

CIN105

1 – Introduction (6 May, 2025)

SLIDE

- Good morning everyone, and welcome to CIN105 – Introduction to Film Study
- My name is Andy and I am going to be your instructor as we, for the next 4 months or so, endeavor to learn more about the artistic medium that we call the cinema
- Today's class will not be very in-depth in terms of material. While reading was assigned, and it is my hope that you did it, we are going to focus more on some broader introductions today – to each other, the syllabus, and the type of work that we will be doing together weekly in this class, both during lecture and your tutorials, which will take place either here or down the hall after each sessions film screening.
- Due to time constraints, we're going to save group introductions for our tutorial session after the screening, but let me start today by telling you a bit about myself.
- As I said before my name is Andy and I am a fifth-year PhD Candidate at the Cinema Studies Institute, which is housed just across the street in Innis College.
- **SLIDE** My research focuses, actually, not on cinema as we traditionally understand it, but rather on videogames, digital media, and the history of computers. My dissertation is about the historical relationship between the videogame industry and the American military, and focuses on the way the military has used videogames or videogame like simulations for training purposes, from the beginning of the history of videogames in the 1960s until the present day. I'd be happy to talk more about my research if it sounds interesting to you any time during office hours.
- Now, before we begin walking through the syllabus for the course in detail, I want to take some time to introduce you all to the kind of work we're going to be doing this summer, to briefly set-up what this class is all about.
- First, as a kind of disclaimer, let me say that we will be watching many different types of films in this course – some of them you will find familiar, and some you will not. Some of the material you might find challenging and unexpected so be prepared, but endeavour at all turns to approach the material with an open mind.

- **SLIDE** We're going to start by watching a short segment from a film, what is commonly called a clip, because in the old days of celluloid film getting a sequence like this to show would involve literally clipping a piece of film out of the middle of a reel with scissors.
- As we watch this clip, I want you to think about a very broad question. How does it make you feel? Once you've thought about that, ask a second question: why do you think it made you feel this way? That is, give the film some agency: what did it do, specifically, to elicit those feelings in you?
- When the clip ends, we're going to take a moment to ruminate on that feeling, and you're encouraged to write down specifically some of the thoughts you had while watching.
- Play Clip
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- A lot of you are probably here because you want to major or minor in cinema studies, and to do so you want to learn more about how movies work on some fundamental level, to be able to, as the syllabus says, "communicate with incision how meaning is produced in cinema"
- But I want to start this discussion by suggesting that you all already *kind of* know how meaning is produced in the cinema. You're all already fairly sophisticated viewers.
- **SLIDE** Today, we exist in an audio-visual ecology that is vast and all encompassing. You interact with audio-visual material every single day, whether that be by watching films, TV shows, or just browsing on your phone.
- As a consequence, you have internalized many of the "conventions" of cinematic form through pure cultural osmosis. You already know, for example, that certain types of edits, or cuts, can convey passages of time, or that the choice of positioning of the camera at a certain height can convey variously that a character possesses authority or, conversely, that another character lacks it.
- You are actually very well-schooled in what we might call the "language" of cinema, its vocabulary – shot, angle, cut, edit, scene, etc – even its codes and conventions. These rules are ingrained in you, and it's why you can even follow a film at all, comprehend what's going on, make sense of the story intuitively without needing to explicitly think about it.

- But that is just it – the majority of what we understand in this regard *is intuitive*.
SLIDE When we watch a movie we want to get sucked in, to be immersed, and therefore to not really think about *how* the film is communicating these things to us in an explicit manner. We just sit back and enjoy ourselves.
- Explicitizing this process is the core goal of this course. By the end, it is my goal that you will be able to recognize and communicate precisely how films *work on you as a spectator* – what techniques are being chosen to communicate material, and why filmmakers make the choices that they make.
- In a second, we'll walk over the steps we're going to take to achieve this goal by breaking down the syllabus week by week. First, though, I want to return to the film clip we just watched and ask you all: how did it make you feel? If you wrote anything specific down, feel free to share, but if not feel free to just riff.
- Let students respond to the clip

Open up syllabus

- As this quick example hopefully illustrates, moving images are designed to work on us as embodied spectators in specific ways. Specific tactics and techniques are deployed to make us *feel* things, and getting at *how* that is accomplished requires paying very close attention to the sounds emanating from the screen, the way the camera moves or does not move, the color and organization of the objects in the frame, and the way the images themselves are organized or edited to elicit meaning through juxtaposition. The word we will use for this process, as we come to understand it better, is **film analysis**.
- Our goal in the first half of this course is going to be to acquire a specialized vocabulary that will help enable us to conduct film analysis as specifically as possible.
- *Walk through first half of course schedule*
- When we reconvene for the second half of the course in early July, we're going to begin to shift our focus. We're going to consider the ways in which understanding a film on its own as a formal, bounded object may be insufficient for a rich understanding of its place in culture more broadly, and so we will think about how films can also be understood through their relationship to the broader world.
- First we will consider their relationship to specific artistic and critical traditions

- Next, we will consider their relationship to other films – we will ask how a film can be understood as, for instance, part of a filmmaker’s larger body of work, or perhaps as a vehicle for one of its stars – how audiences might make sense of a film purely on the basis of who is in that film.
- Finally, we will consider film’s relationship to the larger social world. Here, we will ask not only what an individual film might have to say about a given social issue, but also how film itself as an artistic medium reinforces or challenges assumptions that we might make about the world. Another way to put this is we will end this course by considering *what film even is to begin with*, and how it plays a role in socialization alongside all the other types of media that we interact with and are shaped by on a daily basis.
- If we return to the clip we just watched from *Blue Velvet*, we can think about the film’s relationship to all of these frames of analysis that we will be taking.
- We could look at the formal tradition of the art film, to understand the way the film’s form subverts or plays with the expectations and conventions of Hollywood cinematic style.
- We could look to the body of work of David Lynch, the director, where we would see that *Blue Velvet* shares many thematic and formal qualities with his other films like *Mullholland Drive*, or his television work *Twin Peaks*.
- Finally, we may just look to the tradition of American cinema in general and argue that *Blue Velvet*, in its ominous framing of otherwise idyllic suburban American life, is offering a critique of the American dream and the way that it has been represented in classical Hollywood melodrama.
- In sum, in the second half of the course, we’ll be thinking about what it means to understand films in terms of these kinds of contexts. Indeed we will be thinking a lot about what a word I just used casually – to represent something – actually means in the context of cinematic style.
- So before I introduce today’s screening to you I just want to make a few more generalized notes about this course and how it is going to work.
- Structurally, the course is a bit odd, due to time constraints in the summer term. Each Tuesday and Thursday we will meet here first for the weekly lecture, then we will all watch a film together, and then after the film half of you will go down the

hall with our teaching assistant, Sam Reimer, and the other half will stay here, and we will have simultaneous tutorials, which are smaller, more discussion based classes where we will discuss how the weekly material applies to the film we just watched, and perhaps to all the films we have watched in general.

- In tutorial you are encouraged to share you thoughts and feelings about the material, but there is an important caveat that I want to state up-front:
- This course does not exist to validate or reinforce your taste in movies, and I can almost guarantee you will watch films in this class that you don't like.
- I have tried to select films for this course that I *think* many of you will like or find interesting, but more importantly we will be watching films from a diverse set of perspectives, time periods, and places.
- This course is about expanding your comfort zone when it comes to watching cinema, which means your only job during its duration is to simply watch the movies and have something to say about them. While some weeks you will love a film and other weeks you might hate it, what I and your teaching assistant Sam care much more about is *what you think about how it works*. Your job in tutorial, regardless of whether the material was to your taste, is to simply have an opinion about how the film works or does not work for you.
- Finally, I just want to walk quickly through the rest of the syllabus to make sure we are aware of the basic course expectations starting with the assignment structure.
- *Walk through the rest of the syllabus*
- Ok now we will have a quick washroom break and then I will introduce this week's film

SLIDE Introduction to screening:

- The first movie we are going to be watching together is *The Player*, directed by Robert Altman and released in 1997. Has anyone seen this film before?
- There are a few reasons to watch this film, but for now I'm going to be brief, as we will have more time to talk about it in tutorial afterward, and we will return to moments from the film later in the course.

- Most obviously, as you will see almost immediately, this is a film about making movies. This means that the film serves as an excellent introduction to many concepts that we will return to later. For instance, many characters will discuss the Hollywood division of labour on a film set, and they will debate at length about what tropes make movies more appealing in the market, concepts we will go over in detail when we learn about classical Hollywood style in the second semester.
- There is also discussion about the merits of celebrity and star power in cinema, as you watch think about why it is that movie stars figure so heavily in the discussions of what films get made and what films don't get made – we will return to the concept of film stardom, again, in the second semester.
- There will also be much discussion in the film of film form and narrative, our topics in the next two sessions of the course – pay attention to the ways that characters describe story as something that can be understood according to rules – what does it mean for a story to have a “good” or “bad” ending, and how are these things achieved? How does this film structure *itself*? What is it about, and how do you know?
- Indeed, this is a film that is about movies *in general*, how they are made, their purpose, what makes them good or bad, and it is riddled with references to other films, and filled with celebrity cameos. This means this film is what we will be calling “self-reflexive” – the movie is in part aware of its own existence as a movie and will point to this artifice through various references, jokes, and visual gags. This is a concept that we will return to in more detail later in the course, but for now, while you watch, ask yourself what purpose the meta-nature of the film might serve? Why is it so insistent on reminding the viewer that they are watching a movie?
- Finally, this is a movie that plays with all of the formal techniques of film style that we will spend the first unit of our course narrowing down. For now, you don't necessarily have all the specialized terms to articulate how the film plays with these techniques, but you will certainly notice them. I want you to keep the following broad question in mind while watching: how does the movie communicate its story to you? In thinking about that question, think about the following:
 - o How does the camera move?
 - o How is the film edited? Are there lots of cuts, or are the takes particularly long in duration? What is the effect of each on how you learn story information?
 - o What does the film sound like? What stands out to you about the way the audio track is used?
 - o And finally, most generally, what does the film look like? Is it colorful, or is it drab, is it bright or is it dark? When is it each of these things, and is there significance to such choices?
- With that, let's all enjoy *The Player*!