

Film Studies 270: Introduction to Film

Spring Semester, 2002

TTh 11:30-12:45, VCC

Screening: Tuesdays, 3-6pm, Williams Hall Theater (2nd Floor)

Instructor: Victoria Sturtevant

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Office: Language Hall 102

Office Hours: Tuesdays, 2-3, and by appt.

Required Texts:

Stephen Prince, *Movies and Meaning: An Introduction to Film, 2nd Edition* (MM)

Timothy Corrigan, *A Short Guide to Writing about Film*. 3rd or 4th Edition

Various Reserve or Online Texts and Articles

Course Objectives:

This course will introduce you to basic issues of structure, aesthetics, and ideology in film. In order to learn these fundamentals, it is essential that you be willing to discard passive viewing habits and force yourselves to become knowledgeable, critical, and informed consumers of visual culture. This process is harder than it sounds, and it will take practice. In the pursuit of this goal, the course will take up a great deal of your time: in addition to a full reading/writing load, I require one screening a week, plus a visual media assignment to be completed in the library. These assignments must be approached with an active mind: take notes, make connections, formulate theses as you watch. Students who regard media assignments as opportunities to sit back and take in a movie will not perform well in class participation, writing assignments, or exams. On the other hand, as you learn to watch visual media in different ways, your ability to take pleasure in a really good, really interesting film will increase dramatically. It is an exciting class, and it is a hard class. Please be prepared for both.

During this course, students will learn:

- ◆ The basic vocabulary of cinema: camerawork, mise-en-scène, editing, and sound
- ◆ The basic technology of cinema: aspect ratios, projection speeds, and lenses
- ◆ How different modes of filmmaking (documentary, Avant-Garde, Classical Hollywood) employ these elements in different ways and to different ends
- ◆ Some basic history of major international film movements of the 20th Century
- ◆ The economic structure of contemporary American film production, and how the profit motive inflects cinema's position as an art form
- ◆ How to analyze films for ideological meanings
- ◆ How to write a unified and concrete paper making an argument about how a film creates meaning through its visual and audio structure
- ◆ How to prepare for class and speak comfortably in a large group

Requirements and Particulars:

Readings: Complete the assigned readings before the first class of the week. You will be responsible for the information contained in the readings whether I go over it in lecture or not. I also reserve the right to assign extra readings during the course of the semester, with as little as one class-period warning. If you miss a class, please check with another student in case there has been some supplemental reading assigned.

Screenings: There is a screening for this course every Tuesday from 3-6 p.m. Most often we will not use the whole 3 hours. Check the syllabus for the running times of each week's film(s). If you know now that this screening will conflict with some other aspect of your semester's schedule (team practices, social club obligations, other classes, employment, etc.), drop the course now. Attendance will be taken religiously. Every film screened is vital to your experience of the class.

Please don't even think about renting the video in lieu of a screening. Movies are meant to be seen on a big screen, with a big group of people, not by yourself on your puny home monitor. *Be early to every screening.* We will make every effort to start promptly at 3, and slipping through the door after the lights are out is both rude and irritating. Be prepared to take notes during the film. The lights will be off, so you may wish to obtain a penlight for this purpose.

Conferences: Students may arrange to meet with me any time during the semester. If you have any concerns about your performance, your grade, or if you are falling behind, *please let me know as early as possible* so we can arrange a strategy to help you. It is your responsibility to let me know if you need help. I am available by email, by office phone, during office drop-in hours (Tuesdays 2-3), or by appointment.

If you have any condition or disability which requires accommodation, please notify me as soon as possible (today after class or via email).

Grading: The plus/minus grading system is in effect for this course. Your grade will be broken down in the following way:

Participation (20%): This grade includes attendance, preparedness, attention, and verbal class comments. Attendance alone is not remotely sufficient. Each student is responsible for making one comment, or asking or answering one question at each and every class meeting. It is up to you to make sure you are an active part of the class dynamic. If you miss more than three class periods, this grade will suffer. Please notify me if you know that you will be absent for any reason, so I can give you make-up materials. Although it is helpful to me to know where you are, be advised that notifying me does not constitute an 'excused' absence.

I reserve the right to quiz you on the readings any day of the semester. Quiz grades will count toward your participation grade. If you are absent on the day of a quiz, the quiz will not be figured into your grade, although the absence will.

Short papers, group work, and other daily informal assignments will also be figured into the participation grade. Do not take this 20% for granted: you start with zero and must earn your way up.

Screening Journal (20%): Every week until the midterm you will compose a typed, one page double-spaced (times new roman 12pt font) journal paper on the film screened. Journal instructions will be distributed Tuesdays, completed entries will be collected Thursdays. If you miss class, you may Learnlink the journal to me, but I much prefer paper copies. Late journals will be penalized.

Midterm Exam (20%): The in-class midterm will be in an essay/short answer format. A review session will precede the exam, but please do not take for granted that I will cover every question at this session. Because some of the exam questions will involve film clips that I will show during the exam period, make-up or early examinations will only be permitted under the most dire circumstances.

One 5-page Paper (20%): This paper will be a very structured analysis of a film I assign. Many many details to follow.

Final Exam (20%): The final will be in take-home essay format. Instructions and details to be distributed April 30.

A Note on Grading: Completing all the requirements of this course does not earn a student a grade of A. To earn an A, one must complete all the requirements in a way that I find exceptional. The fact that this course is introductory does not guarantee that the grading scale will be lenient or that all students will receive high marks.

Learnlink Conference: Please make sure the icon for the Learnlink conference for this course appears on your desktop (if you are not familiar with Learnlink, see me for instructions). Check the conference regularly for course materials, instructions, last minute changes, and other important information.

Extra Credit: Throughout the semester, I will announce various events and films which students may earn extra credit for attending. In each case, the student must save the ticket stub and write an extra journal entry on the film or event to earn the equivalent of 1-2 exam points, for a maximum of five points for the semester. See our Learnlink conference for details and updates.

The Honor Code is in effect throughout this course. Academic honesty is absolutely essential to our conduct as a university, and any student found to be in violation of the Honor Code will be reported to the Honor Council. A few particulars:

- ◆ Any outside sources (INCLUDING INTERNET SOURCES) you use for papers and take-home assignments must be cited in a footnote, an endnote, or an internal citation plus a bibliography. Please refer to chapter 7 of the Corrigan book for instructions on correctly citing sources.
- ◆ Any assignment completed for one course and turned in for another course is a violation of the Honor Code.
- ◆ The most common penalty for students found to be in violation of the Honor Code is an F in the course, not just an F on the assignment.

Please Note: Film is a powerful medium. One of the things it has the power to do is to shock and offend the viewer. I am a big wimp myself, so I will make every effort to warn you before any image you may find alarming appears on the screen. But please be prepared for this aspect of the medium. You may always, without penalty, 1) close your eyes or exit the room; or 2) talk to me (or email me) about any clip or screening that upsets you.

Course Schedule

Jan. 17 **Introductions, Basics**

Jan. 22-24 **Structure**

Reading: MM Ch. 2; Corrigan pp. 156-165 (3rd Ed.) or 182-201 (4th Ed.)

Jan. 22 *Run Lola Run* (Tom Tykwer, 1998) 81 min.

Creature Comforts (Aardman, 1990) 33 min.

Jan. 29-31 **Cinematography and Production Design**

Reading: MM Ch. 3

Jan. 29 *L.A. Confidential* (Curtis Hanson, 1997) 138 min.

Feb. 5-7 **Mise-en-Scène**

Reading: MM Ch. 4

Feb. 5 *My Best Girl* (Sam Taylor, 1927) 79 min.

The Idle Class (Charlie Chaplin, 1921) 25 min.

Feb. 12-14 **Editing and the Continuity System**

Reading: MM Ch. 5

Feb. 12 *Bonnie and Clyde* (Arthur Penn, 1967) 111 min.

Feb. 19-21 **Sound**

Reading: MM Ch. 6

Feb. 19 *The Graduate* (Mike Nichols, 1967) 105 min.

Feb. 26-28 **Narrative/Narration**

Reading: MM pp. 2-31

Feb. 26 *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, 1941) 119 min.

March 5 Exam Review

March 7 **Midterm Exam**

March 5 *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960) 109 min.

March 11-15 Spring Break

March 19-21 **Documentary**

Reading: MM pp. 259-263, Corrigan Ch. 1-3

March 19 *Hoop Dreams* (Steve James II, 1994) 170 min.*

*We will begin the video in class so the screening will not run quite so long

March 19 **Paper Assignment Distributed**

March 26-28 **Genre and Ideology**

Reading: MM pp. 31-47, Corrigan Ch. 4-7

March 26 *Singin' in the Rain* (Stanley Donen/Gene Kelly, 1952) 120 min.

April 2-4 **Industrial Issues and Film Criticism**

Reading: MM Ch. 8, 10

April 2 Current Release, details TBA

April 9-11 **National/Historical Contexts and Movements**

Reading: MM Ch. 9

April 9 *Jules and Jim* (François Truffaut, 1961) 100 min.

April 11 **Paper Due**

April 16-18 **Avant-Garde and Art Film**

Reading: Stan Brakhage, "Metaphors on Vision" (Reserve)

April 16 *The Seventh Seal* (Ingmar Bergman, 1956) 96 min.

Meshes of the Afternoon (Maya Deren, 1943) 14 min.

April 23-25 **Gender and "The Gaze"**

Reading: John Berger, Ch. 3 of **Ways of Seeing** (Reserve)

April 23 *Orlando* (Sally Potter, 1992) 93 min.

Heaven (Tracey Moffatt, 1997) 28 min.

April 30 **Wrap-up/Take-Home Exam Distributed**

May 3 Take Home Exam Due by 5 p.m. in my mailbox in the Humanities Bldg.

Yes, you may turn it in early.