Prelims French Single Honours ('Sole') Reading List

(for circulation to freshers by College Tutors pre-arrival)

In addition to French papers I-IV (language and literature), you take the following papers in film, theory and thought. In the case of each paper, your lecturers/seminar tutor will provide you with topic-specific reading lists and essay titles. This document provides preliminary guidance to allow you to orientate yourself at the beginning.

Paper XI Introduction to French Film Studies

Introductory reading:
- Michael Temple and Michael Witt (eds), The French Cinema Book (British Film Institute, 2004). A detailed introduction to French cinema as an industry.
- David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, Film Art, An Introduction (McGraw Hill, various editions). A very useful introduction explaining all the technical terms that are used to analyse a film.

This paper will introduce you to four twentieth- and twenty-first century French film directors. We discuss the concepts of realism, documentary and avant-garde cinema and introduce the basic tools of film analysis.
In your essay-writing you will be able to engage with the directors’ ideas and with their particular way of realising them. The films under discussion involve a wide range of themes such as love, power, gender relations and autobiography. Each director has a different style of filmmaking. The focus of the course is the question of how the film medium represents contemporary reality. We will look at the way each of these directors uses devices of storytelling to present a particular point of view upon the world we live in. You will be encouraged to watch more films by each of these directors.

The prescribed films are:
1. Henri-Georges Clouzot: Le Corbeau (1942)
2. Jean-Luc Godard: Vivre sa vie (1962)

The teaching for this paper takes place in Michaelmas Term, with seminars on the prescribed films in weeks 2, 4, 6 and 8. You will be required to submit to your seminar tutor an essay on three of the films and to do a seminar presentation on the fourth. The three-hour examination in Trinity Term requires you to answer three questions, each on a different film. There will be a choice of two questions on each film.

In addition to the seminars you must follow a Faculty-based lecture-series entitled Introduction to Film Studies in weeks 1, 3, 5 and 7 in Michaelmas Term. These lectures present basic concepts of film analysis – montage, story, self-reference, and spectatorship – in four lectures devoted to four international
films. These films are used simply as illustrations for the lectures and are not treated as set texts for examination purposes. The films are: Sergei Eisenstein: Potemkin (1925); Alfred Hitchcock: 39 Steps (1935); Michelangelo Antonioni (1967): Blow-up; Claire Denis: Beau Travail (1999).

See the appendix to this document, which gives fuller introductory information about the film studies course.

**Paper XII Introduction to French Literary Theory**

This paper will introduce you to four twentieth-century literary critics. In your essay writing you will be able to engage with their ideas about literature and with their particular way of expressing them. You will be encouraged to apply these ideas to your own reading of texts.

The prescribed texts (note the recommended editions) are:
1. Valéry, 'Questions de poésie' and 'Poésie et pensée abstraite', in *Théorie poétique et esthétique*, part of *Variété: Oeuvres*, vol. I (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade) (Gallimard) [both essays are available electronically on Weblearn, accessible via Single Sign-On]
2. Sartre, *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* (Folio) [Sections I and II only]
3. Barthes, *Critique et vérité* (Seuil)
4. Todorov, 'La notion de littérature', 'L'origine des genres', 'Les deux principes du récit', 'Introduction au vraisemblable' in *La Notion de littérature et autres essais* (Seuil)

The teaching for this paper takes place in Hilary Term weeks 5-8 and Trinity Term weeks 1-4 in a combination of lectures and seminars. You will be required to submit to your seminar tutor an essay on three of the authors, and to do a seminar presentation on the fourth. The three-hour examination in Trinity Term requires you to answer three questions, each on a different author. There will be a choice of two essay questions on each author.

**Paper XIII Key Texts in French Thought**

This paper will introduce you to four thinkers from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries. In both essay and commentary writing you will be able to engage with their ideas and with their particular way of expressing them.

The prescribed texts (note the recommended editions) are:
1. Descartes, *Discours de la méthode*, edited by Laurence Renault (Garnier-Flammarion)
2. Rousseau, *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité* (Folio)
3. Bergson, *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* (PUF) [Chapters I and II only].

The teaching for this paper takes place in Michaelmas Term weeks 5-8 and Hilary Term weeks 1-4 in a combination of lectures and seminars. You will be required to submit to your seminar tutor an essay or commentary on three of the authors, and to do a seminar presentation on the fourth. Written work should include at least one essay and at least one commentary. The three-hour examination in Trinity Term requires you to answer three questions, each on a different text, one a commentary, the other two essays. There will be a choice of one commentary passage from each text and one essay question on each text.

**APPENDIX ON THE FILM COURSE**

This appendix gives important information about the approach to the film course, which is studied throughout Michaelmas Term.

**Teaching Format and Exam**

In Michaelmas Term for the Prelim Sole Course in Film, you each attend parallel sets of lectures and seminars: the general lectures on film form and the language specific seminars. The reason for this division is that you are taught general film theory as well as film culture. Film culture, in this case Spanish, Russian, German or French, is specific to a geographical area: films respond to historical events, political problems, and features of society, such as differences between city life and country life, or differences between men and women. Not all the aspects of film form that we discuss in the general lectures will be equally relevant to your set films, but the general lectures aim to present you with the scope of film language.

General film theory concerns the form of narration in film. In this document you find a dictionary of the basic terms of film form together with references to teaching material and to the lectures.

The lectures are not a replacement for the set textbook in general film theory, which is David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson: *Film Art an Introduction*. This book, which is available in many Oxford libraries, is an excellent teaching tool. It is clearly written and has numerous examples. The lectures explore further some of the themes, which are treated in a general way by Bordwell and Thompson. Students should read in particular Chapters 6,7,8, and 9 in the section on ‘Film Style’.

The purpose of the lectures is to show how theoretical terms are used within film interpretation. The theory lectures teach how to use the general concepts of film form in the appreciation of a specific film. The second part of the course, the language specific seminars, teaches interpretation of the films that you will be examined on. As a student, you are invited to combine these two parts of the
course in the way that you find most useful. The general lectures are interpretations of the following four films:
Eisenstein: *Potemkin*
Hitchcock: *39 Steps*
Antonioni: *Blow-up*
Denis: *Beau Travail*
These films have been chosen because they together present a short overview of film history, beginning in silent film, moving through genre films and modernism and ending in contemporary political filmmaking.

**Basics of Film Form**

In studying film, we are concerned with a kind of language, which is different from the language that we speak. Film is also an aesthetic form, which can be compared to other aesthetic forms, such as music. The basic elements of communication in film is the relationship between what we see in the film image and what precedes this image in the sequence of the film. We will now introduce a number of terms, which can help us to describe in further detail this relationship.

1. **The frame**: the frame is the border of the film image at any point in time. Whatever is represented in the image, the image itself will have borders. These borders involve choice. Filmmakers must have chosen for instance where to put the camera in relation to what we see. They must also have chosen the duration of a particular frame. We will now turn to these two aspects in turn, duration and camera position.

2. **The shot**: the word 'shot' refers to any continuous piece of filming ('continuous' used in a mechanical sense: as long as the film strip has not been cut, there is one continuous shot).

3. **The edit**: when there is a transition between two shots, which have been edited together we say that there is an 'edit'. Film editing, or montage, is the splicing together of shots in order to compose a sequence of discrete images. The duration of a shot is determined by the edit.

4. **Long take**: if the camera films a scene and we see the scene continuously without edit, that is, without interruption, we say that the scene is a 'long take.' In narrative film, a single scene is often composed of many shots. This is because the filmmaker has chosen to film the scene from different angles in order, for instance, to highlight the reactions of different characters to what the other characters are saying. This draws our attention to the other area of choice, which concerns the position of the camera.

5. **Medium shot**: we distinguish between different types of shot according to where the camera is placed. If we start with the 'medium shot' this is a shot produced by a camera that is located some metres away from a dramatic scene. We see characters from their knees to their head, and we have an overview of the situation. At the same time, we concentrate on the characters in the image and not on the location or the surroundings. We can also have a 'long shot', which is made by a camera further away from the scene. Such a shot reduces the characters to parts of a larger situation. The focus is now on the setting of the scene. We can also have shots made by a camera that is very close to a character
or to an object, framing for instance a face in order to record its expression. This we call a ‘close-up’.

6 Mise en scene: we now have two dimensions of framing, involving duration and camera position. They both have a consequence for the frame or border of the image. When there is an edit the frame naturally changes. The same is true of a change in camera position. When the camera is moving, we have a change of camera position (but without an edit). Now, with these two dimensions of composition, we can describe the choices that the filmmaker has made in order to draw our attention to important moments in the story as it unfolds. We have not so far said anything about the content of the image, what it is that we see within the frame. The composition of the image as a physical scene, containing decoration, positions and movements of actors, costume, light and colour we call mise en scene. The word comes from French and originally means stage production. Filmmakers make a kind of stage production of the script before they begin filming. When we see the film, the composition of the scene and the choices of camera position work together and jointly form the mise en scene of the film.

7 Self-reference: the film may draw attention to itself and to the fact that it consists of images. In that case we are not just looking through the frame to figure out what happens to the characters. We look at the film image, as an image. We are aware that the film image is a fabrication, that it has something in common with photographs, paintings, posters and other images.

8 Genre and narrative: film stories are dramas, which can have a specialised setting and a particular theme. A film genre will contain certain kinds of characters, situations, types of dialogue, characteristic settings and most importantly a general mood. One of the most famous genres in the history of film is a set of thrillers made in the US, depicting the underworld of large cities in the late thirties and early forties. These films have been called ‘noir’ because all the characteristic features of these films add up to form a particular ‘dark’ mood. Narrative, or story telling, in film often presupposes such a genre convention. Hitchcock’s 39 steps is a British detective film and a spy story. The film Beau Travail refers to the genre of exotic war films, but in order to disappoint our expectations rather than to fulfil them.

9 Spectator: This notion of expectation implies a spectator. Films are made to be viewed. They are made with the viewer’s reactions in mind. This is a feature of filmmaking that was explored already by Eisenstein who sought to shape the viewer’s experience in a rhythmic and structured way. The film spectator can be addressed by the film on many different levels. A film may appeal to or challenge her ideas. The film may deliberately set out to confuse the spectator as Antonioni does in Blow-up. The spectator may be challenged to think about his own involvement with what he sees as Denis does in Beau Travail.

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Revised May 2019