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FS 270: Introduction to Film

Tu/Th Seminars in Language Hall 101
Weekly screenings in Library Room 201

Dr. Elizabeth Venell
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Office hours in Humanities 205
Tu/Th 2:00-3:00pm & by appointment

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How are movies made, and how do movies make meaning? These are the fundamental questions that animate film studies. This course is an introduction to the techniques and elements that comprise the art and industry of filmmaking. We will consider the language of film form alongside the historical and aesthetic contexts of filmmaking, developing and focusing our abilities to analyze cinema from *aperture* to *zoom*. The course content gives rise to three major objectives: students will learn to recognize and name film techniques; students will use their educated observations to consider how those techniques produce meaning; and students will refine methods for discussing and writing about film construction, meaning, and trends.

Textbook: Phillips, William. *Film: An Introduction*. 4th edition. New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2009.

Format: In general, new topics will be introduced during class on Tuesdays, and practiced or tested on Thursdays. In addition to seminars, screenings are a critical component of film studies; attendance is mandatory for every film. Students are expected to take notes during screenings for future reference in class discussions and assignments, and engage with the films much like one would in a weekly lab.

Evaluation: A range of assignments, some in-class and some take-home, combine with film reviews and short analyses to make up the bulk of the grade; steady engagement and diligence throughout the semester will be rewarded. A final, take-home project is the culminating assignment of the semester.

Late work is not eligible for full credit.

A record of absences and tardiness will reduce the final grade. Multiple absences (due to emergencies or illness) must be documented to avoid penalties.

Honor Code: As in all courses, students are required to abide by the Oxford College Honor Code, available for review at http://www.oxford.emory.edu/audiences/current_students/Academic/academic-success/student-honor-code. In film studies, common knowledge extends to basic information about a film, including its year, director, cast, and country of origin. However, plot summaries and other analyses are the unique work of particular authors, and they require citation. Content from

outside sources, including specific arguments, descriptive phrases, and general information beyond the scope of our class discussions must be cited.

Additional Classroom Policies: No electronic devices and no meals (by sitcom bachelor standards) are permitted during classes and screenings. Any exceptions must be approved by the instructor on a case-by-case basis (for example, the course is conducted in accordance with the ADA). Use of unapproved electronic devices and/or significant food consumption will be considered an offense punishable by a critically reduced participation grade, public embarrassment, temporary confiscation, and/or instructor's consumption. Small snacks are permitted during screenings provided that they do not interfere with note-taking. Freshly popped popcorn, a ubiquitous signifier of attending movies for entertainment purposes, is exclusively banned from the classroom during seminars and screenings. Anyone found in violation of this policy will be required to give a class presentation on a topic of the instructor's choice.

This syllabus forms an implied contract. Any revisions to the policies or schedule will be made in writing.

Note on Explicit Content: During the lectures and screenings, students will encounter graphic content, including but not limited to nudity, explicit sexuality, vulgarity, drug use, and violence, which may be troubling to viewers. Enrollment in this course indicates the student's awareness of this fact, as well as a willingness to approach these representations in a mature—and sensitive—scholarly manner. If you are concerned that particular themes or images may be triggering, alternative or supplementary arrangements can be made in advance and in coordination with the instructor.

Assignments

Film Reviews (3 @ 15 points each = 45% total grade)

Film reviews are one of the most popular modes of writing about film, and some reviewers or sites of publication are quite influential over the film's box office success. Contemporary viewers often consult review aggregators such as Rotten Tomatoes before attending (or deciding to attend) a film. What is lost in many popular reviews, however, is an educated sense of film production techniques. Reviewers in the popular press often gloss over the role of major filmmaking techniques in favor of focusing on the worthiness of the narrative, quality of acting, or expense of the special effects. In the film review assignments, you are tasked with composing a review that is both informed and accessible. That means you must explain your use of terms and give illustrative examples, but not lose the reader's attention with technical details or excessive plot summary. It does not mean that you should shy away from citing particular film techniques; on the contrary, you are required (and encouraged!) to show off your knowledge and understanding of film studies thus far. Rather than simply mentioning noteworthy film techniques, *explain them*, and explain their particular and contextualized effects in the film that you are reviewing.

Each student will complete three film reviews, to be submitted at the beginning of any class between September 24 and December 5. Reviews should address one of the films and reading from the previous two weeks. (Reviews submitted on films outside of that range will be accepted but considered late.)

I submitted reviews on these three dates: \ \ \

Formal Analysis / Plot Summaries (3 @ 10 points each = 30% total grade)

Each student is required to complete three formal analysis summaries of films that we screen, to be presented and submitted in the first class meeting after the screening. Not only does this give students an opportunity to decide how to distribute some of their work for the semester, but it also ensures that a number of students will be prepared to lead the class discussion by relating the reading to the film, or some aspect of the film, that we screened. Summaries should recap the film narrative and point out relevant formal techniques (visual or audio elements of the film that we are studying); mention one or two scenes in particular from the film that illustrate an aspect of film form; and culminate in a few discussion questions for the class.

I signed up for the following three dates: \ \ \

Final Exam (10% total grade)

Students will have a few days to complete a take-home final, consisting of multiple types of short and long-answer questions.

Classroom Performance (15% total grade)

Pop quizzes and in-class group exercises are designed to provoke synthesis of ideas, and to push beyond the basic memorization of film terms into an understanding of their broader significance. Engaged participation in class discussions and attendance at seminars and screenings contribute to the overall classroom performance grade.