

DMS 305 Film Analysis: Reality and Film

FALL 2004

Bernadette Wegenstein

Mon/Wed 10:00-11:50 (Screening Room CFA 235)

Website: <http://pluto.fss.buffalo.edu/classes/dms/berna/dms305/>

Office Hours Wed 12:30-2:30

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This course offers introductory theoretical tools for film analysis. The guiding questions will regard the representation of reality in film and the various possibilities of what have been called “reality bleeds.” How can reality be described in film language? To what extent do the codes of reality and film compete with each other? And, why is it that in recent film (and TV) history the concept of reality is “pushing more and more through the fourth wall?” These and other questions will be discussed in respect to three cultural/historical moments. First, Italian New or Neo-Realism, a period around the Second World War when Roberto Rossellini and other Italian film directors “recorded history” through a blur of documentary and fiction. We will also consider the early work of Pier Paolo Pasolini, who brought the era of Italian Neo-Realism to an end. Second, within our block “Back to Realism” we will analyze more recent examples of docufiction such as in *David Holzman’s Diary* (1967), and the Scandinavian “dogma films.” The “dogma oath” was sworn by Lars von Trier and other Danish and Swedish directors in 1995 with the purpose of capturing reality with original locations, no artificial requisites, and, most importantly, the steady cam—emphasizing the idea of presence. Third and last, we will look at current “reality bleeds,” from Oliver Stone’s documentary on JFK and “reality and horror bleeds” such as the *Blair Witch Project*, to the philosophical discussions of reality versus virtuality in current reality tv shows and websites. Students will write papers on specific films, “mockumentaries,” or tv shows, or on theoretical aspects of the representation of reality. (See Practical)

New Realism (Italy)

- *Rome Open City* (1945), *Paisà* (1946), *Germany Year Zero* (1947) - Roberto Rossellini
- *Bicycle Thieves* (1948) - Vittorio de Sica
- *The Earth Trembles* (1948) - Luchino Visconti
- *Accattone* (1961) - Pier Paolo Pasolini

Back to Realism

- Docufiction (USA): *David Holzman’s Diary* (1967) – David Holzman
- Dogma 95 Films (Denmark, Sweden, USA)
- *The Celebration* (1998) - Mogens Rukov, Thomas Vinterberg
- *The Idiots* (1998) - Lars von Trier
- *Mifune’s Last Song* (1999) - Søren Kragh-Jacobsen
- *The King Is Alive* (2000) - Kristian Levring

Reality Bleeds (USA, Canada)

- History and Documentation: *JFK* (1991) - Oliver Stone; *Dirty Pictures* (2000) - Frank Pierson
- Reality and Horror: *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) - Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez, *Book of Shadows: Blair Witch 2* - Joe Berlinger
- Mockumentary: *This is the Spinal Tap* (1984) – Rob Reiner
- Reality TV Shows: *Survivor* (2001); *Big Brother* (The Netherlands, Germany); *Cops*
- Reality and the Web: *Jennicam.org*, *Refresh* (Diller + Scofidio)

Additional Film list (optional)

This Is the Truth (1982)- Doug Hall (video artist); *Zelig* (1983) - Woody Allen; *FairyTale: A True Story* (1997) - Charles Sturridge; *Open Your Eyes* (1997) - Alejandro Amenábar

Reader

- *Film Theory and Criticism* (FTC)- Edd. Gerald Mast, Marshall Cohen, Leo Braudy. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999 (available at the bookstore 47,95 \$ new; 36 \$ used)

Online readings

1. Baudrillard, Jean. "Simulacra and Simulations," in: *Selected Writings*. Ed. Mark Poster. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. 1988
2. Casetti, Francesco. "Cinema and Reality," in: *Theories of Cinema 1945-1995*. Austin: University of Texas Press. 1999
3. Collins, Jim. "Television and Postmodernism," in: *Film and Theory. An Anthology*. Stam, Robert/ Miller, Toby (edd.). London: Blackwell. 2000
4. Hallam, Julia with Marshment, Margaret (edd). "Realist Moments: Representation and Reality," in: *Realism and Popular Cinema*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. 2000
5. Hayward, Susan (ed.). "Italian Neo-Realism," in: *Cinema Studies. The Key Concepts*. London and New York: Routledge. 2000
6. Metz, Christian. "The Imaginary Signifier," in: *Film and Theory. An Anthology*. Stam, Robert/ Miller, Toby (edd.). London: Blackwell. 2000
7. Roncoroni, Stefano (ed.). "Introduction," in: *Roberto Rossellini. The War Trilogy: Open City. Paisan. Germany—Year Zero*. New York: Grossman Publishers. 1993
8. Rosenthal, Alan (ed.). "JFK," in: *Why Docudrama? Fact-Fiction on Film and TV*. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press. 1999
9. Stam, Robert/ Burgoyne, Robert/ Flitterman-Lewis, Sandy (edd.). "From Realism to Intertextuality," in: *New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics. Structuralism, post-structuralism and beyond*. London and New York: Routledge. 1992

Syllabus

week 1: Aug 27, Aug 29 week 2: Sep 5	Introduction to course; screening <i>Rome Open City</i> Italian New Realism: Roberto Rossellini (<i>Paisà, Germany Year Zero</i>) <u>Reading:</u> Hayward, Roncoroni (online)
week 3: Sep 10, Sep 12	Italian New Realism: Vittorio de Sica; screening <i>Bicycle Thieves</i> <u>Reading:</u> André Bazin (FTC), pp. 195-211
week 4: Sep 17, Sep 19	Italian New Realism: Luchino Visconti; screening <i>The Earth Trembles</i> <u>Reading:</u> Casetti (online)
week 5: Sep 24, Sep 26	Critique of New Realism: Pier Paolo Pasolini; screening <i>Accattone</i> <u>Reading:</u> Siegfried Kracauer (FTC), pp.171-182
week 6: Oct 1, Oct 3	Documentation and Reality: screening <i>David Holzman's Diary</i> <u>Reading:</u> Christine Gledhill (FTC), pp. 251-272
week 7: Oct 8, Oct 10	Back to Realism: The Scandinavian Dogma films; screening <i>The Celebration</i> <u>Reading:</u> Jean-Louis Baudry (FTC), pp. 760-777; Dogma Oath (online)
week 8: Oct 15, Oct 17	The Scandinavian Dogma films; screening <i>The Idiots</i> <u>Reading:</u> Metz (online)
week 9: Oct 22, Oct 24	The Scandinavian Dogma films; screening <i>Mifune's Last Song</i> <u>Reading:</u> Stam/Burgoyne/Flitterman-Lewis (online)
week 10: Oct 29, Oct 31	History and Documentation: screening <i>JFK</i> <u>Reading:</u> Rosenthal (online)
week 11: Nov 5, Nov 7	History and Documentation: screening <i>Dirty Pictures</i> <u>Reading:</u> Robert Stam and Louise Spence (FTC), pp. 235-250
week 12: Nov 12, Nov 14	Reality and Horror: screening <i>Book of Shadows: Blair Witch 2</i> <u>Reading:</u> Tania Modleski (FTC), pp. 691-700
week 13: Nov 19	Mockumentary: screening <i>This Is Spinal Tap</i> <u>Reading:</u> Rick Altman (FTC) pp. 630-641
week 14: Nov 26, Nov 28	Reality TV Shows and Webcams: <i>Survivor, Boot Camp, Big Brother</i> <u>Reading:</u> Collins (online)
week 15: Dec 3, Dec 5	Reality and the Web; <i>jennicam.org, Refresh</i> <u>Reading:</u> Baudrillard (online)
week 16: Dec 10-14	exam week; digital archives