First-Year Seminar: Childhood and Youth in Cinema

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Course Description
The cultural notion of childhood has been built upon a complex combination of ideological constructs that have appeared throughout history in such a way that images of children become, in representative arts, signs with multiple meanings. This course looks at a wide range of films from around the world that offer different cultural and historical representations of children, childhood, and youth, paying close attention to how they manifest certain themes aesthetically and narratively. We will see how the figure of the child in cinema may alternately as well as simultaneously convey crude realism and romantic nostalgia, but, beyond this tension, may also stand in for tropes of innocence, dependence, inaptitude, nationhood, sexuality, desire, and suffering, amongst others. Adopting a variety of methods of analyses, we will consider several questions throughout the course: why and how do filmmakers focus on child characters in their critiques of society, history, power, and discrimination?, how do children on screen convey realism and/or nostalgia, future and/or past?, and, moreover, is the thematic rigidity of “childhood in cinema” a productive or a reductive analytical framework for thinking more broadly about cinema, identity, and representation?

Learning Outcomes
This course helps students think critically about visual media and explore a variety of theoretical frameworks in order to formulate their final thesis. The course aims for developing students’ critical approach to film and media in general by way of a case study. Having exercised the application of film theory in the analysis of films centered on the theme of childhood, students at the completion of the course should be able to:

• critically engage with seminal works in Film Theory and apply them in their original writing;
• evaluate the validity of strict and concise analytical frameworks;
• develop a substantial body of resources on childhood and media representation;
• apply, compare, and critique methodological and critical frameworks in their own analyses;
• engage in online publishing activities and develop media-rich forms of academic writing and publishing;
• produce an original theoretical and analytical essay on visual media and childhood.

Required Texts
Additional readings will be made available via NYU Classes.

Course Website
We will be using a Web Publishing website to hold all communications related to the course. You should make yourself familiar with its interface early on, and learn how to submit assignments and utilize all the available resources. Instructions are available on the site.

Grade Breakdown
Attendance and Participation (10%)
Discussion Questions (15%)
Family Archive (15%)
Response Paper (20%)
Presentation (10%)
Final Paper (30%)

Description of Assignments
**Attendance and Participation:** students are expected to attend to and actively participate in all classes. Unexcused absences and/or minimal engagement in class discussions will affect participation grade.

**Discussion Questions:** each week one student will be responsible for bringing in three or four discussion questions to be explored in conjunction with the assigned readings. As a discussion leader, the student will help guide the conversation about the week’s readings and lead the critical analysis of media presented in class using the framework under consideration.

**Family Archive:** students will gather photographs from at least 3 different generations in their families that depict children in any given setting. We will use a collaborative spreadsheet to collect relevant metadata for each of those photographs (such as location, year, persons on the photograph, name of photographer, medium, camera type, etc). Once students have exhausted the metadata, they will each write a historical narrative based on critical analyses of the archival sources they have collected as well as other sources they might have consulted in the process, including oral histories from family members. In addition to photographs, students may collect other relevant artifacts such as letters, toys, media artifacts, etc. We will compile all of the family histories in a digital showcase website hosted by either Omeka or Scalar.
Response Papers (5 pages): a short essay that addresses a film screened in class, using readings and class discussions to help in the analysis of childhood in cinema. Topics for the response paper will be given at the time of assignment.

Presentation (10 min): each student will be expected to present a detailed analysis of a scene of their choosing from a film on the theme of the course. May be used as initial research and exercise for final paper. Presentations will be scheduled throughout the semester. (Depending on the number of enrolled students, presentations may be done in pairs or in groups of 3).

Final paper (8-10 pages): students will submit an original, theoretically sound, and engaging essay that addresses one or two films amongst the supplemental filmography (excluding those screened in their entirety in class) and their treatment of young characters and childhood. Student may consider style, genre, narrative, and form, as well as the nature of performances in the films, and the films’ contexts. The student is expected to develop his/her own thesis drawing from the course readings, screenings, and lectures. (Note: prior permission must be given by the instructor should the student like to write about a film not listed in the additional filmography).

Note: all papers will be submitted on the course’s blog, hosted by NYU’s Web Publishing. This will give students the opportunity to share their work with one another and utilize the tools available in a digital publishing platform.

The Moses Center for Students with Disabilities
Academic accommodations are available for students with physical or learning disabilities. For more information, you can contact the Moses Center on the 2nd floor of 726 Broadway, via phone at 212-998-4980, or online (www.nyu.edu/csd). Students who are requesting academic accommodations are advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.
Schedule

Week 1 | 01/28: Media, Attractions, and Material Culture

*The Sprinkler Sprinkled* (L’Arrouser Arrosé, Louis Lumière, France, 1895)
*The Little Darling* (D. W. Griffith, 1909)
*Falling Leaves* (Alice Guy Blaché, USA, 1912)
*The Kid* (Charlie Chaplin, USA, 1921)


Week 2 | 02/04: Rebellion and the Dangerous Future

*Zero for Conduct* (Zéro de conduite, Jean Vigo, France, 1933)
*The Young and the Damned* (Los Olvidados, Luis Buñuel, Mexico, 1950)
*The White Ribbon* (Das Weiße Band, Eine deutsche Kindergerschichte, Michael Haneke, Germany/Austria/Italy, 2009) [excerpt]


Week 3 | 02/11: Branding Childhood

*Dumbo* (Ben Sharpsteen, USA, 1941)
*Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* (William Cottrell, David Hand, USA, 1937)

[excerpt]
* Cinderella* (James Kirkwood, USA, 1914) [excerpt]
* Cinderella* (Clye Geromini, Hamilton Luske, Wilfred Jackson, USA, 1950) [excerpt]


• Máire Messenger Davies, “‘Crazyspace’: The Politics of Children’s Screen Drama” Screen 46.3 (Autumn 2005): 389-399. [recommended]


Week 4 | 02/18: Children at War

• Germany Year Zero (Germania anno zero, Roberto Rosellini, Italy, 1948)
• Come and See (Idi i smotri, Elem Klimov, URSS, 1985) [excerpt]
• Osama (Siddiq Barmak, Afghanistan, 2003) [excerpt]

• Karen Lury, “Mud and Fairytales: Children in Films about War” in The Child in Film, 105-144.


  * Family Archive draft due

Week 5 | 02/25 Oppressed Children

• The 400 Blows (Les quatre cents coups, François Truffaut, France, 1959)
• Hope and Glory (John Boorman, Lasse Hallström, UK, USA, 1987) [excerpt]
• Au revoir, les enfants (Louis Malle, France, 1987) [excerpt]


Week 6 | 03/03: Subjective Cinema and Its Codes: Imagina(rra)tion

• Where the Wild Things Are (Spike Jonze, USA, 2009)
Pan’s Labyrinth (El laberinto del fauno, Guillermo del Toro, MEX, SPA, 2006) [excerpt]

The Wizard of Oz (Victor Fleming, USA, 1939) [excerpt]

What Maisie Knew (David Siegel, Scott McGehee, USA, 2012) [excerpt]


* Family Archive Project due

Week 7 | 03/10: “Devil” Children

The Exorcist (William Friedkin, USA, 1973)

The Sixth Sense (M. Night Shyamalan, USA, 1999) [excerpt]

We Need to Talk about Kevin (Lynn Ramsay, USA, 2011) [excerpt]

The Ring (Ringu, Hideo Nakata, Japan, 1998) [excerpt]

- Joe Kelleher, “Face to Face with Terror: Children in Film” in Children in Culture: Approaches to Childhood, ed. Karin Lesnik-Oberstein (New York: St. Martin’s, 1998), 29-54. [recommended]
- Linda Williams, “Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess” Film Quarterly 44.4 (1991): 2-13. [recommended]

Spring Break: 03/16 – 03/22

Week 8 | 03/24: Identity and Representation: Difference Inscribed

Gummo (Harmony Korine, USA, 1997)

Bad Hair (Pelo malo, Mariana Rondón, Venezuela, 2013) [excerpt]

Girlhood (Bande de filles, Céline Sciamma, France, 2014)


• Reighan Gillam, “All Tangled Up: Intersecting Stigmas of Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Mariana Rondón’s Bad Hair” in Black Camera 9.1 (Fall 2017), 47-61 [recommended]

Week 9 | 03/31: Sexuality and The Queer Child

XXY (Lucía Puenzo, Argentina/Spain/France, 2007)
Boy Meets Boy (Bravo, 2003) [episode]
Tomboy (Céline Sciamma, France, 2011) [excerpt]
The Way He Looks (Hoje eu quero voltar sozinho, Daniel Ribeiro, Brazil, 2014) [excerpt]


• Barrie Thorne, “Crossing the Gender Divide,” in Gender Play: Girls and Boys in School (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP), 111-134.


Week 10 | 04/07: Childhood, Nostalgia, and Motherlands

The Red Balloon (Le ballon rouge, Albert Lamorisse, France, 1956)
Machuca (Andrés Wood, Chile, 2004)
The Boys from Fengkuei (Feng gui lai de ren, Hsiao-Hsien Hou, Taiwan, 1983) [excerpt]
The Year My Parents Went on Vacation (O ano em que meus pais saíram de férias, Cao Hamburger, Brazil, 2006) [excerpt]


**Week 11 | 04/14: Ideology, Family, Traps**

_Dogtooth_ (Kynodontas, Yorgos Lanthimos, Greece, 2009)

_The Castle of Purity_ (El castillo de la pureza, Arturo Ripstein, Mexico, 1973) [excerpt]

_The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser_ (Eder für sich und Gott gegen alle, Werner Herzog, W. Germany, 1974) [excerpt]

_Thirteen_ (Catherine Hardwicke, USA, 2003) [excerpt]

_The Apple_ (Sib, Samira Makhmalbaf, Iran, 1998) [excerpt]

• Mark Fisher, “Dogtooth: The Family Syndrome” *Film Quarterly* 64.4 (Summer 2011): 22-27.


  *Response Essay due*

**Week 12 | 04/21: Children and Capitalism**

_Treeless Mountain_ (Na-moo-eobs-neun san, So Yong Kim, USA/S. Korea, 2008)

_City of God_ (Fernando Meirelles and Kátia Lund, Brazil, 2003) [excerpt]

_Slumdog Millionaire_ (Danny Boyle, UK/USA, 2008) [excerpt]

• Susan Ferguson, “Capitalist Childhood in Film: Modes of Critique” *Jump Cut* 55 (Fall 2004), n.p.


**Week 13 | 04/28: Television and Children as Consumers**

_Sesame Street_ (PBS, 1969-) [episode]

_Teletubbies_ (BBC, 1997-2001) [episode]

_Spongebob Squarepants_ (Nickelodeon, 1999-) [episode]

_Adventure Time_ (Cartoon Network, 2010-) [episode]


• Ellen Seiter, “Children’s Desires/Mother’s Dilemmas,” in *The Children’s Cultural Reader*, 297-317. [recommended]

• Jonathan Bignell, “Familiar Aliens: *Teletubbies* and Postmodern Childhood” *Screen* 46.3 (Autumn 2005): 373-387. [recommended]

**Week 14 | 05/05: Child Stars**

*Home Alone 2: Lost in New York* (Chris Columbus, USA, 1992)

*Hannah Montana* (The Disney Channel, 2006-2011) [episode]

*The Littlest Rebel* (David Butler, USA, 1935)


• Joe L. Kincheloe, “The New Childhood: *Home Alone As a Way of Life*” in *The Children’s Culture Reader*, 159-177. [recommended]

* Final Paper due

**Additional Filmography for Final Paper (in chronological order)**

*I Was Born But...* (Yasujirō Ozu, Japan, 1932)

*Wee Willie Winkie* (John Ford, USA, 1937)

*Pinocchio* (Hamilton Luske, Ben Sharpsteen, USA, 1940)

*Bambi* (David Hand, USA, 1942)

*Los olvidados* (Luis Buñuel, Mexico, 1950)

*Alice in Wonderland* (Clyde Geronimi, Wilfred Jackson, Hamilton Luske, UK, USA, 1951)

*Peter Pan* (Clyde Geronimi, Wilfred Jackson, Hamilton Luske, USA, 1953)

*Pather Panchali* (Satyajit Ray, India, 1955)

*Ivan’s Childhood* (*Ivanovo detstvo*, Andrei Tarkovsky, USSR, 1962)

*Barren Lives* (*Vidas secas*, Nelson Pereira dos Santos, Brazil, 1963)

*The Jungle Book* (Wolfgang Reithermann, USA, 1967)

*Naked Childhood* (*L’Enfance Nue*, Maurice Pialat, France, 1968)


*Murmur of the Heart* (*Le souffle au coeur*, Louis Malle, France, 1971)


*The Traveler* (*Mossafer*, Abbas Kiarostami, Iran, 1974)
The Mirror (Zerkalo, Andrei Tarkovsky, USSR, 1975)
Cría Cuervos (Carlos Saura, Spain, 1976)
Pixote (Pixote: a lei do mais fraco, Hector Babenco, Brazil, 1981)
Fanny and Alexander (Fanny och Alexander, Ingmar Bergman, Sweden, 1982)
E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial (Steven Spielberg, USA, 1982)
Stand by Me (Rob Reiner, USA, 1986)
Where is the Friend’s Home? (Khane-ye doust kodjast, Abbas Kiarostami, Iran, 1987)
Emma’s Shadow (Skyggen af Emma, Søren Kragh-Jacobsen, Denmark, 1988)
The Decalogue 1: I Am the Lord Thy God (Dekalog, jeden, Krzysztof Kieslowski, Poland, 1989)
Celia (Ann Turner, Australia, 1989)
Home Alone (Chris Columbus, USA, 1990)
Home Alone 2: Lost in New York (Chris Columbus, USA, 1992)
Dazed and Confused (Richard Linklater, USA, 1993)
Menace II Society (Allen and Albert Hughes, USA, 1993)
Welcome to the Dollhouse (Todd Solondz, USA, 1995)
The White Balloon (Badkonake sefid, Jafar Panahi, Iran, 1995)
Toy Story (John Lasseter, USA, 1995)
Matilda (Danny DeVito, USA, 1996)
Life is Beautiful (La vita è bella, Roberto Benigni, Italy, 1997)
Central Station (Central do Brasil, Walter Salles, Brazil, 1998)
Kirikou and the Sorceress (Kirikou et la Sorcière, Michel Ocelot, France, Belgium, Luxembourg, 1998)
The Virgin Suicides (Sofia Coppola, USA, 1999)
Fat Girl (À ma soeur, Catherine Breillat, France, 2001)
Pan’s Labyrinth (El laberinto del fauno, Guillermo del Toro, 2006)
The Year My Parents Went on Vacation (O ano em que meus pais saíram de férias, Caio Hamburger, Brazil, 2006)
Bridge to Terabithia (Gabor Cuspo, USA, 2007)
City of Men (Cidade dos homens, Paulo Morelli, Brazil, 2007)
Mutum (Sandra Kogut, Brazil, 2007)
Slumdog Millionaire (Danny Boyle, Loveleen Tandan, 2008)
Let the Right One In (Låt den rätte komma in Tomas Alfredson, Sweden, 2008)
Up (Peter Docter, Bob Peterson, USA, 2009)
Hugo (Martin Scorsese, USA, 2011)
Otelo Burning (Sara Blecher, S. Africa, 2011)
Wadjda (Haifaa al-Mansour, Saudi-Arabia, Germany, 2012)
The Life of Pi (Ang Lee, USA, 2012)
Beasts of the Southern Wild (Benh Zeitlin, USA, 2012)
The Wonders (Le Meraviglie, Alice Rohrwacher, Italy, 2014)
Girlhood (Bande de filles, Céline Sciamma, France, 2014)
Misunderstood (Incompresa, Asia Argento, Italy, 2014)
The Wonders (Le Meraviglie, Alice Rohrwacher, Italy, 2014)
Beasts of No Nation (Cary Fukunaga, USA, 2015)
Lamb (Ross Partridge, USA, 2015)

*Microbe and Gasoline* (*Microbe et Gasoil*, Michel Gondry, France, 2015)

*Ojka* (Jon-ho Bong, S. Korea, USA, 2017)

*The Florida Project* (Sean Baker, USA, 2017)