

FILMING THE CITY



Somers Town Directed by Shane Meadows. Thomas Turgoose as Tommo and Piotr Jagiello as Marek. photo by Dean Rogers

Course code: LONS MSFC 310

Number of credits: 4

Instructors: Ryan Powell & Douglas Ray

Semester: Summer 2011

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Film studies has become increasingly attentive to the role of the city in film. New York, Paris, Berlin and London: archetypal cinematic cities each with complex and multifarious meanings. In this course we'll explore key themes of contemporary urban British cinema, with an emphasis on filming the city. Urban cinema is an interdisciplinary subject linking film studies with sociology, cultural studies, geography and urban studies. The course explores films that look at urban housing, employment, race, class, gender and immigration; examining their responses to urban successes and failures. Many writers have drawn attention to the correlation between the mobility and visual and aural sensations of the city and the cinema; the striking ability of cinema to capture and express the spatial complexity, diversity, and social dynamism of the city through mise-en-scene, location filming, lighting, cinematography and editing (Mark Shiel). The course pays attention to a range of texts both as aesthetic objects but also as responses to economic, political and social pressures exerted on the film industry since the 1990s. The unit is broken roughly into two blocks: the first looks at representations of London in the 1990s; the second explores the London of the noughties. We'll explore the similarities and differences in the range of representations of the city across time and place. A key component of the course also involves a special two session block that involves practical instruction through which the student makes and screens their own London-based film. (No previous experience in filmmaking is required for this course.)

Teaching and Learning Activities

The course is structured primarily on seminar-based, student-led forms of tutor-student interactions, and on independent research. Some sessions, however, will also contain lecture style elements, including PowerPoint presentation and clips. In class we will discuss the films and texts set for each week. We'll be examining the social and production context of the films, their aesthetics and, when necessary, how they were received. Several weeks will contain a brief introductory lecture outlining the use of formal film terms and the basic methods to be employed in analysing films for class assignments.

Learning Outcomes

This unit explores an extremely current and stimulating topic in film studies and the range of films and readings will enable the student to become adept at discussing contemporary British cinema, with relation to aesthetics, industry, filmmaking practice and reception in an engaged and informed manner. Together we will engage in 'on-location' filmmaking practices through a two session shooting and screening section of the course. We will also explore the resources available in London to encourage students to become independent and knowledgeable film researchers. With tutorials, guest lectures and seminars with practicing filmmakers and scholars whose work is centred on the British city students will have the opportunity to gain first hand knowledge from an inter-disciplinary perspective. By the end of the course students will have had the opportunity to gain knowledge and skills in film analysis, film research and filmmaking, along with a comprehensive understanding of how these elements may be used to illuminate the ways in which social, cultural, political and aesthetic phenomena may come to shape representations of the contemporary British city.

Course Assessment Components

The following modes of assessment will be discussed during the course and there will be opportunities for students to ask questions if they have any queries.

1. Essay One/Film Analysis (20% of final grade) 1,500 words
(to be submitted by 5pm on Monday June 20th).

The first assessment takes the form of a written film analysis in which students select from a provided list of topics that asks them to analyse how cinematic techniques are used to shape the representation of the British city in a particular film and to discuss what kinds of social, political and cultural issues are raised by this representation. The questions will be limited to films screened in the first five weeks of the course. Assigned course readings as well as additional material procured through your own research must be incorporated into the analysis.

2. Filming Assignment (30% of final grade)
(film production to take place during week 3/Screening in class on Monday 4 July)

3. Final Essay (40% of final grade) 2,500 words
(to be submitted by 5pm on Friday 22 July)

For the final essay students will be asked to analyse a specific film or set of films explored in the course from a critical perspective that engages with a range of scholarly materials. This paper will challenge students to become independent scholars and they are encouraged to make use of the British Film Institute's library to conduct research (a training session at the library will be offered as part of the course). Textual analysis and close reading of the film(s)

and any promotional materials discussed will be necessary in developing the piece to form a critical exploration of the role of cinematic techniques in shaping representations of the British city. A list of essay topics will be distributed early on in the course in order to allow the student time to conduct independent film research and to make use of the many resources London has to offer with regards to this.

4. Class Participation (10% of final grade)

As a seminar based course, in-depth class discussion/analysis of films viewed and critical texts studied forms the basis for much of the course. It is of key importance that the student come prepared and having read and carefully considered all coursework prior to each class meeting. The student's dedication to this area will provide the primary basis for their participation grade.

Co-curricular activities

Visit to the BFI library

Attending screenings of recent films at London cinemas that have connections to course.

Course readings

Filming the City: A Course Reader will contain reading for each week, however students are expected to supplement this with other readings. Apart from the first week, readings should be conducted prior to the relevant session as they will be discussed in class. Other required readings/books are listed below.

*****Required Text: David Bordwell and Kristen Thompson *Film Art******

There are several editions, any of which are suitable for this course. The book can be purchased through Amazon.co.uk (and is typically quite inexpensive).

*****Required Text: Annette Kuhn, *Ratcatcher* (BFI: London, 2008)*****

Can be purchased at Amazon.co.uk or at Foyles Bookstore on Charing Cross Road.

Key texts (several readings will be drawn from the following books)

Charlotte Brunson, *London in Cinema: the cinematic city since 1945* (London: BFI, 2007)

Andy Webber and Emma Wilson (eds.), *Cities in Transition: the Moving Image and the Modern Metropolis* (Wallflower Press, 2008)

Robert Murphy (ed.), *The British Cinema Book* (3rd Revised ed.), (London: BFI; Palgrave, 2009)

Robert Murphy (ed.), *British Cinema of the 1990s* (London: BFI, 2000)

Supplementary

David B. Clarke (ed.), *The Cinematic City* (London: Routledge, 1997)

Mark Shiel and Tony Fitzmaurice (eds.), *Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Societies in a Global Context* (Oxford; Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2001)

Eva Mazierska and Laura Rascaroli, *From Moscow to Madrid. Postmodern Cities, European Cinema* (London: IB Tauris, 2003) [Introduction and part three on Great Britain]

Justine Ashby and Andrew Higson (eds.), *British Cinema: Past and Present* (London: Routledge, 2000)

Samantha Lay, *British Social Realism: From Documentary to Brit Grit* (London: Wallflower Press, 2002)

John Hill (guest editor), *Cinéaste XXVI Contemporary British Cinema Supplement*, Autumn 2001

Amy Sargeant, *British Cinema: A Critical and Interpretive History* (London: BFI, 2005)

Paul Dave, *Visions of England* (Berg Publishers, 2006)

Joe Kerr and Andrew Gibson (eds.), *London From Punk to Blair*, (London: Reaktion Books, 2003)

COURSE OUTLINE

SUMMARY OF FILM SCREENINGS

- Week 1 (Mon) *Notting Hill* (Rodger Michell, 1999) GB 124min
(Wed) *Riff-Raff* (Ken Loach, 1991) GB 95m
- Week 2 (Mon) *Naked* (Mike Leigh, 1993) GB 131min
(Wed) *Young Soul Rebels* (Isaac Julien, 1991) GB 105min
- Week 3 (Mon) *London* (Patrick Keiller, 1994) GB 85min
(Wed) Filming Day
- Week 4 (Mon) Screening of Student Films/Selection of Short Films Shot in London
(Wed) *Last Resort* (Pawel Pawlikowski, 2000) GB/Russia 73min
- Week 5 (Mon) *The Full Monty* (Peter Cattaneo, 1997) GB 91min
(Wed) Research Training at the British Film Library
- Week 6 (Mon) *Ratcatcher* (Lynne Ramsay, 1999), GB/France 94min
(Wed) *Somers Town* (Shane Meadows, 2008) GB 71min

SESSION 1: Introduction & Urban Fairytales

Tutor: Douglas Ray

Screening: *Notting Hill* (Rodger Michell, 1999)

Required Reading

- Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art*. Chapter: The Shot: Mise-en-scène
- Charlotte Brunson, 'Landmark London' in *London in Cinema: the cinematic city since 1945*, (London: BFI, 2007), pp. 21-56 (Course Reader)

Further Reading

David Martin-Jones, 'Two Stories, one right, one wrong. Narrative, national identity and globalization in *Sliding Doors*', *CinéAction!* No. 64, 2004, p. 24

Nick Redfern, 'London Spaces in Contemporary British Cinema: *Notting Hill* and *South West 9*,' (<http://www.literarylondon.org/london-journal/september2006/redfern.html>)

Pamela Church Gibson, 'Imaginary Landscapes, Jumbled Topographies: Cinematic London' in *London From Punk to Blair*, edited by Joe Kerr and Andrew Gibson (London: Reaktion Books, 2003), pp. 363-369

SESSION 2: Documenting London

Tutor: Douglas Ray

Screening: *Riff-Raff* (Ken Loach, 1991)

Required Reading:

- Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art*. Chapter: The Shot: Cinematography
- Charlotte Brunson, 'Local London' in *London in Cinema: the cinematic city since 1945*, (London: BFI, 2007), pp. 57-88 (Course Reader)

- John Hill, 'Class, Politics, and Gender: High Hopes and Riff-Raff' in John Hill, *British Cinema in the 1980s: Issues and Themes* (Clarendon Press, 1999), pp. 192-204 (Course Reader)

Further Reading:

John Hill, 'Finding a Form: Politics and Aesthetics in Fatherland, Hidden Agenda and Riff Raff' in George McKnight (ed.), *Agent of Challenge and Defiance: The Films of Ken Loach* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997), pp. 125-143

Websites:

<http://www.isj1text.ble.org.uk/pubs/isj83/newsinger.htm> (Issue 83 of INTERNATIONAL SOCIALISM JOURNAL Published Summer 1999)

<http://archive.sensesofcinema.com/contents/directors/03/loach.html>

Further viewing:

The Chain (Jack Gold, 1984)

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| SESSION 3: Angst in the City |
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Tutor: Ryan Powell

Screening: *Naked* (Mike Leigh, 1993)

Required Reading

- Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art*. Chapter: The Relation of Shot to Shot: Editing.
- Mike Mason, 'Naked: Social Realism and the Urban Wasteland' in *Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Societies in a Global Context*, ed. Mark Shiel and Tony Fitzmaurice (Oxford; Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 244-254 (Course Reader)
- Iunoa Babini, 'The Urban Soul of British Cinema of the 1990s: London as Cinematic City in Mike Leigh's *Naked* and Gary Oldman's *Nil By Mouth*' in Axel Goodbody and Wendy E. Everett (eds.), *Revisiting Space: Space and Place in European Cinema* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2005), pp. 47-59
- Claire Monk, 'Men in the 90s' in Robert Murphy (ed.), *British Cinema of the 90s* (London: BFI, 2000), pp. 156-166

Further Reading

Amy Raphael (ed.), *Mike Leigh on Mike Leigh* (Faber and Faber, 2005), pp. 224-249

Ben Highmore, 'Street Scenes-Circulation, Crowds and Modernizing London' in *Cityscapes* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 26-44

Further Viewing

Nil By Mouth (Gary Oldman, 1997)

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| SESSION 4: Independent Production. Exploring Race & Sexuality |
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Tutor: Ryan Powell

Screening: *Young Soul Rebels* (Isaac Julien, 1991)

Required Reading

- Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art*. Chapter: Sound in the Cinema

- John Hill, 'Race and the Politics of Form: The Black Workshops and the films of Isaac Julien' in John Hill, *British Cinema in the 1980s: Issues and Themes* (Clarendon Press, 1999), pp. 219-240 (Course Reader)
- Introductions by Isaac Julien and Colin MacCabe and 'States of Desire' interview with Julien by Bell Hooks in *Diary of a Young Soul Rebel* (London: BFI, 1991). The latter interview is reprinted in *Transition*, no. 53 (1991); also available online though JSTOR.

Further Reading

'Recording Narratives of Race and Nation' in *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 69-96

Orgeron, Devin Anthony and Orgeron, Marsha Gabrielle, 'Interventions: An Interview with Isaac Julien', *Coil* 9-10, 2000, pp. 110-119

Karen Alexander, 'Black British Cinema in the 90s: Going Going Gone' in Robert Murphy (ed.), *British Cinema of the 90s* (London: BFI, 2000), pp. 1-16

Further Viewing:

My Beautiful Laundrette (Stephen Frears, 1985)

SESSION 5: Filmmaking – Planning Session

Tutor: Douglas Ray

Required Reading

- Steven D. Katz, *Film Directing Shot by Shot: Visualising from Concept to Screen*. Pages numbers to be announced in advance of class meeting.

SESSION 6: FILMING DAY

Tutor: Douglas Ray

Meet in London – at a location to be discussed.

Students will shoot their own short films in groups under supervision.

SESSION 7: Student Film Screening/The Short Film in Great Britain

Tutor: Douglas Ray

Student Film Screening

Short Film Screening: *Following* (Christopher Nolan 1998)

Essential reading:

Danny Boyle – by Amy Raphael (course reader)

SESSION 8: Film Europe & Immigration

Tutor: Ryan Powell

Screening: *Last Resort* (Pawel Pawlikowski, 2000)

Required Reading

- Alice Bardan, 'Welcome to Dreamland': the Realist Impulse in Pawel Pawlikowski's *Last Resort*' in *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film*, vol. 6, no. 1(2008), pp. 47-63 (Course Reader)
- Roy Stafford, 'Nowhere to Run for Asylum?' in *In The Picture*, no. 46 (1 April 2003), pp. 14-16 (Course Reader)
- Les Roberts, 'Welcome to Dreamland': From Place to Non-Place and Back...' in *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film*, vol. 1, no. 2 (1 April 2002), pp. 78-90 (Course Reader)

Further Reading

Claire Monk, 'Projecting a New Britain' *Cinéaste* XXVI Contemporary British Cinema Supplement, Autumn 2001, pp. 34-7

Further Viewing

Dirty Pretty Things (Stephen Frears, 2002)

SESSION 9: The Northern City

Tutor: Ryan Powell

Guest Lecturer: Timothy Bell

Screening: *The Full Monty* (Peter Cattaneo, 1997) GB 91min

Required Reading:

- Peter Davidson, 'Typographies: Britain', *The Idea of North* (London: Reaktion 2005), pp199-233 (course reader)
- Cora Kaplan, 'The Death of the Working-Class Hero' in *New Formations* 52, spring 2004, pp94-110 (course reader)

Further Reading:

Owen Hatherley, 'Sheffield: The Former Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire', *A Guide to the New Ruins of Great Britain* (London: Verso 2010), pp77-113 (course reader)

Further viewing:

Distant Voices, Still Lives (Terence Davies, 1988)

The Jealous God (Steven Woodcock, 2005)

SESSION 10: BFI Library Research Training

- Class to meet at the British Film Institute Library. Details to be announced.

SESSION 11: The Fantastical City

Tutor: Ryan Powell

Screening: *Ratcatcher* (Lynne Ramsay, 1999), GB/France 94min.

Required Reading

- Annette Kuhn, *Ratcatcher* (BFI: London, 2008).

Further Reading

Duncan Petrie, 'Devolving British Cinema: The New Scottish Cinema and the European Art Film' in John Hill (guest editor), *Cinéaste* XXVI Contemporary British Cinema Supplement, Autumn 2001, pp. 55-57.

Nick Redfern, 'Defining British Cinema: Transnational and Territorial Film Policy in the United Kingdom' in *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2007

(<http://www.euppublishing.com/doi/pdfplus/10.3366/JBCTV.2007.4.1.150>)

John Hill, 'Failure and Utopianism: Representations of the Working Class in British Cinema of the 1990s' in Robert Murphy (ed.) *British Cinema of the 90s* (London: BFI Publishing, 2000)

Websites:

Production notes for *Red Road*: <http://www.vervepics.com/redroad.shtml>

Further Viewing

Red Road (Andrea Arnold, 2006)

SESSION 12: Kid's Eye View

Tutor: Ryan Powell

Somers Town (Shane Meadows, 2008)

Required Reading

- David Forest, Shane Meadows and the British New Wave, Britain's Hidden Art Cinema in "Studies in European Cinema" Volume: 6 | Issue: 2&3 Cover date: December 2009 Page(s): 191-201. (Course Reader)
- Mark Sinker, Review of *Somers Town*, *Sight and Sound*, vol. 18, no. 9 (1 September 2008), p. 68 (Course Reader)

Further Reading/Websites

<http://itpworld.wordpress.com/tag/shane-meadows/>

<http://www.eyeforfilm.co.uk/feature.php?id=513>

<http://www.shanemeadows.co.uk>

Further Viewing

Bullet Boy (Saul Dibb, 2004)