

English 288: Introduction to Film
University of Saskatchewan
Class: T/TH 2:30-3:35 THORV 205A
Screening: T 4:00 MURRY 299

Instructor: Dr. Justin Pfefferle
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Office: Health Science, A102
Office Hours: Monday, 1:00-2:30

Course Description:

English 288 will introduce students to the field of film studies. Over the course of the term, we will view and discuss significant films, read seminal works of film criticism and theory, and cultivate a vocabulary for thinking, talking, and writing critically about cinema. Beginning with early experiments in photography and moving image technology, we will follow a trajectory that includes silent film, German Expressionism, Surrealism, *Film Noir*, American Direct Cinema, the French New Wave, and contemporary Canadian documentary. Alongside films by filmmakers such as Charlie Chaplin, Alfred Hitchcock, David Lynch, and Sarah Polley, we will engage with major theoretical concepts that will enrich our understanding of the medium of film.

Students who take this course should expect to heighten their awareness of the formal, material, and technological qualities of cinema. They should also look forward to developing critical practices that will initiate them into the academic study of film and nourish their everyday film-viewing lives.

Grading Breakdown:

Class Engagement: 20%

Thoughtful and constructive engagement is crucial to any course in the humanities. Be prepared to contribute in a meaningful way to our intellectual community.

Unit Reflections (3): 30%

At the end of each unit, you will write a short (250-300 word) piece that reflects on the films, readings, and concepts that we will have studied over the previous four weeks. The piece should be exploratory in nature while still being polished and intellectually rigorous.

Blog Post (750-900 words): 20%

The first major assignment for the course will be a piece of “alt-criticism” that you will write and publish as a blog (anonymously, if you wish). You will use the terminologies and theoretical concepts that we will have studied in class to provide your reader with a critical assessment of your “alt-viewing” experience. Do something to de-naturalize a film and your engagement with it: watch a film repetitively; without sound; in super slow-motion; backwards; in public. Use the Blog Post to outline the insights that your experiment in alt-viewing yielded.

Final Project (1500-1800 words): 30%

The final project for the course will require you to perform a critical analysis of a film or films in light of the major ideas that will have circulated in class over the course of the term. As well as engaging with assigned critical readings, you will support the argument of your paper with viewing, reading, and research conducted outside class.

Due: Date of Final Exam

Course Viewing and Reading:

Screenings for the course are Tuesdays at 4:00 (immediately after class) in Murry 299. Films are likely to exceed the 80-minute time frame. It is your responsibility to clear your schedule so that you are able to view films in their entirety.

All reading for the course will be posted on Blackboard; you must print these off and read them before class.

The course textbook, which students are not required to own, is Maria Pramaggiore and Tom Wallis (eds), *Film: A Critical Introduction*. The textbook will be put on reserve, and recommended readings from it are indicated below.

Course Trajectory

Introduction to Introduction to Film (6 Sept)

- What is Film?
- What is Film Studies?
- "English" and Media Specificity
- Film, Modernity, Magic

In-class: Early films by Thomas Edison, Georges Méliès, Auguste and Louis Lumière.
Reading: Virginia Woolf, "The Cinema"

Unit One: Film History / Foundations in Film Studies

Week One (13 Sept): Soviet Cinema

- The Image and the Frame
- Film Editing: Montage, Collage, the "Kuleshov Effect"
- Film Semiotics
- Modernism, "Metropolitan Perception," and the City Symphony

Film: **Dziga Vertov, *Man With a Movie Camera* (1929)**

Reading: André Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image"

Textbook: 191-228

Week Two (20 Sept): Silent Cinema: The Art of Charlie Chaplin

- The Camera and Camerawork
- Film and the Technological Apparatus
- Marxism, Industrialism, Labour
- Silent Cinema?

Film: **Charlie Chaplin, *Modern Times* (1936)**

Reading: Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"

Textbook: 129-159

Week Three (27 Sept): Cinema and Surrealism

- The Cut
- Alt-viewing
- What makes a movie "avant-garde"?
- Film, Surrealism, Psychoanalysis

Film: **Salvador Dalí and Luis Buñuel, *Un Chien Andalou* (1929)**

Reading: André Breton, "The First Manifesto of Surrealism"

Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny"

Textbook: 291-301

In-class: clips from Maya Deren, *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943); Man Ray, *Emak Bakia* (1926)

Week Four (4 October): German Expressionism

- *Mis en scène*
- The Optical Unconscious
- Cinema and Sleep Walking
- German Expressionism

Film: **Robert Wiene, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919)**

Reading: Thomas Elsaesser, "Caligari's Family: Expressionism, Frame Tales and Master Narratives." From *Weimar Cinema and After: Germany's Historical Imaginary*.

Textbook: 87-111

In class: Clips from Fritz Lang, *Metropolis* (1927)

Assignment: Unit Reflection 1 (6 October)

Also View (Suggested):

Charlie Chaplin, *The Great Dictator* (1940)

Maya Deren, *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943), *Ritual in Transfigured Time* (1946), *A Study in Choreography for Camera* (1945)

Sergei Eisenstein, *Battleship Potemkin* (1925)
Robert Flaherty, *Nanook of the North*
Buster Keaton, *The Cameraman* (1928), *The General* (1926), *Sherlock Jr.* (1924), *Steamboat Bill Jr.* (1928)
Fritz Lang, *M* (1931), *Metropolis* (1926)
F.W. Murnau, *Faust* (1926), *The Last Laugh* (1922), *Nosferatu* (1922)
Vsevolod Pudovkin, *Chess Fever* (1925), *The End of St. Petersburg* (1927), *Storm over Asia* (1928)
Man Ray, *Emak Bakia* (1926)
Walter Ruttmann, *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* (1927)
Robert Wegener, *The Golem* (1920)

Unit Two: Movement and Genre

Week Five (11 Oct): *Film Noir*

- Narrative Cinema
- Point of View
- Feminism and *femmes fatales*
- Determinism, Existentialism, *Film Noir*

Film: **Billy Wilder, *Double Indemnity* (1944)**

Reading: Paul Schrader, "Notes on Film Noir"

Selected readings from *Cahiers du Cinema*

Textbook: 308-318, 112-120

In-class: clips from Robert Aldrich, *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955), Edgar Ulmer, *Detour* (1945), Ida Lupino, *The Hitchhiker* (1953), Robert Montgomery, *Lady in the Lake* (1947)

Week Six (18 Oct): **The Hollywood Musical**

- Talkies
- The Studio System
- Film Sound
- Musicals, Ideology, Meta-narrative

Film: ***Singin' in the Rain* (1952)**

Reading: From Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*

Richard Dyer, "Entertainment and Utopia"

Textbook: 233-252; 355-389

In-class: clips from Lars von Trier, *Dancer in the Dark* (2000), Fred Zinnemann, *Oklahoma!* (1955)

Assignment: Blog Post (20 October)

Week Seven (25 Oct): The French New Wave

- “Real” Time and Cinematic Time
- Cinema, Politics, Aesthetics
- Film Praxis
- New Wave vs. Left Bank

Film: **Agnes Varda, *Cleo from 5 to 7* (1962)**

Reading: Geneviève Sellier, “The Independent Filmmakers of the Left Bank: A ‘Feminist’ Alternative?” From *Masculin Singular: French New Wave Cinema*. Trans. Kristin Ross.

In-class: clips from Jean-Luc Godard, *Breathless*, Louis Malle, *Elevator to the Gallows*

Week Eight (1 Nov): Arthouse Cinema

- Duration, Repetition, Hypnosis
- The Camera and Access
- Feminist Filmmaking
- Arthouse Cinema and Everyday Life

Film: **Chantal Akerman, *Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975)**

Assignment: Unit Reflection 2 (3 Nov)

Also View (Suggested):

Robert Aldrich, *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955)

Ingmar Bergman, *Persona, Wild Strawberries* (1957)

Alan Crosland, *The Jazz Singer* (1927)

Basil Dearden, *Victim* (1961)

Stanley Donan, *Royal Wedding* (1951)

Jean-Luc Godard, *Alphaville* (1965), *Breathless* (1960), *Contempt* (1963), *Une Femme est une femme* (1961)

Alfred Hitchcock, *Strangers on a Train* (1950)

Stanley Kubrick, *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968)

Ida Lupino, *The Hitchhiker* (1953)

Carol Reed, *The Third Man* (1950)

Mark Sandrich, *Shall We Dance* (1937)

Lars von Trier, *Dancer in the Dark* (2000)

Billy Wilder, *The Apartment* (1960)

--. *Some Like it Hot* (1959)

Unit Three: Cinema Thinks Itself

Week Nine (15 Nov): Hitchcock

- What is an *auteur*?
- Violence and the Camera
- Cinema and Claustrophobia
- Spectatorship, Scopophilia, Voyeurism, Ethics

Film: **Alfred Hitchcock, *Rear Window* (1954)**

Reading: Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema"

Tania Modleski, "The Master's Dollhouse: *Rear Window*." *The Women Who Knew Too Much: Hitchcock and Feminist Theory*, Second Edition.

In-class: Clips from Michael Powell, *Peeping Tom* (1960); Hitchcock, *The Birds* (1963)

Text: 331-336; 397-406

Week Ten (22 Nov): Cinema Verité and American Direct Cinema

- Still and Moving Images
- Music and Counterculture
- Performing for the Camera
- American Direct Cinema

Film: **Albert and David Maysles, *Gimme Shelter* (1970)**

Reading: From Laura Mulvey, *Death 24X a Second*.

From Dave Saunders, "Looking Forward (from an American Past to the American Modern)." *Direct Cinema: Observational Documentary and the Politics of the Sixties*.

Pauline Kael, Review of *Gimme Shelter*

In-class: Clips from Robert Drew, *Primary* (1960), DA Pennebaker, *Dont Look Back* (1967) and *Monterey Pop* (1968), Barbara Kopple, *Harlan County, USA* (1976)

Week Eleven (29 Nov): The Dream Factory

- Good Bad Acting
- Between Hollywood and Arthouse
- Doubles and Doppelgängers
- Melodrama

Film: **David Lynch, *Mulholland Drive* (2001)**

Reading: George Toles, "Auditioning Betty in *Mulholland Drive*"

In class: Clips from Billy Wilder, *Sunset Blvd.* (1950); Lynch, *Inland Empire* (2006)

Week Twelve (6 Dec): Canadian Documentary

- Documentary, Fiction, Narrative
- Celluloid and Digital

Film: **Sarah Polley, *Stories We Tell* (2012)**

Reading: From Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality*

Trinh T. Minh-ha, "Documentary Is/Not a Name"

In-class: Clips from Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Reassemblage*

Assignment: Unit Reflection 3: (8 December)

Also View (Suggested):

Alfred Hitchcock, *North by Northwest*

--. *Psycho*

--. *Rebecca*

--. *Vertigo*

David Lynch, *Eraserhead*

--. *Lost Highway*

--. *Blue Velvet*

--. *Inland Empire*

Albert and David Maysles, *Salesman*

--. *Grey Gardens*

Errol Morris, *The Thin Blue Line*

D.A. Pennebaker, *Dont Look Back*

Michael Powell, *Peeping Tom*

Ridley Scott, *Blade Runner*

Late Work:

If you anticipate not being able to submit work on time, you must make a formal (written) request for an extension no later than two weeks before the due date. After that point, due dates are non-negotiable. Although I will accept late work, I will dock 5% per day late.

Mandatory Attendance Policy:

Attendance for this class is mandatory. Failure to attend more than three classes will result in your being asked to drop the course.

Mandatory Screening Policy:

The ideal way to experience film is collectively and on a big screen. Unless otherwise indicated, screenings for this class are mandatory. Failure to attend more than three screenings will result in your being asked to drop the course.

NB: Although our screening time is scheduled from 4:00-6:20, most of the films will exceed that length.

Technology Policy:

A 2011 study at the University of Michigan found that 75% of students reported that “using a laptop during class increased the amount of time they spent on non-course work.” 35% of students reported having spent “more than ten minutes per class using social media sites and email.”

Although I am uploading readings to the web, I expect you to print them out and have them with you – ideally with voluminous marginal notes! – in class every day. Without exception, laptops, tablets, and cell phones must be stowed away in bags.