Week 2: Cities

**Screenings:**  
*Man with a Movie Camera* (dir. Dziga Vertov, Russia, 1929)  
*A Propos de Nice* (dir. Jean Vigo, France, 1931)  

Cinema and the modern city were born at about the same time and continue their fascination with each other. This seminar looks at cinematic studies of the city as a way of exploring geographical approaches to film and literary analysis. We start with a look at the ‘city symphonies’ of the 1920s: films that celebrate the crowds, machines, and structures that constitute urban modernity. The expansion of European and American cities in the early twentieth century was a source of inspiration for both writers and filmmakers, and we make connections between these through their shared interests in architecture, urban rhythms, social patterns, and orchestrated movements. We also consider more recent examples of these examinations of urban life and the ways in which they shape our own perceptions of particular cities such as London, New York, and Los Angeles. Walking through the city will be a particular point of focus as we examine the activities of individuals and crowds, efforts to control their movements, and the ‘tactics’ used to disrupt order.

**Required reading:**


Walter Benjamin, ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’ (1935) in *Illuminations* (London: Pimlico, 1999) and available online:


Suggested reading:


Suggested viewing:
Los Angeles Plays Itself (dir. Thom Anderson, USA, 2003)
Of Time and the City (dir. Terence Davies, UK, 2008)

Week 3: Adaptation
Screenings: Ran (dir. Akira Kurosawa, Japan, 1985)
O Brother, Where Art Thou? (dir. Joel and Ethan Coen, USA, 2000)

In this seminar we study one of the most obvious relationships between film and literature: the adaptation. Adaptations are, of course, films based on books. But they also include films based on plays, poems, and other, earlier films. Adaptations not only allow us to study the process of re-interpretation but also open up opportunities to study media specificity—that is, what makes a film a film—what makes a novel, a novel. What can a film do that a novel cannot and vice-versa? Through our examinations of these two films and the required readings we shall consider the diverse elements that constitute the language of film (framing, editing, sound, etc.) and theoretical approaches to understanding cinema. As Marshall
McLuhan famously stated, ‘The medium is the message’. What, then, is the message that all films communicate about the medium of cinema?

**Required reading:**
Theodor Adorno ‘Chapter Three: Culture Industry Reconsidered’ in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (London: Routledge, 2001). This is available as an e-resource via YorSearch.

**Suggested reading:**
Linda Hutcheon and Siobhan O’Flynn, ‘Chapter One: Beginning to Theorize Adaptation’ in *A Theory of Adaptation* (London: Routledge, 2012). This is available as an e-resource via YorSearch.

**Suggested viewing:**
*Great Expectations* (dir. David Lean, UK, 1946)
*Hamlet* (dir. Grigori Kozintsev, USSR, 1964)
*Emma* (dir. Donald McGrath, USA, 1996)
*Clueless* (dir. Amy Heckerling, USA, 1995)
*Ten Things I Hate about You* (dir. Gil Junger, USA, 1999)
Week 4: Dialogue

Screenings: It Happened One Night (dir. Frank Capra, USA, 1934)
Lady Bird (dir. Greta Gerwig, USA, 2018)

With the introduction of sound to cinema in the late 1920s, the increase in radio listening, and the spread of telephones, ‘talk’ became not just a means of communicating information in interpersonal exchanges but a focal point of film, literature, and, more broadly, interwar culture. In this seminar we talk about ‘talk’ and the use of dialogue in conveying information, constructing character, creating insiders and outsiders, and commenting on the sound of cinema itself. To initiate these discussions we first turn to American and British cinema of the 1930s and its celebration of snappy dialogue. We next turn to more recent works including an outshoot of the ‘Mumblecore’ genre. Coded exchanges, listening in, gossip, miscommunication, and mistaken identity all factor into the different forms of talk. These will help us to analyse conversation as a circuit that connects individuals and generates its own forms of meaning.

Required reading:
Nessa Johnston, ‘Theorizing Bad Sound: What Puts the “Mumble” into Mumblecore?’, The Velvet Light Trap 74 (Fall 2004).

Suggested reading:
Jane M. Greene, ‘A Proper Dash of Spice: Screwball Comedy and the Production Code’, Journal of Film and Video, vol. 63, no. 3 (Fall 2011)

Suggested viewing:
Bringing Up Baby (dir. Howard Hawks, USA, 1938)
His Girl Friday (dir. Howard Hawks, USA, 1940)
Before Sunrise (dir. Richard Linklater, USA, 1995)
Nights and Weekends (dir. John Swanberg, USA, 2008)

Week 5: Surveillance

Screenings:  The Conversation (dir. Francis Ford Coppola, USA, 1971)
The Lives of Others (dir. Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, Germany, 2006)

In this seminar we look at the links between cinema and surveillance and consider how technology extends our senses of sight and sound and shape our perception of the world around us. We start with ideas about phenomenology and film: the experience cinema has on the body beyond just its ‘visual pleasure’. Film can be seen as a multi-sensory experience, and we’ll discuss theoretical approaches for analysing cinema’s appeal to sensations beyond sight. We’ll then focus on film and the opportunities it creates for watching people, examining movements, listening in, and even impacting behaviour. The surveillance of citizens has been a longstanding part of state governance. We’ll discuss the recording of our activities as part of everyday security and the threats such forms of control bring to our civic freedoms.

Required reading:

Suggested reading:

**Suggested viewing:**

* M (dir. Fritz Lang, Germany, 1931)
* Blow Up (dir. Michelangelo Antonioni, UK, 1966)
* Enemy of the State (dir. Tony Scott, USA, 1998)
* Caché (dir. Michael Haneke, France and Germany, 2005)

**Week 6: Reading Week**

No Seminar or Screenings

**Week 7: Empathy**

**Screenings:**  *Mildred Pierce* (dir. Michael Curtiz, USA, 1945)  
*Do the Right Thing* (dir. Spike Lee, USA, 1989)

Understanding the emotions and motivations of others is one of the reasons we read novels and watch movies. In this seminar we discuss empathy as one of the aims of many films and examine the strategies used to make us feel sorry, sadness, anger, even disgust for certain characters. The ‘emotional turn’ in media studies has meant awareness of the ways in which moving images, editing, interfaces, etc. manipulate our emotions and the ways in which we experience on-screen situations. We’ll discuss these manipulations and how they motivate certain responses. We’ll also consider how heightened emotions can trigger conflicts between characters. In particular, we’ll look at conflicts in families, conflicting expectations between women and men, and racial conflicts in local communities.

**Required reading:**


Carl Plantinga, ‘Disgusted at the Movies’, Film Studies (Summer 2006).

**Suggested reading:**
Mark Reid, Spike Lee’s Do The Right Thing (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

**Suggested viewing:**
*Jeanne Dielman* (dir. Chantal Akerman, Belgium, 1975)
*Hunger* (dir. Steve McQueen, UK, 2008)
*Still Alice* (dir. Richard Glatzer and Wash Westmoreland, USA, 2014)

**Week 8: Robots**

**Screenings:**  
*Blade Runner* (dir. Ridley Scott, USA, 1982)  
*Blade Runner 2049* (dir. Denis Villeneuve, USA, 2017)

Robots, replicants, artificial intelligence, and anxieties about a post-human world are topics we pursue in this week’s seminar. Fears about machines that can ‘think’ have been around for ages, and films have dramatised the possibilities (good and bad) of these beings. We’ll discuss the potential of these machines as well as their limitations. Can they indeed ‘think’? Can they feel? Do they have emotions? Empathy? We’ll also look into the ways in which these technologies extend our own capabilities, that is, how they function as prosthetics. Through these machines we are able to see, hear, record, and remember much more than is humanly possible. The ‘prosthetic aesthetic’ is a feature of films about our technological future and a way to think about film itself as medium that extends our sensory awareness.
**Required reading:**


Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener, ‘Chapter Four: Cinema as Eye’ in *Film Theory: An Introduction through the Senses* (London: Routledge, 2010).


Vivian Sobchack, ‘Chapter Nine: A Leg to Stand On’ in *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (London: University of California Press, 2004). This is available as an electronic resource via YorSearch.

**Suggested reading:**


Laura Marks, ‘Introduction’ to *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002). This is available as an e-resource via YorSearch.


**Suggested viewing:**

*Metropolis* (dir. Fritz Lang, Germany, 1927)

*I, Robot* (dir. Alex Proyas, USA, 2004)

*Ex Machina* (dir. Alex Garland, UK, 2014)

*Her* (dir. Spike Jonze, UK, 2014)
Week 9: Networks

**Screenings:**  *Desperately Seeking Susan* (dir. Susan Seidelman, USA, 1985)

*The Social Network* (dir. David Fincher, USA, 2010)

Networks connect people to each other and to technologies of transportation and communication. The re-circuiting of our work and social lives is the subject of this seminar as we turn to films that document these connections. Communication networks allow people to stay in touch with each other and to make new connections across social and spatial divides. Networks like Facebook and Instagram even allow people to project specific images of themselves—often idealised or fantastical images that mark the escapist potential of social media. Interacting with and within a social network can create opportunities for likeminded individuals to form groups and for eavesdropping on the lives of others. Do social networks and social media allow for freedom of expression or standardisation of behaviour? Are they influenced by individual users or just another way to classify people into different types of consumers?

**Required reading:**


Ben Little and Alison Winch, “‘just hanging out with you in my backyard”: Mark Zuckerberg and Mediated Paternalism’, *Open Cultural Studies* 1 (2017).

Caroline Ruddell, ‘Introduction’ to *The Besieged Ego: Doppelganger and Split Identity on Screen* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014). This is available as an e-resource via YorSearch.

**Suggested reading:**

Caroline Ruddell, ‘Chapter Two: Why Psychoanalysis?’ and ‘Chapter 4: Gendering the Double’ in *The Besieged Ego: Doppelganger and Split Identity on Screen* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014). This is available as an e-resource via YorSearch.


**Suggested viewing:**

*The Matrix* (dir. Lilly and Lana Wachowski, USA, 1999)


*Lo and Behold, Reveries of the Connected World* (dir. Werner Hertzog, USA, 2016)

**Week 10: Memory**

**Screenings:**  
*Beaches of Agnès* (dir. Agnès Varda, France, 2008)  
*Waltz with Bashir* (dir. Ari Folman, Israel, 2008)

Remembering past events, emotions, places, and experiences is a process that includes the construction of narrative and disruption of time. This seminar looks into the (re)construction of the past and its intermingling with the present through films and writings about memory. In *Beaches of Agnès*, filmmaker Agnès Varda weaves together excerpts from her films, shots of her revisiting their locations, and personal memories. *Waltz with Bashir* is a documentary that uses animation to represent the seemingly unrepresentable: the trauma of war as experienced by one soldier. Both films can help us to consider theories of memory and trauma, the collective memory that binds groups, memorial sites, and suppressed thoughts. ‘It’s difficult to separate the line between the past and the present’, says the subject of the film Grey Gardens, and in this seminar we’ll discuss how the past informs our experience of the present and the present shapes our understanding of the past.

**Required reading:**


Sigmund Freud, ‘A Note Upon the Mystic Writing Pad’ (1925), *Theories of Memory: A Reader* eds. Michael Rossington and Anne Whitehead (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007).


**Suggested reading:**


**Suggested viewing:**

*Mirror* (dir. Andre Tarkovsky, USSR, 1975)

*Grey Gardens* (dir. Albert and David Maysles, USA, 1975)

*Memento* (dir. Christopher Nolan, USA, 2000)