

Institut de Langue et de Culture Françaises

**Institut Catholique de Paris**

## **Great authors in French cinema**

### **Course description**

This film course will focus on the history of french cinema, from its scientific beginning at the end of the 19th century, along with the industrial revolution, through the diversity of representations in the 20 th century up to the beginning of the 21st. In order to embody those changes, we will study the important authors, whose contribution have made french cinema unique in its style. Historical films will be the main guideline, but in its widest aspect, from opinion position to historical reenactment and how documentary becomes historical fact. This theme has been fully explored since the beginning of cinema, and that will allow us to question representation and its diverse evolution along with society. Leading French filmmakers challenged this rediscovery of the past, guiding us through the analysis of the language of the moving image.

### **Course structure**

Each course will develop chronologically one moment of french cinema focusing on one filmmaker and one film. but also the historical context, of the film's release and the history. Each film will be analysed in its filmic components, (sound, editing, camera movements..) and of course discussed ; history being interesting in order to have a better view on our world.

#### Week 1 : the pioneers

From document to fiction, the Lumière Brothers and Georges Méliès

*La Tentation de Saint Antoine, the temptation of Saint Anthony* by George Méliès

*L'affaire Dreyfus, the Dreyfus Affair* by Georges Méliès, 1899

The Lumiere Brothers' first films, 1895-1897

*The passion of Joan of Arc* by Carl Th. Dreyer, this silent film made in 1928 is based entirely on the only document on Joan of Arc, the record of her trial.

#### Week 2 : French classical cinema with Jean Renoir

As France experienced its first populist movement, with the Front Populaire in 1935 and before the deterioration of the European situation with the second world war, french cinema will develop its aesthetic.

*Grand Illusion, La grande illusion* by Jean Renoir 1937

During the first world war, the life of french prisoners in Germany who plots to escape. A humanistic view on both sides of belligerents, and a look on the evolution of class relationships

Week 3 : poetic realism : Marcel Carné

*Children of Paradise* by Marcel Carné, 1945

Probably one of the most famous french film, shot during the second world war, « se battre, c'était continuer à faire des films. Reconquérir par l'esprit ce que l'on avait perdu avec les armes » ( to fight was to continue making films. Reconquering by the spirit what we had lost with the weapons, Marcel Carné on *Children of Paradise*)

Week 4 : Nouvelle Vague : Jean-Luc Godard

The French New wave is an important movement gathered around the magazine *les cahiers du cinema*, influenced by the italian Neorealism and classical hollywood cinema, they were involved in current social issues and found new means to film, closer to documentary.

*Breathless* de Jean-Luc Godard, 1959

Week 6 : women Filmmakers : Agnès Varda

*Cléo de 5 à 7 ( Cleo from 5 to 7)*, by Agnès Varda, 1962, depicts a beautiful portrait of a woman and a city. Through the errands of Cleo, Varda takes us inside Paris

Week 7 : an outsider of the New Wave : Jean-Pierre Melville

*Army of Shadows, L'armée des ombres* by Jean-Pierre Melville, 1969

One of the pygmalion of the New Wave films the french Resistance with the style and energy of american cinema. Melville himself was part of the Resistance, that has been at the center of his preoccupations.

Week 8 : fiction and history, how a plot can underline the historical context ?

*The Last Metro, Le dernier métro* by François Truffaut, 1980

During the german occupation, the life of a theater, that hides its former jewish director. Paris during the occupation is shown as a theater with its secret life. The idea of the play is in itself an image of the life of the French Resistance.

Week 9 : written test

Week 10 : direct cinema and documentary

How will documentary influence our perception of history ?

*General Idi Amin Dada, autoportrait General Idi Amin Dada: A Self Portrait* by Barbet Schroeder, 1974

In this documentary, Barbet Schroeder interviews the Ugandan dictator, Idi Amin. By letting the general speak and direct freely, Barbet Schroeder makes a unique and cruel portrait of the dictator.

Week 11 : contemporary cinema : Benoit Jacquot

*Les adieux à la reine ( Farewell my queen)* by Benoit Jacquot, 2011

## **Assignments :**

### **Written test**

A test will be held in class on history and technique and a film analysis

### **Oral presentation**

Each student will make an oral film review of ten minutes on a film. A list of films will be proposed but each student can submit a personal choice, that will be discussed.

### **Research paper**

Each student is required to propose a detailed and elaborate study on two historical films with similar subject. The paper will question the link with history, a study of the filmmakers. The comparison will question their aim, their means.. With academic analyses and personal insights, the paper will develop each film approach, style and the relevance for today's society. The use of internet must be ethical, and a detailed bibliography must end the paper.

### **Online proposal**

A blog will be created for the class. Between each course, every student must post an article, a video or any document considered relevant for our subject. Each week, each student will have to post and comment on the previous class, creating links with american cinema, and

### **Grading**

Students will be graded on seriousness, participation and assiduity. Students must complete all assignments on time and must attend each class. Punctuality is of course required, a student can be expelled if late.