

FILM 97 Introduction to Film Studies

Course Code: FILM 97

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And

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Credits: 4

Class Hours: This course will be instructed through pre-recorded lectures, as well as e-mail and online consultations.

Course Description:

This course is designed to provide a broad overview of film studies through an examination of basic concepts and issues in the field.

Required Textbook and YouTube series:

Film Studies: An Introduction, by Ed Sikov, Columbia UP 2009 ([Film Studies: An Introduction \(Film and Culture Series\) Kindle Edition: \\$18.99](#))

Film Making Masterclass: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TzyraAp3jaY>

Course Objectives:

In this course, students will be trained to develop an appreciation of all types of narrative cinema, and learn all of the essential elements that make up the film appreciation experience, and some basics details about how to make a film. We will assess fundamental techniques for analyzing films, helping students to understand mise-en-scene and montage, and the formalities of camera movement. We will review the basis of filmmaking, including editing, composition, lighting, the use of color and sound, and narrative, as a means of providing students with the tools for film appreciation. The course will offer basic explanations of core critical concepts, practical advice, and suggested assignments on particular technical, visual, and aesthetic aspects to help students understand the formal language and anatomy of film.

Learning Outcomes:

By the completion of this course, students will have a strong understanding of film and film theory.

Course Schedule:

Week 1:

INTRODUCTION: REPRESENTATION AND REALITY

Consider the word representation. What does it mean—and what technology does it take—to represent real people or physical objects on film? These are two of the basic questions in film studies, and they will serve as the launching point for our introductory discussions.

MISE-EN-SCENE: WITHIN THE IMAGE

Film studies deals with the problems of reality and representation by making an initial assumption and proceeding logically from it. This assumption is that all representations have meaning. The term *mise-en-scene* (*also* *mise-en-scène*) describes the primary feature of cinematic representation. *Mise-en-scene* is the first step in understanding how films produce and reflect meaning. It's a term taken from the French, and it means *that which has been put into the scene* or *put onstage*.

Everything—literally everything—in the filmed image is described by the term *mise-en-scene*: it's the expressive totality of what you see in a single film image, and we will study it to help us gain insight into the film making and viewing process.

Week 2:

MISE-EN-SCENE: CAMERA MOVEMENT

Motion pictures share a number of formal elements with other arts. The shape of a particular painting is essentially its aspect ratio—the ratio of width to height of the image—and the composition and lighting effects created by the painter play a central role in that painting's meaning, as does the distance between the artist and his or her subject. The term *mise-en-scene* is derived from the theater: the arrangement and appearance of a play's sets and props, and it helps us to set the stage for an examination of how camera movement works in the advancement of a film's narrative.

MISE-EN-SCENE: CINEMATOGRAPHY

Cinematography—photography for motion pictures—is the general term that brings together all the strictly photographic elements that produce the images we see projected on the screen. *Lighting devices and their effects; film stocks and the colors or tones they produce; the lenses used to record images on celluloid; the shape of the image, how it is created, and what it means*—these all constitute the art of cinematography. This, too, is an aspect of *mise-en-scene*. The word *cinematography* comes from two Greek roots: *kinesis* (the root of *cinema*), meaning movement, and *grapho*, which means to write or record. We will assess this term, and its implications, in regard to various film examples.

Week 3

Editing!

With all but a very few exceptions, films—especially narrative feature films—are made up of a series of individual shots that filmmakers connect in a formal, systematic, and expressive way. There are practical as well as artistic reasons for directors to assemble movies from many hundreds, if not thousands, of shots. For one thing, film cameras are able to hold only a limited amount of celluloid film—not enough for a feature-length motion picture. More important, narrative films generally compress time considerably by leaving out the boring parts of the stories, leaving the

viewer to “fill-in” the story. Editing from this perspective is both personal, and part of the story of how films are made.

Sound

We call them *silent movies*, those early films that did not have a soundtrack. But they weren't actually silent. Most motion pictures of that era were screened with some form of live music. In large urban theaters, exhibitors would often hire a full orchestra to accompany the movies they showed, while in small venues there would simply be a pianist. Organs, too, were commonly used to accompany films in those years. Not only could a single pipe organ or electric organ simulate a variety of instruments from clarinets to violins, but it could also provide a variety of sound effects. This all changed when sound was integrated into the film experience, and we'll examine the many components of this process.

Week 4:

NARRATIVE: FROM SCENE TO SCENE

Even the simplest stories can be broken down into component parts:

1. Boy meets girl
2. Boy loses girl
3. Boy tries to get girl back
4. Boy and girl get together in the end

If this conventional story takes the form of a feature-length film, each of its four parts is composed of hundreds of individual shots. Each shot contains *mise-en-scene* elements that convey expressive information, and each transition from shot to shot compounds that information by creating relationships. But what about *the story*? How does the boy meet the girl? Why does he lose the girl? What does he do to get her back? We'll explore the basics of narrative in film, with examples from great films.

FROM SCREENPLAY TO FILM

The screenwriter plays one of the key roles in the creation of a motion picture. He or she constructs a detailed story, maps out a scene-by-scene blueprint of the film's plot, and writes dialogue that may or may not sound like everyday life but that nonetheless fit the tone and style of the particular film. That's an important distinction. You may have the idea that movie dialogue must be realistic, but this is not the case, or certainly not always.

Filmmakers:

We generally hear about films as having been made by their directors: “Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan*,” “Wong Kar-Wai's *2046*,” “Michel Gondry's *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* ...” But consider this: of those three films, only *2046* was written by the person who directed it. Robert Rodat wrote *Saving Private Ryan*'s screenplay, not Steven Spielberg, and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* was written by Charlie Kaufman. Why is the director necessarily the film's creator? What about the screenwriter? Or the producer? Or the cinematographer? How about the actors? Shouldn't they be part of the process, particularly if there is *ad lib*? We shall examine basic issues relating to film makers and their relation to the final product.

Acting:

How does film studies deal with acting? Movie reviewers tell us that certain performances are good while others are terrible. The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences gives awards every year in tribute to the quality of individual performances. And we all come away from the movies we see with opinions of whether the stars have done a good job creating their characters or not. But it should be clear by now that as an academic discipline, film studies is less interested in issuing judgments than in analyzing aspects and components of meaning.

Genre

Genre: *a type or category of film—such as the western, the horror film, the comedy, or the musical—that has its own recognizable conventions and character types.*

To return to a point raised while defining the term convention, we sometimes assume that art is about pure creativity—that great films (or novels, or paintings, or musical works) are a matter of complete originality. But genres belie that idea. Genres rely on repetition and variation rather than uniqueness—familiar, recognizable *conventions* rather than raw, pure *inventions*.

Courses (class-by-class):

1. Syllabus
2. What is film studies?
3. Early Cinematic Origins
4. Glossary beginning with A
5. Interview Dance films 1
6. Interview Dance films 2
7. Interview Dance films 3
8. Interview Max 1
9. Interview Max 2
10. Glossary B-
11. Textbook 1
12. Textbook 2
13. Animation Disney
14. Textbook 3
15. Animation Documentary
16. Textbook 4
17. Interview Law and film
18. Is the Man who is Tall Happy 1
19. Is the Man who is Tall Happy 2
20. Is the Man who is Tall Happy 3
21. Manufacturing Consent 1
22. Manufacturing Consent 2
23. The making of the Avukah documentary: London
24. Chapters 9 & 10; Film Terms
25. Beat Generation films 1
26. Beat Generation films 2
27. Growing Up in America
28. Pull My Daisy
29. The Making of the Avukah documentary 2
30. Conclusions

Grading & Evaluation:

Assignment 1: 20% (5 double-spaced pages), on Representation and Reality, and Mise-en-scène

Assignment 2: 20% (5 double-spaced pages), on Camera Movement and cinematography

Assignment 3: 20% (5 double-spaced pages), on Editing and Sound

Assignment 4: 20% (5 double-spaced pages), on Narrative and Screenplay

Attendance and participation in discussions: 20%

The assignments are designed to match the material of each week. The subjects proposed are only guidelines, and I am happy to have you complete the assignment in a fashion that accords with your interests, as long as you connect it to the material of the course.

Here are a few examples, and we'll talk about them in one of my lectures. **They are just examples and we encourage you to follow your own path** as long as it relates to the themes and vocabulary and ideas of that week.

For example, if you are interested in documentary films, you might wish to talk about "representation and reality" for your first paper, and explain what a documentary film is, what some important examples are, and outline some of the challenges of representing "reality" for a screen.

For the second assignment, you might be interested in talking about how camera movement affects the viewer's experience, and give some examples from films that you have watched. It might be fun as well to upload some short films that you make from your phone. So, for example, you might talk about the difference between seeing a particular scene as filmed on a tripod, versus that same scene filmed "hand-held", with lots of movement. You can talk about how this conveys the story differently and, again, you can make reference to films you've seen.

For the third assignment, you can delve into the editing process. This has changed significantly over time, so another way to do an assignment like this one is to look up the history of editing, and talk about how it has changed from, say, 1920-2020, with examples.

For the fourth assignment, you might wish to become more theoretical, and look up "narrative theory". What can you learn from an approach such as Genette's approach to narratology with his insistence upon different categories of analysis? How might his work apply to film?

Letter Grade Assignment

Final grades assigned for this course will be based on the percentage of total points earned and are assigned as follows:

Letter Grade	Percentage	Performance
A	93-100%	Excellent Work
A-	90-92%	Nearly Excellent Work
B+	87-89%	Very Good Work
B	83-86%	Good Work
B-	80-82%	Mostly Good Work
C+	77-79%	Above Average Work
C	73-76%	Average Work
C-	70-72%	Mostly Average Work
D+	67-69%	Below Average Work
D	60-66%	Poor Work

Letter Grade	Percentage	Performance
F	0-59%	Failing Work

Course Policies

Build Rapport

If you find that you have any trouble keeping up with assignments or other aspects of the course, make sure you let your instructor know as early as possible. As you will find, building rapport and effective relationships are key to becoming an effective professional. Make sure that you are proactive in informing your instructor when difficulties arise during the semester so that they can help you find a solution.

Understand When You May Drop This Course

It is the student's responsibility to understand when they need to consider disenrolling from a course. Refer to the Course Schedule for dates and deadlines for registration. After this period, a serious and compelling reason is required to drop from the course. Serious and compelling reasons includes: (1) documented and significant change in work hours, leaving student unable to attend class, or (2) documented and severe physical/mental illness/injury to the student or student's family.

Commit to Integrity

As a student in this course (and at this university) you are expected to maintain high degrees of professionalism, commitment to active learning and participation in this class and also integrity in your behavior in and out of the classroom.

Academic Honesty Policy & Procedures

"The principles of truth and honesty are recognized as fundamental to a community of scholars and teachers. University expects that both faculty and students will honor these principles, and in so doing, will protect the integrity of academic work and student grades."

Definitions

"**Cheating** is the act of obtaining or attempting to obtain credit for academic work through the use of any dishonest, deceptive, or fraudulent means."

"**Plagiarism** is a form of cheating."

"Plagiarism is the use of distinctive ideas or works belonging to another person without providing adequate acknowledgement of that person's contribution."