

Introduction to Film

FS 270

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Elizer 257

**Tues/Thurs 1:40-3:20pm
& Thurs 3:30-6:30pm**

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Dr. Elizabeth Venell

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**Office hours
at 602 Emory St.
T/Th 10:30-11:30am
and Wed 12-2pm**

Course Description:

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*.

Course content gives rise to three major objectives: students learn to recognize and explain film techniques, use their educated observations to consider how these techniques produce meaning, and develop their capacities for comprehending, discussing, and writing about the significance of cinema and related media.

Textbook: Bordwell and Thompson's *Film Art*, 10th

edition. Supplemental readings, images, or videos will be distributed in class and on Blackboard.

Format: In general, new topics will be introduced during the seminar on Thursdays, and class discussions of our film screenings will be on Tuesdays that follow screenings. Please complete the reading in advance of our class meeting (on the following schedule, pages correspond with the day they will be discussed in class), so you are prepared for discussion, primed for relevant clips, and familiar with new terminology.

Weekly screenings: Scheduled screenings are a critical component of film studies; attendance is mandatory for every film. Screenings rarely last the entire period, and students are encouraged to research the film's running time to aid in personal scheduling. There will be minimal lecture and discussion during the screening sessions. Students are expected to take notes during screenings for future reference in class discussion and assignments.

Evaluation: Participation (10%) is composed of attendance as well as informed and thoughtful contributions to class discussions. Come to class prepared, on time, and stay for the whole period. If you are not inclined to comment or answer questions in class, make an effort to contribute once a week. You are allowed two absences without penalty, but beyond that allowance, your grade will drop with every absence and significant tardiness. There are a few single assignments: the Rewatch Assignment (5%) asks you to reflect on the knowledge gained from DVD audio commentary; the Genre Project (10%) is an opportunity to screen and compare several films from a specific category. Podcast Movie Reviews (15%) and Film Analysis Papers (30%) are due at alternating, regular intervals throughout the semester (you have your choice of 3rd assignment), and monthly quizzes (20%) keep us up to date on new terms and concepts from the field. A final project, a shot-by-shot video analysis (10%), is due in place of an exam.

Late work is not eligible for full credit; the maximum final score will drop by five points each late day, beginning after the assignment is collected in class.

Rewatch Assignment	5%
Participation/Attendance	10%
Genre Project	10%
Shot-by-shot Analysis	10%
Podcast Movie Reviews	15%
Quizzes	20%
Film Analysis Papers	30% (8, 10, 12)

Inquiries about grades can usually be answered by referring to the syllabus. Specific or individual questions about grades should be addressed during office hours.

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 in Chicago format.

Accessibility: This course is conducted in accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (amended 2008). Oxford's Access, Disability Services, and Resources (ADSR) Office is nearby, in 134 Project Room, East Village Murdy Hall. Services are outlined on their website, <http://equityandinclusion.emory.edu/>, or you can contact the office at adsroxford@emory.edu. Please bring any requests for formal accommodations to my attention early in the semester, so we can make a plan for you to get the most out of the class. More broadly, used copies of the textbook are available in the bookstore and online, and two copies of the textbook will be on reserve at the library circulation desk (typically a three-hour checkout period). For English-language films, we will not generally screen the film with closed captions; however, films not in English will be screened with subtitles. Captions and subtitles are often available for the films we watch, so if you are interested in those resources (for example, you want to review the dialogue after the screening for an essay or for better comprehension), I can help you access them.

Campus events, services, and extra credit: There are many opportunities for film students to enrich their knowledge of filmmaking and film history this semester. In addition to the Southern Circuit documentaries that tour our campus, the Atlanta campus hosts Emory Cinematheque, which will offer film screenings on Wednesday evenings through February. Students also have access to the Oxford Writing Center, on the second floor of the library, which offers personalized tutoring, brainstorming, and feedback on student writing. Appointments can be made online through <https://oxford.mywconline.com>. How does this all relate to extra credit? Attendance at a campus film screening, verified by checking in with me and/or submitting a 300-word summary of the film event, will count as extra credit toward your attendance and participation grade.

Similarly, a verified visit to the writing center will contribute a minor bonus to your grade on the assignment (including assignments that are not submitted in writing).

Additional Policies and Etiquette: No electronic devices (included but not limited to cell phones, tablets, and laptops) are permitted during classes or screenings. Any exceptions must be approved by the instructor on a case-by-case basis (for example, as a formal accommodation). Let the syllabus be your warning: violations of the electronic device policy will destroy your participation grade like Godzilla. Snacks are permitted during screenings provided that they do not interfere with viewing or note-taking. (Thursdays are our long days (1:40-6:30pm!), so plan your meals and snacks accordingly.) Freshly popped popcorn, a ubiquitous signifier of people attending movies for fun and amusement, is enthusiastically banned from the classroom. Please think of the screening period as you would lab or class time.

Lastly, this syllabus forms an implied contract. The schedule is subject to change at the instructor's revision. Students are required to complete all of the above as scheduled. Additional assignments or readings may be distributed in class, and additional exercises will certainly be conducted in class. Absences may result in missed work that is not explicitly outlined on the syllabus. Significant amendments to the schedule will be made in writing (e.g. rescheduling after university cancellations).

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 manner. If you are concerned about particular themes or images, alternative screening arrangements can be made with the instructor at least a week in advance.

	Topic	Reading	Screening	Due
Jan. 12	Introductions			Notecards
Jan. 14	Early film history	461-479	No screening	
Jan. 19	Sound cinema, Post-war film	480-498		Rewatch
Jan. 21	Decisions + technology	1-16; 425-429	<i>Chungking Express</i> (Wong Kar-wai, 1994)	Quiz 1
Jan. 26	Production phase	16-34		
Jan. 28	Distribution + exhibition phases	34-47	<i>Dear White People</i> (Justin Simien, 2014)	
Feb. 2	Film form and meaning	50-70		Podcast 1
Feb. 4	Plot, causality, time, range of information	72-97	<i>Groundhog Day</i> (Harold Ramis, 1993)	
Feb. 9				Analysis 1
Feb. 11	Classic Hollywood, <i>CK</i>	97-110	<i>Citizen Kane</i> (Orson Welles, 1941)	
Feb. 16	Setting, subjects, light, time	112-131		Quiz 2
Feb. 18	Acting, composition	131-158	<i>Me and You and Everyone We Know</i> (Miranda July, 2005)	
Feb. 23	Color, speed, perspective, framing	160-188		
Feb. 25			<i>Pariah</i> (Dee Rees, 2011)	Analysis 2
Mar. 1	Camera position and movement; duration	188-216		
Mar. 3	Shot relations	218-232	<i>Vagabond</i> (Agnès Varda, 1985)	Podcast 2
Mar. 8-10	Spring Break	*	*	*
Mar. 15	Continuity editing	232-255		
Mar. 17			<i>The Birds</i> (Alfred Hitchcock, 1963)	Quiz 3
Mar. 22	Alternative editing; sound fundamentals	255-264, 266-281		
Mar. 24	Sound, space, perspective	281-298	<i>Battleship Potemkin</i> (Sergei Eisenstein, 1925)	
Mar. 29				Analysis 3 or Podcast 3
Mar. 31	Style in form + narrative (in <i>CK</i>)	308-326	<i>A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night</i> (Ana Lily Amirpour, 2014)	
Apr. 5	Genre history, classics	328-348		
Apr. 7	Forms of animation	386-398	Mystery Screening	Quiz 4
Apr. 12	Docs: categorical, rhetorical	350-368		
Apr. 14			<i>The Wolfpack</i> (Crystal Moselle, 2015)	
Apr. 19				Genre Project
Apr. 21	Experimental film: abstract/associational	369-386	Experimental Film Program	
Apr. 27 2-5pm	Scheduled final exam period		Online submissions	Shot-by-Shot Video Analysis

For examples of writing about a film's sound, see pp. 298-307. For extensive examples of writing on film with attention to form, see pp. 402-449; specific directions for critical analysis, pp. 450-456.