

Welcome to
FILM 1301: THE ART OF FILM AND VIDEO
[J-Term, 2013]

Professor Kevin Heffernan
Daily, Jan 7-16. 9:00 AM – Noon; 1 – 4:00 PM.

Hours: No regular office hours for J-term; email or see me after class.
Phone (cel): (214) 796-4223 email: kheffern@smu.edu

Course Materials

The text for this class is Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell, *Film Art: An Introduction*, Eighth Edition. Unless otherwise noted, the page numbers refer to Film Art. I will post this and supplementary readings to the class as PDF files on Blackboard.

Rationale and Expectations

This course is an introduction to basic concepts of film and video aesthetics. Aesthetics is the study of how works of art use their constitutive elements to elicit in the viewer a particular kind of perceptual, cognitive, or emotional effect. Films and videos have been chosen to illustrate these concepts and to introduce you to a variety of types of creative work in film and video. While some of the material we view is made in Hollywood, some are from traditions which may be less familiar, particularly the European art cinema and the international avant-garde. We will cover film style, narrative structure, genre, and authorship.

This class has no formal prerequisites. Although some of you probably have more experience and knowledge of film and media than others, I am enthusiastically committed to helping all of you engage with the material at a high level. In order for us to do this, you have to keep up with the reading, some of which can be rather factually dense (this is often characteristic of art, literature, and humanities courses in other fields) and, I cannot emphasize this enough, attend all of the class meetings and screenings.

You are expected to watch the screenings carefully, and you will be tested specifically on them. We recommend taking notes on the films so you will be able to remember details about the use of camera work, sound, mise-en-scene, and narrative structure. You must be prepared to watch all the films screened in their entirety, including opening and closing credits. Also, please do not talk during screenings, as the people around you may be concentrating on the film. Please be aware that not all of the films shown in the course are readily available on video.

Course Aims and Outcomes

By the end of the course, students should be able to

- (1) Distinguish between the stylistic and narrative elements of a film or work of video
- (2) Recognize the narrative functions of stylistic choices made by moving image artists
- (3) Recount important changes in the social, technological, artistic, and economic histories which have effected film, television, and video

- (3) Recount the defining elements of important film and TV genres
- (4) Recognize the stylistic and narrative choices which make one moving image artist's work distinctive from that of others
- (5) Form and test hypotheses about the influence of historical forces on moving-image media industries and individual film and video makers

COURSE REQUIREMENTS: There will be a **MID-TERM** and a **FINAL EXAM**. Midterm exam will be an in-class stylistic analysis of a clip from one of the films or television episodes which have been screened in class in its entirety. The final exam will consist of objective and essay questions based on the readings, lectures, and films screened in class. You will also **write a short paper** of about 5-6 pages on an outside film of your choice. (The assignment for the paper is included on the last page of this syllabus.) See below for the due date. The paper will be *marked down one letter grade for each day it is late*. Each assignment is worth 100 pts. Your grade will be calculated as a percentage of 300 total points. **The mid-term, paper, and final will each count for one-third of your grade.** Therefore, you are strongly urged to stay current with the reading and attend class regularly.

EXTRA CREDIT: There isn't any. Don't ask. If you need to do well in this class to get off probation, raise your g.p.a., graduate on time, etc., then take the course and the work seriously. This will be *a difficult class*, not a blow-off.

****MAKE-UP EXAMS:** Make-ups for the mid-term and final will be arranged for *medical emergencies only*. A verifiable letter from a doctor will be required for non-penalty make-ups. Under certain circumstances a make-up will be given for non-medical reasons. The results of such an exam will be marked down one letter grade. *Early exams cannot be given for any reason.*

****COMPUTERS and cel phones must be put away during screenings. No exceptions.**

READING ASSIGNMENTS and SCREENING SCHEDULE. Please note that the list of films to be screened is tentative and subject to change due to any number of unforeseeable factors. Lectures are designed to both reinforce and supplement the assignments. (The first page numbers refer to Bordwell and Thompson's Film Art)

Mon. Jan. 7--

AM: Course Introduction, Aesthetic Form

Read: 1-73

Screening: *Un Fée. . . pas comme les autres* aka *The Secret of Magic Island*
(1957, dir. Jean Tourane)

PM: Narrative Form

Read: 74-111

Screening: *Citizen Kane* (1941, dir. Orson Welles)

Tues. Jan. 8

AM: Sound

Read: 264-303

Screening: *Mad Men*, "The Other Woman" (prod. Matthew Weiner, 2012)

PM: Mise-en-scène

Read: 112-161

Screening: *Les Noms des Gens* aka *The Names of Love* (2010, dir. Michel LeClerc)

Wed. Jan. 9

AM: Cinematography

Screening: *Csillagosok, katonák* aka *The Red and the White* (1968, dir. Miklos Jansco)

Read: 162-217

PM: Editing

Read: 218-263

Screening: *His Girl Friday* (1940, dir. Howard Hawks)

Thurs. Jan. 10

AM: Discussion: Editing and the Classical Style in *His Girl Friday*

MID-TERM EXAM.

The Art Cinema as Alternative to Hollywood

PM Screening: *The Conformist* (Bernardo Bertolucci, 1970)

Read: 440-476, Bordwell, "The Art Cinema as a Mode of Filmmaking Practice"

Fri. Jan. 11

AM: Film Genre and Genre Films

Read: 318-337, Wood, "Introduction to the American Horror Film"

Screening: *Alice, Sweet Alice* (dir. Alfred Sole, 1976)

PM: Discussion: The Horror Film

Documentary Film Form

Read: 338-354

Screening: *Let There Be Light* (dir. John Huston, 1946)

Mon. Jan. 14

AM: Screening: *Salesman* (1968, dir. Albert Maysles, David Maysles, and Charlotte Zwerin)

Discussion: Documentary Form and Style

PM: Writing Media Criticism and Analysis: Different Approaches

Screening: *The Terminator* (dir. James Cameron, 1984)

Read: 384-439

Tues. Jan. 15

AM: Experimental Cinema

Read: 355-369, Suarez, "Pop, Queer, or Fascist"

Screening *Ballet mécanique* (dir. Fernand Léger, 1922), *At Land* (dir. Maya Deren, 1947), *Scorpio Rising* (dir. Kenneth Anger, 1963), *Dangling Participle* (dir. Standish Lawder, 1970)

PM: Authorship and the Auteur Theory

Screening: *Touch of Evil* dir. Orson Welles, 1958)

Read: Sarris, "Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962"

Wed. Jan. 16— PAPER DUE TODAY!!! [AM session]

Authorship and Auteurism, Continued

Screening: *Yingxiao Bense* aka *A Better Tomorrow* (dir. John Woo, 1986)

John Woo and Authorship

PM: **FINAL EXAM**

PAPER ASSIGNMENT.

Please write a 6-8 page paper on a single film of your choice which has not been screened in class in its entirety. In your paper, discuss the film in relation to the modes or genres discussed in class – art cinema, classical cinema genres - horror films, melodramas, thrillers, musicals, or other genres – or documentaries or experimental films – If a fictional genre, what stock characters, icons, and plot types are present? What central conflict or ambivalence is embodied in the films? How is the central conflict expressed through mise-en-scene and visual style? In the case of documentary or experimental works, what patterns of organization structure the films? Once you have established the generic conventions, compare the two films in terms of how they vary these conventions.

Your writing will be evaluated on how well you argue for your THESIS or central point, supporting it with specific examples and evidence from the film. The clarity and organization of your argument is important, too, as well as paying attention to the *mechanics* of good writing: spelling, grammar, punctuation, etc.

THIS IS NOT A RESEARCH PAPER. I neither want nor expect you to do additional reading on your film and report what others have said. I'm interested in *your* remarks on the film in relation to what we have discussed in class and what the course readings have helped you see. If you must quote somebody keep it brief and cite the source with appropriate footnote form. Be advised again that I do not take kindly to plagiarism. And to that end. . .

Academic Integrity

Like all of your professors, I assume you'll approach every aspect of your life at SMU conscientiously. Nevertheless, some of you may be tempted to cut corners and cheat,

particularly in the classroom. If you are caught cheating on any assignment (e.g., copying test answers or plagiarizing sources), we will follow the guidelines in the SMU Honor Code (found online at http://www.smu.edu/studentlife/PCL_05_HC.asp). Depending on the situation, penalties may range from an F for the assignment to expulsion from the course. If you are unaware of what constitutes plagiarism, please consult the Honor Code, or the Academic Honesty course on BlackBoard.

Attendance Policy

I will take attendance each class meeting. Consistent tardies will also be factored into your participation grade, at half the penalty of absences; if you come in late, see me after class for the sign-in sheet.

I will only grant excused absences as detailed in the 2010-11 SMU Student Handbook for allowed religious observances and school-sanctioned activities (see below). All excused absences must be accompanied by written documentation.

Religious Observation and Attendance

Religiously observant students wishing to be absent on holidays that require missing class should notify me in writing at the beginning of the semester, and should discuss with me, in advance, acceptable ways of making up any work missed because of the absence. (See University Policy No. 1.9.)

University Extracurricular Activities and Attendance

Students participating in an officially sanctioned, scheduled University extracurricular activity may make up class assignments or other graded assignments missed as a result of their participation. It is your responsibility to make arrangements with me prior to any missed scheduled examination or other missed assignment for making up the work. (University Undergraduate Catalogue)

Disability Accommodations

Students needing academic accommodations for a disability must first contact Ms. Rebecca Marin, Coordinator, Services for Students with Disabilities (214-768-4557) to verify the disability and establish eligibility for accommodations. They should then schedule an appointment with the professor to make appropriate arrangements. (See University Policy No. 2.4.)

Online Contact

My e-mail address is kheffern@smu.edu. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have about the course or the FILM curriculum, or even areas beyond that scope. That said, I cannot monitor my e-mail at all times, but endeavor to reply as needed as soon as possible. Please allow at least 24 hours for me to get back to you. Any e-mail I receive after noon on Friday will not be replied to until Monday morning, at the earliest.

Grading Rubrics

Your grade on the midterm, paper, and final essay exams will be based on your ability to integrate many of the issues discussed in class and the readings into an

effective, coherent, well-written, and well-organized essay. The purpose of the exams and paper is to spur you to make connections between films and readings that may not have been explicitly made during class discussions. A mere reiteration of what I or the writers have said will not by itself be an effective use of the essay exam format.

Typically, the grade breakdown has the following characteristics:

A An “A” paper or exam represents effort far beyond the basic requirements of the course and is characterized by a bold and original thesis which the student supports with a range of examples from the films and readings. The “A” essay is flawlessly, even elegantly written. These essays are quite rare.

B A “B” essay demonstrates an informed familiarity with all of the films and relevant readings and deploys examples effectively to support the central thesis of the piece. The writing should be forceful and effective with many previously hidden connections between the films and readings brought to light.

C A “C” effort represents a coherent and effective reiteration of relevant material from the lectures and discussions accented by an effective use of reading where appropriate. The writing is functional and effective with minimal problems in diction, grammar and mechanics. *The great majority of undergraduate essays usually fall within this range.*

D A “D” is characterized by minimal engagement with the most important topics from lecture and some use of the most obvious material for the readings. Often, a “C” essay in terms of content is lowered to a “D” because of significant problems with effective writing. In terms of content, the “D” effort often results from a desperate last-minute effort to engage with readings and/or films that the student has not seen or read or from significant absence from class discussion.

F An “F” essay possesses none, or at least very few, of the redeeming characteristics listed above. Typically, these are even more rare than the “A’s,” but please don’t try to surprise me on this issue.

Other

While in class...

- Do not bring in any food or drink, except for water bottles with caps or lids.
- Please be respectful of the Dean’s staff; this floor is their workplace.
- Please be respectful of your classmates and myself: put away your phones and media players during class time, and keep conversations to a minimum (length and volume).
- You may certainly use laptops, smart phones, and the WiFi connection, for your class notes or in-class assignments, but *do not use the internet to the distraction of others* (you’ve plenty of time outside class to surf the net).

Outside class...

- Absorb media in as much variety as is possible
- Keep connected to others and the world in general
- Take care of yourself. I've been doing this school thing long enough (on both sides of the classroom) to see what happens when you don't. If you'd like to know more, just ask.