



LNDN FILM 3311
Contemporary British Film

CAPA LONDON PROGRAM

Course Description

The 1990s and 2000s saw the British film industry undergo a number of dramatic changes. From an all-time low at the end of 1980s, during the early 1990s British cinema entered a period of confidence and success that was mirrored by a major structural and financial reorganization. Important new directors and actors emerged as a new generation of film-makers began to redefine longstanding British cinema traditions such as horror, comedy and social realism, refashioning them for the contemporary political and social world.

The course will look at some key British films from the mid-1990s to the present. Through the critical study of key films the course will examine the way that these films both emerge from and transform the earlier British cinema tradition, and provide accounts of key British genres and film-making tropes.

Readings will focus on the critical reception of the films and the manner in which they have been absorbed into the canon and, in the case of more recent films that have not yet established a place in the critical literature, examine reviews and reception. There will also be particular focus on the political and social context of the films.

NB. The course will begin with the most recent films first, and move backwards.

Course Aims

All students should have developed basic skills in analyzing film texts. They should also develop a good grasp of long- and short-term trends and themes in British cinema, to the extent that these trends are expressed in recent films. Students will also gain insight on the way that British films reflect and respond to contemporary social and political conditions and event. Students will gain an understanding of key genres in British film, and be aware of some key points in which UK film differs from US film.

Requirements and Prerequisites

There are no special requirements or prerequisites for this course.

Learning Outcomes

Students will leave the course with a clear sense of the particularities of modern British film, having gained a good grasp of recent developments in British cinema. They will have developed an enhanced set of analytic skills for the interpretation of moving images, and have sharpened their ability to view the formal, visual and narrative aspect of a film critically and imaginatively. They will be able to

- a) analyse a film in terms of both filmic content and social context
- b) identify areas where critical analysis is required with regard to a given film
- c) apply various research methods and communicate their findings to a group
- d) give productive critical feedback to their peers
- e) analyse and criticise arguments and theories
- f) learn how to research toward mastering an academic or historical field.

Developmental Outcomes

Students should demonstrate: responsibility & accountability, independence & interdependence, goal orientation, self-confidence, resilience, appreciation of differences.

Students should develop confidence in expressing critical thoughts and imaginative ideas, and should be unafraid to speak their thoughts openly and without conviction and certainty.

Class Methodology

Each class held within the classroom will feature an introduction to the film by one or more students, a film viewing, a student response by one or more students, and then conclude with a class discussion centered on the week's readings with reference to the viewed film. Classes may be broken up into small groups for focussed discussion, depending on time constraints. The course instructor will open each class with a discussion of the class's main theme.

Field Components

CAPA provides the unique opportunity to learn about the city through direct, guided experience. Participation in field activities for this course is required. You will actively explore the Global City in which you are currently living. Furthermore, you will have the chance to collect useful information that will be an invaluable resource for the essays/papers/projects assigned in this course.

Required field component:

BFI Southbank Mediatheque & Reuben Library
http://www.bfi.org.uk/whatson/bfi_southbank/mediatheque
BFI Southbank
Belvedere Road
South Bank
London SE1 8XT

The BFI Mediatheque at the BFI Southbank centre is a unique way for students to explore the heritage of British film and the vast collections of the BFI National Film Archive. In a specially constructed room, numerous individual viewing stations can be used to view hundreds of British films and television programmes selected from the archives, and visitors can search and view in their own time. The Mediatheque offers an unprecedented glimpse in the moving image history of Britain, and the great majority of the films available to view cannot be seen anywhere else. A session selecting and viewing films at the visitors leisure is not only fascinating, and but significantly aids in the comprehension of the cinematic and televisual past, and will put the Contemporary British Film course in historical perspective.

Students may visit the Mediatheque alone or in groups, at any time during the course. However, it is recommended that they visit toward the end of the course, when they have already seen a variety of films, and can usefully use the trip as research for their final paper. The Reuben Library is housed in the same area of the BFI Southbank, and so this is an ideal chance for a research trip.

Students are expected to complete a 500 word assessment of their visit, to be submitted by Week 14 (see below, 'Assessment').

Other suggested field trips:

Students are expected to go to the cinema as regularly as they can during the course, either to see new releases or older pictures. They will be expected to make a special effort to see new British films that are on general release, and will be asked to comment critically on new British films they have seen with relation to themes that arise during the course. If there are films of particular interest, the course leader will notify the class. Students are also strongly encouraged to participate in co-curricular program activities, among which the following are suggested:

Visit the Cinema Museum
<http://www.cinemamuseum.org.uk/>

2 Dugard Way, London SE11 4TH

Tel.: +44 (0)20 7840 2200

Email: info@cinemamuseum.org.uk

Youtube channel: <http://www.youtube.com/user/CinemaMuseum>

The Cinema Museum houses a broad variety of material relating to cinema and film history, ranging from throwaway ephemera to camera hardware and cinema fittings. The museum is a great destination for anyone interested in film, and students should view their visit as providing materials for understanding the broad history of cinema as a social and economic practice as well as an art form. NB The Cinema Museum is only open to visitors by appointment by email or phone, and must be booked at least 24 hours in advance. All visitors are given a guided tour. Entry & tour fee is Adults £7, concessions £5.

Catch a movie at the BFI IMAX cinema BFI

IMAX

1 Charlie Chaplin Walk

South Bank

Waterloo

London SE1 8XR

http://www.bfi.org.uk/whatson/bfi_imax

Student prices begin at £10.50, but there are various price bands.

The BFI IMAX boasts Britain's largest screen, and shows both specially produced IMAX and 3D films, and also mainstream releases in IMAX formats. Students should understand the IMAX as part of a continuum of novel cinema technologies that stretches back to the earliest days of film exhibition. Since the introduction of affordable television sets in the post-war era, cinema exhibitors and film producers have sought to provide cinema experiences that would compete against the small screen. The IMAX is a recent development, but it has a heritage in the Cinerama system of the 1950s, and modern day 3-D is also the descendant of a post-TV film industry. Catching a film on the imposing IMAX screen is an experience that can be critically related to the history of cinema that is displayed at the Cinema Museum.

Attend a film screening as part of the Tate gallery's film programme. Tate

Modern

Bankside

London SE1 9TG

www.tate.org.uk/modern

<http://www.tate.org.uk/modern/eventseducation/film/>

The Tate Modern gallery in Bankside offers an ongoing programme of screenings that both highlight films about specific artists, and also brings to light a much less well-travelled road of film production than the mainstream cinema – the artist's film. This huge area of film production stretches back to the very beginnings of film as a medium, and continues to be a source of exciting and challenging pieces. Tate's programme often contains rare films that are rarely screened anywhere and frequently includes titles and pieces that have never been shown in the UK.

Assessment/Grading Policy

Descriptor	Alpha	UK	US	GPA
Excellent	A	75+	93+	4.0
	A-	70-74	90-92	3.7
Good	B+	66-69	87-89	3.3
	B	63-65	83-86	3.0
	B-	60-62	80-82	2.7
Average	C+	56-59	77-79	2.3
	C	53-55	73-76	2.0
Below Average / Poor	C-	50-52	70-72	1.7
	D+	46-49	67-69	1.3
	D	40-45	60-66	0.7 1.0
Fail	F	<40	<60	0

Grade Breakdown and Assessment of Learning Outcomes

Assessment Task	Grade %	Learning Outcomes	Due Date
Class participation/ Small group discussion	10%	a, b, c, d	Weekly
Field visit paper	10%	b., c.	Week 14
Mid- term Paper	30%	a, b, c, e	Week 7
Final Paper	50%	c, d, e	Week 14

Assignments

Students are expected to produce two papers, one short (800-1200 words) and one long (2500-3500 words). The short paper must take one of the films already viewed as its subject. The long paper may take as its subject any aspect of British cinema during the period covered by the course. See below for specific brief. The final grade is also based on class participation. All students will be expected to make short, informal presentations at least once during the term, which will contribute to the participation grade, but contributions to classroom discussion are also required for this part of the grade. The field visit paper will preferably be a report on the BFI Mediatheque visit, but reports on the co-curricular activities suggested above are also potentially acceptable.

Short Paper (800- 1200 words)

The first, short paper must take as its subject one of the films that the class has watched. Students may focus on any aspect of the film that interests them, and must discuss it critically. *References are not required, nor are they proscribed: in this paper students are encouraged to think independently and write an analysis without limiting their imaginative engagement with the film.* They may focus on formal cinematography, character development, plot, direction, acting, even a single shot, or single frame. Students are encouraged to think openly, and papers are marked according to the quality of ideas regarding the chosen subject, clarity and detail of observation, and coherence of critical analysis. Students are given detailed written feedback on this paper with their mark. The paper is an exercise in independent film analysis, without a strictly academic requirement for references, and it is intended to allow students who may not have written critically about film an open space in which to explore ways of thinking and writing about the subject.

Long Paper (2500- 3500 words)

The longer paper is also an open assignment, and students are encouraged to select their own subjects. They may select any area of the general subject – modern British film – that is of interest to them, and are not limited to films that have been watched in class. However, it is recommended that they use films viewed in class as a starting point. It is possible to restrict the subject to a single film, as in the first paper, but in this paper students are also encouraged to go beyond the restricted remit of the first paper and to think more broadly – they may, for instance, examine the work of a director across several films; compare films on similar subjects or with similar themes; present a close or comparative analysis of formal or thematic features in a given film or films; and so on. **THIS PAPER REQUIRES ACADEMIC REFERENCING AND EVIDENCE OF INDEPENDENT RESEARCH.** Students are *strongly recommended* to use the Reuben Library at the BFI Southbank. All students are required to attend an individual tutorial to confirm and discuss their chosen subject.

NB: IF STUDENTS WOULD PREFER SET QUESTIONS TO OPEN ASSIGNMENTS, QUESTIONS CAN BE PROVIDED ON REQUEST

FIELD STUDY (10%)

Mediatheque visit & review (500 Words)

A short critical review of the students self-guided visit to the BFI Mediatheque. The visit and report are required components of the course.

CLASS PARTICIPATION

Students must participate by contributing to group and small group discussions, and by informally presenting at least one film to the class. 10% of the grade is given for participation: a mark of the full 10% is only awarded to students who make regular and constructive contributions to class and small group discussion.

Students must complete all required components for each course by the established deadlines. Failure to do so will result in a reduction of the course grade and may result in a grade of F for the course in question.

Recommended Reading(s):

STUDENTS ARE STRONGLY ENCOURAGED TO VISIT THE BFI SOUTHBANK REUBEN LIBRARY

All the print texts for the course can be found on open access at the BFI Southbank Reuben library, which is completely free, and very pleasant to work in. It is *essential* that students use this resource.

BFI Southbank
Belvedere Road
South Bank
London SE1 8XT
<http://www.bfi.org.uk/education-research/bfi-reuben-library>

Core suggested readings

Murphy, Robert ed. *British Cinema of the 90s* (BFI, 2000)
Dyja, Eddie *Studying British Cinema: the 1990s* (Leighton Buzzard: Auteur, 2010)
Fitzgerald, John *Studying British Cinema 1999-2009* (Leighton Buzzard: Auteur, 2010)

Weekly Course Schedule

Session by session breakdown of films to be covered, readings, assignments and deadlines:

Week 1 .

Under The Skin (Jonathan Glazer, 2013)

Guardian interview with Jonathan Glazer

<http://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/mar/06/under-the-skin-director-jonathan-glazer-scarlett-johansson>

Kermode, Mark, review, *The Observer*

<http://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/mar/16/under-the-skin-review-jonathan-glazer-singular-vision>

Wigley, Samuel, [BFI.org](http://www.bfi.org) review

<http://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/reviews-recommendations/film-week-under-skin>

Interview with sound designer Mica Levi:

<http://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/interviews/away-picture-mica-levi-her-under-skin-soundtrack>

Week 2 .

A Field In England (Ben Wheatley, 2013)

<http://www.afieldinengland.com>

Review, Peter Bradshaw

<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2013/jul/04/a-field-in-england-review>

Interview, Ben Wheatley

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bgwnIM4qpEU>

Ben Wheatley, Digital Masterclass

<http://www.afieldinengland.com/masterclass/>

McKim, Joel 'The Digital Anachronisms of Ben Wheatley's *A Field in England*' *Critical Quarterly*, 58: 46–51.

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/crqi.12259/full>

Week 3 .

Locke (Steven Knight, 2013)

Mekado Murphy, 'A road movie, but with no rest stops'

<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/27/movies/locke-with-tom-hardy-is-a-minimalist-vehicle.html>

Jonathan Romney, review, *The Guardian*

<http://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/apr/20/locke-tom-hardy-review>

Week 4 . Assignment of Mid-Term Paper

Twelve Years a Slave (Steve McQueen, 2013)

There is a huge amount of review and interview literature online about this film. Students are advised to browse widely but critically. Reading Solomon Northup's original text of the same title is also suggested for those wishing to write about this movie.

Interview with Steve McQueen *Interview* magazine: <http://www.interviewmagazine.com/film/steve-mcqueen-1/#page2>

Interview with Steve McQueen, *The Guardian*, <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/jan/04/steve-mcqueen-my-painful-childhood-shame>

Woods, Michael, review, *London Review of Books* <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v36/n03/michael-wood/at-the-movies>

Week 5

Four Lions (Chris Morris, 2010)

Chris Morris is amongst the greatest satirists working today, and students are strongly suggested to look online at his earlier work including *Brass Eye*, *Nathan Barley*, and *The Day Today*.

Chris Morris interview:

<http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2010/may/01/chris-morris-four-lions-interview>

Nick Fraser 'How Chris Morris fixed his eye on ideology and bombers'

<http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2010/jan/24/chris-morris-four-lions>

Shelina Zahra Janmohamed 'Can Terror be Funny?'

http://www.patheos.com/blogs/altmuslim/2010/05/can_terror_be_funny/

Chris Morris biography:

<http://www.screenonline.org.uk/people/id/1392135/index.html>

Week 6 .

Mid- Term Paper Due

Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy (Tomas Alfredson, 2011)

Hitchens, Peter 'Tinker Tailor Soldier Travesty', *Mail Online*, available at

<http://hitchensblog.mailonsunday.co.uk/2011/09/tinker-tailor-soldier-travesty.html>

Bradshaw, Peter, review, *The Guardian*, available at <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2011/sep/15/tinker-tailor-soldier-spy-film-review>

Week 7

BREAK WEEK

Week 8

Fish Tank (Andrea Arnold, 2009)

Mullen, Lisa 'Estate of Mind' & Roddick, Nick 'Do we know where we're going?' *Sight and Sound* v19 n10 Oct 2009 pp.16-20

Kemp, Philip 'Fish Tank' review *Sight and Sound* v19 n10 Oct 2009 pp.59-60

Week 9 .

This is England (Shane Meadows, 2006)

Fitzgerald, John *Studying British Cinema 1999-2009* (Leighton Buzzard: Auteur, 2010) 'Shane Meadows: a breed apart' pp. 125-136

Sinker, Mark 'Control; Joe Strummer: The Future is Unwritten; This is England' *Film Quarterly* v61 n2 winter 2007-08 pp.22-9

Savage, Jon 'New Boots and Rants' *Sight and Sound* v17 n5 May 2007 pp. 38-42

Felperin, Leslie 'This is England' review *Sight and Sound* v17 n5 May 2007 p.84

Week 10 .

Touching the Void (Kevin Mac Donald, 2003)

Bruzzi, Stella *New Documentary* (second edition) pp. 245-51 (Routledge: 2006)

French, Philip, review, *The Observer*, available at

<http://www.theguardian.com/film/2003/dec/14/philipfrench>

Week 11 .

Dirty Pretty Things (Stephen Frears, 2002)

Lucia, Cynthia 'The Complexities of Cultural Change: an Interview with Steven Frears' *Cinéaste* v28 n4 2003 pp.8-15

Sinclair, Iain 'Heartsnatch Hotel' *Sight and Sound* v12 n12 Dec 2002, pp.32-4

Fitzgerald, John *Studying British Cinema 1999-2009* (Leighton Buzzard: Auteur, 2010) pp.93-5 and pp.101-6

Roddick, Nick 'Dirty Pretty Things' review *Sight and Sound* v12 n12 Dec 2002, p45

Week 12 .

Individual Tutorials: Assignment of main paper (2500-3500 words)

Slots for individual tutorials to be decided with tutor. This is a chance for you to discuss any questions you have, and to settle on a subject for your final paper.

Week 13 .

Secrets and Lies (Mike Leigh, 1996)

Welsh, Jean 'Secrets and Lies', pp.219-24 in *Fifty Key British Films* Barrow and White eds., (Routledge: 2008)

Whitehead, Tony "'Welcome to the family": *Secrets and Lies*', pp.114-33 in *Mike Leigh* (Manchester University Press: 2007)

Week 14 .

Long paper deadline

Film: TBC

Attendance, Participation & Student Responsibilities

Attendance: CAPA has a mandatory attendance policy. Attendance is taken at the beginning of every class. Unauthorized absence from class will result in a reduction of the final grade and potentially a failure for the course.

Missing classes for medical reasons: If you need to miss a class for medical reasons or for a family emergency, you must send an e-mail to let the Associate Director of Academic Affairs (ADAA) know at least one hour in advance of your class or meeting at the following e-mail: excused.absence@capa.org. Note that calling the CAPA Centre (0207 370 7389) is acceptable only if you do not temporarily have access to the internet. An e-mail is still required as quickly as you can get access to the internet again. You will need to provide evidence of the reason for your absence. Unexcused absences will result in a grade reduction. In the event of a missed class or field trip, it is your responsibility to contact your instructor and make up any missed assignments.

Class Participation: Students are expected to participate actively and critically in class discussions, and the participation portion of the class will be graded accordingly. Students must read assignments BEFORE the class, and come in on time. Participation is a vital part of your grade: students are expected to participate orally in seminars and in online forums and discussions in a critical and evaluative manner; to interact with the faculty and fellow students with respect and tolerance; and to actively engage in discussion. Derogatory or inflammatory comments about the cultures, perspectives or attitudes of others in the class will not be tolerated.

Academic Integrity: A high level of responsibility and academic honesty is expected. Because the value of an academic course depends upon the absolute integrity of the work done by the student, it is imperative that a student demonstrates a high standard of individual honor in his or her scholastic work and class behavior. Plagiarism and cheating will result in dismissal from the program. See the Handbook of CAPA Academic Policies for more information and resources on plagiarism.

Use of electronic equipment in class: All devices such as laptops, i-pods, i-pads, netbooks, notebooks and tablets, smartphones, cell phones, etc. are NOT allowed unless you have express permission from the faculty or you have been instructed to do so. If you require an accommodation to use any type of electronic equipment, inform the Associate Director of Academic Affairs at the beginning of Term.

Use of Electronic Translators: In Language courses students are NOT allowed to use electronic translators for writing texts in the target language: those submitting compositions and texts of whatever kind translated in such a fashion will receive a final F grade for the course.

Late Submission: Late submission of papers, projects, journal entries, pieces of homework and portfolios is only permitted with prior approval. A request 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 full alpha grade penalty. 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 F will be given for the assessment.

Behaviour during Examinations: During examinations, you must do your own work. Unless specifically instructed by the lecturer or instructor, talking during an exam 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.

Basic Film Analysis: a few keywords and useful resources

Like all fields, film has its own specialist language of technical terms. These terms are widely used not only in film analysis, but also by film-makers, to describe what they are doing and how they are doing it. If you have not studied film before, some of these terms may be useful to you when talking about what is happening on screen, and becoming familiar with the effects or processes they describe will also help you break down the structure of a film. Familiarity with the way a film is structured will allow you to proceed with a formal analysis, and then move beyond it.

This is only a very basic introductory list, featuring some very common terms, and these definitions are not final or exhaustive. There are many online resources that provide fuller glossaries of terms. See for instance http://www.springhurst.org/cinemagic/glossary_terms.htm
<http://faculty.salisbury.edu/~dtjohnson/filmterms.htm>
<http://classes.yale.edu/film-analysis/>
- and wikipedia is good too.

Camera Angle

The direction from which the camera is shooting in a given shot e.g. high, low.

Cut

The transition between different shots (also the removal or discarding of a unwanted sequence)

- Cross cut Cutting between scenes of action that are occurring in different places at the same time (or indeed, at different times). Also often referred to as a parallel cut/edit.

Diegesis (diegetic, non-diegetic)

Roughly speaking, the diegesis is best understood as the 'world' of the film, the world which is being experienced by the characters, and in which the audience is asked to believe. It can also include things we don't directly see, but do infer. A simple way to understand this is by reference to sound: If a character can hear a sound e.g. a gunshot, then we say the sound is 'diegetic' - it is part of the film world, it is 'within' the film, so to speak. If there is sound which is not within the world of the film e.g. a musical score, sound effects designed for suspense etc, then we can say this is non-diegetic: the swimmer in the water at the beginning of *Jaws* cannot hear the famous *durr dun...* of the soundtrack (non-diegetic sound); but she can hear the sound of the bell ringing on the buoy (diegetic sound).

Edit

The joining together of shots into a single continuous film. The edit structures the space and time of the film, and transforms raw material – shots – into parts of a coherent narrative.

Mise-en-scene.

A broad and fluid term that usually refers to the overall 'look' and 'feel', of the film world: the stylistic and aesthetic presentation and arrangement of the scene before the camera. Literally, what is 'put in the scene': everything that is placed into the scene taking place before the camera (set, costume, lighting, etc.) and which therefore determines what we see on the screen.

Point of View (POV)

A shot taken as though from the eyeline position of a character. Shows what the character is looking at.

Reverse angle shot (sometimes 'shot reverse shot')

A continuity edit whereby the camera shot is taken first from the point of view of one character, before cutting to take the point of view of another, typically during a conversation. Reverse angle shots are not

usually 'pure' POV shots, seen through the characters eyes – typically the camera takes up a position just behind the character's shoulder. The cut then typically repositions the shot over the shoulder of the interlocutor, before switching back and forth along with dialogue.

Shot

An uninterrupted section of film material. From when the camera rolls, to when it stops, constitutes a shot. Shots are the raw material of film, where they change from one to other is a cut, how they are joined together and what they make is an edit.

Scene

A discrete section of narrative, usually taking place in a single location, during continuous time e.g. the scene in *Pulp Fiction* where Vincent Vega and Mia Wallace dance to Chuck Berry's 'You Never Can Tell' in Jack Rabbit Slim's restaurant. Can be made up of any number of shots.

Sequence

A series of scenes which are connected within the narrative, usually in the same space and time e.g. the sequence in *Pulp Fiction* where Vincent Vega and Mia Wallace go to Jack Rabbit Slim's to eat, culminating in the dance scene.