

City Symphony: Experimental Cinema

Course Details

Course Designator & Number: LNDN3262

Number of Credits: 3

Language of Instruction: English

Contact Hours: 45

Instructor: On-Site Instructor

Course Description

"Painters of every nationality depict the city, but only a succession of images can bring it to life." Alberto Cavalcanti, *Rien que les heures* (1926)

The city symphony film emerged in the 1920s, when filmmakers were experimenting with the mobility of viewpoint enabled by the portable film camera and more sensitive panchromatic film stock. The city, in particular its interwar technologies of urban transport and machinery, provided the ideal testing ground for the newly sensitive and mobile camera. It demanded to be seen, and shown, in a new mode that for Brazilian director Alberto Cavalcanti, only film could provide.

The city has been an integral part of the filmmaker's vocabulary since cinema's genesis in the late 19th Century. The urban environment and the craft of film grew up together in the 20th Century. This course takes examples of city films from throughout that century and encourages you to investigate the urban contexts and subjectivities explored therein.

The course will run alongside **Urban Scavenger**, in which you will develop and make your own film within a taught theoretical framework. You will be strongly encouraged to bring ideas from one to the other, and to combine critical analysis with practical filmmaking.

Course Objectives

This course encourages you to both theorize and document your own experiences as visitors to London. It is rooted in the historical context of the early 20th Century, using the genre of the city symphony as a prism through which to examine several key features of early cinema, from sound/silence to montage and visual language. It then moves forward in time to consider relevant works by great film thinkers such as Agnes Varda, Harun Farocki, and Thom Andersen.

By looking at the century thematically, with reference to both the theory and practice of urban filmmaking, you will develop a nuanced understanding of the context of cinema in different moments, encouraging you to inform your own practical exercises with a theoretical framework. You will be prepared by the readings, screenings, and discussions on the course to experience the city with a critical and documentary approach, both self-reflexive and observational. You will be required to express your experience and learning through presentations, a film treatment, and a written assignment, and also to reflect it in the film and written report you produce for the **Urban Scavenger** course.

Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of this course, you will be able to:

- 1) Demonstrate an understanding of the cultural and historical contexts of early cinema
- 2) Explore the film theory discourse around montage and sound technologies
- 3) Examine the definitions and limits of the city symphony form with reference to a specific film
- 4) Write a film treatment
- 5) Adopt a theoretical framework for explorations of the city

Methodology

My Education out-of-class activities

The following field trips provided by CAPA will be compulsory for this course:

- Greenwich River Boat Cruise
- East London Street Art Tour

Required Reading / Materials

Background readings are specified for many modules of the course; see the below schedule for these. They will be available as PDFs before the start of term. **You are expected to print out the readings and bring them to class having read them beforehand.** Links to film material available online, or occasionally to DVDs available for loan, may also form part of this preparatory work and you will need to undertake this viewing prior to class. There is an

additional list for optional further reading. For guidance on using copyrighted materials, consult the Pitt Library Film Studies page: <http://pitt.libguides.com/c.php?g=12123&p=64813>

For guidance on correct citations and referencing, consult the Pitt Citation Style Guide: <http://pitt.libguides.com/citationhelp/mla8thedition>

MLA Style is recommended.

Grading

It is vital that students come to class having read the set texts carefully and with ideas to contribute to the discussion. Screenings will be treated as classroom time: attendance is a course requirement.

Grading Rubric

Letter Grade	Score or Percentage	Description
A	93–100	Achievement that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements.
A-	90–92	Achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements.
B+	87–89	
B	83–86	
B-	80–82	Achievement that meets the course requirements in every respect.
C+	77–79	
C	73–76	
C-	70–72	Achievement that is worthy of credit even though it fails to fully meet the course requirements.
D+	67–69	
D	60–66	
F	0–59	Represents failure (or no credit) and signifies that the work was either (1) completed but at a level of achievement that is not worthy of credit or (2) was not completed and there was no agreement between the instructor and the student that the student would be awarded an I.

Summary of How Grades Are Weighted

Assignments	Percentage of Grade	Learning Outcomes (Course Objectives)
Assignment 1—Presentation	20%	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Assignment 2—Film treatment	35%	1, 2, 3, 4
Assignment 3—Essay	35%	1, 2, 3, 5
Attendance and participation	10%	1, 2, 3
Overall grade	100%	

Assessment Details

Assignments will be marked using specification grading. The rubric for written work will be available once assignments are set.

Assignment 1: Presentation (20%)

You will present for 10 minutes (including excerpts) on a 1920s city symphony film of your choice. You will be assessed on your analysis, connection with themes of the course so far, and relevant clip selection.

Assignment 2: Film treatment (35%)

After study of and around the form of the city symphony, you are invited to prepare a treatment for your own city symphony film. Assessment will be based on conceptual coherence, storytelling, and reflection of course themes.

Assignment 3: Written essay (35%) due 30 March

A 2,000-word analysis of one of the films featured on the course, paying attention to montage techniques and their effects. Assessment will be in accordance with the PLFP specification grading rubric.

Course Content

Unit 1

Kino-Eye: Epistemological Aspects of Documentary Cinema

- Russian filmmaker Dziga Vertov's 1923 manifesto sets out a compelling first-person formulation of the film camera's kinetic possibilities.
- We will watch Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) and consider how far he achieved his manifesto's objectives.
- You will be assigned one other city symphony film from the period to research and present on DATE TBD.
- **Reading:**
 - Hicks, Jeremy *Dziga Vertov: Defining Documentary Film*, London: IB Tauris, 2007, pp. 3-8 and pp. 58-70.
- Assignment 1 assigned

Unit 2

Film & the 1920s City

- We will introduce some context for the city symphony films made in the 1920s, and watch Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin, Symphony of a City* (1927).
- **Reading:**
 - Barbara Mennel's "Modernity and the City Film: Berlin" in *Cities and Cinema*, London and New York: Routledge, 2008, pp. 21-45.

Unit 3

Montage: Thought & Affect

- In this session we will study the Soviet School of Montage, thinking about the rhetoric of moving images, signification and the possibility of filmic language. We will also explore differences between montage and editing aiming at continuity and introduce the concept of *découpage*. There will be an editing exercise.
- **Reading:**
 - Aumont, Jacques. *Montage*. Montreal: Caboose, 2013, pp. 32-46.
- **Recommended reading:**
 - Blog by Adam Curtis (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/adamcurtis>)

Unit 4

A City Symphony Canon

- Students and faculty will present on 1920s city symphony films, followed by a discussion of generic conventions.

- **Reading:**
 - Webber, Andrew “Symphony of a City: Motion Pictures and Still Lives in Weimar Berlin” in *Cities in Transition*, eds. Andrew Webber and Emma Wilson, London/New York: Wallflower Press, 2008, pp. 56–71.
- Assignment 1 **due**

Unit 5

London: A City Symphony

- Director Alex Barrett will introduce his new city symphony film about London, with clips, followed by a Q&A session.
- Assignment 2 assigned

Unit 6

The Flâneur

- The essays of Edgar Allan Poe and Virginia Woolf offer exercises in different sensory modes of experiencing the city by wandering its streets. We will look at several filmic interpretations of the flâneur, before exploring the legacy of flânerie in situationism and psychogeography. You will film their own “derive” in the local area.
- **Readings:**
 - Keiller, Patrick. Excerpt from “The Poetic Experience of Townscape and Landscape” *The View from the Train : Cities and Other Landscapes*, 2013, pp. 4-9.
 - Poe, Edgar Allan “The Man of the Crowd,” first published 1840 (<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/poe/manofcro.html>)

Unit 7

Men in the City

- We examine how masculinities are constructed and conveyed in 1990s films and music videos about the city. Inc. London (Patrick Keiller, 1994), La Haine (Mattheiu Kassowitz, 1995).
- Assignment 2 **due**

Unit 8

Women in the City

- With reference to films by Agnes Varda, we consider when, how, and in what mode women have been able to inhabit urban streets. Cleo from 5 to 7 (1962), The Caryatids of Paris (1982).
- **Readings:**

- Elkin, Lauren, “Flâneuse-ing” in *Flâneuse: Women Walk the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice, and London*. London: Vintage, 2016, pp. 3-23.
- Assignment 3 assigned

Unit 9

The “Other” in the City

- To think about being “other” in the city, we look at Alfonso Cuarón’s *Roma* (2018). We analyse its construction of filmic space and how the camera crosses the threshold between public and private, while depicting social divisions and gender difference.

Unit 10

Networked City

- How can we talk about space, place, and connections? A fascination with the networks that enmesh the city has been a hallmark of city symphonies since the 1920s; we consider some more recent reflections of this from D.A. Pennebaker’s *Daybreak Express* (1953) to Harun Farocki’s *Counter Music* (2004).
- **Reading:**
 - Henri Lefebvre *The Production of Space* tr. Donald Nicholson-Smith, Oxford: Blackwell, 1991, pp. 33.

Unit 11

Sound Theory & Practice

- We will consider conventional approaches to sound and voiceover, and a narrative thread in the city symphony film and the documentary form more generally. We’ll watch clips illustrating some of Chion’s listening modes. There will be a practical exercise in sound recording and mixing.
- **Reading:**
 - Chion, Michel “The Three Listening Modes...” in *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen* tr. Claudia Gorbman, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, pp. 25-34.
- Assignment 3 due

Unit 12

“A City Symphony in Reverse”

- We will watch Thom Andersen’s *Los Angeles Plays Itself* (2003) and discuss its genre and mode of analysis.

Unit 13

Global Symphonies

- We watch Godfrey Reggio's *Koyaanisqatsi* (1982) and consider the evolution of the global symphony since then, and its relationship with the city symphony.

Policies

Attendance Policy

Students are expected to be on time and attend all classes while abroad. Many instructors assess both attendance and participation when assigning a final course grade. Attendance alone does not guarantee a positive participation grade; the student should be prepared for class and engage in class discussion. See the on-site syllabus for specific class requirements.

CAPA has a mandatory attendance policy. Student attendance at all classes is required and expected. Attendance is taken at the beginning of every class. The first time a student has an unexcused absence for a class, their grade will not be impacted. The second time a student has an unexcused absence in that class, it will result in a 3 percent reduction of the final grade (for example: an A- [92] will become a B+ [89]). The student will be placed on academic probation at this time. Three unexcused absences per class will result in failure of the course.

Excused Absences

Absences are only excused for medical reasons, for a family emergency or for a religious holiday. To request an excused absence, you must contact excused.absence@capa.org ahead of time with the reason for their absence, otherwise the absence will not be excused. Even if the student knows the absence will not be excused, they should still contact CAPA to inform CAPA they will not be in class. In addition to contacting excused.absence@capa.org, it is the responsibility of the student to contact their instructor and make up any missed assignments.

Class Participation

You need to be committed to full participation in a live community of learners, albeit online in the case of any Globally Networked Learning components, and ensure you attend class and participate fully.

You are expected to participate in all sessions and to participate actively and critically in class discussions: the participation portion of the class will be graded accordingly. You must read assigned reading BEFORE the class and arrive at the session on time.

Participation is a vital part of your grade: you are expected to participate orally in class sessions and in online forums and discussions in a critical and evaluative manner; to interact with the faculty and fellow you with respect and tolerance; and to actively engage in discussion. Derogatory or inflammatory comments about the cultures, perspectives or attitudes of others will not be tolerated.

Statement of Technology

- What technology is required in the course (computer, operating system, software, webcams, internet connectivity, etc.)?

- The use of the following applications or platforms may be required for this course: Canvas, Google Maps, Google Hangouts, Google Slides, Screencast-O-Matic, and Zoom is required in this course.
- It is recommended for you to use a desktop or laptop computer less than six years old with at least 1GB of RAM, and to use the most recent version of Chrome or Firefox with JavaScript enabled. Internet connections should be at least 512kbps.
- Email AcademicAffairs@capa.org regarding any concerns you have about your ability to secure reliable internet access or about any other academic technology needs.
- Any use of technology must be compliant with FERPA.

Academic Accommodations

Any student who feels they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a physical, psychological, medical, or learning disability should contact Academic Affairs at their earliest convenience at academicaffairs@capa.org. Students requesting Accommodations must have their home institution's Disabilities Services or an appropriate licensed professional or healthcare provider submit official documentation directly to CAPA in a timely manner outlining their specific needs. If the documentation is submitted by a provider other than the home institution's Disabilities Services, it must be someone familiar with the history and functional limitations of the student's disability (not a relative or family member of the student). Any required accommodations will be approved by CAPA's Vice President for Academic Affairs, in consultation with relevant Academic Directors, before being relayed to faculty. Any student who requires an accommodation based on official documentation should also discuss their needs directly with their instructor.

Sexual Misconduct, Required Reporting, & Title IX

CAPA: The Global Education Network is committed to encouraging a safe and healthy environment at our seven CAPA centers. This commitment includes the understanding of, and applicable adherence to, the guidelines outlined in Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. Title IX necessitates that US universities provide equity in all educational programs and activities without sex discrimination. CAPA understands the implications of Title IX compliance for our institutional partners and thus endeavors to support this compliance as a vital aspect of partnership. The safety and security of all students during a program is a matter of crucial importance to CAPA. To facilitate this, CAPA encourages you to openly disclose any and all information that is Title IX relevant so that CAPA staff can provide support and connect you with appropriate resources. Because you may not understand the implications of Title IX abroad, CAPA will work to advise you about the resources available through Title IX and explain the importance of compliance in Title IX reporting. CAPA will work to build student confidence in CAPA's status as a mandated reporter by outlining the advantage of disclosure for the student, reassuring them that any information disclosed will not be used in an inappropriate manner, and stressing that individuals will only be informed on a need-to-know basis.

Late Submission

Late submission of papers, projects, journal entries, pieces of homework and portfolios is only permitted with prior approval. A request for an extension must be made to the relevant faculty member no later than two days prior to the due date. Late submission without prior approval will result in a 3 percent per day deduction of the final grade. In either case, work cannot be submitted after feedback has been provided to the rest of the class on the relevant assessment or one week after the due date whichever comes first, after which point a grade of "0" will be given for the assessment.

Behavior During Examinations

During examinations, you must do your own work. Unless specifically instructed by the lecturer or instructor, accessing online resources of any kind is not permitted, nor may you compare papers, copy from others, or collaborate in any way. Any failure to abide by examination rules will result in failure of the exam and may lead to failure of the course and disciplinary action.

Examinations

These may take place in timed format, with all students required to undertake the exam together in a limited time, or in an open "take home" format, where a prompt will be provided in advance by faculty and you will be given a certain number of hours to complete their work. Exam questions will be made available in CANVAS at a certain time and will be removed at the end of the scheduled time. You will write your answers directly in CANVAS or as an MS Word.doc, as required by the instructor. Where an MS Word document is required, these must be uploaded by the student via Turnitin in CANVAS by the end of the scheduled time.

University of Minnesota Policies & Procedures

Academic integrity is essential to a positive teaching and learning environment. All students enrolled in University courses are expected to complete coursework responsibilities with fairness and honesty. Failure to do so by seeking unfair advantage over others or misrepresenting someone else's work as your own can result in disciplinary action. The University Student Conduct Code defines scholastic dishonesty as follows:

Scholastic Dishonesty

Scholastic dishonesty means plagiarizing; cheating on assignments or examinations; engaging in unauthorized collaboration on academic work; taking, acquiring, or using test materials without faculty permission; submitting false or incomplete records of academic achievement; acting alone or in cooperation with another to falsify records or to obtain dishonestly grades, honors, awards, or professional endorsement; altering forging, or misusing a University academic record; or fabricating or falsifying data, research procedures, or data analysis.

Within this course, a student responsible for scholastic dishonesty can be assigned a penalty up to and including an “F” or “N” for the course. If you have any questions regarding the expectations for a specific assignment or exam, ask.

Student Conduct

The University of Minnesota has specific policies concerning student conduct. This information can be found [on the Learning Abroad Center website](#).