FI565 History of British Cinema

In a country with a very strong literary and theatrical tradition, the British have also had a long-standing love of "going to the pictures." For more than a century, British filmmakers have been forging a rich and diverse national cinema in the face of Hollywood's dominance on British screens for most of that time. This course will offer an introductory historical overview of British cinema from its beginnings to the present day, assessing its role in the construction of British national identity, evaluating its major directors—including Carol Reed, Humphrey Jennings, Ken Loach, Mike Leigh and Terrence Davies. The films will be approached through multiple frameworks, including consideration of aesthetics (e.g. the question of realism), culture (e.g. gender and class), and history (e.g. questions of empire and modernity). The institution of cinema and film culture in a larger sense will be considered through the exploration of British film exhibition, criticism, cultural policy, and industry. Both fiction films and documentaries will be addressed with a particular focus on the urban experience. The cinematic city – London, in particular – will be discussed in relation to issues of memory and historicity.

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