

CREATIVE PROJECTS IN FILM HISTORY

Professor: Colin Williamson, PhD

Spring 2018

[This is a skeleton version of a syllabus for an abbreviated upper-level undergraduate seminar in cinema studies. The course met for 3 hours once per week.]

Course Description

This course brings together the fields of media art and historiography in an experimental introduction to research methods in film and media studies. Students will be given the opportunity to explore film history by taking on the role of active interpreters and creative users of archival materials. Rather than simply studying the historical contexts in which the cinema developed, students will work closely with archival materials, scholarly texts, and audiovisual media to understand the assumptions involved in, and the consequences of, interpreting historical sources. Our focus will be on the early history of the cinema, when the identity of film as we understand it now was very much in flux. In recent decades, early film history has been a tremendous resource for challenging myths about the origins of motion pictures, for reflecting on the politics of the stories we tell about the medium, and for explaining why the cinema has developed the ways it has for more than a century. Rather than producing a final research paper, we will be combining research writing with short animations and other motion picture exercises that will be compiled into multimedia projects--e.g., a web page or something comparable. We will also be visiting the Museum of the Moving Image during the semester.

Course Objectives:

- Through original archival research and writing, students will learn how to develop research questions and to employ the appropriate methods for answering them using primary and secondary source materials. In the process, students will gain experience in producing strong analyses in the form of research writing.
- By studying the methods and issues of archival research, students will develop a foundational understanding of film history as a field that will help them engage with other topics in film studies while also enriching their liberal arts perspectives.
- Through carefully designed exercises involving creative uses of archival materials, and a multimedia final research project, students will learn to use audiovisual media to conduct, design, and present original research.
- There is a strong emphasis on class discussion, workshops, and presentations of research-in-progress, which will enable students to give and receive feedback on the nature and implications of their work. Participation in these class discussions, workshops, and presentations will also enhance students' oral presentation skills.

Assessment: Assignments and Grading (Based on a 200-point scale)

Assignments: Detailed prompts for individual assignments will be posted on Blackboard and distributed throughout the semester. Please consult the course schedule for due dates. All assignment **due dates are non-negotiable** unless a valid excuse for a late submission is provided, in which case the professor will evaluate any deductions in the grade awarded for the assignment according to the “Late Assignments” policy below.

- Exercises 1-4 _____ 40% (80 points)
 - Final Project _____ 30% (60 points)
 - Participation _____ 20% (40 points)
 - Attendance _____ 10% (20 points)
- **Exercises** (10% of final grade / 20 points each; 40% / 80 points total): Students will complete 4 short exercises (written and creative) using archival materials provided at the beginning of the semester. Each exercise will be sequenced and, collectively, they will be compiled into the final project. *A prompt for completing each exercise will be distributed in class and available on the Blackboard website.*

Exercise 1: “Muybridge in Context” – For this exercise, you will use a guiding theme to put your photographic plate in historical context. The format for this will be a very short photo-essay.

Exercise 2: “Old / New” – For this exercise, you will compile a set of connections between your photographic plate and other audiovisual media artifacts based on resemblances and affinities.

Exercise 3: “Iteration” – For this exercise, you will “reanimate” your photographic plate by turning it into a piece of media art.

Exercise 4: “Project Outline” – For this exercise, you will design a map that you will use to design a website that curates exercises 1-3 and provides a “digital exhibition space” for your photographic plate.

- **Final Project** (30% of final grade / 60 points): Students will be asked to complete a substantial final project that will assess how well students can connect central themes and questions from the class to their archival exercises. Students will be required to create and present a multimedia research project that combines research writing with archival materials and creative audiovisual components in a digital format. A detailed prompt for this project will be made available to students at the beginning of the semester. *Points will be deducted for submitting late based on the “Late Assignments” policy below.*

Schedule (subject to change)

FEBRUARY 8 - INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF THE COURSE

FEBRUARY 15 - THE PROBLEM OF ORIGINS AND MYTHS

Reading(s): Tom Gunning, "Introduction" to *The Great Art of Light and Shadow*
Tom Gunning, "Never Seen This Picture Before: Muybridge in Multiplicity"

FEBRUARY 22 - ARCHAEOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO EARLY FILM HISTORY

Reading(s): Thomas Elsaesser, "Archaeologies of Interactivity"
Thomas Elsaesser, "The New Film History as Media Archaeology"
Rebecca Solnit, *River of Shadows*

MARCH 1 - THE ARCHIVE AS A CABINET OF CURIOSITIES

Reading(s): Barbara Maria Stafford, "Revealing Technologies / Magical Domains"
Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History"
Marta Braun, *Eadweard Muybridge*
*Supplemental: Stephen Bann, "Shrines, Curiosities, and the Rhetoric of Display"

Field trip to the Museum of the Moving Image (meet at the museum at 1PM)

MARCH 8 – DREAMS AND CONSTELLATIONS

Reading(s): Meredith Bak, "The Ludic Archive: The Work of Playing with Optical Toys"
Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film*
Ian Christie, "Moving-picture Media and Modernity"

Exercise 1 due in class

MARCH 15 – SPRING BREAK (NO CLASS)

MARCH 22 – MEDIA ART / MEDIA ARCHAEOLOGY

Reading(s): Erkki Huhtamo, "Resurrecting the Technological Past"
Wanda Strauven, "Media Archaeology: Where Film History, Media Art, and New Media (Can) Meet"

Exercise 2 due in class

MARCH 29 – RESURRECTING MUYBRIDGE

Screening: *Eadweard Muybridge, Zoopraxographer* (Thom Andersen, 1975)

Reading(s): Hollis Frampton, "Fragments of a Tesseract"
Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive*

APRIL 5 – AFTERLIVES WORKSHOP

Reading(s): Andreas Fickers and Annie van den Oever, "Experimental Media Archaeology: A Plea for New Directions"

APRIL 12 – AFTERLIVES WORKSHOP (CONTINUED)

Exercise 3 due in class

APRIL 19 – WEBSITE-BUILDING WORKSHOP

Reading(s): Siegfried Zielinski, *Deep Time of the Media*

APRIL 26 – PRESENTATIONS AND FEEDBACK SESSION

Exercise 4 due in class

MAY 3 - STUDY DAY – NO CLASS

MAY 10 - NO CLASS

Final Project due via email by 12 noon