EXPANDED COURSE DESCRIPTION

FILM AND VIDEO

School of the Arts, Media, Performance and Design
Department of Cinema and Media Arts

FA / FILM 3215 3.0 SECTION A
MAGICAL REALIST CINEMA
FALL 2018 / WINTER 2019

Last Modified Date: 10/15/2018

COURSE CALENDAR DESCRIPTION

The course begins with an introduction to magical realism in cinema and literature. Internationally renowned directors such as Takashi Miike, Jacques Rivette, Raul Ruiz, and Emir Kusturica all have used magical realism in some form in their films. The course analyzes the major theoretical discussion of the genre and how it has broken away from mimetic forms of art. We will discuss various hybrid forms of magical realism (which is itself a hybrid form of realism and fantasy) and other film genres (crime, romance, and comedy). Finally, the course will deal with the social, political, and philosophical themes of magical realist cinema. Major topics for the course include: early magical realist cinema, magical realist hybrid film genres, fairy tales and myths, modernism and postmodernity, historicity, nostalgia, global flows, feminism, and metafiction. Open to non-majors.

This course surveys a wide and diverse array of cinematic magical realist forms. This course will situate magical realist cinema in a transnational context given that magical realist literature is a transnational phenomenon itself, one that is often associated with postcolonial thought. We will explore the literary theory and history of magical realism and compare/contrast between literature and film throughout the course, recognizing that this mode became known as a literary genre first and acknowledged as a film genre much later. We will reference seminal figures from literature like Franz Kafka, Jorge Luis Borges, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, and others throughout the course to better understand magical realism from other fantastic genres.

This course will present magical realist cinema in chronological order, beginning with early cinema and ending with contemporary works to show how the genre has evolved over time. Each week we will discuss a major topic or theme of magical realist cinema and at times we will refer to short stories or excerpts from novels when applicable. Previous knowledge of literature or literary theory is not required for this course as the instructor will explain the pertinent information in the lectures to the week’s topic and screenings. The suggested reading list is there for your review essays and final paper but also can be used to gain a better understanding of the course materials or be used as a way to delve deeper into of the class screenings that interest you. Open to non-majors.

INSTRUCTOR(S)

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Section / Format / Term</th>
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<td>Lang, Cody</td>
<td>Sec. A / SEMR / F</td>
<td><a href="mailto:cmlang@yorku.ca">cmlang@yorku.ca</a></td>
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SPECIAL FEATURES

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major topic or theme of magical realist cinema and at times we will refer to short stories or excerpts from novels when applicable. Previous knowledge of literature or literary theory is not required for this course as the instructor will explain the pertinent information in the lectures to the week’s topic and screenings. The suggested reading list is there for your review essays and final paper but also can be used to gain a better understanding of the course materials or be used as a way to delve deeper into of the class screenings that interest you.

The course will begin with an introduction to an explanation of magical realism in cinema and literature. Directors like Takashi Miike, Jacques Rivette, Raul Ruiz, and Emir Kusturica all have used magical realism in some form in their films. We will review the major theoretical discussions of the genre and how it has broken away from mimetic forms of art. Then we will discuss various hybrid forms of magical realism (which is itself a hybrid form of realism and fantasy) and other film genres (crime, romance, and comedy). Finally, the last four lectures will deal with the social, political, and philosophical themes of magical realist cinema.

Major topics for the course include: early magical realist cinema, magical realist hybrid genre films, fairy tales and myths, modernism and postmodernity, historicity, nostalgia, global flows, feminism, and metafiction.

LIST OF LEARNING OUTCOMES AND EXAMPLES OF

The purpose of this course is to introduce students to magical realism. They will be encouraged to think critically about the relationship between literature and film, film genre, and theories of magical realism from literature and cinema. The course will introduce students to interdisciplinary scholarly work on literature and film, as well as films that challenge traditional generic boundaries of realist and commercial cinema.

After completing the course, students should have:
1. A general understanding of magical realism; its origins in painting and literature; its use in cinema from early cinema to the present.
2. A good understanding of medium specificity of literature (textual) and cinema (audio-visual) and how magical realism is similar/different between the two media.
3. The ability to critically analyze different texts: film and literature.
4. The ability to propose research questions and use critical textual analysis to write an academic research essay.
5. The ability to understand a variety of film genres and how magical realism is used to subvert or augment those genre conventions.
6. The ability to critically evaluate cinema from silent/early sound era to the present with respect to the magical realist genre.
7. Developed knowledge about the various forms magical realist cinema in the transnational context.

GRADED ASSESSMENT

Attendance/Participation (15%)

Students will be graded on their attendance of the lectures and on their participation in discussions. Make sure to bring notes on the readings and screenings that interest you so you are better prepared to discuss the subject matter in class.

Reading/Film Responses (3 in total worth 15% each)

Write a detailed critical discussion of one reading AND film from one of the lectures. The purpose of this assignment is to explain how the ideas from the reading illuminates the film and magical realism by responding to a set of questions provided by the course director. Three questions will be presented for each response paper and you have to answer one of them in your response. Approximately 500 words (or 2 pages double-spaced). Due dates are Week 2, Week 5, and Week 8.

Final Essay Proposal (10%)
A brief proposal and bibliography of your final essay. Approximately 250-500 words. Due at the beginning of class on Week 9. The proposal will be marked and returned on Week 10.

Final Essay (30%)
The final essay will be a topic of your choice which is based on a close reading of two of the assigned or supplemental readings from one of the lectures in the course. The essay should also discuss two (or more) screenings shown in the course or films/TV-shows of your choosing. This assignment will give you a chance to develop an original argument based on this genre. I will provide a filmography appendix for the course listing a wide range of magical realist films but students are not obligated to pick two titles from that list if they have others in mind. The final essay should be approximately 2000 words and contain three references to other sources. Due at the beginning of class on Week 12.

Administrative Information

Last date to drop a fall term (F) course without receiving a grade: November 9, 2018

Academic Policies / Information
The Senate Academic Standards, Curriculum and Pedagogy Committee (ASCP) provides a Student Information Sheet that includes:
York's Academic Honesty Policy and Procedures / Academic Integrity Web site
• Access/Disability
• Ethics Review Process for Research Involving Human Participants
• Religious Observance Accommodation
• Student Code of Conduct
http://secretariat.info.yorku.ca/files/CourseInformationForStudentsAugust20121.pdf
• Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities
• Alternate Exam and Test Scheduling
• Grading Scheme and Feedback Policy
The Senate Grading Scheme and Feedback Policy stipulates that (a) the grading scheme (i.e. kinds and weights of assignments, essays, exams, etc.) be announced, and be available in writing, within the first two weeks of class, and that, (b) under normal circumstances, graded feedback worth at least 15% of the final grade for Fall, Winter or Summer Term, and 30% for ‘full year’ courses offered in the Fall/Winter Term be received by students in all courses prior to the final withdrawal date from a course without receiving a grade.
• Important University Sessional Dates (you will find classes and exams start/end dates, reading/co-curricular week, add/drop deadlines, holidays, University closings and more.
http://www.registrar.yorku.ca/enrol/dates/index.htm
• Manage my Academic record
http://myacademicrecord.students.yorku.ca/

"20% Rule"
No examinations or tests collectively worth more than 20% of the final grade in a course will be given during the final 14 calendar days of classes in a term. The exceptions to the rule are classes which regularly meet Friday evenings or on Saturday and/or Sunday at any time, and courses offered in the compressed summer terms.
Final course grades may be adjusted to conform to Program or Faculty grades distribution profiles.

Course Schedule:

Week 1 – Introduction I: What is Magic(al) Realism?

Lecture: An introduction to the themes, interests, and objectives of the course. Expectations for classroom decorum will be addressed, as will warnings about potentially offensive content in future weeks. We will
discuss the origins of the magic(al) realism in the visual arts and literature. We will compare how the term is used in both contexts mentioned above, the visual arts (magic realism as the heightening of mundane reality, making the everyday appear strange or uncanny) and literature (magical realism as the combination of realism and fantasy).

Both uses of magical realism in other media apply to the cinema which has delved into fantastic modes since its inception. We will chart the beginnings of magical realism in the cinema, comparing it to gothic, surrealist, comedy, and science fiction modes. These comparisons will help us discover what is distinct about magical realism, and whether it makes sense to call it genre or something else.

Screenings:
Arsenal (Alexander Dovzhenko, 1918) (excerpt)
Un chien andalou (Salvador Dali and Luis Bunuel, 1929)
The Phantom Carriage (Victor Sjostrom, 1921) (excerpt)
The Avenging Conscience (D.W. Griffith, 1914) (excerpt)
Sherlock Jr. (Buster Keaton and William Goodrich, 1924) (excerpt)
Paris Qui Dort (Rene Clair, 1924)

Suggested Readings:

Week 2 – Introduction II: Miracles, Morality Plays, and Other Worlds

Lecture: This week we will discuss Todorov’s theory of the fantastic and the antecedents to magical realism in literature outside Latin American to discover how early films similarly use magical realist techniques. Early magical realist movies combined fantasy and realism in various ways and for different purposes. These films were influenced by surrealism, fairy tales, and Greek myths. This week we will look at early magical realist cinema from France, Italy, Denmark, and the U.S., beginning with discussing Jean Cocteau’s strange trilogy about other worlds and dreamscapes. We will then move on to popular Hollywood movies inspired by the A Christmas Carol wherein a fantastic scenario is introduced to teach the main character a moral lesson. Finally, we will look at the miraculous in cinema and how magical realist films incorporate miracles and elements from fables into realist cinematic discourses. We will also discuss the significance of religious symbols (angels, miracles, faith, the Messiah, etc.) in these films and how mythical tropes were used in then contemporary cinema to represent the fantastic.

Screening:
The Blood of the Poet (Jean Cocteau, 1932) (excerpts)
Orpheus (Jean Cocteau, 1950) (excerpts)
A Matter of Life and Death (Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, 1945) (excerpts)
It’s a Wonderful Life (Frank Capra, 1946) (excerpts)
Ordet (Carl Dreyer, 1955) (excerpts)
Miracle in Milan (Vittorio de Sica, 1951)
Week 3 – Magical Realism and Modernist Cinema

Lecture: Modernism in film is characterized by those directors who had a distinct film style, one that was as personal as their fingerprints (examples include Hitchcock, Kurosawa, Bergman, Antonioni, Fellini, Godard, etc.), emerging in Hollywood, Europe, and Japan in the fifties and continuing into the seventies. Around this time, magical realist literature became a worldwide phenomenon with the publication of Gabriel García Márquez’s One Hundred Years of Solitude. However, before Márquez’s book, there were many antecedents to magical realism in literature like the short stories of Borges and Kafka, both of whom are also considered to be literary modernists with their unique writing style and effacement of realist literature (we should also note that Márquez claimed his biggest influence was William Faulkner, a preeminent figure in literary modernism). Both Borges and Kafka influenced early magical realist cinema even though magical realism as a genre was not recognized as one in film. Also, modernist directors like Alain Resnais were influenced by magical realist works like The Invention of Morel when making Last Year at Marienbad. All of this is to say that magical realism showed up in films by directors who were breaking away from realist conventions by mixing the fantastic with realism. We will reference Freud’s theory of the uncanny to better understand the strangeness of magical realist cinema. This week we will look at the convergence of cinematic modernism and magical realism, whether it be through warping time, memory, and space in Last Year at Marienbad; the comedies of Tashlin and Lewis that create their own absurdist-magical worlds; Welles’s adaption of Kafka’s The Trial; the ironic nightmare scenario of The Exterminating Angel; and finally Oshima’s indictment of anti-Korean racism in Japan with Death by Hanging.

Screening:

Artists and Models (Frank Tashlin, 1955) (excerpts)
The Exterminating Angel (Luis Bunuel, 1962) (excerpts)
The Ladies Man (Jerry Lewis, 1961) (excerpts)
The Trial (Orson Welles, 1962) (excerpts)
Last Year at Marienbad (Alain Resnais, 1961) (excerpts)
Death by Hanging (Nagisa Oshima, 1968)

Required Readings:

Suggested Readings:
Week 4 – Magical Realism, Post-surrealism, and the Neo-Baroque

Lecture: This week we will focus on the persistent overlap between surrealism and magical realism. In particular we will look at the similarities and differences between Raul Ruiz (a director known for both magical realism and surrealism) and David Lynch (known for making movies with surrealist aspects). We will also consider how early theories of magical realism situated it in relation to the baroque (in an attempt to distance Latin American literature from European surrealist and realist fiction) and what it means to label the magical realist cinema of Raul Ruiz as neo-baroque.

Screenings:
Wild at Heart (David Lynch, 1990) (excerpts)
Lost Highway (David Lynch, 1997) (excerpts)
The Hypothesis of the Stolen Painting (Raul Ruiz, 1978) (excerpts)
Three Lives and Only One Death (Raul Ruiz, 1996) (excerpts)
City of Pirates (Raul Ruiz, 1983)

Required Readings:

Suggested Readings:

Week 5 – Magical Realism Cinema and Historicity

Lecture: This week we will look at how magical realist cinema represents history. We will compare how other historical films from commercial cinema think of history from a postmodern perspective. One of the features of postmodernism is the lack of historical consciousness or awareness. Past, present, and future are flattened out or rather only understood as a sequence of fashions or stereotypes. In film, postmodernity is expressed through nostalgia, often this is a nostalgia for a past that never existed (consider the way George Lucas envisions the fifties in *American Graffiti* (1973) or attention to detail in the set designs of *The Conformist* (1970) and *Chinatown* (1974)). Magical realist films imagine history differently and do not obscure the differences between the past and the present and thus are not nostalgic for a past that never existed.
Screenings:
Fever (Agnieszka Holland, 1981) (excerpts)
Chinatown (Roman Polanski, 1974) (excerpt)
Blue Velvet (David Lynch, 1986) (excerpts)
The House of Water (Jacobo Penzo, 1983) (excerpt)
The Tin Drum (Volker Schlondorff, 1979)

Required Readings:

Suggested Readings:

Week 6 – Genre Hybrids I: Magical Realism and Crime

Lecture: We now begin our three week tour of hybrid genre films that intersect with magical realism. We will discuss how magical realism itself is a hybrid form combining realism and fantasy and then extrapolate towards more complicated hybrid forms where magical realism intersects with other genres.

This week we will look at the intersections of magical realism and crime films with a particular focus on Japanese cinema. Crime films are known for their recognizable narrative structures and character archetypes that propose a certain view of masculinity and codes of honor. Directors like Suzuki and Miike subvert these conventions through magical realism, undermining the ideology of gangster stories. We will sample several yakuza films from Japan along with other magical realist films that intersect with crime.

Screenings:
Tokyo Drifter (Seijun Suzuki, 1965) (excerpts)
A Man of Principle (Francisco Norden, 1984) (excerpt)
Time of the Gypsies (Emir Kusturica, 1988) (excerpts)
Dead or Alive (Takashi Miike, 1999) (excerpt)
Dead or Alive 2: Birds (Takashi Miike, 2000) (excerpts)
Gozu (Takashi Miike, 2003)

Required Readings:

Suggested Reading:
Week 7 – Genre Hybrids II: Magical Realist Love-Stories

Lecture: This week we will cover how magical realism is used in love-stories to either subvert and/or augment their conventions. We will discuss how love-stories inherited their conventions from romance (adventure quests and wish-fulfillment) and comedy (stories about a romantic couple coming together, society becoming more inclusive). Each of these antecedents work well with magical realism because their stories deal with transforming the world which magical realism does literally by combining the fantastic with realism. Magical realist love-stories therefore either subvert/disrupt these codes (like in *Tropical Malady*) or they supplement them with fantastic embellishments (like in Woody Allen's movies, *Groundhog Day*, and *Black Cat, White Cat*).

Screenings:

*The Purple Rose of Cairo* (Woody Allen, 1987) (excerpts)
*Midnight in Paris* (Woody Allen, 2011) (excerpts)
*Wings of Desire* (Wim Wenders, 1987) (excerpts)
*Black Cat, White Cat* (Emir Kusturica, 1998) (excerpts)
*Tropical Malady* (Apichatpong Weerasethakul, 2003) (excerpts)
*Groundhog Day* (Ivan Reitman, 1993)

Required Readings:


Suggested Readings:


Week 8 – Genre Hybrids III: Magical Realist Comedies

Lecture: This week we will cover how magical realism intersects with film/TV comedy by warping the use of fictional space. Comedies have the tendency to already embellish reality for jokes and the more absurd they get the more magical and strange they become, hence the hybridization of comedy and magical realism. This involves creating fantastic spaces where the rules of reality are suspended without any explanation. In another sense, dark or ironic comedies that delve into philosophy or metafiction also introduce the fantastic into realist discourses (with films like *Genealogies of a Crime* and *Being John Malkovich*). We will also discuss how magical realist literature uses deadpan comedy and silly intrusions on reality for comic effect as well.

Screenings:
Week 9 – Magical Realism and Global Flows

Lecture: Magical realism has often been discussed in the context of postcolonial art because of the way it subverts the dominant aesthetic conventions of the West. This week we will discuss the way magical realist films represent globalization, transnational intersections, racism, and peripheral spaces.

Screenings:
- *Days of Eclipse* (Alexander Sokurov, 1988) (excerpts)
- *The Bird People in China* (Takashi Miike, 1998) (excerpts)
- *The World* (Jia Zhangke, 2001) (excerpts)
- *Blissfully Yours* (Apichatpong Weerasethakul, 2002) (excerpts)
- *Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter …and Spring* (Kim Ki-Duk, 2003) (excerpt)
- *Still Life* (Jia Zhangke, 2006)

Required Readings:

Suggested Readings:
Week 10 – Magical Realism and the Margins: De-centering Privileged Centres.

Lecture: This week continues the discussion we began with global flows and magical realism, focusing now on the ex-trinsic nature of magical realism as a form. Magical realism is ex-trinsic because it has broken away from Western literary history as well as writing about figures that have been pushed to the margins of the Global North. In another sense, magical realism is ex-trinsic because it creates alternative worlds that can be used to correct existing reality. In literature, novels like *Foe*, *What the Crow Said*, and *Midnight’s Children* use magical realism, using oppressed figures at the centre of their fictional worlds that they use to rewrite history. We will discuss how, in film, we find similar ex-trinsic stories being told about marginal peoples, cultures, and spaces that are now made possible by using magical realism.

**Screenings:**
- *Celine and Julie Go Boating* (Jacques Rivette, 1974) (excerpts)
- *Duelle* (Jacques Rivette, 1976) (excerpts)
- *To Sleep with Anger* (Charles Burnett, 1990) (excerpts)
- *Daughters of the Dust* (Julie Dash, 1991)

**Required Readings:**

**Suggesting Readings:**

Week 11 – The “Textualization” of the Spectator in Magical Realism

Lecture: This week is about the another type of hybridization in magical realism which is the intersection of the fiction and reality. We look at films and literature that feature moments where the character becomes “textualized” or rather becomes part of the fiction that they are reading/viewing. In this case, magical realism intersects with metafiction (fiction about the process of creating fiction) and so we will discuss films that feature artists or characters becoming part of the creation that they are creating or one that they have entered by accident.

**Screenings:**
- *Kafka* (Steven Soderbergh, 1991) (excerpts)
- *Naked Lunch* (David Cronenberg, 1991) (excerpts)
- *Adaptation* (Spike Jonze, 2002) (excerpts)
- *Stranger than Fiction* (Marc Forster, 2006) (excerpts)
- *Synecdoche, New York* (Charlie Kaufman, 2008)
Required Readings:

Suggested Readings:

**Week 12 – Women and Women and Women: Femininity in Magical Realism**

Lecture: In the final lecture we will look at the issue of femininity and feminist discourses in magical realism. We will consider how dominant literary and cinematic discourses worked within the realist mode and that magical realism disrupt those conventions much in the same way that feminist discourses challenge the dominance of patriarchy. Magical realist films that deal with femininity represent stereotypical feminine class positions and spaces, women’s experiences and problems. There is no single definable feminist ideology between these films but they are united by the way they erode the global dominance of patrilineal artistic forms.

Screenings:
*Orlando* (Sally Potter, 1992) (excerpts)
*Beloved* (Jonathan Demme, 1998) (excerpts)
*Bird People* (Pascale Ferran, 2014) (excerpts)
*Like Water for Chocolate* (Alfonso Arua, 1992)

Required Readings:

Suggested Readings:

Many courses utilize Moodle, York University's course website system. If your course is using Moodle, click here to access it.  
Moodle @ York University