

PROGRAMME SPECIFICATION FOR M.ST. IN FILM AESTHETICS

1. Awarding institution/body	University of Oxford
2. Teaching institution	University of Oxford
3. Programme accredited by	n/a
4. Final award	Master of Studies (M.St.)
5. Programme	Film Aesthetics
6. UCAS code	
7. Relevant subject benchmark statement	Communication, media, film and cultural studies
8. Date of programme original specification	October 2008

9. Educational aims of the programme

The course concentrates on film from the point of view of aesthetics. It also studies film as an art form. It therefore focuses on:

- the detailed study of film style and form, and the articulation of it in writing – for example, narrative structure, use of camera, colour, performance, sound, music, editing, and composition.
- matters of philosophical aesthetics – and their particular application to film – such as matters of value, judgement, appreciation, taste, ontology, medium, intention, expression, meaning/ interpretation, creativity, beauty, metaphor, symbolism, fiction, storytelling, convention, stylistic groupings, emotion, imagination, conceptual clarification, and the relation between ethics, morality and aesthetics.
- classic and contemporary film theory and film-philosophy especially as they relate to aesthetics – such as, matters of film specificity, spectatorship, modernism, phenomenology, affect, and the work of film philosophers (e.g. Hugo Muntersburg, Rudolph Arnheim, Gilles Deleuze, Stanley Cavell)

Many Master's programme's concentrate on historical, cultural, and political approaches to the study of film, and may only have an aesthetic component. This programme is dedicated to the specialist study of film aesthetics.

The first term of the course will look at the analysis of film style, train techniques of film analysis, and look at key concepts in film form, film criticism, film theory, and film-philosophy. The students will study classic texts of film criticism and film theory.

The second term (Hilary Term) consists of four classes, each covering a particular aesthetic topic. This part of the course provides the students with the opportunity to engage with four different areas of specialisation.

In Trinity Term the students write a 10,000-word dissertation. The dissertation provides the students with the opportunity to work with a tutor in their area of specialisation.

10. Programme outcomes

A. Students will develop a knowledge and understanding of:

- how film functions as an aesthetic medium and art form.
- the ways in which one carefully analyses the style of a film
- the concepts and arguments in film aesthetics .
- the relevant aesthetic issues within different types of film-making practice.
- the history of film criticism and film theory as they relate to film aesthetics

Related teaching/learning methods and strategies

In order to acquire knowledge and understanding, the students are provided with an extensive General Aesthetics Reading list, and further lists which outline the key texts in film criticism and film theory as they relate to aesthetics. In the main foundational options key articles and chapters are provided in the form of photocopies and pdf documents, but all the options highlight key pieces of reading. Students are expected to read these before class and passages are examined in class. Each week one specific film is focused upon, and the students view this in the form of a communal screening. Sequences from the film are then analysed in detail.

Assessment

The three essays for the degree must be directly related to expanding upon, or speaking to, a knowledge area studied in the classes.

B. Skills and other attributes

Students will have the opportunity to develop the following skills during the course:

I. Intellectual skills

On completion of the course, students will have:

- acquired intellectual sophistication in handling theoretical and methodological issues
- proved able to apply conceptual tools and questions
- gained a grounding in relevant research methods and written a dissertation, which may constitute a basis for proceeding to a future research degree.

II. Practical and Transferable Skills

The 'MSt in Film Aesthetics' is particularly skill oriented. Most of the skills in analysing how audio-visual texts work and what they mean are transferable, especially in the contemporary context of a screen based culture. On completion of the course, students will be able to:

- view and listen with increasing awareness and detail
- describe, evoke and analyse images and sounds in the spoken and written word
- discuss films and their moments intimately and intricately
- provide sophisticated interpretation
- critically discriminate
- analyse and synthesise a range a relevant of academic literature.
- explain and analyse theoretical arguments or concepts with clarity and precision
- expand on or counter theoretical or interpretive claims with careful argumentation.
- imaginatively develop their own film theory or conceptual frameworks.
- test and explore theory and concepts alongside the relevant audio-visual evidence
- present the analysis of audio-visual work in a clear, attractive, and arresting way.

Related teaching/learning methods and strategies

In order to acquire these skills, there is a diagnostic exercise in the early part of the year which tests the students' capabilities with regard to examining a film sequence. Within the classes, students analyse style and meaning by observing aspects of film form and gradually refining interpretations in conversation with each other, under the guidance of the tutor. Students are also encouraged to explain and articulate clearly arguments from the literature, while also assessing the qualities of the argument. They are also encouraged to recognise different methods and approaches of the literature on film aesthetics, so that they are in a sensible position to choose which they would like to adopt in their own written work.

Assessment:

All the assessments require that students exhibit the skills outlined here. The essays and dissertation, in particular, require the close reading of both films and texts, and the appropriate presentation of audio-visual material.

11. Programme Structures and Features

The course runs from late September to June, from the week preceding the first term (Michaelmas Term) to the end of the last term (Trinity Term). The course is divided into three distinct parts. For the first two terms the course is taught in classes accompanied by film screenings. Both classes and screenings are compulsory. During the final term, the students write a dissertation in consultation with a supervisor. At the beginning of the course, in the week preceding week 0, the students attend a one-week film workshop with the Oxford Film and Video Makers.

The first term (Michaelmas Term) presents classes which explore fundamental aspects of film criticism, film analysis, film theory, film form, and film aesthetics. A 6,000 essay expands on a topic in relation to this term's work.

The second term (Hilary Term) consists of four classes, each covering a particular topic in film theory run by a specialist tutor. This part of the course provides the students with the opportunity to engage with four different areas of specialisation within contemporary film studies. They include: Film and Phenomenology; Film Music; the Aesthetics of Italian Cinema; Film and Modernist Aesthetics; Contemporary Theories of Spectatorship - Embodiment, Ethics and Politics; The Film-Philosophy of Stanley Cavell; Colour and Contemporary Chinese Cinema. A 6,000 expands on a topic in relation to this term's work.

The two 6000-word essays are derived in consultation with a tutor. Although the essay will not be supervised beyond this initial consultation, it is presented at first in a draft version which tutors provide a mark and comments. Students may then revise the essay in light of these comments, and submit a final version at the end of the year.

In Trinity Term the students write a 10,000-word dissertation. The dissertation provides the students with the opportunity to work with a tutor in their area of specialisation, and to pursue an original project.

At the end of Trinity Term students also submit a 3,000 word 'Concept Essay'. This essay should focus on a concept from aesthetics or more specifically from film aesthetics. It does not need to include detailed film analysis although examples from films are acceptable. This essay should especially exhibit cogency, concision, synthesis, clear logical argumentation and citation of relevant theoretical and philosophical work.

Film Workshop

The compulsory one-week workshop at the Oxford Film and Video Makers introduces the students to the practical process of making a film, from writing a story-board to shooting and editing. The workshop will include work with 16-millimetre film as well as DVD technology. It aims to familiarise the students with all the practical aspects of the filmmaking process. Although the degree is not a practical one this aspect of the course immediately orients the students towards an aesthetic point of view and immerses them in the matter of aesthetic choices. The Oxford Film and Video Makers is a well-known and highly-regarded school, organising courses both at beginners' and industry level.

12. Support for Students and their learning

A. Induction Arrangements

An induction programme for new postgraduates is provided at the start of the academic year, introducing academic, administrative and pastoral resources, the Faculty Library and IT resources, the Bodleian, and the Oxford University Computing Services.

B. Academic Guidance and Support

All students on arrival receive a copy of the course handbook, and other preliminary documentation. Notice of lectures and classes each term is given on a lecture list currently available both on paper and on web.

Each student is assigned a general supervisor, who will help to introduce the student to Oxford and to the course, will provide advice on academic progress throughout the course and will also fulfill a pastoral role.

Language training can be provided through the University Language Centre.

C. Pastoral and Welfare support

Faculty or departmental Directors of Graduate Studies are available to assist graduate students in all aspects of their studies. In addition, graduate students have access in their college to many officers with responsibility for pastoral and welfare support. These include the college tutor for graduates and a college adviser, the Chaplain, and the college nurse and doctor. In addition there is peer support from the Middle Common Room (MCR) which elects student officers with special responsibility for welfare. These will liaise with the central Oxford University Students' Union. Both college and faculty/department have Harassment Advisers within a network of such advisers organised centrally. The University provides support services for disabled students and students with children. There is a central University Counselling Service. Financial support is available from central university and college hardship funds, from the University/Faculty/Departmental/College Graduate Studentship scheme, and from a number of trusts administered by faculties and departments. The University has an excellent Careers Service.

D. Libraries

Films are available for the students in The Taylorian, The English Language Faculty Library and the Magdalen College Library. The Bodleian as well as the Taylorian and the English Faculty libraries possess the necessary literature.

E. IT

All colleges provide IT facilities and have access to an IT Officer to support students, and IT Officers are also available in faculties. In addition, Oxford University Computing Services provide a wide range of training courses and excellent resources.

13. Criteria for Admission

In order to qualify, students must have completed a Bachelor degree, normally in a humanities, fine art or social sciences. The criterion for admission is academic excellence. More specifically applicants must show the ability to analyse a text with precision either through close reading or conceptual scrutiny. Applicants should show an interest in, and if possible a knowledge of, the aesthetics of cinema.

14. Methods for evaluating and improving the quality and standards of learning

The responsible bodies for monitoring the quality and standards of learning are the Educational Policy and Standards Committee of Council through the Humanities Divisional Board and the relevant faculty boards and departments and the course committee, as well as the colleges.

Faculty boards and departments, with their Graduate Studies Committees, Joint Consultative Committees and IT Committees, will all play a part in the ongoing monitoring and improvement of quality in the programme. The course committee also monitors students' progress and invites feedback on a termly basis.

The Faculty Board will evaluate and improve the standard of lecturing through a formal annual student feedback, and of the course as a whole through:

- an annual appraisal of examination performance through internal and external examination reports;
- an annual review of the student handbook;
- annual staff appraisal;
- periodic review and revalidation.

Any changes to the curriculum agreed by a faculty board or department must be approved by the divisional board and by the Educational Policy and Standards Committee (EPSC) of Council.

The provision of a faculty or department as a whole is reviewed internally by EPSC every six years.

The colleges monitor the student's progress through regular meetings with a college adviser. Colleges also invite written feedback from students.

15. Regulation of assessment

The dissertation should be submitted in a scholarly form, acknowledging primary and secondary sources, making sensible use of the film material and scholarly literature available in Oxford, and with an appropriate critical apparatus.

The dissertation will be judged on the following criteria:

- the devising of a project with coherent and manageable boundaries especially given the word length and the relatively short time scale (week 6 of Trinity)
- the choice of an appropriate film or selection of films given the nature of the analysis

- detailed, appropriate and well written film analysis
- intelligent use of concepts from the relevant body of critical literature
- the precision and rigour of the argument or investigation
- the familiarity with the chosen area of research.

The approach which a student adopts will depend upon the subject that has been chosen.

Candidates will be awarded a distinction, pass or fail, with 60 being the mark for a pass and 70 for a distinction. The dissertation is weighted at 40% of the final mark, the three essays at 20% each.

A dissertation judged worthy of a distinction will be expected to display a high level of rigour and coherence in its investigation and a high level of competence in the understanding relevant film aesthetic matters. It should also show high proficiency in concrete examination of film form and style. A dissertation will normally be of passable standard if it represents in the examiners' judgement a good 2.1 standard in these same areas.

A candidate who fails to submit any of the written elements by the dates specified shall be deemed to have withdrawn.

Marking Scale

>70	Class I	A very good answer that is structured, innovative and comprehensive
60-69	Class II(i)	A good answer that includes major points and their significance
50-59	Class II(ii)	A less than satisfactory answer that includes some major points
40-49	Class III	A weak answer that omits several major points
30-39	Pass	A very poor answer that fails to address considerable areas of the question
<29	Fail	Totally inadequate

16. Indicators of quality and standards

Independent review of the quality of educational provision in the relevant faculties and departments by the (then) Teaching Quality Agency awarded them points out of a possible maximum of 24 as follows:

Classics	24
English	Excellent (in 1994, under the previous scheme)
Modern History	Excellent (in 1994, under the previous scheme)
Modern Languages	22
Music	22
Philosophy	24

Anthropology	Excellent (in 1994, under the previous scheme)
--------------	--

The Research Assessment exercise of 2001 carried out by the Higher Education Funding Council for England awarded the following marks, up to a maximum of 5*, for the quality of research amongst staff :

Classics	5*
English	5*
Modern History	5
Modern Languages	5*
Music	5*
Philosophy	5*
Anthropology	4