

Film Theories, Criticisms, Histories

FILM 2200F
Western University
Department of Film Studies 2013

Course Aims:

Film 2200 introduces students to the major critical methods and trends in the history of writing on film. The course examines the dominant historical and theoretical approaches that have shaped the study of film. To do so, it investigates the social, economic, technological, political, historical, and trans-national contexts by which film studies has been framed. Additionally, the course explores theories of film genre, authorship, race and ethnicity, masculinity, feminism, fan culture, realism, technology, music, sound, and ideology. Successful students will learn how to engage with historical and theoretical arguments in order to produce a stronger understanding of film.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course you will be able to identify the key conceptual elements of film theory and criticism. You will develop a critical awareness of film as an artistic medium, refine critical thinking skills, and learn how to analyze film language (the construction of film images, systems of film editing, film sound, and the varied modes of organizing these core elements (narrative, non-narrative, etc.).

Instructor

Professor Benjamin Wright
E-mail: bwrigh25@uwo.ca
Office Hours: Wednesdays 11:30-12:30, or by appointment
Office Location: UC 69

Teaching Assistant

Andrew Evans: aevans56@uwo.ca

Meeting Times

SCREENING: Mondays 9:30-12:30
LECTURE: Wednesdays 9:30-11:30

Required Texts

Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, eds. Film Theory and Criticism. 7th ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. (TB)

Additional weekly readings will be available on OWL. The textbook is available at the campus bookstore.

Grade Breakdown

Attendance and Participation: 10%

Midterm Test: 20% **(October 23 during Lecture)**

Final Paper: 30% **(Due November 27 in Lecture)**

Final Exam: 40% (Date TBA)

Paper Requirements

Students will write one (1) paper over the course of the semester. The essay assignment must be typed, double-spaced, using 12-point Times Roman font and 1-inch margins.

All papers must be submitted at the end of class on their specified due dates. Papers will not be accepted if they are e-mailed or turned in to the Department office. Late papers will receive a deduction of a full letter grade for every week they are overdue. Exceptions will be made only in the event of a documented medical or family emergency.

Notes on Citations and Outside Research

All research incorporated into the essay assignments must be accompanied by a bibliography and citations using a standard academic format. MLA, APA, and Chicago are all acceptable. Failure to include citations for course material and outside research may result in a failing grade for the assignment and could lead to an investigation of plagiarism. If you are unsure what constitutes an acceptable academic source, consult Dr. Wright. Under no circumstance should Wikipedia or other user-generated websites be used.

Midterms and Final Examination

The midterm test and final exam will deal with information from lectures, readings, assignments, handouts, and screenings. For a missed exam, you must inform the professor before an exam and present verifiable evidence in order to schedule a make-up exam. Students who wish to take an incomplete must also present documentation to Dr. Wright.

E-mail

Although your TA and I will try to answer e-mails in a timely fashion, we cannot guarantee any response within a set time frame. If you have a time-dependent matter to discuss, please see one of us during an office hour or make an appointment for another convenient time. We do not accept assignments by e-mail.

Cell Phones

Cell phones are to be turned off for class. People who text or receive calls during class will be asked to leave and need permission to re-enter the course.

Laptop Computers

Unless otherwise specified by the instructor, laptops are for taking lecture and tutorial notes only. Anyone found using their laptop for e-mail, unauthorized browsing, etc. will have their privilege revoked for the duration of the academic year and will not be permitted to bring a laptop to class.

OWL

All assignments and announcements will be posted to OWL for your convenience.

Course Schedule

WEEK 1 (September 9-11) INTRODUCTION: FINDING A LANGUAGE

Screening: *The General* (1926, Buster Keaton, USA)

Reading: OWL: Rudolf Arnheim, "Film and Reality"; Hugo Munsterberg, "The Means of the Photoplay"; James Agee, "Comedy's Greatest Era";

TB: Noel Carroll, "The Specificity Thesis"

FILM LANGUAGE: NARRATIVE AND STYLE

WEEK 2 (September 16-18) REALISM

Screening: *The Little Foxes* (1941, William Wyler, USA)

Reading: TB: Andre Bazin, "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema"; Jean Louis Baudry, "The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in Cinema"; Siegfried Kracauer, "The Establishment of Physical Existence"

WEEK 3 (September 23-25) FORMALISM

Screening: *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929, Dziga Vertov, Soviet Union)

Reading: TB: Sergei Eisenstein, "Beyond the Shot [The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram]"; The Dramaturgy of Film Form [The Dialectic Approach to Film Form]"

WEEK 4 (Sept. 30-Oct.2) GENRE THEORY

Screening: *Unforgiven* (1992, Clint Eastwood, USA)

Reading: OWL: Rick Altman, "Semantics and Syntax";

TB: Thomas Schatz, "Film Genre and the Genre Film"

WEEK 5 (October 7-9) NARRATION I: CLASSICAL

Screening: *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981, Steven Spielberg, USA)

Reading: OWL: David Bordwell, "Classical Narration"

Canadian Thanksgiving – October 14 – NO CLASS

WEEK 6 (October 16) NARRATION II: HIGH CONCEPT

Reading: OWL: Justin Wyatt "High Concept"

FILM APPROACHES: FEMINISM, MASCULINITY, IDEOLOGY

WEEK 7 (October 21-23) FEMINIST CRITICISM

Midterm Test**Screening:** *Some Like it Hot* (1959, Billy Wilder, USA)**Reading: TB:** Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"**WEEK 8** (October 28-30) MASCULINITY & ACTION CINEMA**Screening:** *Die Hard* (1988, John McTiernan, USA)**Reading: OWL:** Yvonne Tasker, "Dumb Movies for Dumb People"**WEEK 9** (November 4-6) IDEOLOGY**Screening:** *The Bellboy* (1960, Jerry Lewis, USA)**Reading: TB:** Jean Louis Comolli and Jean Narboni, "Cinema/Ideology/Criticism"**WEEK 10** (November 11-13) RACE AND REPRESENTATION**Screening:** *Do The Right Thing* (1989, Spike Lee, USA)**Reading: OWL:** Mark Lawrence McPhail, "Race and Sex in Black and White"; Mary Beltran, "The New Hollywood Racelessness"**FILM CULTURE: ENGAGING WITH STYLE AND NARRATIVE**

WEEK 11 (November 18-20) MUSIC**Screening:** *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* (1966, Sergio Leone, Italy)**Reading: OWL:** Claudia Gorbman, "Narratological Perspectives on Film Music"; Hanns Eisler, "Prejudices and Bad Habits"; Charles Leinberger, "Ennio Morricone's The Good, the Bad and the Ugly: A Film Score Guide"**WEEK 12** (November 25-27) TRANSMEDIA: FANS AND AUDIENCES**Final Paper Due****Screening:** *Avatar* (2009, James Cameron, USA)**Reading: OWL:** Henry Jenkins**WEEK 13** (December 2-4) POST-THEORY**Screening:** *Zodiac* (2007, David Fincher, USA)**Reading: OWL:** David Bordwell, "Contemporary Film Studies and the Vicissitudes of Grand Theory"**Important Information for Students**

1. Plagiarism: Plagiarism is a major academic offence. Students must write their essays in their own words. Whenever students take an idea, or a passage, from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations.

www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

2. Plagiarism Checking: If you plan to use Plagiarism checking software in your course, you must include the following passage on your syllabus: All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between the University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com.

3. Prerequisites: Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you will be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. The decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

4. UWO Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness: Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and or assignments must apply to their Academic Counseling Office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department.

Please go to the following site for information on the university Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness: www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf

For information on the examination services provided by the Student Development Centre, please visit

www.sdc.uwo.ca/ssd

5. Mental Health: Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

<http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/>

6. Complaints: If students have a complaint concerning a course in which they are enrolled, they must discuss the matter with the instructor of the course. If students are still not satisfied, they should then take the complaint to the Film Studies Office, University College, Room 80. These regulations are in place because a failure to follow these procedures creates the potential for injustices of various kinds affecting either the instructor or the students themselves, or both parties. Concerns should not be allowed to fester but should be raised with the instructor in a timely manner, so that they can be addressed in time to make a difference to the course.

GRADING CRITERIA

A+ (90-100)

- **Argument:** Clear development of a specific, challenging and original thesis. The writer has taken significant risks successfully; in the resulting piece, distinctive ideas and

- content have discovered their necessary distinctive form. Detailed reference to appropriate texts, with evidence of individual response. Ability not only to expound subject but to see it around—subtleties and ambiguities, qualifications and concessions, relations to other subjects, etc.
- **Presentation, structure:** Quotations well integrated into text. Proper paragraphs. Almost no typographical errors.
- **Language Skills:** Sentence structure correct, with full range of sentence types (compound, complex, and compound-complex), with full range of punctuation (including semicolons, colons, dashes, parentheses). Graceful style, neither pompous nor breezy, and few errors.
- **Research/scholarship:** Evidence of effective, extensive and independent research, with proper documentation of sources. Quotations used appropriately and purposively.

A (80 to 89)

- **Argument:** The writer has taken risks and most of them succeed. Clear development of a specific and challenging thesis, with proper paragraphs. Detailed reference to appropriate texts, with evidence of individual response. Ability not only to expound subject but to see it around—subtleties and ambiguities, qualifications and concessions, relations to other subjects, etc.
- **Presentation, structure:** Quotations well integrated into text. Proper paragraphs. Almost no typographical errors.
- **Language Skills:** Sentence structure correct, with full range of sentence types (compound, complex, and compound-complex), with full range of punctuation (including semicolons, colons, dashes, parentheses). Graceful style, neither pompous nor breezy, and few errors
- **Research/scholarship:** Evidence of effective and independent research, with proper documentation of sources. Quotations used appropriately and purposively.

B (70 to 79)

- **Argument:** Clear development of a specific thesis, with proper paragraphs. Adequately detailed reference to texts. Ability to expound reasonably sophisticated ideas with clarity.
- **Presentation/structure:** Quotations well integrated into text. Proper paragraphs. A few typographical errors.
- **Language Skills:** Sentence structure correct, with reasonable range of sentence types and full range of punctuation. Style not too wordy, with errors relatively few and minor.
- **Research Scholarship:** Evidence of adequate research, with proper documentation of sources.

C (60 to 69)

- **Argument:** Reasonably clear development of a thesis, with proper paragraphs. Basic ability to expound ideas, whose development might be rather thin. Effort to support points with references to the text. Tendency to replace analysis with descriptive retelling of plot.

- **Presentation/structure:** Presentation showing lapses in tidiness and/or proofreading. Poor use of paragraphs.
- **Language Skills:** Sentence structure correct, but perhaps overly simple, with tendency to avoid punctuation besides period and comma. Errors relatively few, but occasionally serious, with evident misunderstanding of some point of elementary grammar (comma splices, fragments, semicolon errors, subject-verb disagreements, poorly integrated quotations)
- **Research/Scholarship:** reasonable effort at documentation, but rather thin.

D (50 to 59)

- **Argument:** Difficulty with paragraphing or consecutive thought. Ideas inchoate but clouded by weak expression. Overgeneralization with inadequate support, or examples that run to lengthy paraphrase, with little or no analysis.
- **Presentation/Structure:** Very poor to non-existent use of paragraphs. Inadequate and inaccurate documentation. Multiple typographical errors.
- **Language Skills:** Errors of grammar or diction frequent enough to interfere with understanding.
- **Research/Scholarship:** Little serious effort to research the topic.

F (49 and down)

- **Argument:** Ideas too simple for level of course. Argument completely incoherent. Erroneous content showing little or no understanding of subject.
- **Presentation/Structure:** Very sloppy proof-reading. Documentation virtually non-existent.
- **Language Skills:** writing frequently ungrammatical.
- **Research/Scholarship:** Non-existent. Content largely “borrowed” from sources with no individual distillation, but no apparent attempt to deceive.

O (Report to Department)

- Plagiarism with intent to deceive