

FMST 325/2 (Fall 2024) Studies in Film Acting and Performance

Monday 13:15-17:15 VA 114

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Course Description

Acting and Performing in moving image media takes many different forms. This course examines a wide range of acting styles in international cinema from a historical perspective. In the first part of the course we will look at examples of American cinema about which a great deal has been written, and on which the discourse around film acting developed. We will then look at a variety of ways of thinking and writing about performance in different contexts and from different perspectives. Film performance is deeply intertwined with celebrity culture and star studies; it is also linked to identity politics and performances of the self, and the politics and practices of casting, so the course will cast a wide net in order to bring all these modes of performativity together.

Acting and Performing are notoriously difficult to talk about because they are elusive and always enmeshed in storytelling, technologies, collaboration, and of course costume and mise-en-scene. This course aims to help students talk and write about film acting, which is often a matter of finding the right vocabulary and identifying the performative aesthetics in any given media. Through writing assignments and class discussions students will develop a vocabulary to talk about acting and performance, and learn how to distinguish characters from the actors who create them.

Some of the films and excerpts shown in class from decades past contain scenes of social injustice that students may well find disturbing or offensive, including a number of instances of racist and sexist violence. We will be watching these films because they are also examples of important performances, and we will discuss them in detail in order to unpack the historical contexts of these films and their moral universes. Students are invited to express their discomfort with any screening privately with the instructor, or through an anonymous feedback portal on the moodle site.

Course Objectives

- To understand the different theories of acting that have been developed since the early years of cinema, and be able to identify and describe different acting styles that have emerged historically and globally
- To be able to describe a film performance in relationship to storytelling, character creation, mise-en-scene, costume, direction, and collaboration between actors
- To understand the basic dynamics that have underscored the star system and film celebrity
- To be able to use a critical vocabulary for acting and performance
- To understand the social justice and ethical issues involved in casting and performance

Concordia University is located on unceded Indigenous lands. The Kanien'kehá:ka Nation is recognized as the custodians of the lands and waters on which we gather. Tiohtià:ke/Montréal is historically known as a gathering place for many First Nations. Today, it is home to a diverse population of Indigenous and other peoples. We respect the continued connections with the past, present and future in our ongoing relationships with Indigenous and other peoples within the Montreal community.

Syllabus

1. Sept 9 Introduction to the Course

Tomboy (Céline Sciamma, 2011) 82 mins.

Excerpts: *The Body Remembers when the World Broke Open* (Elle-Máijá Tailfeathers, 2019)

- Diana Taylor "Framing [Performance]" *Performance* (Durham NC, Duke University Press, 2016), 1-42
- Watch: [Resilient Ageing Women: A Question of Performance](#) video essay by Maud Ceuterick [*In*] *Transition* Vol 10 no 3 (2023)

2. Sept 16 Silent Film Acting

True Heart Susie (D. W. Griffith, 1919) Starring Lillian Gish 86 mins.

Leontine's Boat (1911) 8 mins

Laughing Gas (1907) 5 mins.

- Roberta E. Pearson, "The Theatrical Heritage," in *Eloquent Gestures : The Transformation of Performance Style in the Griffith Biograph Films*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 18-37
- James Naremore "Lillian Gish in *True Heart Susie*," in *Acting in the Cinema*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 99-113.

3. Sept 23 Studio-era Hollywood

The Lady Eve (Preston Sturges, 1941), 94 mins. Starring Barbara Stanwyck
 Excerpts: *Stella Dallas* (King Vidor, 1937) Starring Barbara Stanwyck
Double Indemnity (Billy Wilder, 1943)

- Andrew Klevan "Tonal Finesse," in *Barbara Stanwyck* (BFI, 2013), 57-80.
- James Naremore, "Expressive Coherence and Performance within Performance," in *Acting in the Cinema*, (CA: University of California Press, 1988). 68-82.

4. Sept 30 Method Acting

On the Waterfront (Brando/Kazan, 1954) 108 mins. Starring Marlon Brando
 Excerpts: *A Streetcar Named Desire* (Elia Kazan, 1951). Starring Marlon Brando

- Virginia Wright Waxman, "Masculinity in Crisis: Method Acting in Hollywood," in *Movie Acting: The Film Reader* ed. Pamela Robertson Wojcik, (New York: Routledge, 2004), 127-144.
- Konstantin Stanislavski, Forward and section "A" *An Actor's Handbook: An Alphabetical Arrangement of Concise Statements on Aspects of Acting*, Ed and trans, Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood, (New York: Routledge, 1963 [1924] , 6-28.

5. Oct 7 Stars

Midterm takehome exam starts

The Misfits (John Huston, 1961), 125 mins. Starring Marilyn Monroe

- Shonni Enelow, "She's Crazy," in *Method Acting and its Discontents: On American Psycho Drama* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2015), 25-29.
- Amanda Konkle, "The actress and her method," *Some Kind of Mirror: Creating Marilyn Monroe* (Ithaca, NY: Rutgers University Press, 2019), 141-187.

6. Oct 21 Japanese film acting

Midterm takehome exam is due

Sound of the Mountain/Yama no oto, (Mikio Naruse, 1954) 95 mins. Starring Setsuku Hara
Excerpts: *Tokyo Story/Tokyo Monogatari* (Yasujiro Ozu, 1953). Starring Setsuku Hara
When a Woman Ascends the Stairs/Onna ga kaidan wo agaru toki (Mikio Naruse, 1960) starring Takemine Hideko

- Catherine Russell, "Three Japanese Actresses of the 1950s: Modernity, Femininity and the Performance of Everyday Life," *CineAction!* 60 (2003), 34-44
- Vivian Sobchack, "Being on Screen: A Phenomenology of Cinematic Flesh, or the Actor's Four Bodies," in *Acting and Performance in Moving Image Culture: Bodies, Screens, Renderings*, eds. Jorg Sternagel, Deborah Levitt, Dieter Mersch, (Metabasis, Germany, 2012), 429-446.

7. Oct 28 Theatre/Film

Opening Night (John Cassavetes, 1974) 144 mins. Starring Gena Rowlands

- Maria Viera, "Playing with Performance: Directorial and Performance Style in John Cassavetes' *Opening Night*," *More than a Method Trends and Traditions in Contemporary Film Performance*, Ed. Cynthia Baron, Diane Carson and Frank P. Tomasulo, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004), 153-172.
- Malte Hagener, "All about Gena: Myrtle and Virginia: The Transitional Nature of Actress, Role and Character," in *Acting and Performance in Moving Image Culture: Bodies, Screens, Renderings*, eds. Jorg Sternagel, Deborah Levitt, Dieter Mersch, (Metabasis, Germany, 2012), 195-207.

8. November 4 Camp and Exploitation

Foxy Brown (Jack Hill 1974), 92 mins. Starring Pam Grier
Excerpts: *Jackie Brown* (Quentin Tarantino, 1997). Starring Pam Grier

- Mia Mask, "Pam Grier: A Phallic Idol of Perversity and Sexual Charisma," in *Divas on Screen: Black Women in American Film*, (University of Illinois Press, 2009,) 58-103.
- Susan Sontag, "Notes on Camp," rpt. In Fabio Cleto, *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject: A Reader*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 54-65.

9. November 11 Brechtian cinema

Orlando (Sally Potter, 1992), 94 mins. Starring Tilda Swinton

Excerpt: *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant* (R.W. Fassbinder, 1972)

- Dennis West, Joan M. West and Tilda Swinton, "Achieving a State of Limitlessness: An Interview with Tilda Swinton," *Cineaste* 1993 Vol. 20 No. 1 (1993) 18-21.
- Bertolt Brecht, "New Techniques of Acting," *Brecht on Theatre*, John Willett ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), 136-147.

10. Nov 18 Slow Cinema Performance and Opacity

What Time is it There? / Ni na bian ji dian (Tsai Ming-Laing, 2001) 116 mins. Starring Kang sheng Lee

Excerpts: *Vive l'amour/ Ai qing wan sui* (Tsai Ming Laing, 1994)

Meek's Cutoff (Kelly Reichardt 2010) Starring Michelle Williams.

A Man Escaped/Un condamné à mort (Robert Bresson, 1956)

- Bert Cardullo, "The Space Of Time, The Sound Of Silence: Tsai Ming-Liang's *What Time Is It There?*" *Teaching Sound Film : A Reader* (Rotterdam: Sense, 2016), 273-281.
- Robert Bresson, *Notes on Cinematography*, trans. Jonathan Griffin (New York: Urizen Books, 1977) 72 pages (read as much as you can)
<https://davenold.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Notes-on-Cinematography.pdf>
- Recommended: Chris Berry, "Where is the Love? The Paradox of Performing Loneliness in Ts'ai Ming-Liang's *Vive l'Amour*," in *Falling for You: Essays on Cinema and Performance*, eds. Lesley Stern and George Kouvaros, Sydney: Power Publications, 1999), 147-176.

11. Nov 25 Reenactment

Close-up / Nema Ye Nazdik (Abbas Kiarostami, 1990) 98 mins. Starring Hossain Sabzian

The Third Memory (Peter Huyghe, 1999) 10 mins. Starring John Wojtowicz

Excerpts: *Dog Day Afternoon* (Sidney Lumet, 1975)

- Ivone Margolies, “Exemplary Bodies: Reenactment in *Love in the City, Sons and Close Up*,” in *Rites of Realism: Essays in Corporeal Cinema*, Ivone Margolies ed, (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 217-244.
- Ruth Erikson, “The Real Movie: Reenactment, Spectacle, and Recovery in Pierre Huyghe’s *The Third Memory*,” *Framework* Vol 50 no. 1&2 (Spring and Fall, 2009), 107-124.

12. Dec 2 Digital Performance

Frozen River (Courtney Hunt, 2008)

Excerpts: *The Three Disappearances of Soad Hosni* (Rania Stephan, 2011).

“Proshai, Livushka,” *The Sopranos* Episode 3:2 (March 4, 2001)

- Lisa Bode, “No Longer Themselves? Framing Digitally Enabled Posthumous ‘Performance,’” *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 49, No. 4 (Summer 2010), 46-70.
- Cynthia Baron and Yannis Tzioumakis, “Beyond Indiewood: American Independent Cinema in the Digital Age,” *Acting Indie: Industry, Aesthetics, and Performance*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 295-310.

Assessment and Assignments

Moodle Posts	25%
Mid-term exam	30%
Final Paper	35%
Attendance and participation	10%

Moodle Posts

Students must post six times over the course of the semester. Each week a question about one or more of the readings will be posted on a discussion forum on the class moodle page. You can either answer the question in a new thread, or you could respond politely to another student’s post. Posts must be between 200 and 400 words in length. References to assigned readings should include page numbers. You may write in English or French. The questions will be available on Wednesday of each week at the latest and the forum will be closed on Saturday before each class at 12 pm. Any posts later than that will not be read or graded. You will get one grade for the combined posts. The criteria are clarity and originality.

Mid-term Takehome exam

October 7 to 21

In this take-home exam you will be asked to write an essay of 1000 to 1500 words about selected film clips from films screened in class. The exam questions will be available on moodle following our class on October 7. Answers will be due two weeks later on October 21, submitted through moodle. It will be based on all the material covered in class up to and including week 5, including all the readings, lectures, and screenings.

Final paper

Due Dec 9. All papers should be between 10 and 12 pages long (2500 to 3000 words), double spaced, including bibliography. Students must write an original research paper that makes reference to assigned readings and includes new research. Please choose one of the topics listed in the *handout on week 6*. You are encouraged to speak to the instructor or the TA during their office hours about your topic before you get started.

Class Participation

A sign up sheet will be circulated during every class. Please make sure you sign in. Participation grades are based on attendance and also participation, so please identify yourself when you have a contribution to make to class discussion.

Tips for Success in this Class

Class Journal

Start a notebook dedicated to this class in which you can write notes about your at-home reading, in-class screenings and notes taken during lectures. Use the notebook also to make notes to yourself about acting and performances that you see outside of class to get used to the idea of talking and thinking about acting. You can use the notebook to draft moodle responses and ideas for a final project.

Late work:

Take-home exams and Final exams may be submitted earlier than the due date. Late papers will be penalized 3% per day. Students applying for an Incomplete at the end of the semester will be penalized one full letter grade.

Communications: Check your email and Moodle regularly for class updates. If you miss class, it's your responsibility to get notes from a classmate (emails asking the professor what was covered in class won't receive a response). Not all the films are easily available online, so it may be difficult to make up for missed screenings. If you have questions or concerns about course content or assignments, come see me during office hours.

Electronic Devices: Cellphones should be off, unless there are extenuating circumstances (e.g. child/eldercare, emergency situation). Laptops and tablets are permitted for notetaking only. Please turn screens off during films as the light is disruptive for others in the class.

Direct or anonymous feedback

If you would like the instructor to be aware of any disturbing material that arises in class, or if you have any complaints about the class, you may email me directly, or you may post your thoughts on the moodle button set up to receive anonymous information. There will also be formal course evaluations at the end of the term, but if you want to convey during the course please do so.

Use of Gen AI (Chat GPT)

Use of Gen AI is not recommended. However, students may choose to use generative AI tools as they work through the assignments in this course; this use must be documented in an appendix for each assignment. The documentation should include what tool(s) were used, how they were used, and how the results from the AI were incorporated into the submitted work.

Books on Reserve

Baron, Cynthia, Diane Carson and Frank P. Tomasulo. *More than a Method Trends and Traditions in Contemporary Film Performance*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004.

Baron, Cynthia, and Sharon Marie Carnicke. *Reframing Screen Performance*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008.

Baron, Cynthia. *Modern Acting : The Lost Chapter of American Film and Theatre*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016

Bresson, Robert. *Notes on Cinematography*. Jonathan Griffin Trans. New York: Urizen Books, 1977.

Butler, Isaac. *The Method : How the Twentieth Century Learned to Act*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022.

Klevan, Andrew. *Film Performance : From Achievement to Appreciation*. Short Cuts: Introductions to Film Studies. London: Wallflower, 2005.

Naremore, James. *Acting in the Cinema*. Berkely: University of California Press, 1988.

Robertson Wojcik, Pamela ed. *Movie Acting: The Film Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2004.

Stern, Lesley and George Kouvaros eds. *Falling for You: Essays on Cinema and Performance*. Sydney: Power Publications, 1999.

Sternagel, Jorg Deborah Levitt, Dieter Mersch, eds. *Acting and Performance in Moving Image Culture: Bodies, Screens, Renderings*. Metabasis, Germany, 2012.

LIST OF STUDENT SERVICES AT CONCORDIA 2024-25

1. [Access Centre for Students with Disabilities](#)
2. [Student Success Centre](#)
3. [Counselling and Psychological Services](#)
4. [Concordia Library Citation and Style Guides](#)
5. [Health Services](#)
6. [Financial Aid and Awards](#)
7. [Academic Integrity](#)
8. [Dean of students Office](#)
9. [International Students Office](#)
10. [Student Hub](#)
11. [Sexual Assault Resource Centre](#)
12. As a Concordia student, you are a member of the Concordia Student Union and have many resources available to you including:
 - a. [HOJO](#) (Of Campus Housing and Job Bank)
 - b. [CSU Advocacy Centre](#)
13. [Otsenhákta Student Centre](#)
14. [Birks Student Service Centre](#)