*Updated April 7, 2024*

*SUBJECT TO CHANGE*

# HIST-LIT 90 GE: **Screen Cultures from Cinema to TikTok**

*Thursdays 12:45–2:45pm ✦ Barker Center 128*

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Office Hours: TBA

**The way we see the world is growing inseparable from the way our screens show that world to us.** It would be almost impossible to avoid screens for even a single day. This course follows the 125-year history of screen cultures in the United States—from motion pictures, to television, to personal computers, Gameboys, and, of course, smartphones. How have people engaged with screens, and how have these responses changed along with the technology? How did those in power try to use screens or limit them in response to larger political events and concerns? How have U.S. and transnational screen cultures shaped or troubled racial boundaries and gender binaries? What is the relationship between culture, media, and technology? In this course, students will interact with screens in material form and assume the role of viewer for a range of different screen products: films, animation, television shows, video games, websites, and TikTok videos. Additionally, we will also read newspaper and magazine accounts, fiction, and poetry to explore the cultural reception of screens, while engaging with the work of critics and artists including Stuart Hall, Marlon Riggs, Hito Steyerl and Walter Benjamin.

**Assignments:**

1. **Presentation** – *due 12pm the day before your assigned class:* Make and share with the class a video-based response (1–3 minutes long) to one or more of the primary texts (of any medium) assigned that week. TikTok and Instagram are both acceptable tools to use to make the video, but are not required. *25% of grade*

2. **Film response paper** – *1–2 pages, due September 12:* Pick a single scene from *Sunrise* to think about. What do you see? How might what you see affect how you feel or respond? *5% of grade*

3. **Secondary source response paper** – *1–2 pages, due October 3*: Respond to a secondary text from the first five weeks of the course. Summarize its argument and briefly respond to that argument—do you find it persuasive? Why or why not? *5% of grade*

4. **Comparative close read paper** – *3–4 pages, due October 17:* Select either *Sunrise* or *High Sierra*, and, focusing on a single scene again, compare it to a scene in *The Honeymooners*. Think about them visually, and think about the different ways in which they would have been viewed. *15% of grade*

5. **Final paper partial draft** – *4–5 pages of writing, due November 15:* You will choose from a set of possible paper prompts provided by me and draft the opening four pages of a final paper, including the introduction. In addition, you may turn in an outline of the entire paper. *Graded by completion. 10% of grade*

6. **Final paper** – *10–12 pages, due December 11: 30% of grade*

**Grading:**

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|---|---|
| Participation | 30% |
| Presentation | 10% |
| Response papers, *each* | 5% |
| Close read paper | 15% |
| Final paper draft | 10% |
| Final paper | 25% |

**Required books:**

- **Ray Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451*** (1953, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012). ISBN 9781451673319 — *Available on reserve in Lamont Library.*

**PDFs of all other readings are available on the course Canvas site**. If you encounter any problems (financial or otherwise) accessing course material, please get in touch with me.

**Attendance, participation, and class culture:** Attendance is required. Our classroom will be a space for intellectual conversation, debate, and questioning, so **your active participation and engagement with the material is imperative**. If you are quieter by nature, please come speak to me in office hours so we can discuss strategies for your participation.

**Pronouns: Preferred gender pronouns will be respected by everyone in class.** I will default to the pronouns you have selected on my.harvard, but if you have other preferences please let me know. Please address your fellow students directly by name or "you" when responding to a point made by your classmates, with whom you are in conversation during our discussions.

**Subject material:** Our subject matter can be divisive and offensive and is certainly worthy of scrutiny and critique. However, I encourage you to approach the material as an important (if often difficult) part of history and culture, meant to spark lively discussion about its past and its present significance. You are welcome to come speak with me if you have any concerns. In particular, this course engages with racist and sexist tropes within film and television, video game simulations of warfare, and death by suicide.

**Printing and screens:** In this course, especially, we should be mindful of how and why we use screens, and the effect our screen use might have on our ability to be present and to engage with each other. While many of our course readings are PDFs, **please try to bring hard copies to class**; it is to your advantage as a reader to fully annotate and mark up readings, so try to limit screens in the classroom. **Since most of our class time will be spent in discussion, I encourage you to think of class as a space to generate questions and conversation, rather than notes.** It is not appropriate to use phones during discussion.

**Email and Canvas:** I will sometimes provide email updates about readings, assignments, and other course matters. While I am always happy to talk during office hours, you are also welcome to email me with any questions. I try to respond to all emails within a 48-hour period; please read and respond to your email regularly. Please also check the course Canvas site frequently for any changes to the readings and assignments

**Deadlines and extensions:** Everyone will start with 3 "grace days" to be used at your discretion. You need not ask for an extension, but rather use these days as necessary. Your 3 days may be used in any permutation (e.g. 1 day on the first, 2 days for the second), but once you have used all three, no more will be granted, so plan accordingly. After all days are used, papers will be deducted a step for each late day (an A becomes an A–, etc.).

**Collaboration and Plagiarism:** Collaboration is welcome and encouraged within the seminar format of our class. You may find it helpful to consult with your peers about readings or paper ideas, and our class will also provide opportunities to work collaboratively on presentations and peer editing. However, **all written work submitted for evaluation should be the product of your own thought, research, and writing**. Accordingly, you must properly cite any engagement with other authors. In accordance with the Honor Code, plagiarism is a serious offense and must be reported to the Honor Council. If you are unsure of what constitutes plagiarism, please be sure to consult the Harvard Guide to Using Sources or come speak with me during office hours.

**Academic Integrity:** Writing in History & Literature involves building on the ideas of other writers and thinkers, contributing ideas of your own, and signaling clearly for readers where each idea comes from. In addition to acknowledging how other writers have contributed to your work, **doing your work with integrity also consists of developing ideas that are wholly, genuinely, and uniquely yours**. Your writing should reflect your thinking, shaped by your own efforts to clarify and articulate your understanding. This development is at the heart of academic writing: articulating and working through early ideas will lead to more complex understandings and analysis as you draft and revise your work. **Writing is thinking; there are no shortcuts.**

**All writing you submit in this course must be your own.** You may not use generative AI tools. Submitting work as yours that you did not develop or create on your own is a violation of the Harvard College Honor Code. Remember that language generating models, so-called artificial intelligence, only recognize rudimentary patterns that reflect and reinforce the status quo. Your writing will be stronger if it is the product of your own original ideas that evolve through the writing process.

**Accommodations:** If you need academic adjustments or accommodations in this course, please speak with me and present your letter from the Accessible Education Office (AEO), which is a resource for students with disabilities and temporary health conditions who may require accommodations to fully participate in all aspects of Harvard student life. If you wish to notify me, please do so by the end of the second week of the term so that I may respond in a timely manner, since accommodations are not retroactive. The AEO consults with any student who experiences barriers related to physical or mental health, or learning disabilities, and works collaboratively with students and their faculty. Students are not required to share their diagnoses or clinical documentation with anyone outside of the AEO, but you may wish to notify me if there are potentially inaccessible elements of this course. All discussions will remain as confidential as possible within the parameters of FERPA; I may consult AEO to discuss appropriate implementation. Please be in touch with the AEO directly if you are not yet registered.

## *Provisional* Schedule of Readings:

***Unit 1:* SILVER SCREEN** 📽️ *Cinema, Mass Media, and Hollywood*

What did viewers see on the first movie screens? What was new about cinema? How did Hollywood come to dominate entertainment? Why did America become the center of all movie production?

***September 5*** **Introduction**

Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attractions: Early Cinema, Its Spectator, and the Avant-Garde," *Wide Angle* 8 (1986)

Charles Musser, "At the Beginning" (2004)

IN CLASS: Short films from Lumière, Méliès, Porter

***Date TBD*** SCREENING of ***Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans***, dir. F.W. Murnau (1927)

***September 12*** **Global Hollywood**

Mordaunt Hall, "A Film Masterpiece," *New York Times* (September 24, 1927)

Lee Grieveson, "League of Corporations" (2018)

VIEW: *Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans* dir. F.W. Murnau (1927)

VIEW: "Mussolini Speaks," Fox Movietone presentation (1927)

**DUE: Film response paper**

***September 19*** **Standardizing the Image**

"Sidelights on Manufacture of Motion Picture Film," *Motion Picture News* (1918)

Genevieve Yue, "China Girls in the Film Laboratory" (2020), excerpt

VIEW: *Mercy, the Mummy Mumbled*, dir. R.G. Phillips (1918)

FIELD TRIP *to* **Harvard Film Archive**

***Date TBD*** SCREENING of ***High Sierra***, dir. Raoul Walsh (1941)

***September 26*** **Classical Hollywood**

Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility" (1935)

VIEW: *High Sierra*, dir. Raoul Walsh (1941)

***Unit 2:* TELEVISION** 📺 *Live Broadcasting, Around-the-Clock Programming, Computer Terminals*

Was television stupefying? How was television different from cinema, and what does it share with computing? How did live broadcasting change how Americans understand the world?

***October 3*** **Moving Images at Home**

Ray Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451* (1953)

Lynn Spiegel, "Installing the Television Set," (1992)

VIEW: Episode of *The Honeymooners* (1955)

**DUE: Secondary source response paper**

***October 10*** **Representations**

Stuart Hall, "Black Men, White Media" (1974)

VIEW: Episode of *Black Journal* (1968)

VIEW: *Color Adjustment*, dir. Marlon Riggs (1992)

*October 17* **24/7 Programming**

Nam June Paik, "Media Planning for the Postindustrial Society,"

Faye D. Ginsburg, "Screen Memories: Resignifying the Traditional in Indigenous Media" (2002)

VIEW: "Global Groove" (1973), excerpt

**DUE: Comparative close read paper**

FIELD TRIP *to* **Harvard Art Museums**

*October 24* **Personal Computing**

Malcolm Harris, *Palo Alto* (2022), pt. 3, ch. 3 and pt. 4, ch. 4

Laine Nooney, *The Apple II Age* (2023), excerpts

VIEW: Harun Farocki, "Images of the World and the Inscription of War" (1988)

*Unit 3:* **PORTABLE SCREENS** 📱 *Pocket Gaming, Touchscreens, Social Media, Virtual Reality*

What did it mean to have a screen in your pocket? What made the iPhone into a universal commodity? What is the relationship between the portable screen and the internet?

*October 31* **Pocket Displays**

Jeffrey Goldsmith, "This Is Your Brain on Tetris," *Wired* (May 1, 1994)

"The Pokémon Invasion," letters, *Time* (December 13, 1999)

IN CLASS: Exercise with original Game Boy (1989)

*November 7* **Touchscreens**

Helen Grace, "iPhone Girl: Assembly, Assemblages and Affect in the Life of an Image" (2013)

Xu Lizhi, collected poems (2011–14)

IN CLASS: Exercise with original iPhone (2007)

*November 15* **Platforms**

Kate Eichhorn, *Content* (2022), excerpts

Patricia Lockwood, "The Communal Mind" (2019)

Arvind Naranayan, "TikTok's Secret Sauce" (2022)

**DUE: Partial draft of final paper**

*November 21* **Screens Everywhere**

Kyle Chayka, *Filterworld: How Algorithms Flattened Culture* (2024), excerpts

VIEW: WWDC Keynote announcing Apple Vision Pro, excerpts (2023)

*November 28* **NO CLASS — THANKSGIVING RECESS**

*December 11* **DUE: Final paper**