

UNDERSTANDING FILM

SPRING SEMESTER 2017

FILM 2332.001.17S

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Office: JO5.109

Office hours: by appointment

CLASS LOCATION AND TIMES

MONDAYS

4:00 PM - 6:45 PM

January 9, 2017 – May 8, 2017

JO 4.614

Direct link to class: <http://go.utdallas.edu/film2332.001.17s>

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is intended to introduce you to the field of film studies in a way that will allow you to more actively engage with, and appreciate, the films that you watch. During the course of this class, we will examine the technical aspects of filmmaking (cinematography, lighting, editing, sound, etc.), the theoretical perspectives by which we can “unpack” film (auteur theory, genre theory, feminist theory, etc.), and the historical and cultural contexts in which films have been made. By the end of this course, you should be able to look at a film as more than a simple piece of entertainment, and begin to take it apart to understand how it has been constructed and what meanings it communicates.

TEXTBOOKS (Required)

Film Art: An Introduction (11th edition), David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson, and Jeff Smith (McGraw-Hill, 2017)

Engaging Cinema: An Introduction to Film Studies, Bill Nichols (Norton, 2010)

These textbooks are widely available from the campus bookstore, Off Campus Books, Amazon.com, and many textbook resellers. Although the 11th edition of *Film Art* is specified (and the syllabus is based on this edition), 10th edition is also acceptable. Should you have any questions about the required readings, please see me.

Additional readings, if any, will be distributed in class.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

There are three levels of learning objectives specific to this course

- **"Student Learning Objectives"** are what I expect you to take away from this course. These objectives are specific to this particular class, and reflect my goals in teaching this material.
- **"General Education Core Objectives"** are those overall skills that the State of Texas expects you to gain from this course. These are not subject specific, but should transfer to other areas of study.
- **"FILM 2332 Course Objectives"** are where the above objectives meet. These are the State objectives viewed through the lens of the material we will cover in this class. This section also details the way in which the achievement of those objectives will be assessed.

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students who successfully complete this course will be able to:

- Develop a critical film "language" regarding analytical terminology and concepts, and to be able to discuss film and the way in which meaning is conveyed through cinematography, editing, sound, narrative, genre conventions, etc.
- Become an "active" viewer who can look beyond the simple entertainment value of film and unpack its deeper messages in a culturally-appropriate manner.
- Gain an understanding of the historical context in which film exists, and the manner in which history and popular culture intersect and influence each other.

GENERAL EDUCATION CORE OBJECTIVES

Students who successfully complete this course will demonstrate competency in the following core objectives:

- **Critical thinking skills** – Students will engage in creative and/or innovative thinking, and/or inquiry, analysis, evaluation, synthesis of information, organizing concepts, and constructing solutions.
- **Communication skills** – Students will demonstrate effective written, oral, and visual communication.
- **Teamwork** – Students will demonstrate the ability to work effectively with others to support a shared purpose or goal, and consider different points of view.
- **Social responsibility** – Students will demonstrate intercultural competency and civic knowledge by engaging effectively in local, regional, national, and global communities.

FILM 2332 COURSE OBJECTIVES:

- **Critical thinking skills** – Analyze the artistic, industrial, and social-cultural dynamics of cinema (assessed via exams, group presentations, and class discussions).
- **Communication skills** – Create short film evaluations that demonstrate mastery of critical concepts and approaches that deepen engagement with cinema (assessed via exams, group presentations, and class discussions).
- **Teamwork** – Evaluate and critique the work of others in order to sharpen analytical skills and to explore different points of view (assessed via the group presentations, and class discussions).
- **Social responsibility** – Demonstrate knowledge of how society and culture shape film aesthetics and reception (assessed via exams, group presentations, and class discussions).

GRADING

Your final grade will be calculated based on the following factors:

Group Project: 30%
Exam 1: 20%
Exam 2: 20%
Final Exam: 30%

My grading scale is as follows:

97-100 = A+
94-96 = A
90-93 = A-
87-89 = B+
84-86 = B
80-83 = B-
77-79 = C+
74-76 = C
70-73 = C-
67-69 = D+
64-66 = D
60-63 = D-
0-59 = F

ATTENDANCE

You are expected to attend all classes, to be attentive and considerate, and to keep up with the assignments listed on the syllabus. Screenings and readings are all to be completed BEFORE the Monday class session. If you must miss a class, you remain responsible for all course material covered in that class: there are no make-up classes, and each class will be taught only once. Each class period represents one week's worth of work, so attendance will be taken in every class.

Please note that the *Rules on Student Services and Activities* of the University of Texas System will be strictly adhered to. For information on the administration's rules and policies regarding student conduct and discipline, academic integrity, e-mail use, withdrawal from class, student grievance procedures, incomplete grade policies, disability services, and religious holy days, consult the material, generated by the administration, available in the relevant folder on eLearning or in the University catalog. Note also that **all course requirements must be met: this means that if you miss more than four class periods, and/or fail to take and complete all exams and assignments in full, you will guarantee an automatic failing grade for the course.** Make-up exams will be permitted only in the most serious circumstances (family emergency or illness) which must be documented to my and the university's satisfaction.

IN-CLASS ELECTRONICS

This class has a no laptop, no tablet, and no phone policy. Please **do not bring laptops or tablets to class** unless prior arrangements have been made. Please keep your phones on silent/vibrate and out of

sight. Electronics are great, but they are distracting to you and everyone around you, including your professor.

PARTICIPATION

I expect each one of you to actively participate in each class. I realize that this may be difficult for some of you, but this class should be as much discussion as lecture, with you coming to each session prepared not only to discuss the film in question, but also the assigned reading. I value your participation, so feel free to share your thoughts on the films, on the readings, or on my lectures, albeit in a polite and respectful way. Since this class is all about actively engaging with film, it's appropriate that you actively engage with the class. When you do, I promise you'll find the entire experience far more enjoyable and much more fulfilling.

SCREENINGS

Watching the weekly films is mandatory. No exceptions. All of the films included in the syllabus are on reserve at the UNT library, although you are free to watch them in any way that is convenient. It is entirely your responsibility to watch these films in a timely fashion, as we will not be viewing them in class. If you choose not to view the films, for whatever reason, I can pretty much guarantee you will not pass the class.

PROMPTNESS

I expect you to arrive promptly for class, and to be ready to start the lecture/discussion promptly at 7:00 PM. We have a lot to cover in a relatively short amount of time, so please plan to arrive on time. As well, I expect that you will stay through the entire class, and not attempt to leave early.

GROUP PROJECT

At the end of the first class session and the week following, you will be expected to organize into ten groups of nine for the group presentations that will begin in Week 3. A group sign-up sheet will be available for your name and contact email addresses; it will be scanned and posted on eLearning once it is completed (you may also photograph it yourself). Each group will choose one of ten class sessions on offer.

On that day, during the first twenty to thirty minutes of class, and in whatever manner you choose (one person speaking for the group, one person handling technology, everyone speaking in turn, etc. That's up to you, although you will all stand up together), you will briefly present three or four interesting points you learned from watching the film for the week, as well as the assigned reading(s) and your own independent research, and lead the class in discussion of three questions derived from concepts and issues presented by the film and your research. I'm not looking for a presentation of trivia here, but an exploration of themes, analyses, and/or critical readings that both deepen and broaden our knowledge of the film in question. For example, were you to present on the science fiction classic *Robot Monster* (1953), mentioning that the main shooting location in Bronson Canyon was the same as the location of the Batcave in the 1966 *Batman* TV show is trivia. Fun to know, but it contributes nothing to our understanding of the film. However, you might compare the structure of the film to the works of Italian Neo-Realists such as Roberto Rossellini or Vittorio de Sica, and explain why that is important, or you

might want to examine the film in terms of its place within the apocalyptic film genre of the 1950s and in the context of the Cold War that was raging during that time. Or you might choose a combination of all of the above.

Each group must make specific reference to research sources, fully crediting the authors of such works, and must make specific reference to the week's film (if there is more than one film, you may focus on either or both) and the assigned reading(s). You may employ a clip or two, whether from the week's film or from another film that illustrates something usefully, but you will be penalized if clips in total take up more than five minutes of your allotted time.

The presentations will be graded both by you and by your peers at the end of class; the grading forms will serve as roll for that day as well. All students in the group will receive the same grade, and any students who requests to do so may read the comments generated by his or her classmates that day after class, or the week following the presentation (when the grade will be available as well).

EXAMS

EXAMS #1 and #2 will be held during class time.

FINAL EXAM DATE, TIME, AND PLACE TO BE ANNOUNCED

FINALS WEEK FOR SPRING 2017 SEMESTER IS TUESDAY, MAY 2 – MONDAY, MAY 8.

Please do not be late for the Exams. Once the exam has begun, no latecomers will be seated.

All exams will be 100 questions, multiple choice. Material will come from the assigned readings, our in-class discussions, film screenings, and any supplemental material supplied during class. In other words, anything is fair game. I don't believe in "trick" questions, but I will ask questions designed to probe your knowledge and assimilation of the material covered.

CELL PHONES AND OTHER MATTERS OF COMMON COURTESY

As mentioned above, cell phones **MUST** be turned off or set to vibrate during class time. No exceptions. This is not the time for talking to your friends, texting your parents, sharing photos, or playing games on your phone. It is disrespectful both to me and to your fellow students. If you insist on using your phone during class time, you will be asked to leave, and your absence will be counted against your grade.

I personally don't mind if you bring drinks to class, but please be mindful that others use the room we're in, so make sure you clean up after yourself, dispose of trash properly, and leave the room as clean and neat as you found it. I do not intend to clean up after you – as an adult that is your responsibility.

A NOTE ABOUT ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND PLAGIARISM

I have every expectation that any material that you turn in or submit for a grade will be your original work. **Plagiarism – which includes buying or otherwise obtaining material from others and passing it off as your own, as well as copying or paraphrasing the work of another without proper attribution – will not be tolerated.** As a writer myself, I take this matter very seriously. Any assignment submitted to me and found to contain plagiarized material – in whole or in part – will receive a grade of zero and could lead to further action on the part of the University. End of discussion. Please familiarize yourself with UTD's policy on plagiarism

(<http://www.utdallas.edu/library/help/PlagiarismTutorial/Textonlytutorial.htm>) and take it to heart, as it is fully your responsibility to know what plagiarism is and how to avoid it. There is no excuse for plagiarism, or for any form of academic dishonesty. If you have any questions or concerns about this, please feel free to see me.

Consider this your first and final warning on the subject.

For a detailed discussion of UTD's policy on academic integrity, plagiarism, and other subjects, please see <http://go.utdallas.edu/syllabus-policies>.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The Office of Student Success offers a number of resources to assist students in a number of academic disciplines, including writing, communication, reading, and study skills. Please visit <http://www.utdallas.edu/studentsuccess> for more information on these helpful services.

COMET CREED

This creed was voted on by the UT Dallas student body in 2014. It is a standard that Comets choose to live by and encourage others to do the same:

"As a Comet, I pledge honesty, integrity, and service in all that I do."

UT DALLAS SYLLABUS POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

The information contained in the following link constitutes the University's policies and procedures segment of the course syllabus.

Please go to <http://go.utdallas.edu/syllabus-policies> for these policies.

SCHEDULE

- JANUARY 9 Introduction to Class
 Review of Syllabus
 Outline of Expectations
 What is Film?
 Why should we study it?
 Why does film matter?
 What is the difference between Film Analysis and Film Theory?
 Why are they useful?
- JANUARY 16 **NO CLASS – MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY**
- JANUARY 23 An Overview of Film History Part I: 1896 - 1949
 How did we get here, and where are we going?
WATCH: *Casablanca* (Warner Brothers, 1942; 102 minutes)
REQUIRED READING: Nichols pp. 3-25; Bordwell pp. 50-71, 452-463, 474-477
- JANUARY 30 An Overview of Film History Part II: 1950 - Today
 The movies grow up
WATCH: *Head* (Raybert Productions, 1968; 86 minutes)
REQUIRED READING: Bordwell pp. 482-488
****GROUP PRESENTATION #1****
- FEBRUARY 6 Cinematography, Editing, Mise-en-Scene
 The “how” of film
WATCH: *Battleship Potemkin* (Goskino, 1925; 66 minutes) **[There are many versions of this film available in various forms of media. Please make sure that you are watching the 2007 Kino International version, with the original Meisel orchestral score. This version is on reserve in the library.]**
REQUIRED READING: Bordwell pp. 112-140, 159-178, 215-259, 470-473 (*Pages 29-59 in Nichols will also be helpful, but these pages are not required*)
****GROUP PRESENTATION #2****
- FEBRUARY 13 ****EXAM 1 (Covers material through Week 5)****
- FEBRUARY 20 Text and Narrative
 The building blocks of story
WATCH: *Rashomon* (Daiei Motion Picture Company, 1950; 88 minutes)
REQUIRED READING: Nichols pp. 139-168; Bordwell 72-109
****GROUP PRESENTATION #3****

- FEBRUARY 27 Film and Culture
 How who we are influences what we produce
WATCH: *Red Nightmare* (Warner Bros., 1962; 28 minutes)
 Invasion of the Body Snatchers (Allied Artists, 1956; 80 minutes)
REQUIRED READING: Nichols pp. 3-25
****GROUP PRESENTATION #4****
- MARCH 6 World Film: Germany, Italy, and France
 The world of film doesn't begin and end with Hollywood
WATCH: *The 400 Blows* ("Les quatre cents coups," Les Films du Carrosse/Sedif Productions, 1959; 99 minutes)
REQUIRED READING: Bordwell pp. 463-470, 477-482
****GROUP PRESENTATION #5****
- MARCH 13 NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK
- MARCH 20 World Film: Japan, China, and Bollywood
 Differences between Eastern film and Western film
WATCH: *Gojira* (Toho Studios, 1954; 96 minutes) [Please be sure that you are watching the Japanese version of this film with English subtitles, NOT the American version from 1956 titled "Godzilla, King of the Monsters" starring American actor Raymond Burr. The correct version is on reserve in the library.]
REQUIRED READING: Bordwell pp. 488-492
****GROUP PRESENTATION #6****
- MARCH 27 ****EXAM 2 (Covers material through Week 11)****
- APRIL 3 Genre
 What makes a Western a Western?
WATCH: *Little Caesar* (Warner Brothers, 1931; 79 minutes)
REQUIRED READING: Nichols pp. 248-286; Bordwell pp. 326-349
****GROUP PRESENTATION #7****
- APRIL 10 Gender and Race
 Issues of representation and how movies reflect/create reality
WATCH: *Coffy* (American International Pictures, 1973; 91 minutes)
REQUIRED READING: Nichols pp. 325-358
****GROUP PRESENTATION #8****

APRIL 17 Ideology

What is this movie really about, anyway?

WATCH: Triumph of the Will (Leni Riefenstahl-Produktion, 1935; 110 minutes)

REQUIRED READING: Nichols pp. 287-324

****GROUP PRESENTATION #9****

APRIL 24 Mediating Reality

Who decides what “reality” is?

WATCH: This is Spinal Tap (Spinal Tap Prod., 1984; 82 minutes) **REQUIRED READING:** TBD

NOTE ABOUT POTENTIALLY OFFENSIVE CONTENT

Some of the content covered in this class, whether in reading, screenings, or discussion, might contain material that could be considered controversial or offensive to some. I understand that some people, for various reasons, are uncomfortable with depictions, or discussions, of violence or sexuality, for example, but I cannot tailor this class for each individual. If you feel that you do not wish to expose yourself to such material, please consider enrolling in another class.

*The descriptions and timelines contained in this syllabus are subject to change
at the discretion of the Professor.*