

Cinema & Philosophy

Cinema History Through the Lens of Jewish Thought

Curriculum - Spring Semester 2025 (February - May)

N	Date	Session
1	Feb 10	Introduction to Film Language and Course Methodology
2	Feb 17	Revolutionary Frames: Sergei Eisenstein and Cinema's Political Awakening
3	Feb 24	Laughing Through Ethics: Charlie Chaplin and Maimonides' Guide for the Perplexed
4	Mar 3	Harmony in Chaos: Jean Renoir and Spinoza's Ethics
5	Mar 10	The Uncanny Screen: Hitchcock's Psycho and Freud's Mind
6	Mar 24	Dream Factories: Classical Hollywood and the Power of Myth (Martin Buber)
7	Mar 31	Cinema After Auschwitz: Italian Neorealism and Adorno's Critique of Culture
8	Apr 7	Reproducing Reality: The French New Wave and Benjamin's Aura
9	Apr 14	The Language of Dreams: Fellini and Noam Chomsky's Linguistic Theory
10	Apr 15	Faith and Doubt: Bergman's Cinema and Leibowitz's Radical Ethics
11	May 5	Truth in Fragments: Kurosawa's Rashomon and Bloch's Historical Method
12	May 12	The Future of Storytelling: Independent Cinema and Harari's Post-Humanism
13	May 19	Gender in Flux: Pedro Almodóvar and Judith Butler's Performativity

Course Program:

1. Introduction to Film Language and Course Methodology

A foundational session introducing film language (mise-en-scène, montage, etc.) and the course's methodology, outlining how Jewish thought will serve as a framework for understanding key filmmakers and movements in cinema.

2. Revolutionary Frames: Sergei Eisenstein and Cinema's Political Awakening

Explore the birth of cinema and Sergei Eisenstein's groundbreaking montage theory, contextualized by his political vision, from silent film to the first sound film, *The Jazz Singer*.

3. Laughing Through Ethics: Charlie Chaplin and Maimonides' Guide for the Perplexed

Dive into Chaplin's blend of humor and moralism, examining his work through the ethical philosophy of Maimonides, who sought to balance intellect and ethics in guiding human behavior.

4. Harmony in Chaos: Jean Renoir and Spinoza's Ethics

Discover how Renoir's humanism and complex portrayals of society in *The Rules of the Game* and *The Grand Illusion* mirror Spinoza's philosophy of ethical harmony in a rational, yet chaotic, universe.

5. The Uncanny Screen: Hitchcock's Psycho and Freud's Mind

Analyze *Psycho* and *The Birds* through Freud's theory of the mind, exploring the uncanny and psychological tension Hitchcock masterfully crafts in his narratives.

6. Dream Factories: Classical Hollywood and the Power of Myth (Martin Buber)

Examine the Hollywood studio system alongside Martin Buber's I-Thou philosophy, contrasting the commodification of film with Buber's call for authentic human relationships and connections.

7. Cinema After Auschwitz: Italian Neorealism and Adorno's Critique of Culture

Explore Italian Neorealism's raw depictions of post-war society through Adorno's critique of art and culture, focusing on how films responded to moral collapse after World War II.

8. Reproducing Reality: The French New Wave and Benjamin's Aura

The French New Wave's reinvention of cinema is paired with Walter Benjamin's concept of the "aura" in art, analyzing how technology altered the relationship between art, authenticity, and audience.

9. The Language of Dreams: Fellini and Noam Chomsky's Linguistic Theory

Fellini's films often delve into the dreamlike, symbolic world, where language is not just verbal but visual and emotional. We will explore how Noam Chomsky's theories of language as an inherent structure in the human mind can be applied to Fellini's exploration of storytelling, symbolism, and cinematic expression.

10. Faith and Doubt: Bergman's Cinema and Leibowitz's Radical Ethics

Study Bergman's explorations of faith and existential crisis in films like *The Seventh Seal* through Yeshayahu Leibowitz's radical ethics, where the confrontation of meaning and belief is central.

11. Truth in Fragments: Kurosawa's Rashomon and Bloch's Historical Method

Analyze *Rashomon* through Marc Bloch's historical philosophy, which embraces the complexity and multiplicity of perspectives when attempting to discern truth in history and narrative.

12. The Future of Storytelling: Independent Cinema and Harari's Post-Humanism

Explore the rise of independent American cinema through Yuval Noah Harari's ideas on technology, human evolution, and storytelling's role in shaping future societies.

13. Gender in Flux: Pedro Almodóvar and Judith Butler's Performativity

Explore how both Butler's theory of performativity, which posits that gender is not something we are but something we perform, parallels Almodóvar's cinematic portrayal of fluid identities, unconventional relationships, and characters who defy traditional gender roles.