English 202: Film Analysis and Interpretation

Instructor: Fusco
Office Hours: T 1-3
Required Texts:
Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art*
Corrigan, *A Short Guide to Writing About Film*

Assignments:
Quizzes and Participation: 15%
Short Writing Posts: 20%
Final Paper: 15% Final: 25%
Midterm: 25%

SLOS:
Students in this class will:
• apply techniques of critical film analysis to analyze film in the context of culture, society, and individual identity.
• demonstrate independent critical judgment and analytical skills in relation to critiquing film.
• articulate the relationships between film and its historical, cultural, economic and technological contexts.

COs:
This course satisfies Silver Vein CO7. *Artistic Composition, Interpretation, & Expression.*

Course Description:
This course is an introduction to the basic concepts of film analysis and topics in film studies. It operates on the premise that before you can explore more complex facets of film studies—such as advanced theory, criticism, and history—you must first develop expertise in analyzing the basic elements of film form and style. Thus we will devote several weeks to building a precise vocabulary to describe mise-en-scene, cinematography, editing, and sound in film with the goal that you will learn to trace the function of style and form within a scene and across a film. With these skills, you can enhance your everyday viewing of film (and television), build upon this knowledge in subsequent film studies courses, and generally become a more discerning consumer and producer of visual discourse. Once we work through the nuts and bolts of film analysis, we will explore various modes of filmmaking and introductory critical methods related to genre, authorship, and film theory. You will be expected to engage familiar films in unfamiliar ways and to work through films that may not be as accessible.

The films for this class have been chosen to illustrate concepts in film analysis and to
introduce you to a variety of types of filmmaking. While I hope you will enjoy the screenings, their primary purpose is to help you build your skills and expand the breadth of your knowledge. Approach these films with an open and attentive mind!

You are expected to watch the films carefully from beginning to end during one of the weekly designated screening times, and you will be asked to recall specific details from them. You are expected to take notes during the screenings so that you can remember specific examples related to the use of sound, camera work, mise-en-scene, editing, and narrative structure/form. Film notes will also benefit you come exam time.

MPAA WARNING!!! (Kind of…) We will be watching films that contain graphic violence and nudity, and that deal with adult themes. If you think this content will offend or disturb you, please feel free to talk to me about your questions or concerns.

Course Policies

Absences/Lateness. I allow everyone three unexcused “freebie” absences; after this, additional absences will affect your participation grade. Excessive lateness counts as half an absence.

Statement on Academic Dishonesty: Cheating, plagiarism or otherwise obtaining grades under false pretenses constitute academic dishonesty according to the code of this university. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated and penalties can include canceling a student's enrollment without a grade, giving an F for the course or for the assignment. For more details, see the University of Nevada, Reno General Catalog.

Statement of Disability Services: Any student with a disability needing academic adjustments or accommodations is requested to speak with me or the Disability Resource Center (Thompson Building, Suite 101) as soon as possible to arrange for appropriate accommodations.

Statement for Academic Success Services: Your student fees cover usage of the Math Center (784-4433 or www.unr.edu/mathcenter/), Tutoring Center (784-6801 or www.unr.edu/tutoring-center), and University Writing Center (784-6030 or http://www.unr.edu/writing-center). These centers support your classroom learning; it is your responsibility to take advantage of their services. Keep in mind that seeking help outside of class is the sign of a responsible and successful student.

Statement on Audio and Video Recording: Surreptitious or covert video-taping of class or unauthorized audio recording of class is prohibited by law and by Board of Regents policy. This class may be videotaped or audio recorded only with the written permission of the instructor. In order to accommodate students with disabilities, some students may have been given permission to record class lectures and discussions. Therefore, students should understand that their comments during class may be recorded.
Participation. For this class to work well, everyone will need to participate. When I assess participation, I will be considering both quantity and quality. You should aim to speak every day, and you should work to ground your comments in the reading and other course materials (this is how I will judge your engagement with the reading). Of course, asking good questions also counts as participation!

Religious Holidays: Students who must miss classes, examinations, or any other assignments as a consequence of their religious observance should provide me with notice of the dates of religious holidays on which they will be absent in the first two weeks of the semester.

Readings/Films: Readings for the week should be completed prior to screenings, as the films are used to illustrate the readings. Not everything in the reading will be covered in class and some of the later reading can be difficult. Thus it is important that you read closely and take notes. You are responsible for the content in the readings even when the material does not come up explicitly in class. If you do not understand elements of the reading, you should feel free to ask questions in class or in office hours.

Respect: We will be discussing some possibly controversial subject matters and things may get heated. I insist that all discussion be carried out with a spirit of respect, even when people disagree. That said, I strongly encourage you to consider this classroom a safe space to push yourselves in new and exciting ways. (P.S. Please don’t text in class.)

WEEK ONE: Film as Industry, Film as Art
Read: Chapter 1: “Film as Art: Creativity, Technology, and Business”
Screening: Ridley Scott, Alien (1979) and Alien Special Features (Pre-production, Production, Post-Production);
In Class: The Movies Begin (Selections)
Writing Assignment: Read about film reviews in Corrigan; post a 500 word review of a film you watched recently.

UNIT ONE: ANALYZING FILMIC TECHNIQUE

WEEK TWO: Introducing Film Analysis; Looking at Film Style
Read: “Chapter 2: Film Form”
Screening: Howard Hawks, His Girl Friday (1940)
Writing Assignment: Read about film analysis in Corrigan; Post a 1 page analysis of a formal element in His Girl Friday.

WEEK THREE: Film Narration
Read: “Chapter 3: Narrative as a Formal System,” 74-96
Screening: Christopher Nolan, Memento (2000)
Writing Assignment: Spend 1 page describing the plot of Memento, and 1 page reacting to the film's narrative structure.
WEEK FOUR: “Pop Quiz, Hot Shot”: Classical Narratives and Alternatives
Reading: “Chapter 11: Film Criticism,” 384-410; “Chapter 12: Film Art and Film History,” 456-463
Screening: Luis Buñuel, *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* (1972); In-class: Jan de Bont, *Speed* (1994)
Writing Assignment: Write a 2 page reaction to the ways in which *Speed* and *DCB* conform to or diverge from classical narrative models.

WEEK FIVE: “Blending is the Secret”: *Mise-en-Scene*
Read “Chapter 4: The Shot: Mise-en-Scene”
Screening: Tim Burton, *Edward Scissorhands* (1990); In-class: Robert Wiene, *Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920)
Writing Assignment: Pick one aspect of *Mise-en-Scene* from *Edward Scissorhands* and discuss its function in the film.

WEEK SIX: Cinematography in High School
Read: Chapter Five: The Shot: Cinematography, 162-194
Writing Assignment: How does van Sant's use of the “Long Take” contribute to his exploration of violence in American high schools?

WEEK SEVEN: “The Lord can't hear you, Daniel”: Sound and Salvation in *There Will Be Blood*
Read: Chapter 7: The Sound in Cinema
Writing assignment: Pick one scene and focus on Anderson's use of either diegetic or non-diegetic sound. What function does sound play in the scene?

WEEK EIGHT: Midterm Review; Midterm
Read: Chapter 8: Summary: Style as Formal System
MIDTERM EXAM

WEEK NINE: Stitching together Space and Time: Editing
Read: Chapter Six: The Relation of Shot to Shot: Editing
Writing Assignment: Analyze the effect of Hitchcock's editing on viewer identification.

UNIT TWO: FILM ART AND CULTURAL CONTEXTS
WEEK TEN: Editing and Ideology
Read: Cripp's “The Reaction of the Negro to the Motion Picture Birth of a Nation”
Writing Assignment: Discuss one example of a scene in which you see Griffith's editing colliding with his political perspective.

WEEK TWELVE: Introducing Film Theory: Art Cinema and the Woman’s Gaze
Read: *Film Art*: Chapter 12: Film Art and Film History
Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, “Varda in Context”
Screening: Agnes Varda, *Cleo from 5 to 7* (1962)
Writing Assignment: How might Varda's account of one woman's day encourage viewers to rethink possibilities for the cinema?

WEEK TWELVE: Performing Reality: Documentary Film
Read: Chapter 10: Documentary, Experimental, and Animated Films
Screening: Maysles Brothers, *Grey Gardens* (1975)
In class: Werner Herzog, *Grizzly Man* (2006)
Writing Assignment: What is the relationship between storytelling and documentary truth in *Grey Gardens*? Do the Maysles Brothers have a responsibility towards one or the other?

UNIT THREE: FILM GENRE
WEEK THIRTEEN: Introducing Genre: The Hollywood Musical
Screening: Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly, *Singin' in the Rain* (1952)
Read: *Film* Chapter 9: Film Genres
Writing Assignment: The final scene of *Singin' in the Rain* includes a mise-en-abyme (an endlessly self-representing image-within-an-image), depicting a billboard advertising *Singin' in the Rain*. Engaging Feuer, how else does the film advertise itself to you, the spectator, as a pure entertainment?

WEEK FOURTEEN: Subverting Genre: von Trier's “Favorite Things”
Read: José Arroyo, “How Do You Solve a Problem Like von Trier?”
Gavin Smith, “Imitation of Life”
Writing Assignment: Pick one convention of the musical that you see von Trier referencing and explain how he subverts it.
WEEK FIFTEEN: Student-Choice Film for Final Review
Screening: Students’ Choice
Film Analysis Paper Due

Final Exam