



## **POSTGRADUATE FILM STUDIES READING GROUP**

### **THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY**

SEMESTER 1, 2017

The **Postgraduate Film Studies Reading Group** seeks to bring together postgraduate research students and staff who engage the object of film in their research practice. We hold fortnightly discussions built around canonical and contemporary works of film theory. It is our goal to foster an environment that encourages diverse approaches to film studies as a scholarly discipline, from studies in technology and aesthetics to performance and adaptation to ‘filmosophies’ informed by literature, images and sound. While we aim to interrogate some of the paradigm-establishing-and-shifting ideas underpinning the discipline, expertise is not a requirement of involvement in the group, and we welcome anyone who wishes to join. All readings are pre-assigned, selected by current postgraduate students to offer both new and established scholars a focused point for discussion.

In taking film as our object for analysis, we hope to engage the rich diversity of film studies, bringing together research students and staff from a range of departments and schools at the University of Sydney.

## MEETINGS

Mondays 4-6pm

*Note: there is no screening or reading group meeting during the semester break, and on Monday 12 June (Queen's Birthday).*

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## VENUES

Screenings: SNH Lecture Theatre 3003, Sydney Nanoscience Hub (SNH) A31, Physics Road

Reading group: SNH Seminar Room 3001, Sydney Nanoscience Hub (SNH) A31, Physics Road (except for the final meeting)

*NOTE: The final reading group meeting on 19 June will take place in the Schaeffer Seminar Room 210, RC Mills Building A26, Fisher Road.*

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## READINGS

***For each reading group meeting, make sure to watch the film and read ALL of the required readings. The intellectual depth and vibrancy of our critical discussion depends on it. Additional texts are, of course, optional.***

Most readings are accessible electronically in one of three ways:

- through the library Crosssearch function or catalogue as eBook chapters or journal articles
- through the library catalogue by searching on the journal title
- by clicking on the reading reference (indicated by '**[link]**').

A few readings are only accessible through eReserve on the FASS - FILM STUDIES Postgraduate eCommunity site. These are indicated with '**[eR]**'.

To access these eReserve readings, go to 'Postgraduate Film Studies Reading Group', and then click on 'eReserve Readings'.

## **POSTGRADUATE STEERING GROUP**

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## **ACADEMIC SPONSOR**

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# PROGRAM

**SESSION 1: 3 April** | SNH Lecture Theatre 3003

**Introduction and Welcome**

**‘Beyond Vision’: Horror and the Cinematic Image I**

*I Walked with a Zombie* never obliges the viewer to commit to either a natural or supernatural explanation of Jessica Holland’s state. By the end of the film, we may still not be convinced that a supernatural causality has determined the events of the narrative. A mystery that never reveals its solution, the film extends mysteriousness to all its levels and characters.

Chris Fujiwara, *Jacques Tourneur*

[W]e cannot fully arrest the world in thought and language... [T]here [exists] a beyond, a region of massive interest to us but to which we have no cognitive or linguistic access.

John Gibson, “Zombie Philosophy”

## **Screening:**

*I Walked with a Zombie*. Dir. Jacques Tourneur. USA, 1943.

## **Additional texts:**

*Cat People*. Dir. Jacques Tourneur. USA, 1942.

*The Leopard Man*. Dir. Jacques Tourneur. USA, 1943.

*Night of the Demon*. Dir. Jacques Tourneur. USA, 1957.

**SESSION 2: 10 April** | SNH Seminar Room 3001

**'Beyond Vision': Horror and the Cinematic Image II**

"I'll tell you a secret," Lewton once explained in an interview, "if you make the screen dark enough, the mind's eye will read anything into it you want! We're great ones for dark patches."

J.P. Tellote observes that Tourneur's use of 'dark patches' of screen space signals a black hole or vacant meaning in the physical realm which, in spite of man's natural desire to fill it with consciousness and significance, persistently and troublingly remains open.

Paul Meehan, *Horror Noir*

[Cinema's] ... relation to reality is, of course, shared with photography, and comes from the tradition of the camera obscura, while its movement belongs to the tradition of optical illusions that exploit a peculiar ability of the human eye to deceive the mind.

Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second*

Whether it's in the interplay between lightness and darkness, the animate and the inanimate, the natural and the supernatural or the known and the unknown, it is clear that the effectiveness of Val Lewton and Jacques Tourneur's series of RKO horror films depend on the limitation and deception of vision and knowledge. This session will examine Lewton and Tourneur's second collaboration, *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943), focusing on the ways in which a mechanical deconstruction of the cinematic apparatus (specifically in terms of projection and animation) can provoke a contemplation (and fear) of that which lurks beyond sight and intellectual certainty.

**Readings:**

Mulvey, Laura. "Uncertainty: Natural Magic and the Art of Deception." In *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image*, 33-53. London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2006.

**[eR]**

Royle, Nicholas. "Darkness." In *The Uncanny*, 108-111. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003. **[eR]**

Telotte, J.P. "Narration and Incarnation: "I Walked with a Zombie"." In *Film Criticism*, Vol.6, No.3, 18-31. Spring 1982. **[eR]**

**Additional texts:**

Cubitt, Sean. "Introduction." In *The Practice of Light: A Genealogy of Visual Technologies from Prints to Pixels*, 1-19. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2014. [READ ONLY PAGES 1-3] **[eR]**

Meehan, Paul. "The Val Lewton/Jacques Tourneu Noir Legacy." In *Horror Noir: Where Cinema's Dark Sisters Meet*, 53-72. USA: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2011. **[eR]**

Warner, Marina. "Our Zombies, Our Selves." In *Phantasmagoria: Spirit Visions, Metaphors, and Media into the Twenty-first Century*, 357-369. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.

**SESSION 3: 24 April | SNH Lecture Theatre 3003**

**The Reality of Illusion / The Illusion of Reality I**

For Godard, the means of countering the exploitative function of commercial film (and hence of the parties that produce it) was the deconstruction of the myth of realism by insisting that the movie image is illusion, albeit a real illusion. ... *The Last Movie* is a notable essay within the frame of reference established by Godard.

David E. James, "Dennis Hopper's *The Last Movie*"

... *The Last Movie* begins with an art object and dissolves it back to its components, back to life.

David E. James, "Dennis Hopper's *The Last Movie*"

*The Last Movie* is a wasteland of cinematic wreckage.

Roger Ebert, "Review: *The Last Movie / Chinchero*"

**Screening:**

*The Last Movie*. Dir. Dennis Hopper. USA, 1971.

**Additional text:**

*The American Dreamer*. Dirs. L.M. Kit Carson, Lawrence Schiller. USA, 1971.

**SESSION 4: 1 May** | SNH Seminar Room 3001

## **The Reality of Illusion / The Illusion of Reality II**

When movies about the movies reveal cinematic fakery or show, they generally put forward an alternative reality that contrasts with the illusion of the movies. But because the entire film inevitably is trapped in the cinematic realm for the viewing audience, the identification of a genuine 'truth about Hollywood' becomes ironic or paradoxical.

Christopher Ames, *Movies About the Movies*

Hollywood's fascination with itself as the geographical and metaphoric locus of the American film industry spans nearly its entire history. Many films that sit within this self-reflexive tradition exhibit a perverse proclivity toward chipping away at Tinseltown's glamorous façade: films such as *A Star is Born* (dir. William A. Wellman, 1937) and *Sunset Boulevard* (dir. Billy Wilder, 1950) were lauded for revealing – or at least purporting to reveal – the dark side of the industry that birthed them. There is a further subset of films that critique Hollywood using both narrative and form, resulting, for example, in the metacinema of *Mulholland Drive* (dir. David Lynch, 2001) and *Adaptation* (dir. Spike Jonze, 2002). Lacking consistent markers delineating the 'real' from 'fantasy' narrative worlds, these films collapse in on themselves, thus calling attention to their constructed and illusory nature. Dennis Hopper's *The Last Movie* is a radical experiment in this vein, deconstructing both Hollywood and itself. Primarily remembered as a significant critical and commercial flop, its failure led to Hopper's exile from Hollywood and contributed to the waning of the New Hollywood era. This session investigates *The Last Movie* as a historically and artistically potent entry in the catalogue of Hollywood's representations of itself and its own industrial processes.

### **Readings:**

[Ames, Christopher. "Introduction: Hollywood Stories." In \*Movies About the Movies: Hollywood Reflected\*, 1-20. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997. \[link\]](#)

James, David E. "Dennis Hopper's *The Last Movie*." *Journal of Film and Video* 35, no.2 (Spring 1983): 34-46. [eR]

### **Additional text:**

*Los Angeles Plays Itself* (Thom Andersen, 2003)

**SESSION 5: 8 May | SNH Lecture Theatre 3003**

**Authoritative Anatomy: the corporeal avant-garde and dead aesthetics in the work of Yvonne Rainer and Kristy Guevara-Flanagan I**

I had a sense of my potential, that I was going to make something out of this recalcitrant, undancerly body. I was going to carve my own way.

Yvonne Rainer, *Feelings are Facts*

There's something more vindictive in the backlash against women's movements; that women are "put back in their place" by way of men murdering them. Then there's the ideal of the passive woman, in repose, being the ideal, and this is an extension of that.

Kristy Guevara-Flanagan

**Screening:**

*Trio A.* Dir. Yvonne Rainer, 1966.

*Hand Movie.* Dir. Yvonne Rainer, 1966.

*El Corrido De Cecilia Rios.* Dir. Kristy Guevara-Flanagan, 1999.

*What Happened to Her?* Dir. Kristy Guevara-Flanagan, 2016.

**Additional texts:**

*Fly.* Dir. Yoko Ono, 1966.

*Removed.* Dir. Naomi Uman, 1999.

**SESSION 6: 15 May** | SNH Seminar Room 3001

**Authoritative Anatomy: the corporeal avant-garde and dead aesthetics in the work of Yvonne Rainer and Kristy Guevara-Flanagan II**

I made the transition from choreography to filmmaking between 1972 and 1975. In a general sense my burgeoning feminist consciousness was an important factor. An equally urgent stimulus was the encroaching physical changes in my aging body.

Yvonne Rainer, *Feelings are Facts*

It's really hard to watch is what they always say and that they don't want to watch it again.

Kristy Guevara Flanagan on popular reactions to her film  
*What Happened to Her* (2017).

From their neoteric beginnings, women's films with a feminist lens used the social nature of cinema to identify inequalities and encourage change. This session considers two filmmakers intent on analysing feminisms, questioning traditional ideals of a feminine aesthetic, and highlighting the erasure of women in televisual landscapes through explorations of corporeal conditions such as death, grief, ugliness and awkwardness. Yvonne Rainer's "unenhanced physicality" is examined through her series *The Mind is a Muscle* and *Hand Movie*. Rainer's quiet exhibitionism of the body's mundane vulnerability foregrounds the basic components of ordinary embodied empathy. To then rehistoricise adverse reactions to feminists like Rainer, two films by UCLA academic and filmmaker Kristy Guevara-Flanagan will be considered; the personal interrogation of trauma in *El Corrido De Cecilia Rios* (1999) and 2016's antagonistic *What Happened to Her*, an examination of crime drama's reliance on sexualising death. This session seeks to identify the feminist optic that perseveres today, to examine agitations of femininity and beauty, and to regroup the fight for the recognition of the absence and distortion of authoritative women in the cinematic apparatus.

**Readings:**

Jacque Lynn Foltyn, "Dead famous and dead sexy: Popular culture, forensics, and the rise of the corpse," *Mortality*, Vol. 13, No. 2, (2008): 153-156, 163-170.

Elise Archias, "Hurray for People: Yvonne Rainer." In *The Concrete Body*, 30-35. Newhaven: Yale University Press, 2016. [entire article is 30-77].

Claire Johnson, "The Subject of Feminist Film Theory/Practice." In *The Sexual Subject: a screen reader in sexuality*, 295-299. London: Routledge, 1992.

**Additional texts:**

Deborah Jermyn, "You can't keep a dead woman down : the female corpse and textual disruption in contemporary Hollywood." In *Images of the Corpse: from the Renaissance to Cyberspace*, ed. Elizabeth Klaver. Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004.

Manisha Krishnan, "We Talked to a Director About the Cultural Obsession with Hot Murdered White Women." *VICE*, May 2016.

Leshu Torchin, "Conditions of Activism: Feminist Film Activism and the Legacy of the Second Wave." In *Feminisms: Diversity, Difference and Multiplicity in Contemporary Film Cultures*, eds. Laura Mulvey and Anna Backman Rogers, 141-148. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015.

Malin Hedlin Hayden and Jessica Sjöholm Skrubbe, "Women Artists Vs. Feminist Artists: Definition by Ideology, Rhetoric or Mere Habit?" In *Feminisms is Still Our Name: Seven Essays on Historiography and Curatorial Practices*, 57-85. London: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010.

**SESSION 7: 22 May** | SNH Lecture Theatre 3003

**Cyborg Bodies and the Pursuit of Electronic Souls in Mamoru Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell* I**

**Section 6 Department Chief Nakamura:** Nonsense! There's no proof at all that you are a living, thinking life form!

**Puppet Master:** And can you offer me proof of your existence? How can you, when neither modern science nor philosophy can explain what life is?

**Screening:**

*Kōkaku Kidōtai (Ghost in the Shell)*. Dir. Mamoru Oshii. Japan/UK, 1995.

**Additional Texts:**

*Blade Runner*. Dir. Ridley Scott. USA/Hong Kong/UK, 1982.

*Papurika (Paprika)*. Dir. Satoshi Kon. Japan, 2006.

*The Matrix*. Dir. Lana & Lilly Wachowski. USA, 1999.

**SESSION 8: 29 May** | SNH Seminar Room 3001

**Cyborg Bodies and the Pursuit of Electronic Souls in Mamoru Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell II***

Why should our bodies end at the skin, or include at best other beings encapsulated by skin? From the seventeenth century till now, machines could be animated—given ghostly souls to make them speak or move or to account for their orderly development and mental capacities. Or organisms could be mechanized—reduced to body understood as resource of mind. These machine/organism relationships are obsolete, unnecessary. For us, in imagination and in other practice, machines can be prosthetic devices, intimate components, friendly selves. We don't need organic holism to give impermeable wholeness, the total woman and her feminist variants (mutants?).

Donna Haraway, *Manifestly Haraway*

This session will examine the unfolding relationship between the human body and technology by calling into question the constraints and/or freedoms possessed by the human form/identity when in direct, sustained contact with technology. Through an investigation of 'bodies' and the 'cyborg species' in Mamoru Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell*, particular focus will be placed on philosophical concerns, visual spectacle, the film's unease with the body, gender ambiguity and hybridity, cyborg reproduction, and the cyborg spiritual quest.

**Readings:**

Napier, Susan J. "Doll Parts: Technology and Body in *Ghost in the Shell*." In *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation*, 103-116. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. [eR]

Orbaugh, Sharalyn. "Sex and the Single Cyborg: Japanese Popular Culture Experiments in Subjectivity." In *Robot Ghosts and Wired Dreams: Japanese Science Fiction from Origins to Anime*, ed. Christopher Bolton, Istvan Csicsery-Rony Jr., and Takayuki Tatsumi, 172-192. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007.

**Additional text:**

Haraway, Donna J. "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century." In *Manifestly Haraway*, 3-90. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016.

**SESSION 9: 5 June** | SNH Lecture Theatre 3003

**Futuristic Narrative and Naive Form in Hershman Leeson's *Teknolust* I**

*Teknolust* reflects the originality and cheerful abundance of an artist who has practiced for decades as a woman and a feminist, constructing incessantly against the dominant binary cultural system, against invasive hermeneutics and against oblivion. It is also a fun film, a “joyful act of insurrection” (Braidotti 4); it offers a generous landscape of intimate and political narrative, fearless of ingenuity and ridicule. The futuristic ambience of a bio gender warfare is littered with improbable wigs, old fashion sterilization methods (boil on the stove and stick in labelled jam jar), unexplained but ever present little band-aids ... In the end love prevails, whatever that is. Oh, and an unforgettable dance scene.

**Screening:**

*Teknolust*. Dir. Lynn Hershman Leeson. USA, 2002.

**SESSION 10: 19 June** | **Schaeffer Seminar Room 210**, RC Mills Building [note the different venue]

### **Futuristic Narrative and Naive Form in Hershman Leeson's *Teknolust II***

What is becoming more and more clear, instead, is that all the categories of our social science stand to be reformulated starting from the notion of gendered social subjects. And something of this process of reformulation - re-vision, rewriting, rereading, rethinking, "looking back at ourselves" - is what I see inscribed in the texts of women's cinema but not yet sufficiently focused on in feminist film theory or feminist critical practice in general.

Teresa De Lauretis, "Rethinking Women's Cinema"

This session is meant to ignite reflections on the potential of cinema to create worlds and possibly the current struggle of cinema as art to re-view and rethink itself. *Teknolust* is a film that proposes one of many possible strategies of de-aestheticisation through a sort of intentional naiveté that exposes the shortcomings, if not the mystifications, of technology both in reality and in film form.

#### **Readings:**

[Braidotti, Rosi. Punk Women and Riot Grrls. pg 1-5 and 18-20 \(Conclusions\). \[link\]](#)

[Sontag, Susan. "Against Interpretation." In \*Against Interpretation and Other Essays\*. New York: Picador, 1966. \[link\]](#)

#### **Additional texts:**

<http://www.lynnhershman.com/> [link]

De Lauretis, Teresa. "Rethinking Women's Cinema." In *Figures of Resistance*, 25-47. University of Illinois Press, 2007.

Original publication: "Aesthetic and Feminist Theory: Rethinking Women's Cinema." *New German Critique* 34 (Winter 1985):154-175.