**French Cinema: History, Practice, Analysis, 2015/16**

**LNLN027S5**

**Level 5**

**Convenor: Dr Andrew Asibong (**[**a.asibong@bbk.ac.uk**](mailto:a.asibong@bbk.ac.uk)**)**

**Teachers: Dr Andrew Asibong and Dr Muriel Tinel-Temple**

**Mondays, 6pm-9pm**

The aim of this module is to facilitate the analysis, from a variety of different cultural, theoretical and methodological perspectives, of films produced in France between 1940 and the present day. There will be a focus throughout much of the module on the representation of cultural trauma and desire, and the limits of that representation. Through comparative analysis of similarities and differences between films from different eras, we will be able to reflect not only on recurring cultural issues but also on the questions at the heart of film studies (e.g. genre, form, period, auteur, star, technology, ideology) that will inevitably arise through our study of divergence across the spectrum of texts falling under the rubric “post-war French cinema”. In addition to weekly comparative analysis there will be three guest lectures by Dr Muriel Tinel-Temple: on French cinema under the Occupation; on the New Wave; and on the specificity of the documentary form. Students will be expected to have watched all films marked as ‘advance viewing’ and to have read anything marked as ‘essential reading’ (this will be provided on Moodle) in advance of the class.

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**Week 1: 4th January 2016: The excesses of French cinema: film, ‘truth’ and what escapes it**

In this opening session, we will watch together Jean Rouch’s classic ethnographic film and will try to consider its capacities and limitations as a cinematic vehicle for capturing the cultural, political and emotional ‘truth’ of France at a certain moment in 1960. We will also watch a (very) short film by François Ozon, which also places the simultaneously insufficient and excessive aspects of ‘truth’ at its centre.

**Screening:**

*Chronique d’un été* [Chronicle of a Summer](Jean Rouch, 1961)

*Action Vérité* [Truth or Dare](François Ozon, 1994)

**Week 2:11th January 2016: French Cinema during the Occupation**

In this session we are going to discuss the situation of cinema during the Occupation in term of economy (organisation of the industry), people (who were making films?), aesthetic (what type of film were made?), spectatorship and censorship.

**Screening (extracts):**

*Le Corbeau* [The Raven] (H.G. Clouzot, 1943)

**Essential Reading:**

* Crips, Colin, *The Classic French Cinema 1930-1960*, London: I.B.Tauris, 1997, pp.43-63.

**Further viewing:**

* *Les Visiteurs du Soir* [Visitors of the Evening] (Marcel Carné, 1942)
* *Lumière d’été* [Summer Light] (Jean Grémillon, 1943)
* *Le Ciel est à vous* [The Sky is Yours] (Jean Grémillon, 1944)
* *Les Enfants du Paradis* [Children of Paradise] (Marcel Carné, 1945)

**Further reading:**

* Mayne, Judith, *Le Corbeau*, London: I.B.Tauris, 2007
* Ehrlich, E., *The Cinema of Paradox: French Filmmaking under the German Occupation*, New York: Columbia University Press,1985

**Week 3: 18th January 2016: Introduction to the French New Wave**

In this session we are going to discuss the main aspects of the French New Wave in terms of history, theory, evolution and impact.

**Screening (extracts):**

*Deux de la vague* [*Two in the Wave*](Antoine de Baecque, 2010)

*Les 400 coups* [The 400 Blows] (François Truffaut, 1959)

*A bout de souffle* [Breathless] (Jean-Luc Godard, 1960)

**Essential Reading:**

* Marie, Michel, *The French New Wave: An Artistic School*, Blackwell publishing, 2002, pp.70-97.

**Further viewing :**

* *Le Beau Serge* [Handsome Serge] (Claude Chabrol, 1958)
* *Les Cousins* [The Cousins] (Claude Chabrol, 1958)
* *Tirez sur le pianiste* [Shoot the Pianist] (François Truffaut, 1960)
* *Paris nous appartient* [Paris Belongs to Us] (Jacques Rivette, 1961)
* *Une Femme est une femme* [A Woman Is a Woman] (Jean-Luc Godard, 1961)
* *Lola* (Jacques Demy, 1961)
* *Le Petit Soldat* [The Little Soldier] (Jean-Luc Godard, 1961-1963)
* *Jules et Jim* (FrançoisTruffaut, 1962)
* *Vivre sa vie* [To Live Your Life] (Jean-Luc Godard, 1962)
* *Adieu Philippine* [Goodbye Philippine] (Jacques Rozier, 1962)
* *Cléo de 5 à 7* [Cleo from 5 to 7] (Agnès Varda, 1962)

**Further Reading:**

* Douchet, Jean, *French New Wave*, Distributed Art Publishers, 1999
* Graham, Peter, and Vincendeau, Ginette, *The French New Wave: Critical Landmarks*, Palgrave Macmillan/BFI, 2009
* Greene, Naomi, *The French New Wave: A New Look*, Wallflower, 2007
* Neupert, Richard, *A History of the French New Wave*, University of Wisconsin, 2002
* Ostrowska, Dorota, *Reading the New Wave*, Wallflower, 2008
* Wiegand, Chris, *French New Wave*, Pocket Essentials, 2005

**Week 4: 25 January 2016: Desire**

In this session we will consider two iconic examples from French cinema of the representation of that allegedly most quintessential of French preoccupations: erotic desire. What aesthetic, ethical, emotional and political problems, with regard to representation, are raised by these two very different explorations of human sexuality?

**Advance viewing:**

*Le Mépris* [Contempt] (Jean-Luc Godard, 1963)

*La Vie d’Adèle* [Blue is the Warmest Colour] (Abdellatif Kechiche, 2013)

**Essential reading:**

Bersani, L. and Dutoit, U., ‘Forming Couples’, in *Forms of Being* (London: BFI, 2004)

Williams, L., ‘Cinema's Sex Acts, *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 67, No. 4 (Summer 2014), pp. 9-25

**Week 5: 1 February 2016: Revolution**

In this session we will think about the problem of revolt, insurrection and social transformation, and how these issues have been approached in post-1968 French cinema. What strategies of ‘engagement’ (or ‘commitment’) are deployed by the filmmakers in question? And what is their politicizing effect, if any, on the spectator?

**Advance viewing:**

*Tout va bien* (Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin, 1972)

*White Material* (Claire Denis, 2009)

**Essential reading:**

Lesage, J., ‘Godard and Gorin’s Left Politics’, *Jump Cut*, no. 28, April 1983, pp. 51-58, <http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/JC28folder/GodardGorinPolitics.html>

Ruhe, C., ‘Beyond Post-Colonialism? From *Chocolat* to *White Material*’ in Vecchio, M. (ed.) *The Films of Claire Denis: Intimacy on the Border* (I.B. Tauris, 2014)

**READING WEEK: 8 February 2016**

**Week 7: 15 February 2016: ‘Community’**

In this session we will approach the vexed question of how French cinema has cinematically represented its own fraught modes of belonging. From the crisis moment of 1939 captured in Renoir’s only apparently lightweight classic to the familial rot explored by Desplechin’s equally jocular-seeming ‘Christmas tale’, we will try to analyse the seemingly perennial cultural problem of the dysfunctional group formation.

Advance viewing:

*La Règle du jeu* [Rules of the Game] (Jean Renoir, 1939)

*Conte de Noel* [A Christmas Tale](Arnaud Desplechin, 2008)

**Essential reading:**

# Brooks, C. W., ‘Jean Renoir's *The Rules of the Game*’, French Historical Studies

Vol. 7, No. 2 (Autumn, 1971), pp. 264-283

Frodon. Jean-Michel, ‘Family Politics’, No. 604 (2005), <http://www.cahiersducinema.com/Repliques-Family-Politics.html>

**Week 8: 22 February 2016: French Documentary**

In this session we are going to discuss the forms of documentary films and its tradition in France through the work of Nicolas Philibert.

**Screening (extracts):**

*Être et avoir* [To be and to have] (Nicolas Philibert, 2002)

**Essential Reading**

* Feinstein, Howard, “The Unpredictable Revelations of Nicolas Philibert”, in Cousins, Mark, MacDonald Kevin, *Imagining reality*, Faber & Faber, 2012, pp.378-382

**Further viewing (Nicolas Philibert’s Filmography):**

* 1990 *La Ville Louvre* [Louvre City]
* 1992 *Le Pays des sourds* [In the Land of Deaf]
* 1994 *Un Animal, des animaux* [Animals and more Animals]
* 1996 *La moindre des choses* [Every Little Thing]
* 2007 *Retour en Normandie* [Back to Normandie]
* 2010 *Nénette*
* 2013 *La Maison de la Radio*

**Further Reading**:

* Baker, Maxine, *Documentary in the Digital Age*, Focal Press, 2006
* Benyahia, S.C., *Teaching Film and TV Documentary*, BFI, 2007
* Grant, Barry and Hillier, Jim, *100 Documentary Films*, BFI, 2009
* Powrie, Phil, “Unfamiliar places: ‘heterospection’ and recent French films on children”, *Screen*, 46:3, Autumn 2005, 341-352
* Ward, Paul, *Documentary: the Margins of Reality*, Wallflower, 2005
* Witt, M., “The Renaissance of Documentary Filmmaking in France in 1980s and 1990s, in *Critical Studies in Television*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, vol. 7 n.2, Autumn 2012, p.10-29.

**Week 9: 29 February 2016: Trauma**

How has French cinema confronted the problem of individual and collective trauma, that which, according to many definitions of the word, is supposed to elude representation altogether? Resnais and Haneke will be considered as New Wave and contemporary explorers of essentially the same terrain: the ‘unspeakable’ memory of past violence – and anxiety regarding its future repetition.

**Advance viewing:**

*Hiroshima mon amour* (Alain Resnais, 1959)

*Hidden* (Michael Haneke, 2005)

**Essential reading:**

Moses, J. W., ‘Vision Denied in *Night and Fog* and *Hiroshima mon amour*’, *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 15:3 (1987)

Croombs, M., ‘Algeria Deferred: The Logic of Trauma in *Muriel* and *Caché*’, *Scope* <http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/scope/documents/2010/february-2010/croombs.pdf>

**Week 10: 7 March 2016: Stigma**

French cinema is not known for its excursions into genres such as the fantastic, or horror, but on the occasions when this happens, the trip is often necessitated by a preoccupation with social isolation and stigma. In these bizarre films by Franju and Denis, we see a form of French cinematic experimentation which places marginality and exclusion at the centre of its agenda.

**Advance viewing:**

*Les Yeux sans visage* [Eyes without a Face](Georges Franju, 1959)

*Trouble Every Day* (Claire Denis, 2001)

**Essential reading:**

Asibong, A., ‘Viral Women: Singular, Collective and Progressive Infection in *Hiroshima mon amour*, *Les Yeux sans visage* and *Trouble Every Day*’ in Vassallo and Cooke (eds.), *Alienation and Alterity: Otherness in Modern and Contemporary Francophone Contexts* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009)

**Week 11: 14 March 2016: Working through**

Many of the films we’ve looked at so far resemble psychoanalytically-attuned games, insofar as they skirt around what are essentially unconscious processes of repression and illness, both individual and collective. How has French film attempted to go beyond neurotic or psychotic malaise and into a space of psychic reparation, or even ‘health’? And what would such a project look like?

**Advance viewing:**

*La Jetée* (Chris Marker, 1962)

*Sous le sable* [Under the Sand] (François Ozon, 2001)

**Essential reading:**

Asibong, A. ‘La femme et la mer’ in *François Ozon* (Manchester University Press, 2008), pp. 83-90

ffrench, Patrick ‘The Memory of the Image in Chris Marker’s *La Jetée*’, *French Studies*, 59:1 (2005)

**Assessment: 2 essays**

**Essay 1, 2000 words (40%), due Friday 12 February**

**Essay 2, 3000 words (60%), due Friday 8 April**