

## **Radical Film History**

Fall 2015

26:510:533

Thursdays 5:30-8:10pm, Conklin 447

Professor Whitney Strub

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243 Conklin Hall (inside Women's & Gender Studies main office)

Office hours: Thursday 3-4 and by appointment (widely available, on campus almost every day)

This research seminar will begin with an historical overview of efforts to link film to a radical praxis, from the silent era through digital production. While primarily centered on the United States, the scope will be global, ranging from Latin American Third Cinema to Chris Marker's attempts to create a participatory workers' cinema in post-1968 France. Other topics might include films of the Popular Front era, the Hollywood Ten, Black filmmaking and the "L.A. Rebellion" school, Newsreel and the New Left, queer and feminist film, and the cinema of postcolonial resistance movements. While close textual analysis will mark our studies, we will also foreground historical questions of production, distribution, and reception. Students will write an original research paper engaging with a specific history of radical film.

As a research seminar, this course is set up in two phases. For the first half of the semester, we'll engage in intensive readings (and viewings) designed for two purposes: to serve as a somewhat rapid crash-course survey in radical film history, and also to provide methodological models for the sorts of work students might undertake. Then in the second half of the semester we will shift to focusing on the research and writing process, as students pursue their own projects; we will meet to share feedback, notes on progress, and ideally, mutually supportive collective encouragement.

The course is not premised on any doctrinaire definition of radical film. The most robust cinematic traditions of radical film practice emanate out of the Left, but students interested in the Right might certainly investigate its filmic legacies as well. *Radical* might also invoke the oppositional *formal* practices of underground and avant-garde film, too. So students are encouraged to think capaciously in defining their own research projects here.

### **Required books:**

There are no required books for this course. All readings will be in the form of journal articles and book chapters—on the logic that these provide the best models for the sort of work we'll be doing. Unless otherwise noted, all articles should be available through the databases subscribed to by the Rutgers Library website. All book chapters will be posted as pdfs on the course Blackboard.

**Note:** I ask that laptops remain closed during our meetings. So please either print the readings, or access them on a reading device (Kindle/Tablet/etc) that doesn't double as a web browser. You will need the readings on hand during our meetings.

### **Grading and Class Requirements**

- \* Participation and responses to films/readings (25%)
- \* ONE short essay, 5-7 pages (25%)
- \* Final paper, 25 pages (50%)

1. Participation and responses: The expectation is that students will come to class having read the week's assigned pieces carefully and considered them, and will carry the discussion based on that work.

Responses will be weekly and informal, in the realm of 300-500 words, on a shared blog to be chosen by the class (Wordpress? tumblr?). The expectation here is that each member posts at least once per week (before noon Thursday), and also comments on at least twice on other posts.

2. Short essay: This will involve reading a film from class—something assigned to watch, or emanating out of the readings—against 2-3 reviews from the time of its release, thinking historically about how and why the critics approached it as they did, and how different perspectives may be afforded by a critical distance of time and/or positionality. **DUE IN CLASS THURSDAY OCT. 15.**

3. Final paper: This will be an independent research paper, based on your own work in primary and secondary sources. It might also be a comparable project—digital essay, essay-film, etc.—of equal research and analytic rigor.

Each of these will be elaborated in a more formal assignment sheet.

### **Venues to Acquaint Yourself With:**

Anthology Film Archives: <http://anthologyfilmarchives.org/>

Film Forum: <http://filmforum.org/>

Maysles Documentary Center: <http://maysles.org/mdc/>

Film Society at Lincoln Center: <http://www.filmlinc.org/>

Spectacle: <http://www.spectacletheater.com/>

Screen Slate (digest of NYC repertory screenings): <http://www.screenslate.com/>

These are just some examples of the rich film culture we are privileged to live near—be adventurous and explore!

### **Course Schedule**

#### **Sept. 3**

Introductions

Chris Robé, "Anarchist aesthetics and U.S. video activism," *Jump Cut* 56 (2014)

## Sept. 10: Development of Radical Film

Watch:

*Salt of the Earth* (DVD on reserve at Dana, also on YouTube here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i9oY4rmDaWw>)

*Battleship Potemkin* Odessa Stairs sequence

([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=laJ\\_1P-Py2k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=laJ_1P-Py2k))

(entire film can be viewed online through Rutgers Library)

Chris Robé, "Screening Race: The Antilynching Film, the Black Press, and U.S. Popular Front Film Criticism," *Left of Hollywood: Cinema, Modernism, and the Emergence of U.S. Radical Film Culture* (Texas, 2010), 132-191

Chris Robé, "Eisenstein in America: The *Que Viva Mexico!* Debates and the Emergent Popular Front in US Film Theory and Criticism," *The Velvet Light Trap* 54.1 (2004): 18-31.

Benjamin Balthaser, "Cold War Re-Visions: Representation and Resistance in the Unseen *Salt of the Earth*," *American Quarterly* 60.2 (2008): 347-371.

Karen Ishizuka and Patricia Zimmerman, "The Home Movie and the National Film Registry: The Story of *Topaz*," *Mining the Home Movie: Excavations in Histories and Memory* (California, 2008)

And two short primers on Soviet montage:

Glen Johnson's Hitchcock page:

<http://faculty.cua.edu/johnsong/hitchcock/pages/montage/montage-1.html>

Wikipedia for Soviet Montage theory:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet\\_montage\\_theory](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_montage_theory)

## Sept. 17: 1960s Underground/Experimental Film

Watch:

*Hold Me While I'm Naked* (1966, 14 min.):

[http://www.ubu.com/film/kuchar\\_naked.html](http://www.ubu.com/film/kuchar_naked.html)

*Symbiopsychotaxiplasm* (1968), on reserve at Dana

Janet Staiger, "Finding Community in the Early 1960s: Underground Cinema and Sexual Politics," *Swinging Single: Representing Sexuality in the 1960s* (Minnesota, 1999): 39-74.

Juan A. Suárez, "The Kuchars, the 1960s and queer materiality," *Screen* 56.1 (2015): 25-45.

Juan A. Suárez, "The Puerto Rican Lower East Side and the Queer Underground," *Grey Room* 32 (2008): 6-37.

Akiva Gottlieb, "'Just Another Word for Jazz': The Signifying Auteur in William Greaves's *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm: Take One*," *Black Camera* 5.1 (2013): 164-183.

Ara Osterweil, "Absently Enchanted: The Apocryphal, Ecstatic Cinema of Barbara Rubin," *Women's Experimental Cinema: Critical Frameworks*, Robin Blaetz, ed. (Duke, 2007), 127-151

### **Sept. 24: Class, Colonialism, and Resistance**

Watch: *Battle of Algiers* (1966)

Lida Oukaderova, "I am Cuba and the Space of Revolution," *Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies* 44.2 (2014): 4-21.

Nathan Godfried, "Labor-Sponsored Film and Working-Class History: *The Inheritance* (1964)," *Film History: An International Journal* 26.4 (2014): 84-119.

Stephen Charbonneau, "Exporting Fogo: Participatory Filmmaking, War on Poverty, and the Politics of Visibility," *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 55.2 (2014): 220-247.

Nancy Virtue, "Poaching within the system: Gillo Pontecorvo's tactical aesthetics in *The Battle of Algiers*," *Screen* 55.3 (2014): 317-337.

Trevor Stark, "'Cinema in the Hands of the People': Chris Marker, the Medvedkin Group, and the Potential of Militant Film," *October* 139 (2012): 117-150

Lecoite, François. "The Elephants at the End of the World: Chris Marker and Third Cinema," *Third Text* 25.1 (2011): 93-104.

### **Oct. 1: Toward a Revolutionary Cinema?**

Watch:

*The Spook Who Sat By the Door* (1973) OR *Bush Mama* (1975)

Aniko Bodroghkozy, "Reel revolutionaries: An examination of Hollywood's cycle of 1960s youth rebellion films," *Cinema Journal* 41.3 (2002): 38-58.

Cynthia Young, "Third World Newsreel Visualizes the Internal Colony," *Soul Power: Culture, Radicalism, and the Making of a U.S. Third World Left* (Duke, 2006)

Paula Rabinowitz, "Medium Uncool: Women Shoot Back; Feminism, Film and 1968—A Curious Documentary." *Science & Society* (2001): 72-98.

Greg Thomas, "Close-Up: Dragons!: George Jackson in the Cinema with Haile Gerima—from the Watts Films to Teza." *Black Camera* 4.2 (2013): 55-83.

Marc Raymond, "Politics, Authorship and History: the Production, Reception and Marginalization of Street Scenes 1970." *Film History: An International Journal* 22.2 (2010): 133-147.

Elizabeth Reich, "A New Kind of Black Soldier: Performing Revolution in The Spook Who Sat by the Door." *African American Review* 45.3 (2012): 325-339.

Jonathan Kahana, "Documentary Counterpublics: Filming Prison," *Intelligence Work: The Politics of American Documentary* (Columbia, 2008), 205-266

### **Oct. 8: Gender, Sexuality, and Film**

No viewings required; will show selections from Pat Rocco and Barbara Hammer in class

Whitney Strub, "Mondo Rocco Mapping Gay Los Angeles Sexual Geography in the Late-1960s Films of Pat Rocco." *Radical History Review* 2012.113 (2012): 13-34.

Jose B. Capino, "Seminal Fantasies: Wakefield Poole, Pornography, Independent Cinema and the Avant-Garde," *Contemporary American Independent Film: From The Margins To The Mainstream* (Routledge, 2005)

Greg Youmans, "Performing Essentialism: Reassessing Barbara Hammer's Films of the 1970s," *Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies* 27.3 (2012): 101-135.

Kristen Fallica, "More Than "Just Talk": The Chelsea Picture Station in the 1970s," *Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies* 28.1 (2013): 125-133

Marlo David, "Let It Go Black": Desire and the Erotic Subject in the Films of Bill Gunn," *Black Camera* 2.2 (2011)

Nguyen Tan Hoang, "The Politics of Starch," *A View from the Bottom: Asian American Masculinity and Sexual Representation* (Duke, 2014), 151-191

### **Oct. 15: Toward a Black Feminist Cinema**

Watch: *Watermelon Woman* (1996)

Toni Cade Bambara, "Reading the Signs, Empowering the Eye: *Daughters of the Dust* and the Black Independent Cinema Movement," *Black American Cinema*, ed. Manthia Diawara (Routledge, 1993), 118-144

L.H. Stallings, "Redemptive Softness": Interiority, Intellect, and Black Women's Ecstasy in Kathleen Collins's *Losing Ground*," *Black Camera* 2.2 (2011)

Catherine Zimmer, "Histories of The Watermelon Woman: reflexivity between race and gender," *Camera Obscura* 23.2 68 (2008): 41-66.

Laura L. Sullivan, "Chasing Fae: The watermelon woman and black lesbian possibility," *Callaloo* 23.1 (2000): 448-460.

Matt Richardson, "Our Stories Have Never Been Told: Preliminary Thoughts on Black Lesbian Cultural Production as Historiography in *The Watermelon Woman*," *Black Camera* 2.2 (2011)

Kren Beckman, "Black Media Matters: Remembering *The Bombing of Osage Avenue*," *Film Quarterly* 68.4 (2015): 8-23

**Oct. 22**

Individual meetings with professor and self-assigned readings/viewings

**Oct. 29**

Collective workshopping of projects

**Nov. 26/Dec. 3**

Rough draft feedback sessions