyond French cinema history, her research interests include stardom, adaptation, fan cultures, and transnational cinema.

Course Contents

1. Early cinema: 1895-1918
2. The 1920s: Impressionism and the rise of criticism
3. Avant-garde: Dada and Surrealism
4. The 1930s: Political and Popular Front Cinema
5. The Late 1930s: Poetic Realism and Political Tensions
6. French Cinema and the Occupation
7. Postwar Film and the Tradition of Quality
8. New Wave & new French criticism
9. Left Bank filmmakers & looking at war
10. Post-1968: Sex, society, and cinema

11. Heritage Cinema and the French Epic
12. The legacy of the *cinéma du look*
13. National cinema seeking postnationalism: the 1990s
14. New French cinema and transnationalism
15. Adieu Cinema, Hello Cinephilia

Aims

- To develop an understanding of the major developments in French cinema history
- To explore French society and culture as reflected in key films
- To interpret the visual language and art of cinema
- To develop critical and analytical skills
- To refine academic writing and research skills

Assignments and grade distribution

Weekly discussion postings (20%)

Students should plan to write brief responses (150-300 words) to at least **two** of the questions indicated in each week's course agenda. These responses will be posted to an online discussion board, and they are meant to spark *discussion*; students are therefore encouraged to **respond to other students' posts** in addition to providing original ideas.

Screening journal (20%)

For this assignment you will write a series of 1-2 page (400-500 words) responses to films given in the syllabus. You might start by taking notes on the film. What questions does the film raise? You can discuss a particular scene, character, theme, or image in detail. You might also compare this film with other films of the period and/or movement, or texts you have read, or some contemporary films. What is the significance of this particular film in relation to social, economical or cultural context?

Please do not include plot summaries. Presume that the reader knows the basic plot of the movie you are writing about. **This is not a film review**, so avoid any value judgments (e.g. "great" or "boring" or "bad"). Focus instead on one or two topics, and support your ideas with course readings and other relevant material. Make sure to use the vocabulary and analytical tools you have learned in this course.

You are responsible for turning in six screening journals over the course of the semester. It is up to you to choose which six films to write about, as long as they are listed on the syllabus.

Exam (30%)

The take-home exam will be short answer/essay format, with questions based on required readings and screenings. Some topics may be adapted from the weekly discussion questions, in which case your responses must be original thinking that expands or synthesizes prior discussion material.

Final research paper (30%)

The final paper will develop one aspect of French cinema introduced in the course. This essay must show evidence of research above and beyond the required course material (additional recommendations for further reading have been provided in the course syllabus—these would be appropriate sources). All topics are subject to instructor approval. You may want to expand one or more screening journal entries for your final paper, extending your argument and supporting your ideas with research to give context to the film(s).

Selecting a precise topic for research can sometimes be tricky, but in film studies the process often fits one of several common patterns. Research can be tailored to the work of a single director, a single genre, a single star, or a single time period. Two or more films that share similar themes, aesthetic approaches, or subject matter may be compared to one another. Papers can also focus on a single element of filmmaking: narrative structure, cinematography, use of sound, etc. Research might also focus primarily on film criticism. Finally, individual films can be situated in the socio-historic moment of their production and release.

Sample topics for research of this scope might include:

- Comparing the political themes of Jean Renoir's pre-war and post-war films
- Representing class in films made after May '68
- The *Cahiers du cinéma* critics of the 1990s
- Use of music in Alain Resnais's films
- The evolution of Gérard Depardieu's star image from the 1970s to the 2000s
- The influence of surrealism in French fantasy films, 1990-present
- Vichy censorship and popular French cinema, 1939-1945
- Claire Denis and the representation of postcolonial Africa

Essays should be 3000-5000 words in length. In addition, students are strongly encouraged to incorporate a visual component – video essay, captioned film stills, or some other appropriate A/V support – to clarify and enhance the argument presented in the written paper.

Required Texts

The following books should be widely available from English-language booksellers and/or through academic libraries. The majority of the course readings will come from these books. Students enrolled in the course are expected to obtain these books for their personal use throughout the term.

Additional readings are available through JSTOR or online at indicated website(s).

Alan Williams, *Republic of Images: A History of French Filmmaking*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992.

Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, *To Desire Differently: Feminism and the French Cinema*. New York: Columbia U P, 1996.

Guy Austin, *Contemporary French Cinema: An Introduction*. Manchester: Manchester U P, 1996.

Timothy Corrigan, *A Short Guide to Writing about Film*. 6th Edition. New York: Pearson/Longman, 2005.

Expectations

Students should plan to spend at least 6 hours of independent study per week in order to complete the required readings and coursework. Film screenings may add considerable time to this average, depending on the scheduled films for the week.

All students must demonstrate strong academic writing skills in all course assignments. The course assumes that students already have the ability to independently read, evaluate, and analyze complex texts, and that all students possess at least college-level skills in English grammar and essay writing. Additional skills include performing academic research and practicing proper citation of source material.

Plagiarism is the presentation of someone else's ideas as one's own. Any information that has been found in another source **MUST** be acknowledged according to accepted standards of academic citation: credit given both in the body of the essay and in a list of references. Confirmed cases of plagiarism (including improper citation practice) may be penalized with a failing grade for the assignment in question or for the entire course.

Students are expected to possess sufficient technological experience to navigate a course that takes place primarily online. All written work must be submitted through one or more online platforms: e-mail, learning management sites (i.e. Moodle, Sakai, BlackBoard, etc.), and/or possibly others.

Maintaining a respectful course environment among instructors and fellow students is a priority for the course. Offensive comments or behaviors will not be tolerated. Conflicts and differences of opinion between members of the class must be addressed in a professional manner.

Week-to-week course agenda

WEEK 1. Early cinema: 1895-1918

The cinema was born simultaneously in a number of locations across Europe and the US. However, the Lumière brothers are usually given credit as the inventors of cinema over other pioneers, including Thomas Edison, since they organized the first public screening in a Paris café. In its early years, films were short – first less than a minute, then later around five minutes – and involved very little camera movement and editing. The two best-known names of French silent cinema are the Lumières

and Georges Méliès, who are often contrasted in terms of their approach: documentary versus narrative fiction. The Lumière brothers' careful documentary observation of bourgeois life caused them to be hailed as the first cinematic realists. On the other hand, Méliès was an illusionist who later made narrative films that are closer to what we recognize today as belonging to the genres of science fiction and fantasy. His *Le Voyage dans la Lune* (1902) offers a kind of "primal scene" for spectators around the world with its image of a spaceship landing in one of the moon's "eyes." Although the history of cinema is usually interpreted as the ongoing accumulation and confrontation of documentary and fiction symbolized by the work of these pioneers, these forms are not as distinct as we assume.

Another important genre in early French cinema was the serial, episodic films that are best exemplified with Louis Feuillade's *Fantomas* and *Les Vampires*. In the late 1910s, cinema established some of its basic conventions, particularly in editing, which are still in use today. During those years, France was the leader of world film production, and its main rival was Hollywood.

FILMS

- Lumière and Méliès shorts [from "Landmarks of Early Film" DVD]
- Alice Guy Blaché shorts
- *Histoire d'un crime / Story of a Crime* (Ferdinand Zecca, 1901)
- *Les Joyeux Microbes / The Happy Microbes* (Emile Cohl, 1909)
- *Madame Babylas aime les animaux / Madame Babylas Loves Animals* (Alfred Machin, 1911)
- *Le Tour du monde en quatre-vingt jours* (Jean Durand, 1913)
- Selections from *Fantomas* (Louis Feuillade, 1913) and *Les Vampires* (Louis Feuillade, 1915)
- *La Folie de Docteur Tube / The Madness of Dr. Tube* (Abel Gance, 1915)
- *Hugo* (Martin Scorsese, 2011)

READING

Williams, Ch. 1, 2, & 3 (pp 7-73)

Recommended: Richard Abel, *The Ciné Goes to Town: French Cinema 1896-1914*. 1994. Berkeley: U California P, 1998. (Expanded edition)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1) Evaluate the development of narrative form in the Lumière brothers' and Méliès' films.
- 2) Considering Martin Scorsese's *Hugo*, discuss recent interest in early cinema and film history.

WEEK 2. The 1920s: Impressionism and the rise of criticism

During World War I, with brutal fighting taking place in Europe, American films increasingly penetrated the French market while domestic film production sharply declined. This crisis led to a call for a distinctively French cinema that might help counter foreign competition. It was during this time directors like Abel Gance, Marcel L'Herbier, Germaine Dulac, and Jean Epstein made their first films. Later known as the founders of French Impressionist movement, this new generation of filmmakers sought to explore the cinema as an art. Their films displayed a fascination with pictorial beauty and an interest in intense psychological exploration.

Abel Gance's *La Dixième symphonie* (1918) is considered the first major film of the Impressionist movement. He was undoubtedly the most ambitious of the silent directors, culminating in his magnum opus, the five-hour *Napoleon* (1927). *Napoleon* uses a number of new techniques such as split screen, superimposition and rapid montage. Germaine Dulac, the best-known woman filmmaker of the era, directed *La Souriante Madame Beudet* (1923), an explicitly feminist film. The prolific Jean Epstein is best known for his adaptation of Edgar Allan Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1928).

For the Impressionists, art was a form of expression, conveying the personal vision of the artist and creating an experience. They aimed to generate fleeting feelings or impressions through their films. They were also instrumental in creating works of early film theory, claiming that the cinema synthesizes other arts that create spatial relationships, such as architecture, painting, and sculpture.

FILMS

- *La souriante Madame Beudet* (Germaine Dulac 1923)
- *Napoléon* (Abel Gance, 1927) **OR** *La Roue* (Abel Gance, 1923)
- *El Dorado* (Marcel L'Herbier, 1921) **OR** *L'Argent* (Marcel L'Herbier 1928)
- *La Glace à trois faces / The Three-Sided Mirror* (Jean Epstein 1927) **OR** *La Coquille et le clergyman* (Germaine Dulac, 1927)

READINGS

Williams, Chapters 4 & 5 (pp 77-125)

Flitterman-Lewis, Chapters 2 & 3 (pp 47-97)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1) Discuss cinema's relation to other art forms and how cinema established itself as an autonomous art form.
- 2) Analyze the formal style of *Napoléon* (Abel Gance, 1927) or *La Roue* (Gance, 1923) and discuss how it differs from other films of the period.

WEEK 3. Avant-garde: Dada and Surrealism

In the 1920s, a radical type of filmmaking that was called avant-garde (or experimental film) appeared in Europe and the US. These films were usually produced outside the film industry and break with conventions of mainstream narrative filmmaking. Artists associated with modernist styles such as Cubism, Dadaism, and Surrealism also made films. The Dada group, whose artistic philosophy was based on randomness and imagination, organized a number of film screenings, during which René Clair's *Entr'acte* was shown at intermission.

Like Dada, Surrealism rejected conventional aesthetic traditions. But instead of depending on pure chance for the creation of artwork, Surrealists attempted to discover the unconscious mind with the help of the emerging theories of psychoanalysis. Impressionist filmmakers Germaine Dulac and Jean Epstein also made films according to Surrealist principles. Man Ray, an American artist who spent most of his career in Paris, shot some avant-garde films in 1920s. French painter Fernand Léger's *Ballet mécanique* (1924), and Luis Bunuel and Salvador Dali's *Un Chien andalou (An Andalusian Dog)*, 1928) are other well-known examples of avant-garde cinema.

FILMS

- *Entr'acte* (René Clair, 1924, 22 min.)

- *Ballet mécanique* (Fernand Léger, 1924, 19 min.)
- *Un chien andalou* (Luis Buñuel & Salvador Dalí, 1928, 17') **OR** *L'Âge d'or* (Luis Buñuel, 1930, 63')
- *La Pieuvre / The Octopus* (Jean Comandon, 1929, 13 min.)

READING

Williams, Chapter 6 (pp 126-154)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1) Discuss the major differences between avant-garde cinema and commercial feature film. What motivates avant-garde filmmakers to use a different film language?
- 2) How does *Un chien andalou* (Luis Buñuel & Salvador Dalí, 1928, 17') place its audiences in relation to the film?

WEEK 4. The 1930s: Political and Popular Front Cinema

The transition to synchronized sound happened over a remarkably short time, and by the early 1930s the sound film had become the industry standard (over the objections of vocal opponents to the “talkies”). Sound ushered in a host of new best practices for filming, including a focus on the studio as opposed to location filming, a shift that brought with it a new emphasis on set design. The main studios at Joinville, situated on the outskirts of Paris, were acquired by Paramount in 1930 and became a kind of home base for the French film industry. Only Marcel Pagnol, a writer and filmmaker who hailed from Provence and made this southern geography key to his artistic identity, managed to maintain a high-profile, successful movie career making films made outside Paris. His most notable films in the 1930s were his *Marius* trilogy: *Marius* (dir. Alexander Korda, 1931), *Fanny* (dir. Marc Allégret, 1932), and *César* (dir. Pagnol 1936).

Politically, too, the cinema began to evolve in the 1930s, most notably on the Left. The Popular Front, a coalition of left-leaning groups that formed in opposition to the rising popularity of fascism, came to power in 1936 with the election of Léon Blum—but the communist and socialist ideologies he championed had been reflected in films for several years before his rise to power. Class issues were a major theme of the early 1930s, with filmmakers like René Clair and Jean Renoir focusing a great deal of their filmmaking on narratives that resist bourgeois norms and celebrate the working class. Jean Vigo was a remarkably young leftist filmmaker who made only four films before his death in 1934. Vigo's small but highly influential *oeuvre*, which would be championed by the *Cahiers du cinéma* critics in the postwar period, exemplifies both the technical experimentation of the era and the political commitment that filmmakers on the French Left put into many of their films.

FILMS

- *À nous la liberté* (René Clair, 1931)
- *La Maternelle* (Marie Epstein & Jean Benoît-Lévy, 1933)
- *Zéro de conduite* (Jean Vigo, 1933) **OR** *L'Atalante* (Jean Vigo, 1934)
- *Le Crime de Monsieur Lange* (Jean Renoir, 1936)

READINGS

- Williams, Ch. 7 & 8 (pp 157-212)

- Robert Aron, "Films of Revolt" (1929) in *French Film Theory and Criticism*, vol. 1, 432-436 (CR)
- Jean Vigo, "Toward a Social Cinema" (1930) in *French Film Theory and Criticism*, vol. 2, 60-63 (CR)

Recommended: Colin Crisp, *Genre, Myth, and Convention in French Cinema 1929-1939*. Bloomington: Indiana U P, 2002.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1) Discuss the ideological functions of children as represented in *La Maternelle* and *Zéro de conduite*.
- 2) Discuss how the issue of class is addressed in at least two of the films for this week.

WEEK 5. The Late 1930s: Poetic Realism and Political Tensions

Politically and aesthetically, the late 1930s built on the early years of the decade, with many of the same major filmmakers maturing as storytellers and political activists. After Léon Blum's Popular Front fell from power in 1937 (after barely a year in office), disillusionment among the French Left began to take hold. At the same time, popular unrest in Spain paired with Hitler's increasingly obvious (and ominous) ambitions for Germany began to draw the French public's attention away from their memories of the Great War of 1914-1918, pulling them instead towards a reluctant acknowledgment that another huge conflict in Europe was brewing.

In the midst of these tensions, the aesthetic sensibility known as "poetic realism" came to dominate popular filmmaking during and after the Popular Front government. As the term implies, poetic realist films find a kind of romanticism in the lives of the oppressed, focusing on the ephemeral "atmosphere" in which the working class lived. But these films do not bring their characters happy endings, a pessimism that burrows into the very core of the poetic realist sensibility. Critic-turned-director Marcel Carné became its most emblematic figure behind the camera, but the face of poetic realism on screen was Jean Gabin, *the* French star of the late 1930s and considered by many to be the greatest French actor of all time. Coming to film from the vaudeville stage, he became a star in 1936 thanks to his role as a Legionnaire in the colonial film *La Bandera* (Julien Duvivier), after which he appeared in several films per year until the onset of the German Occupation. In these late 1930s films, Gabin represents young, working-class Frenchness, an image that evolved after the war as he took on more paternal roles in keeping with his advancing age.

At the very end of the decade, released practically on the eve of war, Jean Renoir released his masterpiece *La Règle du jeu*, which has since been hailed as not only one of the greatest French films ever made, but one of the greatest films of all time (although it was far less appreciated at the moment of its initial release). Taking the premise of an upstairs-downstairs narrative, the film underscores the importance of class in the tensions of French culture, with subtle nods to foreign politics (more subtle, at least, than the references in Renoir's *La Grande illusion*) that situate *La Règle du jeu* squarely within its socio-historical moment.

FILMS

- *Pépé le Moko* (Julien Duvivier, 1937) **OR** *La Grande illusion* (Jean Renoir, 1937)

- *Quai des brumes / Port of Shadows* (Marcel Carné, 1938) **OR** *Le Jour se lève / Daybreak* (Marcel Carné 1939)
- *La Règle du jeu / Rules of the Game* (Jean Renoir, 1939)

READINGS

- Williams, Ch. 9 (pp 213-242)
- Louis Chavance, "The Cinema in the Service of the Popular Front," (1936) in *French Film Theory and Criticism*, vol. 2, 213-218 (CR)

Recommended: Dudley Andrew, *Mists of Regret: Culture and Sensibility in Classic French Film*. Princeton: Princeton U P, 1995.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1) Compare and contrast Jean Gabin's characters and performance in at least two of this week's films.
- 2) Discuss the visual aesthetics of poetic realism – sets, costumes, cinematographic techniques – and show how they have an impact on narrative content. Focus on Carné (and Duvivier, if applicable).

WEEK 6. French Cinema and the Occupation

After the onset of the Occupation, French cinema presented itself less as a mirror to society than as a means to escape it. Fantasy, an underappreciated genre during the 1930s, surged into the mainstream during the war years, and was often deployed as an indirect means of representing the Occupation. Even Marcel Carné, the poster child for poetic realism, steered his usual team away from the gritty present and towards the allegorical medieval fantasy *Les Visiteurs du soir* (1942). Making only oblique references to reality was a necessary strategy, since Vichy censorship exerted significant control over film production and distribution, at least in the occupied north.

In addition to the genre shakeup, the talent pool on both sides of the camera shifted dramatically during the Occupation, as many major French stars and directors fled the country in the wake of the Nazi invasion. Many made their way to Hollywood, including consummate Frenchmen Jean Gabin and Jean Renoir. Several foreign directors who had been working in France in the 1930s were forced to flee once again, and many of these serial expatriates spent productive war years working in Hollywood, including Robert Siodmak, Anatole Litvak, and Max Ophüls, who would return to France after the war to make his best-known films in the Tradition of Quality.

FILMS

- *Les Visiteurs du soir* (Marcel Carné, 1942)
- *Le Corbeau* (Henri-Georges Clouzot, 1943)
- *Le Ciel est à vous* (Jean Grémillon, 1943)
- *Les Enfants du paradis / Children of Paradise* (Marcel Carné, 1945)

READING

Williams, Ch. 10 (pp 245-271)

Recommended: Evelyn Ehrlich, *Cinema of Paradox: French Filmmaking under the German Occupation*. New York: Columbia U P, 1985.

Noël Burch and Geneviève Sellier, "The 'Funny War' of the Sexes in French Cinema." Trans. Alan Williams and Noël Burch. *Film and Nationalism*, ed. Alan Williams. New Brunswick: Rutgers U P, 2002. 152-177.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1) Compare the representation of gender roles in films of the late 1930s with those seen in Occupation-era films.
- 2) In what ways do this week's films support or reflect the Vichy motto *Travail, Famille, Patrie* (work, family, fatherland), and in what ways can they be seen as subverting this ideology?

WEEK 7. Postwar Film and the Tradition of Quality

After the liberation of occupied France, the cinema seemed to turn away from its immediate past to focus instead on more distant (and often more pleasant) eras. Abandoning the pointed focus on contemporary social issues that marked the cinema of the 1930s, and moving away from the fantasies of the Occupation, popular cinema after the war tended toward big-budget, star-studded adaptations (often very loosely drawn ones) of classic 19th century literature by Zola, Stendhal, Maupassant, and others. This so-called Tradition of Quality wore its leftist, anti-bourgeois agenda very much on its sleeve. But these were also the productions that the *Cahiers* critics, led by François Truffaut, derided in their writing as the "cinéma du papa," dismissing these middle-aged directors' aesthetics and politics as outdated and irrelevant to a rising generation of audiences and filmmakers.

Other trends besides the Tradition of Quality also emerged after the war. Picking up the same thread he had followed in the Occupation-era thriller *Le Corbeau*, Henri-Georges Clouzot became a key director of French *film noir* in the postwar years. Robert Bresson also continued a career that began during the Occupation, honing a spare style and singular tone that he achieved in part by eschewing professional actors, a move that went against the grain of postwar French cinema. Finally, in the realm of comedy, Jacques Tati delighted audiences with his observational, largely physical humor after the war and into the 1960s.

FILMS

- *Fanfan la Tulipe* (Christian-Jaque, 1952) **OR** *Nana* (Christian-Jaque, 1955)
- *Madame de... / The Earrings of Madame de...* (Max Ophüls, 1953) **OR** *Lola Montès* (Ophüls, 1955)
- *Diabolique* (Henri-Georges Clouzot, 1954) **OR** *Le Salaire de la peur / The Wages of Fear* (Clouzot, 1953)
- *Le Journal d'un curé de campagne / Diary of a Country Priest* (Robert Bresson, 1950) **OR** *Pickpocket* (Bresson, 1959)
- *Les Vacances de Monsieur Hulot / Mr. Hulot's Holiday* (Jacques Tati, 1953) **OR** *Playtime* (Tati, 1967)

READING

Williams, Ch. 11 & 12 (pp 272-324)

Recommended: Colin Crisp, *The Classic French Cinema, 1930-1960*. Bloomington: Indiana U P, 1997.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (select 2)

- 1) How does the representation of the past comment on the postwar present in the Tradition of Quality?
- 2) Compare Robert Bresson's approach to literary adaptation (*Diary*, based on a Bernanos novel) to the approach on display in Christian-Jaque's *Nana*.
- 3) Discuss how film form contributes to the humor on display in Jacques Tati's comedy.

WEEK 8. New Wave & new French criticism

The idealism and political movements of the postwar years gave rise to a new and more apolitical lifestyle in France. The new generation of filmmakers called the *Nouvelle Vague* (New Wave) emerged in this socio-political environment. Before becoming filmmakers themselves, many of these directors had been critics for the magazine *Cahiers du cinema* under the leadership of highly influential theorist and critic André Bazin. These young directors strongly criticized the Tradition of Quality and attempted to make personal films that defied industry conventions. Advocating the "auteur policy," these directors not only provided a personal vision of the world but also created innovations in film form and style.

The New Wave's initial impact came in 1959 with the debut films of François Truffaut, (*The 400 Blows*) and Jean-Luc Godard (*Breathless*). These directors were followed by Claude Chabrol, Eric Rohmer and Jacques Rivette. New Wave films were mostly shot on location using portable equipment and small crews, and so were made quickly and cost far less than the star-studded studio productions of the immediate postwar years. Their open-ended narratives were based on chance events and fragmented episodes. Although they often dealt with dramatic matters such as death, these films also incorporated farcical comedy. But since the New Wave directors favored a cinema based on personal vision, their styles did not coalesce into a unified movement. After the mid-1960s, the New Wave began to lose ground in favor of the more personal and political style of the directors associated with it.

FILMS

- *À bout de souffle / Breathless* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1959)
- *Les 400 coups / The 400 Blows* (François Truffaut, 1959)
- *Ascenseur pour l'échafaud / Elevator to the Gallows* (Louis Malle, 1958)

READINGS

- Williams, Ch. 13 (pp 327-353)
- François Truffaut, "A Certain Tendency of French Cinema" (1954)
- André Bazin, "Fifteen Years of French Cinema" (1957)
<http://www.brightlightsfilm.com/64/64bazinfrenchcinema.html>

Recommended: Geneviève Sellier, *Masculine Singular: French New Wave Cinema*. Trans. Kristin Ross. Durham: Duke U P, 2008.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1) Discuss New Wave films' influence on contemporary "postmodern" cinema.
- 2) Discuss how female characters are represented in New Wave cinema.
- 3) What are the stylistic innovations of New Wave cinema? Please discuss using examples from films.

WEEK 9. Left Bank filmmakers & looking at war

Another loosely affiliated group of filmmakers of the late 1950s is the “Left Bank” (*Rive Gauche*) group. Alain Resnais, Agnès Varda, and Georges Franju, like the New Wave filmmakers, practiced cinematic modernism and were keen on stylistic and narrative experimentation. The influence of Surrealism can be seen in the dream-like mental states that structure some of their films. The prototype of Left Bank cinema was *Hiroshima mon amour*, directed by Alain Resnais from a script by French literary star Marguerite Duras. The success of *Hiroshima mon amour* helped launch other Left Bank filmmakers.

Resnais’s next work, *Last Year at Marienbad*, once again juxtaposes the present and the past in confusing ways, pushing modernist ambiguity to new extremes. On the other hand, Georges Franju (*Eyes without a Face* and *Judex*) used classic genre conventions alongside Surrealist techniques. Agnès Varda’s *Cleo from 5 to 7* shows close similarities to the New Wave aesthetic, and her next feature *Le Bonheur* created controversy with its subject matter. Chris Marker’s remarkable *La Jetée* is composed from a series of still photographs, yet nevertheless manages to convey a sense of movement. Another figure associated with the group is the novelist Alain Robbe-Grillet, who debuted as a director with *L’Immortelle* after scripting *Last Year at Marienbad*.

Along with their affiliation with documentary and contemporary literary trends, the Left Bank filmmakers were dealing with the experience of modern warfare and social disintegration. They were interested in the themes of time, memory and trauma.

FILMS

- *Cléo de 5 à 7* (Agnès Varda, 1961)
- *La Jetée* (Chris Marker, 1962)

World War II: (Re)framing the past

- *Le chagrin et la pitié / The Sorrow and the Pity* (Marcel Ophüls, 1971)
- *Nuit et brouillard / Night and Fog* (Alain Resnais, 1955) **OR** *Hiroshima, mon amour* (Alain Resnais, 1959)

Algeria: Representing the current conflict

- *Muriel, ou le temps d’un retour* (Alain Resnais, 1963) **OR** *Le Petit soldat* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1963)

READINGS

- Williams, Ch. 14 (pp 354-378)
- Flitterman-Lewis, Ch. 9 & 10 (pp 248-284)
- Austin, Ch. 2 (pp 18-45)

Recommended: Naomi Greene, *Landscapes of Loss: The National Past in Postwar French Cinema*. Princeton: Princeton U P, 1999.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

- 1) How are memory and amnesia used as a plot device in Left Bank films?
- 2) How are colonial struggles reflected in French cinema during 1960s?

WEEK 10. Post-1968: Sex, society, and cinema

Not unlike the brief success of the Popular Front in the mid-1930s, the political turmoil of May ‘68 – characterized in part by strikes and demonstrations among students and workers around the country, but especially in Paris – marked the

beginning of an era where politics could take center stage in popular cinema. In the aftermath of this social upheaval came a new, clear break in how films were made, and which big names defined the French film industry.

The *polar* (police thriller) genre became more deeply and more visibly engaged with politics. Costa-Gavras's *Z* (and several of his films that followed) used actual historical events as fodder for suspenseful cinematic action. Costa-Gavras also regularly cast the star Yves Montand, who was recognized by the broader public as a supporter of the Communist Party in France. Montand's very public ideological leanings highlight how stardom itself became intertwined with politics post-'68.

After a surge of intensely political films, in the mid-1970s, changes in censorship laws brought more intensely explicit sex into the mainstream. In 1974, the soft-core sensation *Emmanuelle*, based on a gossamer plot and shot by a fashion photographer, was released and went on to amass the most individual entries of any film in the 1970s. Sex had long been gaining visibility (so to speak) in French cinema, but the unprecedented success of *Emmanuelle* ushered in a new era of acceptance and even legitimization for sex on the big screen. The sex comedies of Bertrand Blier (and others) also benefited from these newly open minds in the industry and among audiences, particularly in the long term.

FILMS

- *Z* (Costa-Gavras, 1969)
- *Emmanuelle* (Just Jaeckin, 1974)
- *Les Valseuses / Going Places* (Bertrand Blier, 1974)
- *Le Juge et l'assassin* (Bertrand Tavernier, 1976)

READINGS

- Williams, Ch. 15 (pp 379-404)
- Austin, Ch. 3, 4, & 5 (46-118)

Recommended: Alison Smith, *French Cinema in the 1970s: The Echoes of May*. Manchester: Manchester U P, 2005.

DISCUSSION TOPICS (select 2)

- 1) Discuss how the representation of history (the Dreyfus Affair) in *Le Juge et l'assassin* differs from how history and politics were combined in the Tradition of Quality.
- 2) Compare the representation of gender and sexuality in *Emmanuelle* and *Les Valseuses*.
- 3) Examine the use of star casting in post-1968 films. Discuss how various paratexts – information that comes from outside the films themselves – may have affected the way contemporary audiences saw films like *Z* or *Les Valseuses*.

WEEK 11. Heritage Cinema and the French Epic

In France, the concept of "heritage" (*le patrimoine*) is culturally and politically charged, reaching the peak of its power during the 1980s. One major cinematic trends of this decade was reliance on literary and cultural history, with productions that found generous funding (both domestic and international) and enthusiastic popular audiences. This blend of prestige and populism, often infused with heavy

doses of nationalism, in some ways recalls the postwar Tradition of Quality, but in the 1980s this backward gaze bears a darker, more pessimistic tone.

Heritage films offer various types of nostalgia: colonial (*Indochine*), literary (*Madame Bovary*; *L'Amant*), even cinematic nostalgia, especially Claude Berri's box office hits *Jean de Florette* and *Manon des sources*, each of which remade writer-director Marcel Pagnol's earlier work. These films strive to represent a more "authentic" France, whose authenticity is rooted in a glorious but lost national history. However, at the same time, some heritage films use history as a means to challenge assumptions about the national past. Other films use the past to comment fairly explicitly on contemporary events, as in *La Reine Margot*, which, under the guise of an Alexandre Dumas adaptation, indirectly refers to the violent conflicts of the civil war in Bosnia.

The French star system cast familiar faces for this nostalgia, with several marquee names appearing and reappearing in heritage films: Gérard Depardieu, Isabelle Adjani, and Daniel Auteuil. Other stars circulated in and out of period films; Juliette Binoche, for instance, appeared in the *cinéma du look* (*Mauvais Sang*, Léos Carax, 1986), Krzysztof Kieslowski's *Blue* (1993, part of his art house trilogy *Trois couleurs*) as well as heritage films (*Le Hussard sur le toit*, Jean-Paul Rappeneau, 1995; *La Veuve de Saint-Pierre*, Patrice Leconte, 2000). Isabelle Huppert, a regular star in Claude Chabrol's films of all genres, accompanied him on his turn toward the nostalgic in *Une Affair de femmes / Story of Women* (1988) and *Madame Bovary*.

FILMS

- *Jean de Florette* and *Manon des sources* (both Claude Berri, 1986)
- *Madame Bovary* (Claude Chabrol, 1991)
- *Indochine* (Régis Wargnier, 1992) **OR** *L'Amant* (Jean-Jacques Annaud, 1992)
- *La Reine Margot* (Patrice Chéreau, 1994) **OR** *Ridicule* (Patrice Leconte, 1996)

READING

Austin, Ch. 7 (142-170)

Recommended: Oscherwitz, Dayna. *Past Forward: French Culture and the Post-Colonial Heritage*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois U P, 2010.

Phil Powrie, *French Cinema in the 1980s: Nostalgia and the Crisis of Masculinity*. Oxford: Clarendon P, 1997.

DISCUSSION TOPICS (select 2)

- 1) Compare and contrast the representation of the 19th century in heritage films of the 1980s and 1990s with films from the Tradition of Quality that represent the same period of history.
- 2) Discuss how the pressures of international coproduction can influence the production, distribution, and reception of a project like *L'Amant*, an English language film that nevertheless can be categorized as "French."
- 3) Formulate a detailed ideological analysis of at least one of this week's films. In what ways does this film's ideology reflect contemporary concerns of the decade in which it was produced?

WEEK 12. The legacy of the *cinéma du look*

While generally derided by critics, the *cinéma du look* was a popular alternative to the aesthetics of the heritage film, and its influence on visual style stretches beyond its peak. Jean-Jacques Beineix's film *Diva* (1981) kicked off the movement, followed by Léos Carax and Luc Besson. Coming to feature filmmaking from advertising, they adopted the sleek, highly stylized aesthetics of marketing: saturated colors, urban space, and savvy deployment of popular music. What critics most dislike about *le look* – as its very name suggests – is what they consider a reductive focus on visuals at the expense of other aspects of film narration, particularly character development and ideological expression. This shift away from ideology marks a break with predominant trends post-'68.

In terms of critical reception, notable differences separate the three main *look* filmmakers. Luc Besson has garnered the weakest critical support for his career, although many of his films have been financially successful: *Subway* (1985), *The Big Blue* (1988), and the transnational, big-budget, English-language blockbuster *The Fifth Element* (1997), a semi-flop on initial release whose cult following has since earned the film a certain notoriety. Beineix's *Diva* found support from the industry establishment fairly early, even winning four Césars (though mostly for technical achievements). Léos Carax, who came to directing from film criticism (at the legendary *Cahiers du cinéma*, no less), has also found kinder words from critics, although his films have also had their detractors. Carax's recurring use of actor Denis Lavant echoes a strategy used by a previous generation's auteurs, including Truffaut's partnership with Jean-Pierre Léaud, a collaboration that suggests semi-autobiographical narratives. After a lengthy hiatus from feature films, Carax cast Lavant once again in his 2011 film *Holy Motors*, a sharply divisive work (but a sensation at Cannes) that delighted some critics while leaving others cold.

The distinctive visual style of *le look* has left a lasting mark on French cinema despite its controversial place in French film history. Its continuing influence emerges perhaps most clearly in the fantasy films of creative team Jean-Pierre Jeunet and Marc Caro.

FILMS

- *Diva* (Jean-Jacques Beineix, 1981)
- *Mauvais sang* (Léos Carax, 1986)
- *Nikita* (Luc Besson, 1990)
- *Delicatessen* (Jean-Pierre Jeunet and Marc Caro, 1991) **OR** *La Cité des enfants perdus / City of Lost Children* (Jean-Pierre Jeunet and Marc Caro, 1995)

READING

Austin Ch. 6 (pp 119-141)

DISCUSSION TOPICS

- 1) To what extent is the *cinéma du look* engaged (or disengaged) with ideology? Consider comparing one or more key films of the *cinéma du look* with films from the post-'68 period.
- 2) Compare and contrast the visual and technical aspects (cinematography, editing, mise-en-scène) of each of the three key directors: Beineix, Carax, and Besson.

WEEK 13. National cinema seeking postnationalism: the 1990s

Although international coproduction was absolutely not a new phenomenon, French cinema during the 1990s began to reconnect its national industry to audiences (i.e. markets) around the world. At the same time, French films began to reflect pressing national concerns in the present. With *La Haine*, Mathieu Kassovitz helped draw attention to (but did not singlehandedly create) the *cinéma de banlieue*, with the term *banlieue* referring to the housing projects on the outskirts of major cities. This geographical allusion to a multicultural, chronically disenfranchised population reflects the economic reality of these cultural outsiders. While rooted in specifically national problems, *La Haine* nevertheless found a significant international audience thanks to its gritty subject and Kassovitz's capacity for visual invention.

France's cinematic past also came to the fore through the interventions of young auteurs. Claire Denis's *Beau Travail* (1999) updates the so-called *cinéma colonial*, a popular subgenre of melodrama that peaked in France during the 1930s (see *Pépé le Moko*). Focusing on a present-day, multinational battalion of the Foreign Legion, Denis builds her narrative around a loose interpretation of Herman Melville's *Billy Budd*. The film exemplifies Denis's tendency to represent French people and their postcolonial legacy outside Europe. Taking a very different look at French cinema history, in *Irma Vep* Olivier Assayas satirized the process of transnational filmmaking with a behind-the-scenes narrative about a doomed remake of *Les Vampires*. Not only does the film feature large portions of dialogue in English, but the beleaguered director of the film-within-a-film, played with marked symbolism by former Truffaut regular Jean-Pierre Léaud, is determined to cast Asian action star Maggie Cheung, playing herself, in the role of the burglar Irma Vep. In Assayas's film, the national (cinematic) past and postnational (cinematic) present blur together.

A very different conflict between past and present appears in the popular comedy *Les Visiteurs*. More than 13 million people in France turned out to see this time travel fantasy, whose grafting of the distant past onto the comically flawed present satirizes the impulse that drives the heritage film, still a massively popular genre at the time. Other successful popular comedies in the 1990s were directed and written by women, including *Gazon maudit* and *Le Goût des autres*. Director-writer-actor Josiane Balasko first entered French comedy as part of the Splendid troupe, whose members moved into film work beginning in the late 1970s. By the 1990s, Balasko was writing, directing, and starring in her own films, including *Gazon maudit*, which was (very inaccurately) translated for international release as *French Twist* (a more suitable alternative might be "damned bush," which conveys at least some of the double entendre in the original title). Although Agnès Jaoui comes from a younger generation than Balasko, she has also become a writer/director/star, all roles she took on in *Le Goût des autres*. Both these comedies also found audiences outside France, injecting some humor into the dramatic fare typically sent out on the international art-house circuit. *French Twist* even grossed over \$1 million in its US release, an unusually good return for a non-Hollywood comedy.

FILMS

- *Les Visiteurs* (Jean-Marie Poiré, 1993)
- *La Haine* (Mathieu Kassovitz, 1995)
- *Irma Vep* (Olivier Assayas, 1996) **OR** *Beau Travail* (Claire Denis, 1999)
- *Gazon maudit* / *French Twist* (Josiane Balasko, 1995) **OR** *Le Goût des autres* / *The Taste of Others* (Agnès Jaoui, 2000)

READING

Roger Celestin, "Lost in Globalized Space? A Certain French Cinema Abroad." *Yale French Studies* 115 (2009): 31-46. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25679753>

Myrto Konstantarakos, "Which Mapping of the City? *La Haine* in *French Cinema in the 1990s*. 160-171 (CR)

Recommended: Phil Powrie, ed. *French Cinema in the 1990s: Continuity and Difference*. Oxford: Oxford U P, 2003.

DISCUSSION TOPICS (select 2)

- 1) Discuss how the comedy of *Les Visiteurs* relies on viewers' recognition of contemporary French heritage cinema in creating its humor.
- 2) Examine the representation of race and class in *La Haine*.
- 3) Examine the representation of gender roles in *French Twist* and/or *Le Goût des autres*.
- 4) Considering the argument presented by Roger Celestin, what ideas of "Frenchness" might be presented in *La Haine* and/or *French Twist*, each of which found considerable audiences outside of France?

WEEK 14. New French cinema and transnationalism

French cinema has once again found the critical spotlight in recent years. Diverse and often paradoxical, the contemporary French cinema resists global American hegemony with its new directors and stars. The broad range of subject matter and themes that are presented in contemporary French cinema include popular cinema, art-house productions and new French extremism (or *cinéma du corps*). From Michel Hazanavicius' *The Artist* (2011) to *Intouchables* (Olivier Nakache and Eric Toledona, 2011) French cinema continues to produce global hits. On the other hand, Michael Haneke's French language films straddle art-house and genre cinema, earning critical acclaim around the world. Films that deal with social chaos, migration, and multiculturalism form another popular trend within contemporary cinema.

However, the most incisive and uncompromising tendency of contemporary cinema is the new French Extremism. Filmmakers like Claire Denis, Bruno Dumont and Gaspar Noé are known for their explicit representation of violence and sexuality. In spite of their shocking content, these films push cinematic boundaries and strengthen belief on the potential of film. Overall, offering an insightful social critique, contemporary French cinema portrays isolation and alienation in today's society. Set in a threatening and nightmarish environment, here family and friendship relations fail and disintegrate, often violently.

FILMS

- *Caché* (Michael Haneke, 2005)
- *La Science des rêves / The Science of Sleep* (Michel Gondry, 2006)
- *La Graine et le mulet / The Secret of the Grain* (Abdellatif Kéchiche, 2007)
- *Un prophète / A Prophet* (Jacques Audiard, 2008)

READING

Michel Marie, "French Cinema in the New Century." Trans. Sally Shafto. *Yale French Studies* 115 (2009): 9-30. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25679752>

DISCUSSION TOPICS

- 1) What is the relevance of new French extremism within the larger French culture and cinema as a whole?

- 2) Considering the effects of globalization and postcolonialism, how might one define contemporary French “national” cinema?

WEEK 15. Adieu Cinema, Hello Cinephilia

With the emergence of digital cinema and virtual reality, many commentators claimed that the golden age of cinema was over. It is true that cinema has been dramatically transformed with the influence of the new technologies that surround it. However, the growing interest in other film cultures, combined with easy access to films via digital platforms, proves that cinema still thrives as a narrative form and psychological experience. The new media and different forms of spectatorship encourage a new, more democratic form of cinephilia.

These latest developments are also apparent in the French film culture. Cinema seems to be reinventing itself by examining its history and reviving past narrative forms such as silent film. *The Artist* (Michel Hazanavicius, 2011) and *Holy Motors* (Léos Carax, 2011) can be interpreted as a tribute to the “undeath” of cinema and the transformation of 21st century film culture. Films circulate in various platforms, and media texts of all kinds are subject to endless revision and remediation by their fans. Recognizing this shift, we will end the course by directing our attention to different audio-visual material such as clips and interactive storytelling.

FILMS

- *Holy Motors* (Léos Carax, 2012)
- *Taxi Driver Sweded* by Michel Gondry (2012)

READING

Jonathan Rosenbaum, “Introduction: Goodbye Cinema, Hello Cinephilia,”
<http://press.uchicago.edu/Misc/Chicago/726649.html>

ADDITIONAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abel, Richard. *French Film Theory and Criticism, 1907-1939*. 2 vols. Princeton: Princeton U P, 1988.
- Andrew, Dudley and Steven Ungar. *Popular Front Paris and the Poetics of Culture*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard U P, 2005.
- Buss, Robin. *The French through Their Films*. New York: Ungar, 1988.
- Danan, Martine. “National and Postnational French Cinema.” *Theorising National Cinema*. Eds. Valentina Vitali and Paul Willemen. London: BFI, 2006. 172-185.
- Ezra, Elizabeth and Sue Harris, eds. *France in Focus: Film and National Identity*. Oxford: Berg, 2000.
- Hayward, Susan and Ginette Vincendeau, eds. *French Film: Texts and Contexts*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 2000.
- Hughes, Alex and James S. Williams, eds. *Gender and French Cinema*. Oxford: Berg, 2001.
- O’Brien, Charles. *Cinema’s Conversion to Sound: Technology and Film Style in France and the U.S.* Bloomington: Indiana U P, 2005.

Phillips, Alastair. *City of Darkness, City of Light: Émigré Filmmakers in Paris 1929-1939*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam U P, 2004.

Powrie, Phil, ed. *The Cinema of France*. London: Wallflower, 2006.

Sherzer, Dina, ed. *Cinema, Colonialism, Postcolonialism: Perspectives from the French and Francophone Worlds*. Austin: U Texas P, 1996.

Slavin, David Henry. *Colonial Cinema and Imperial France, 1919-1939: White Blind Spots, Male Fantasies, Settler Myths*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U P, 2001.

Vincendeau, Ginette. *The Companion to French Cinema*. London: Cassell, 1996.

---. *Stars and Stardom in French Cinema*. London: Continuum, 2000.