

Master Syllabus

1. Course Information

College: College of Liberal Arts
Department: Theatre Arts
Course Title: Film Appreciation
Course Designation and Number: MP 131
GE Area(s): IV: Human Expression—Fine and Performing Arts

Writing Intensive: ___ Yes X No

For WI Courses: ___ All sections ___ Selected Sections are WI.

Method(s) of Instruction: X Lecture
X Discussion
___ Web-enhanced
___ Web-only
X Other: In-class observation activities and writing

Includes Lab: ___ Yes X No

Prerequisites: None

2. Objectives

GE Program Objectives:

- to provide an opportunity to develop skills and knowledge that will form the basis for life-long learning.
- to sharpen critical thinking, problem solving and communication skills.
- to learn about the aesthetic, ethical, moral, social, and cultural dimensions of human experience needed for participation in the human community.
- to increase knowledge and understanding of the world in which we live.

GE Area IV Objectives:

- to recognize and critically discuss significant philosophical works.
- to understand the complex blend of personal vision, social-cultural background, ethical values and aesthetic judgment in such works.
- to discuss the diverse means of communication in such works.

Course Objectives and GE Learning Outcomes:

MP 131, Film Appreciation, will teach students about the eclectic, interdisciplinary art of film, which has an extraordinary range of expression, drawing upon literature in film's use of character and story, theatre in film's use of acting and performance, music in film's use of a soundtrack, painting and photography in film's use of visual composition. As well, film is communicative

and works to impart insights about the human condition, explicitly or implicitly focusing on historical and social elements of culture.

Area IV Learning Outcomes Addressed:

- Because MP 131 will focus on how film work, students must develop critical thinking skills.
- As students try to understand what film directors are trying to communicate through their images, students will have to develop communication skills themselves, as well as develop their own aesthetic awareness.
- The wide variety of films studies will lead students to understand the varied cultural dimension of the human experience, as well as to consider the ethical and moral issues raised by such disparate perspectives of expression.

3. Suggested Course Materials

Text: Louis D. Giannetti, *Understanding Movies*, published by Prentice-Hall.

Text: Pam Cook and Mieke Bernick, *The Cinema Book*, published by the British Film Institute.

DVD: An assigned film on DVD or videotape, to be analyzed by the student.

4. Suggested Methods of Evaluation

One midterm examination, one analytical paper (4-6 pages), in-class exercises, and a cumulative final examination.

5. Grading Policy

All GE courses are graded A-F.

6. Suggested Weekly Course Outline Including Typical Assignments

Week 1: **Aesthetics:** The concept of non-evaluation and its application to aesthetics and film appreciation. Traditional definitions of art. The aesthetic attitude. The distinction between the artistic and the aesthetic. A model for the understanding of how art functions. The real world vs. the artistic world. The primary (creative) arts vs. the secondary (interpretive) arts. Classifications of the arts into the auditory, the spatial, and the symbolic. What is cinema? Toward a physical definition of the cinema. The concept of persistence of vision. Film's relationship to each of the arts: music, dance, literature, theatre, architecture, and especially photography and painting. The effect of photography on painting. The relationship between film and 20th-century art movements: impressionism, cubism, surrealism. **Typical Assignment:** Discuss Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane*.

Week 2: **General Film Appreciation:** Developing visual literacy. The vocabulary of film: shot, scene, sequence, frame, composition in depth, point of view, dissolve, etc. How does film embody "significant form"? The tools of expression: (1) The frequency and number of shots, (2) the size of the subject in the frame, (3) the angle of view, (4) composition and balance, (5) the use of lighting and/or color, (6) the movement of lack of movement of the camera, (7) selectivity of focus, (8)

the quality of the lens' distortion. How do images come to express meanings? Image meanings vs. word meanings. **Typical Assignment:** Do an in-class exercise leading to an exhaustive analysis of one film screened: the density of film expression, for example, in John Ford's western, *The Searchers*.

Week 3: **The Concept of Authorship:** An approach to film study. Traditional romantic views of the artist. Who is the artist of a film? Film artist/film industry. The history and theory of authorship as a critical methodology for film art; its application to both the elitist art-house director, such as Ingmar Bergman, and the mass-appeal director, such as Alfred Hitchcock or Steven Spielberg. Alexandre Astruc and the concept of *caméra-stylo*. The inauguration of the age of the visual. The *politique des auteurs*, François Truffaut, the *Nouvelle Vague*, the *Cinémathèque Française*. **Typical Assignment:** View and discuss the film of an *auter*-director, such as Alfred Hitchcock's *Shadow of a Doubt*.

Week 4: **An Authorship Model:** An examination of one director's recurrent themes, images, narrative structure, and style. Comprehensive exegesis; how film can embody its director's world view. Alfred Hitchcock (or someone else) as *auteur*. An explanation of "*auteur* analysis." **Typical Assignment:** View and discuss additional films of the same *auteur*-director to discover thematic consistency, such as Alfred Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train*, *Vertigo*, and/or *Psycho*. Also, begin work on analytical paper.

Week 5: **The Concept of Genre Theory:** The limitations of authorship and the need for genre criticism in film; discussion of connections between apparently disparate works of art from different time periods: the Bible, Greek mythology, King Arthur legends, Japanese myths, motion pictures. The significance of repetition. Carl Jung and the concept of "archetype": the quest, the initiation, man's challenge to the gods. Conventions, types, and icons. Film as dream. Film as the expression of the collective unconscious. How film reveals what we believe. "Genre analysis involved an attempt to understand the milieu and background of the work of art through its relationship with religion, mythology, the social sciences, psychology, and anthropology: the roots of genre are within the fabric of existence itself." **Typical Assignment:** Discuss and make lists of archetypes on current works of art. Also, take midterm examination.

Week 6: **A Genre Model:** A detailed examination of one or more genres. An analysis of recurrent themes, images, and narrative structures. The horror film (the relationship between horror film and nightmare; fears of death, immortality, lack of free will, science, sexuality; the significance of "monsters"; expressionism and the birth of the horror film in pre-Nazi Germany; the vampire and its relationship to Christian and pre-Christian ritual; horror in contemporary America); the western (civilization vs. the wilderness; western Christian values in conflict with outlaws and Indians; the concept of manifest destiny; the lonesome sheriff, the Conestoga wagon, the cemetery on the hill; the effect of World War II and the Vietnam War on the American western; capitalist ideology); the samurai film (feudalism and honor in Japanese society); the disaster film (the disguised search for spirituality; God's judgment; the arrival of a messiah); television genres, etc.

Typical Assignment: Discuss one film genre in length; and analyze the meaning of current trends in popular film.

Week 7: **Film style—Formalism:** The plastic material of the cinema. To what extent does film manipulate reality? Image and editing. Rudolf Arnheim. Lev Kuleshov, Sergei Eisenstein, and the Russian Revolution. Montage and its sources: Marxism, behavioralism, Japanese pictography, futurism. *Creative Geography, The Composite Woman, Moezhukin Editing Footage*. **Typical Assignment:** View and discuss the “Bombing of Hiroshima” sequence from *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* (Alain Resnais, 1959) and the “Odessa Steps” sequence from *Potemkin* (Sergei Eisenstein, 1925).

Week 8: **Film style—Realism:** The photographic basis of film. Siegfried Kracauer: how film records, reveals, and redeems reality. André Bazin and the myth of total cinema: the evolution of film from “death masks” in antiquity through to painting, photography, moving photography, color, widescreen, and eventually to the complete reproduction of reality. Composition in depth. Filmmaker as one with God. **Typical Assignment:** View and discuss realist extracts, such as from *Who’s That Knocking at My Door?* (Martin Scorsese, 1969); *Touch of Evil* (Orson Welles, 1958), *The Passenger* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1975), *Rope* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1948), *The Sacrifice* (Andrei Tarkovsky, 1986), *Bicycle Thieves* (Vittorio DeSica, 1949).

Week 9: **Modes of Film:** Documentary, experimental film, narrative fiction. Problems with the term “realism.” Are documentaries real? How do we determine what is/seems real? *Cinéma vérité*. The changing conventions of realism. Structuralism and semiology: how do things acquire meaning? Films of Navajo Indians. Offscreen space/the center of the frame. The case of Ozu and Japan. Film and anthropology. The ideology of the image. The use of movie stars and the propagation of the dominant ideology. **Typical Assignment:** View and discuss a social documentary, such as *The Times of Harvey Milk* (Robert Epstein, 1984) and a documentary that questions issues of reality, such as *No Lies* (Mitchell Block, 1973).

Week 10: **The Experimental Mode and Ideology:** Escaping/destroying the dominant ideology. Peter Wollen’s principles of counter cinema: pleasure/unpleasure, identification/estrangement, single diegesis/multiple diegesis, closure/aperture, transparency/foregrounding. New cinema, new values, new ways of living, new ways of thinking. **Typical Assignment:** View and discuss films such as *Razor Blades* (Paul Sharits, 1965-68), *Father* (Joan Strommer, 1987), *Meshes in the Afternoon* (Maya Deren, 1943), *x2000* (François Ozon, 1998), *Hatsu Yume [First Dream]* (Bill Viola, 1981), *Jabberwocky* (Jan Svankmajer, 1973).

7. **Other**

Syllabus distributed to students should employ the format approved by UCAP and must include:

- Instructor name, office hours, and contact information
- Office of Disability Services information

- Information on how grades will be determined
- Attendance policy