

ENGL 245: Film Form and Culture
summer I 2012

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Description

This course introduces you to the fundamentals of film analysis. You will learn about the construction of film narrative, as well as about formal elements of film, including principles of editing, mise-en-scene, cinematography, and sound. The course also provides an introduction to issues in film studies that include the meaning of film genre and the role of the film star. The course will focus on narrative feature films from the Classical Hollywood cinema, with some attention to alternative practices.

Course Goals:

The course will train students both to view and write about films analytically. Students will gain an understanding of the basics of film analysis, both in terms of the specific terminology required for film analysis as well as major issues in the field of cinema studies. So, for instance, students will learn not only to distinguish between a zoom and a camera movement but also how to craft an argument for the significance of this formal choice. In other words, by the end of this course students can expect to be able to employ the relevant analytic vocabulary to interpret specific films and to situate their interpretations within the contexts of key issues in cinema studies.

Textbook and readings

1. Bordwell, David, and Kristin Thompson. *Film Art: An Introduction*. 9th edition. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008 (B/T) ISBN: 0073386162
2. Readings that are available on the class ELMS website are designated **ELMS**.

Requirements

Assignments (30 @ 10pts. each)	60% (300 pts.)
Sequence analysis	20% (100 pts.)
Final essay	20% (100 pts.)
Total	100%

Viewing

The films are primary texts for this class, so careful and repeated viewings of them are essential. You should keep a viewing journal (with notes and commentary), which will help you organize and follow up on your initial impressions. The films are available as streaming content via the class ELMS site for a two-week period. All films also are available on reserve at Nonprint Media Services in Hornbake Library, where you can view them onsite. Additionally, these films also are available via commercial streaming and rental services (Netflix, etc.).

Papers

Use the most recent edition of the *Chicago Manual of Style* format for your paper. Papers should use 12-point font, and should include a title, date, and professor's name. Please paginate your papers.

-Ensure that you keep copies of all submitted work. In case of lost essays, **you** are responsible for providing a replacement.

A Note on Late Work:

This course will proceed quickly. In six weeks, you will be asked to assimilate material that usually takes an entire semester to cover. Therefore, you cannot afford to fall behind even a little bit. You must make every effort to keep with the reading, viewing, and assignments as they are mapped out in the syllabus. You should also plan ahead to make sure that you have sufficient time for the more labor-intensive assignments, especially the two papers, which account for 40% of the final grade.

University Policies:

1. Special Needs: If you have a registered disability and wish to discuss accommodations with me, please let me know. Disabilities can be registered through Disability Support Services (4-7682 or 5-7683 TTY/TDD).
2. The University has approved a **Code of Academic Integrity** which prohibits students from cheating on exams, plagiarizing papers, submitting the same paper for credit in two courses without authorization, buying papers, submitting fraudulent documents, and forging signatures. Plagiarism policy: all quotations taken from other authors, including from the Internet, must be indicated by quotation marks and referenced. Paraphrasing must be referenced as well. The following University of Maryland **Honor Pledge** has been proposed by the Council and approved by the University Senate: "I pledge on my honor that I have not given or received any unauthorized assistance on this assignment/examination." This pledge should be written and signed on the front page of all papers, projects or other academic assignments submitted for evaluation in this course.
3. This syllabus is subject to change. Students will be notified in advance of important changes that could affect grading, assignments, etc.

Note

Discussions of your work will occur through email correspondence or via Skype. Don't hesitate to email questions, comments, and especially accounts of problems you are having with the readings or your research. **Check your e-mail regularly.**

WEEK ONE

1) Introduction: What Do We Do When We Go to the Movies?

Tues., 5/29

Read:

Plato, "Parable of the Cave"

Roland Barthes, "Upon Leaving the Movie Theater"

Watch:

Uncle Josh at the Moving Picture Show (Edwin S. Porter/Edison, 1902) 2m

Sequence from *Sherlock Jr.* (Buster Keaton, 1924) 5m

Assignments #1 and 2

Participate in discussion board on questions about the readings and screenings

Watching a film with two bodies—cinema-going assignment

2) Cinema as Institution

Wednesday, 5/30

Read:

B/T, 1-53

ELMS Powerpoint

Watch:

clips on Foley work, storyboards

3) Film Form

Thursday, 5/31

Read:

B/T, 55-77; 396-400

ELMS Powerpoint

Watch:

His Girl Friday (Howard Hawks, 1940) 92m

Assignment #3

Analysis of motifs in *His Girl Friday*

4) Narrative as a Formal System / Classical Hollywood Narration

Friday, 6/1

Read:

B/T, 78-103

Watch:

His Girl Friday (Howard Hawks, 1940) 92m

Assignment #4

Application of narrative terms to *His Girl Friday*

5)

Sat., 6/2

6)

Sun. 6/3

WEEK TWO

7) Editing

Mon. 6/4

Read:

B/T, 223-268

Watch:

Selected clips (see ELMS for detailed list)

Assignments #5 and 6

Editing identification assignment

Discussion of 180-degree rule violation in *The Getaway*

8) Editing, cont.

Tuesday, 6/5

Assignment #7

Discussion board debate about the editing styles of sequences from *Breaking Away* v. *Days of Thunder*

9) Mise-en-scène

Wednesday, 6/6

Read:

B/T, 118-166

Watch: *Vertigo* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958) 128m

Commentated Powerpoint presentation

Selected clips (see ELMS for detailed list)

Assignment #8

Analysis of color symbolism in *Vertigo*

10) Mise-en-scène, cont.

Thursday, 6/7

Assignment #9

Analysis of mise-en-scene in a recent commercial

11) Cinematography

Friday, 6/8

Read:

B/T, 167-222

Watch: *Vertigo* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958) 128m

ELMS Powerpoint

Selected clips (see ELMS for detailed list)

Assignment #10

Analysis of framing and camera movement in *Vertigo*

12) Saturday, 6/9

13) Sunday, 6/10

WEEK THREE

14) Cinematography, cont.

Monday, 6/11

Assignment #11

Analysis of the function of camera movement in the first shot of *Touch of Evil* (Orson Welles, 1958)

15) Film Sound

Tuesday, 6/12

Read:

B/T, 269-97; 470-473

Watch:

Singin' in the Rain (Stanley Donen/Gene Kelly, 1952) 103m

Selected clips (see ELMS for detailed list)

Assignment #12

Analysis of the differences in the soundtracks in two version of the opening shot of *Touch of Evil*

16) Film Style and Authorship: Orson Welles

Wednesday, 6/13

Read:

B/T, 104-114; 312-327

Watch:

Citizen Kane (Orson Welles, 1941) 119m

Assignment #13

Analysis of a sequence from *Citizen Kane*

17) Welles, cont.

Thursday, 6/14

Read:

ELMS, André Bazin, "The Technique of *Citizen Kane*" and "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema"

Assignment #14

Response paper about André Bazin's interpretation of *Kane*

18) Synthesis: Sample Sequence Analyses

Friday, 6/15

Assignments 15, 16, 17, 18

Cat People sequence analysis

Shadows sequence analysis

Duck Amuck analysis

Toy Story 3 sequence analysis

19) Saturday, 6/16

20) Sunday, 6/17

Sequence analysis due

WEEK FOUR

21) Film Genre: Film Noir

Monday, 6/18

Read:

B/T, 328-348

Paul Schrader, "Notes on Film Noir" (ELMS)

Watch:

Double Indemnity (Billy Wilder, 1944) 107m

Assignment #19

Identifying noir elements

22) Film noir, cont.

Tuesday, 6/19

Read:

Oliver Gaycken, "*Double Indemnity*" (ELMS)

Watch:

Double Indemnity (Billy Wilder, 1944) 107m

Assignment #20

Discussion of other interpretative frameworks for *Double Indemnity*

23) Stardom

Wednesday, 6/20

Read:

Richard Dyer, excerpt from *Stars* (ELMS)

Richard Allen and Douglas Gomery, "Case Study: The Role of the Film Star in History" (ELMS)

Watch:

Mildred Pierce (Michael Curtiz, 1945) 111m

Assignment #21

Discussion of Allen and Gomery's treatment of Crawford's star persona in *Mildred Pierce*

24) Stardom, cont.

Thursday, 6/21

Assignment #22

Analysis of a contemporary star persona

25) Alternative Film Form I: Documentary

Friday, 6/22

Read:

B/T, 349-365, 425-431

ELMS, Bill Nichols, "How Do Documentaries Differ from Other Types of Film?"

Assignment #23

Discussion of Nichols's definition of documentary

26)

Saturday, 6/23

27)

Sunday, 6/24

WEEK FIVE**28) Alternative Film Form I: Documentary, cont.**

Monday, 6/25

Watch: *Blue Vinyl* (Daniel Gold and Judith Helfand, 2002) 93m

29) Alternative Film Form II: American Independent Cinema

Tuesday, 6/26

Watch: *Safe* (Todd Haynes, 1995) 119m

Assignment #24

Comparison of the virtues and limitations of how *Blue Vinyl* and *Safe* convey their messages about environmental toxins

30) Alternative Film Form III: Experimental Cinema

Wednesday, 6/27

Read:

ELMS, Stan Brakhage, from "Metaphors on Vision"; **B/T**, 366-381

Watch:

Un chien andalou (Luis Buñuel/Salvador Dalí, 1929) 28m

A Movie (Bruce Conner, 1958) 12m

Window Water Baby Moving (Stan Brakhage/Jane Brakhage, 1959) 12m

Passage à l'acte (Martin Arnold, 1993) 12m

Assignment #25

Discussion of experimental themes and techniques

31) Alternative Film Form IV: Orphan Films

Thursday, 6/28

Read:

Dan Streible, "The Role of Orphan Films in the 21st Century Archive" (ELMS)

Assignment #26

Orphan film assignment

32) Orphan film festival

Friday, 6/29

33)

Saturday, 6/30

34)

Sunday, 7/1

WEEK SIX

35) High Concept Filmmaking

Monday, 7/2

Read:

Justin Wyatt, "The Concept of High Concept" (ELMS)

Watch:

Jaws (Steven Spielberg 1977) 134m

Assignment #27

Make an argument for whether *Jaws* is a high concept film

36) Contemporary Hollywood

Tuesday, 7/3

Read:

Lev Manovich, "Reality Effects in Computer Animation" (ELMS)

Watch:

Jurassic Park (Steven Spielberg, 1993) 127m

37) The Digital—Whither Cinema?

Wednesday, 7/4

Watch:

Pixar shorts; *The Incredibles* (Brad Bird, 2005) 115m

Assignment #28

Paper on the impact of digital technologies on cinema

38) The Digital, cont.

Thursday, 7/5

Assignment #29

YouTube assignment

39) The End

Friday, 7/6

Assignment # 30

Comparison of endings: *Singin' in the Rain* v. *Citizen Kane*

40)

Saturday, 7/7

41)

Sunday, 7/8

Final paper due