

Children's Cinema: Journeys, Dreams, and Wondrous Worlds

From the French New Wave to the post-Revolutionary cinema of Iran, it is well known that filmmakers across the globe have often focused on the perspectives or stories of children to shed light on the struggles, joys, and mundane (turned exhilarating) moments of everyday life. Films focusing on children approach life from a “smaller” or differently illuminated scale than that of the adult subject, sometimes focusing on cycles of growth, while other times exposing the viewer to experiences, journeys, and imaginative worlds otherwise lost to adult realities. The figure of the child is said to embody humanist values, representing a certain messianic virtue, which both brings hope for the future while also carrying its burden. As we navigate this course we will think about point of view, narrative structure, pacing and temporality, as well as the visual and aesthetic coordinates of childhood, and what this opens up for the world of the imagination, cinematic and otherwise. How do children’s perspectives allow filmmakers to approach large-scale socio-political questions through the smaller-scale perspectives of the child as subject? What do children’s ways of seeing the world offer in a society that often marginalizes or undervalues these perspectives? Films about children range in style from slow cinema to wondrous, or dreamy adventures. How do films about children challenge fast-paced or Hollywood conceptions of time and action? What imaginative, experiential, and aesthetic registers do films about children create? How does the child subject affect the cinematographic gaze of the filmmaker? How do we think about the meaning of words like “child-like” or “childish” in the context of the small wisdoms we encounter in cinema about children? The experiences of children and childhood will be examined in parallel to the conflicts unveiled in each film, from war and poverty to familial and internal struggles as a meditation on the experience of growth, but also outside of this temporal trajectory, as part of the particular sensory unfolding of each film. Through a careful examination of the child in film, the class will hone in on representations of local and global cultural contexts in the universal experience of childhood.

Requirements and Grades

30% Film Close Reading Assignments
10% Final Paper Outline (1-2 pages)
30% Final Paper, Final Draft (5-7 pages)
30% Attendance and Participation

Class Format

This is a discussion-based seminar and your participation is key to your success in the course. Class time will give you an opportunity to explore ideas and questions about our texts freely before you give those ideas structure and coherence in your essays. You should arrive at each class ready to discuss that day’s reading: generally, this will mean that you’ve not only done the reading, but also marked the text with questions and observations. (For films, you should plan to take notes during the screenings.) In addition to talking about the course texts, we’ll also have regular writing workshops and peer review sessions.

Assignments

1. Film Journals

You are required to submit a total of 10 film journals, which will entail two parts. The first part will be your initial response to the film. This can include a synopsis and brief description of the film as well as some of the cinematic elements you found intriguing. The second part of the film journal will be the pondered response where you will include analysis of the film, especially anything you came to after our collective discussion. In this section, your writing should be more focused and should focus on aesthetics, genre, politics, or any other thematic question that emerges for you. Comparative approaches are acceptable; you may choose to write about films, literature, or theoretical texts we've covered in class. Outside research is not a requirement for the journal.

2. Visual Analysis Assignment

At the end of the first week of class, you will practice some of the terms you've learned from the film glossary to conduct a 900 word analysis of a film still or scene. You will describe the scene (what was going on at that point of the film, what went on before and after) and focus on the visual/aesthetic and cinematographic elements. What is the camera doing? Is it a close-up or wide angle shot? What is the pace or rhythm of the scene? How does the sound of this scene affect what's going on? You will tie one of these visual elements to the larger theme of the narrative to construct a visual analysis of the scene. Post on the discussion board so that the rest of the class can read and respond to your insights. Due by Friday, July 10th at 5 pm PST.

3. Research Paper

Due date: Aug 8th at 5 pm.

Length: 5-7 pages.

The research paper is intended to encourage further research on one or more aspects of the filmmakers or films we've covered throughout the course. The topic should be relevant to the course objectives and content, however you do not need to focus on the perspectives of children if there is another theme that has compelled you. Your selected paper topic should be discussed with me during office hours. Students are encouraged to send an abstract, one or two paragraphs, to the instructor in advance.

Attendance and Participation

Participation is a vital part of this course; while there will be occasional lectures and presentations, your active participation is a key component to the success of the class! Please come to class prepared to share observations and questions on the films and texts we encounter.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism isn't just copying or buying an entire paper or writing exercise from another student; plagiarism is also copying paragraphs, sentences, or ideas without credit; "quoting without quotation marks"; cutting and pasting (whether from another essay or from a reference work like Wikipedia); or

otherwise passing off the thoughts, words, and/or ideas of others as your own, consciously or unconsciously. **All plagiarized work will receive a failing grade.**

Accommodations

If you need (or think you might need) disability-related accommodations in this class, please get in touch with the Disabled Students Program; DSP will then send me a letter explaining what you need. If you have medical information you would like to share, or if you need special arrangements for your learning experience, please let us know and I will do my best to adjust the course based on your learning needs.

Other related films:

Michael Haneke *The White Ribbon*
Pan's Labyrinth, Guillermo Del Toro
Cinema Paradiso, Giuseppe Tornatore
Fanny and Alexander, Ingmar Bergman
Amarcord, Federico Fellini (1973)
The Wizard of Oz
Blue Bird (1940)

Realism and Rebellion

Unit 1: Week 1

Monday: Introduction, Discuss Jean Vigo, *Zero for Conduct* (1933)

Tues: Vittorio de Sica, *Bicycle Thieves* (1948)

Weds: Readings:

- From André Bazin's *What is Cinema*, read from "An Aesthetic of Reality: Neorealism" (pages 47-60, section entitled: "Bicycle Thief")

Thursday: François Truffaut, *The 400 Blows* (1959)

Readings:

- From *Truffaut on Cinema*: Read Interviews with Truffaut on "Childhood" and "1959: The 400 Blows"

Visual Analysis Assignment Due Friday, by 5pm

Travels and Travails

Week 2

Mon: Satyajit Ray, *Pather Panchali* (1955)

Tues: Abbas Kiarostami, *The Traveller* (1974) and *Bread and Alley* (1970)

Readings:

- Alberto Elena's *The Cinema of Abbas Kiarostami* (Chapter 1 and 2, link provided below) <https://archive.org/details/cinemaofabbaskia0000elen/page/n321/mode/2up>
- Andrew Sarris' "Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962," (pdf in files)

Weds: Abbas Kiarostami, *Where is the Friend's Home?* (1987)

Readings:

- "Children, Narrative, and Third Cinema In Iran and Syria" by Jerry White (pdf in files)
- Reading of Sohrab Sepehri's poem "Where is the Friend's Home?" (pdf in files)

- Siegfried Kracauer, “Time and History” (pdf in files)

Thurs: Amir Naderi, *The Runner* (1984)

Power and Childhood

Week 3

Mon:

Tues: Abbas Kiarostami, *Homework* (1989)

Weds: One on one meetings

Thurs: Charlie Chaplin's *The Kid* (1921) and Yasujiro Ozu, *I Was Born But* (1932)

Readings:

- From *The Cinema of Ozu Yasujiro: Histories of the Everyday* (Read Chapter 1: Early Ozu)

The Humanist Child

Week 4

Mon:

Tues: Majid Majidi, *Children of Heaven* (1997)

Readings:

- From Richard Tapper's *The New Iranian Cinema*, Chapter 12 (Hamid Reza Sadr), “Children in Contemporary Iranian Cinema: When We Were Children”
- From Michelle Langford's *Allegory in Iranian Cinema: The Aesthetics of Poetry and Resistance*, Chapter 2, “The Allegorical Children of Iranian Cinema”

Weds: One on one meetings

Thurs: Kore-eda, *Nobody Knows* (2004)

Readings:

- Gertrud Koch and Miriam Hansen, “Béla Balázs: The Physiognomy of Things” (pdf in files)

Languages of Childhood

Week 5

Mon: Bahram Beyzai, *Bashu, The Little Stranger* (1989)

Tues: Makhmalbaf, *The Silence* (1998) and Djibril Diop Mambéty, *The Little Girl Who Sold the Sun* (1999)

Readings:

- Béla Balázs, “Theory of the Film: Sound” (pdf in files)
- Vlad Dima, “Aural Narrative Planes in Djibril Diop Mambéty's Films” (pdf in files)

Weds: Required Individual Office Hours to Discuss Final Paper Outlines (Sign up for 20 min meeting)

Thurs: Ozu, *Good Morning* (1959)

Readings:

- From *The Cinema of Ozu Yasujiro: Histories of the Everyday* (read chapter 5: Late Ozu)
- <https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2017/07/19/where-farts-come-in/>

Childhood and Fantasy

Week 6

Mon: Akira Kurosawa, *Dreams* (1990)

Tues: Hayao Miyazaki, *Spirited Away* (2001)

Weds: Read Sianne Ngai, “The Cuteness of the Avant-Garde”

Thurs: Sean Baker, *The Florida Project* (2017)

- Readings:

<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2017/nov/02/sean-baker-florida-project-kids-kings-and-queens-their-domain>