

# LONDON

FILM AND MEDIA INSTITUTE

a partnership of



University  
of Pittsburgh

## LNDN FILM 3362 City Symphony: Experimental Cinema

### CAPA London Film Program

### Fall and Spring

#### 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 nineteenth century. The urban environment and the craft of film grew up together in the twentieth century. This course takes examples of city films from throughout that century, and encourages students to investigate the urban contexts and subjectivities explored therein.

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

#### Course Aims

This course encourages students to both theorise and document their own experiences as visitors to London. It is rooted in the historical context of the early twentieth 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, students will develop a nuanced understanding of the context of cinema in different moments, encouraging them to inform their own practical exercises with a theoretical framework. Students 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. They will be required to express their experience and learning through presentations, a film treatment and a written assignment, and also to reflect it in the film and written report they produce for the **Urban Scavenger** course.

#### Requirements and Prerequisites

None.

#### Learning Outcomes

- 1) Gain 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

**Developmental Outcomes**

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

**Class Methodology**

Methods of instruction will include screenings, in-class presentations and analyses, filming sessions, field trips, review sessions and editing supervision.

**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.

**The assigned field component(s) are:**

- Greenwich River Boat Cruise
- East London Street Art Tour

Students are also strongly encouraged to participate in **co-curricular** program activities.

**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 %
Assignment 1: Presentation	20%
Assignment 2: Film Treatment	35%
Assignment 3: Essay	35%
Attendance	10%

**Assignments**

**Assignment 1: Presentation (20%)**

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

**Assignment 2: Film treatment (35%)**

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

**Assignment 3: Written essay (35%)**

A 2000-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.

**Dress Code**

None.

**Required Readings:**

Background readings are specified for many modules of the course, please see the weekly schedule for these. They will be available as PDFs before the start of term. **Students 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 students will need to undertake this viewing prior to class. There is an additional list for optional further reading.

**Resources:**

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

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

**SUNY-Oswego On-line Library Resources**

Students are advised to review assignments and readings. If you do not have access to sufficient additional resources from your home institution to complete the coursework for this class, you may request access to the on-line library resources of SUNY-Oswego: <http://libraryguides.oswego.edu/c.php?g=500670>. To access this resource, you must request access during the first week of the program.

**Weekly Course Schedule**

<b>Session 1</b>	
<b>Required reading:</b> Hicks, Jeremy <i>Dziga Vertov: Defining Documentary Film</i> , London: IB Tauris, 2007, pp. 3-8 and pp. 58-70.	
<b>Kino-eye: epistemological aspects of documentary cinema</b>	<b>Assignment 1 set</b>
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 <i>Man with a Movie Camera</i> (1929) and consider how far he achieved his manifesto's objectives. Students will be assigned one other city symphony film from the period to research and present on 3 February.	
<b>Session 2</b>	
<b>Required reading:</b> Barbara Mennel 'Modernity and the City Film: Berlin' in <i>Cities and Cinema</i> , London and New York: Routledge, 2008, pp. 21-45.	
<b>Film and the 1920s city</b>	
We will introduce some context for the city symphony films made in the 1920s, and watch Walter Ruttmann's <i>Berlin, Symphony of a City</i> (1927).	
<b>Session 3</b>	

<b>Required reading:</b> Aumont, Jacques. <i>Montage</i> . Montreal: Caboose, 2013, pp. 32-46.	
<b>Recommended viewing/reading:</b> Blog by Adam Curtis ( <a href="http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/adamcurtis">http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/adamcurtis</a> )	
<b>Montage: thought and affect</b>	
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 <i>découpage</i> . There will be an editing exercise.	

<b>Session 4</b>	
<b>A City Symphony canon?</b>	<b>Assignment 1 due, assignment 2 set</b>
Students and faculty will present on 1920s city symphony films, followed by a discussion of generic conventions	

<b>Session 5</b>	
<b>London: A City Symphony</b>	
We will watch <i>London: A City Symphony</i> (2017), after which director Alex Barrett will give a talk about his inspirations and the practicalities of making a contemporary city symphony film.	

<b>Session 6</b>	
<b>Required reading:</b> Keiller, Patrick. Excerpt from 'The Poetic Experience of Townscape and Landscape' <i>The View from the Train : Cities and Other Landscapes</i> , 2013, pp. 4-9. Poe, Edgar Allen 'The Man of the Crowd' (first published 1840) <a href="http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/poe/manofcro.html">http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/poe/manofcro.html</a>	
<b>The flâneur</b>	<b>Assignment 2 due</b>
The essays of Edgar Allen 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. Students will film their own 'derive' in the local area.	

<b>Session 7</b>	
<b>Men in the City</b>	<b>Assignment 3 set</b>
We examine how masculinities are constructed and conveyed in 1990s films and music videos about the city. Inc. <i>London</i> (Patrick Keiller, 1994), <i>La Haine</i> (Mattheiu Kassowitz, 1995).	

<b>Session 8</b>	
<b>Required reading:</b> Elkin, Lauren, 'Flâneuse-ing' in <i>Flâneuse: Women Walk the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice and London</i> . London: Vintage, 2016, pp. 3-23.	
<b>Women in the City</b>	
With reference to films by Agnes Varda, we consider when, how and in what mode women have been able to inhabit urban streets. <i>Cleo from 5 to 7</i> (1962), <i>The Caryatids of Paris</i> (1982).	

<b>Session 9</b>	

<b>The 'Other' in the City</b>	
To think about being 'other' in the city, we look at Alfonso Cuarón's <i>Roma</i> (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.	

<b>Session 10</b>	
<b>Required reading:</b> Henri Lefebvre <i>The Production of Space</i> tr. Donald Nicholson-Smith, Oxford: Blackwell, 1991, pp. 33.	
<b>Networked City</b>	<b>Assignment 3 due</b>
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 <i>Daybreak Express</i> (1953) to Harun Farocki's <i>Counter Music</i> (2004).	

<b>Session 11</b>	
<b>Recommended reading:</b> Chion, Michel 'The Three Listening Modes...' in <i>Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen</i> tr. Claudia Gorbman, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, pp. 25-34.	
<b>Sound theory and practice</b>	
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.	

<b>Session 12</b>	
<b>'A City Symphony in Reverse'</b>	
We will watch Thom Andersen's <i>Los Angeles Plays Itself</i> (2003) and discuss its genre and mode of analysis.	

<b>Session 13</b>	
<b>Global symphonies</b>	
We watch Godfrey Reggio's <i>Koyaanisqatsi</i> (1982) and consider the evolution of the global symphony since then, and its relationship with the city symphony.	

## Attendance, Participation & Student Responsibilities

**Attendance:** CAPA has a mandatory attendance policy. Attendance is taken at the beginning of every class. Unless otherwise expressed by your instructor, the first time a student has an unexcused absence for a class, his/her 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 an 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. A pattern of three absences in more than one course will result in dismissal from the program.

**Excused Absences:** Absences are only excused for medical reasons, for a family emergency or for a religious holiday. To request an excused absence, students must contact [excused.absence@capa.org](mailto:excused.absence@capa.org) ahead of time and provide evidence (e.g. a doctor's note) of the reason for his/her absence, otherwise the absence will not be excused. Even if the student knows the absence will not be excused, the student should still contact CAPA to inform CAPA they will not be in class.

In addition to contacting [excused.absence@capa.org](mailto:excused.absence@capa.org), it is the responsibility of the student to contact his/her 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.

***Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a physical, psychological, medical, or learning disability should contact the instructor and/or the director of academic affairs privately to discuss your specific needs.***

**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, self-plagiarism and cheating can result in dismissal from the program.

Self-plagiarism, copying an assignment entirely or partially to submit to a different class in an attempt to receive credit twice for one piece of work is unacceptable and considered cheating by duplication. Students risk receiving an "0" for any assignments in which they have duplicated their own work.

All substantial writing assignments (typically anything worth 20% or more of the final course grade) will be run through the plagiarism checking software Turnitin when submitted via CANVAS. See CAPA's Academic Standards and Policies for more information and resources on plagiarism.

**Sexual Misconduct, Required Reporting, and 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 students to openly disclose any and all information that is Title IX relevant so that CAPA staff can provide support and connect students with appropriate resources. Because students may not understand the implications of Title IX abroad, CAPA will work to advise students 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

**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.