

IMLR Research Training Programme: Visual and Performing Arts

Film Theory and its Applications

Recommended General Introductions to the Field:

1. Robert Stam, *Film Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000). An accessible chronological survey of the major developments in film theory from the late 19th century to 2000.
2. Felicity Coleman (ed.), *Film Theory and Philosophy: The Key Thinkers* (Durham: Acumen, 2009). A collection of essays on 32 key thinkers.
3. Edward Branigan and Warren Buckland (eds.), *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Film Theory* (London: Routledge, 2013). A reference work that explores key concepts in film theory since the beginning of the 20th century.

What is Film Theory?

1. 'Contemporary' Film Theory
2. Classical Film Theory
3. Early Film Theory
4. Three Neglected Traditions:
 - (i) Women Critics/Theorists
 - (ii) Experimental Cinema as Direct Theory
 - (iii) The Filmmaker-Theorist Tradition

1. 'CONTEMPORARY' FILM THEORY

1960s-1970s: Film as Language

(i) Semiotics

Examples:

- (a) Christian Metz, *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974)
- (b) Raymond Bellour, *Analysis of Film* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000). First published in French in 1979.

(ii) Marxism

Example: Jean-Louis Comolli and Jean Narboni, 'Cinema/Ideology/Criticism', in Bill Nichols (ed.), *Movies and Methods*, vol 1, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), pp. 22-30. First published in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, 216, October 1969.

(iii) Psychoanalysis

Examples:

- (a) Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982). First published in 1977.
- (b) Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, 16/3, Autumn 1975, pp. 6-18.

1980s: Reactions against 'Grand Theory'

(i) Critique of the 'Psycho-Semiotic-Marxists'

Example: Noël Carroll, *Mystifying Movies: Fads and Fallacies in Contemporary Film Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988)

(ii) The New Cinema History

Example: Robert Allen and Douglas Gomery, *Film History: Theory and Practice* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1985)

(iii) Cognitive Psychology

Example: Richard Allen and Murray Smith (eds.), *Film Theory and Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997)

1990s to the present: The Pluralisation of Film Theory

(i) Post-Colonial Theory

Example: Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism* (London: Routledge, 1994)

(ii) Feminist Theory:

Examples:

- (a) Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1993)
- (b) Shohini Chaudhuri, *Feminist Film Theorists: Laura Mulvey, Kaja Silverman, Teresa de Lauretis, Barbara Creed* (London: Routledge, 2006)

(iii) Queer Theory

Example: Ellis Hanson (ed.), *Out Takes: Essays on Queer Theory and Film* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999)

(iv) Genre Theory

Example: Raphaëlle Moine, *Cinema Genre* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008)

(v) Digital Theory

Examples:

- (a) Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001)
- (b) Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (London: Reaktion, 2006)

(vi) Sound Theory

Examples:

- (a) Rick Altman, *Sound Theory, Sound Practice* (London: Routledge, 1992)
- (b) Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994)

(vii) Film Philosophy

Examples:

- (a) Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image* and *Cinema 2: The Time Image* (London: Continuum, 2005). First published in French in 1983 and 1985 respectively. (For an introduction to Deleuze's film philosophy, see Richard Rushton, *Cinema After Deleuze* (New York: Continuum, 2012).)
- (b) Jacques Rancière, *Film Fables* (Oxford: Berg, 2006). First published in French in 2001.
- (c) Daniel Frampton, *Filmosophy* (London: Wallflower, 2006)
- (d) *Film-Philosophy* journal: <http://www.film-philosophy.com/index.php/f-p>

2. 'CLASSICAL' FILM THEORY

Exemplar: André Bazin and Realist Film Theory

Key text: André Bazin, 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image', in André Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, trans. Timothy Barnard (Montreal: Caboose, 2009), pp. 3-12. First published in 1945.

Further Reading:

- (i) André Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, trans. Timothy Barnard (Montreal: Caboose, 2009)
- (ii) André Bazin, *Bazin at Work: Major Essays and Reviews from the 1940s and 1950s* (London: Routledge, 1997)
- (iii) Dudley Andrew, *What Cinema Is!* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010)
- (iv) Dudley Andrew, with Hervé Joubert-Laurencin (eds.), *Opening Bazin: Postwar Film Theory and Its Afterlife* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011)

3. 'EARLY' FILM THEORY

Three major early theorists:

1. Boleslaw Matuszewski: Cinema as a New Source of History

Example: Boleslaw Matuszewski, 'A New Source of History', in *A New Source of History and Animated Photography: What it is, What it should be* (Warsaw: Filmoteka Narodowa, 1999), pp. 25-30. First published in 1898.

2. Hugo Münsterberg: the Psychology of the Photoplay

Example: Allan Langdale (ed.), *Hugo Münsterberg on Film. The Photoplay: A Psychological Study and Other Writings* (London: Routledge, 2002). First published in 1916.

3. Jean Epstein: ‘Photogénie’

Example: Jean Epstein, ‘On Certain Characteristics of *Photogénie*’, in Sarah Keller and Jason N. Paul, *Jean Epstein: New Translations and Critical Essays* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), pp. 292-296.

(<http://dare.uva.nl/document/361589>) First published in 1924.

Further Reading:

- (i) Richard Abel, *French Film Theory and Criticism 1907-1939*, vols 1 and 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).
- (ii) Christophe Wall-Romana, *Jean Epstein: Corporeal Cinema and Film Philosophy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013)

4. NEGLECTED TRADITIONS

(i) Women Critics/Theorists

Antonia Lunt (ed.), *Red Velvet Seat: Women’s Writings on the First Fifty Years of Cinema* (London: Verso, 2006)

(ii) Filmmaker-Theorists

Examples: Dziga Vertov, Sergei Eisenstein, Jean Epstein, Germaine Dulac, Louis Delluc, Hollis Frampton, Jean Cocteau, Robert Bresson, Jean-Luc Godard...

Further Reading:

- (i) Jacques Aumont, *Les Théories des Cinéastes* (Paris: Nathan, 2002)
- (ii) Michael Witt, *Jean-Luc Godard, Cinema Historian* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013)

(iii) Experimental Cinema as Direct Theory / Audiovisual Film Theory

Examples: Gustav Deutsch, Ken Jacobs, Rose Lowder, Matthias Müller, Al Razutis, Martin Arnold...

Further Reading:

- (i) Edward Small, *Direct Theory: Experimental Film/Video as Major Genre* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1994)
- (ii) Christian Keathley and Jason Mittell, *The Videographic Essay: Criticism in Sound and Image* (Montreal: Caboose, 2016)
- (iii) Thomas Van den Berg and Miklós Kiss, *Film Studies in Motion: From Audiovisual Essay to Academic Research Video* (Scalar, 2016: <http://scalar.usc.edu/works/film-studies-in-motion/index>)