

**Syllabus: Introduction to Film (ENGFLM 0400)**

**University of Pittsburgh, Fall 2011**

**Th 9-12:50**

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**About “Introduction to Film”**

As a basic exploratory course on the cinematic medium, “Intro to Film” will require its participants to perform the following:

- Develop literacy in filmic language within a variety of stylistic contexts.
- Discuss the relationship between specific films and the social settings in which they were produced.
- Explore significant chapters in film history.
- Reflect on personally- and culturally-determined viewing positions.

**Readings**

The **required text** for this course is: Nichols, Bill. *Engaging Cinema: An Introduction to Film Studies*. New York: Norton, 2010.

Additional required materials will be posted in PDF format to **CourseWeb** (<http://courseweb.pitt.edu>). Their bibliographical details are included in the course schedule below. Minor changes in the reading list may be executed in the course of the semester. You will be notified in advance of any revision.

**Screenings**

**Viewing:** entire films, as well as film clips, will be screened in class. Students are expected to attend these screenings. Outside screenings of these films/clips are encouraged only as supplements to class showings—not as substitutes!

**‘R’ Rating:** several films selected for this course contain ‘adult’ themes, including what may be considered objectionable violence, language, and/or sexual content. Some of these texts also carry an ‘R’ rating. If you foresee a difficulty in viewing any of the scheduled films, I urge you to enroll in another section of Introduction to Film.

## Writing Assignments

### **In-Class Writing**

Unannounced quizzes will be given three times during the semester. Of these, the quiz which is graded lowest will not be counted towards your final grade. The quizzes will be taken at the start of class and may not be made up. In completing these assignments, your handwriting should be legible, and preferably not in cursive form; illegible quizzes will be returned ungraded.

### **Essays**

You are expected to write two essays during the course of the semester. (Submission dates are included in the below class schedule.) Each essay should be ***between 3000-4500 words in length*** (roughly 10-15 pages). Below are the rules for writing essays in this class:

- Your essay should be double-spaced in a 12-point font, with the standard margins (1.25 on the right and left; 1.0 on the top and bottom).
- Write your name and the words “Intro to Film, Fall 2011” in the upper right-hand corner of the first page.
- Your essay should be *titled*, and the title should be *original* in that it reflects your particular position vis-à-vis the topic at hand. The essay title should be placed below your name and course title. No title sheet is necessary.
- Your essay should include page numbers in the upper right-hand corner.
- Your essay should be ***carefully proofread*** for errors in wording, punctuation, and spelling. *If your teacher encounters more than two errors per page, you’ll be required to provide a corrected copy.* Errors of this kind will also negatively affect your grade.
- In order to avoid plagiarism, ***you must cite your sources, even when you are only paraphrasing.*** (*This includes sources you may have found online.*)
- You will need to submit a paper copy of the essay. In addition, you will be required to submit an electronic copy of this essay (by the deadline) to the following address: [introtofilm pitt@gmail.com](mailto:introtofilm pitt@gmail.com). For all intents and purposes, only the paper copy will function as proof of your submission of the assignment.

## Policies

### **Attendance**

You are allowed two absences during the term for whatever reason, though it is strongly recommended that you strive for perfect attendance. *Three absences without a documented excuse (such as a doctor's note) can be grounds for failure.* Students in this situation may want to consider withdrawing from the course and taking it again under better circumstances.

### **Promptness**

Since coming in late for class often disrupts discussion, it should be avoided at all cost. You are allowed no more than two instances of tardiness during the semester. If you come in late on more than two occasions, your grade will suffer accordingly.

### **Class Participation and Etiquette**

You will be expected to arrive in class ready to take part in the conversation about the materials under study. Failure to participate in a vigorous manner will compromise your final grade. While in class you are not allowed to use laptops or cell phones. You are expected to be respectful of your peers and instructor and not partake in any activity unrelated to discussion while the class is in session.

### **Submission**

All writing assignments (essays, quizzes) must be completed in order to pass this course. The assignments should also be submitted on time. Late submissions will have a negative effect on your grade, and may be grounds for failure.

### **Plagiarism**

Plagiarism by a student is:

- When a student presents as his/her own, for academic evaluation, the ideas, representations, or works of another person or persons without customary and proper acknowledgement of sources.
- When a student submits work of another person in a manner which represents the work to be his/her own.
- When a student knowingly permits his/her work to be submitted by another person without the instructor's authorization. ("Student Obligations and Adjudication," University Policy 02-03-03).

Cheating/plagiarism will not be tolerated. Students suspected of violating the University of Pittsburgh Policy on Academic Integrity (<http://www.as.pitt.edu/faculty/policy/integrity.html>) will be required to participate in the procedural process as outlined in the English Department regulations (<http://www.english.pitt.edu/resources/plagiarism.html>). A minimum sanction of an "F" for the plagiarized paper will be imposed.

## **Grading**

Grading in this class is merit-based, meaning that a student's work will be assessed in comparison to the work of other students in the class, and in relation to general academic standards. The criteria for assessment of written work are as follows:

- **Critical:** displaying complex, multivalent thinking which questions assumptions of the “natural” and entertains different, at times contradictory possibilities, ultimately forging positions that are coherent and meaningful.
- **Textual:** reading with careful attention to detail, and providing nuanced analysis which seeks out and thoughtfully engages the complexities and ambiguities of the text.
- **Contextual:** convincingly relating particular arguments to broader social-political-cultural contexts and concerns.
- **Developmental:** revealing progress as a writer and thinker over time.

Your final grade will ultimately be comprised of the following factors:

- **Participation** 10%
- **Quizzes** 20% (three unannounced quizzes, lowest one will be dropped)
- **Midterm Essay** 30%
- **Final Essay** 40%

As previously noted, violation of class policies on attendance, promptness, and submission will adversely affect your grade, potentially resulting in failure.

## **Additional Assistance**

### **The Writing Center**

The Writing Center is an excellent resource for working on your writing with an experienced consultant. Consultants can work with you on a one-time basis, or they can work with you throughout the term. For more information, consult the following URL: <http://www.composition.pitt.edu/writingcenter/index.html>

### **Other Services**

Pitt offers a number of services to help students who are struggling either academically or personally. If you are a student with a disability, you may wish to contact Disability Resources and Services in 216 William Pitt Union or at 412-648-7890. Pitt also offers free counseling at the Counseling Center, located in 334 William Pitt Union (412-648-7930), for students who are experiencing personal or emotional difficulties.

## Class Schedule

### Basic Terms

- **9/1: Introduction: Studying Film**  
Reading: Nichols Introduction.
- **9/8: The Language of Cinema**  
Reading: Nichols Ch. 1.
- **9/15: Narrative Fiction Film and Formal-Social Analysis**  
Reading: Nichols Ch. 4 & 8.  
Recommended Reading:  
Cohan, Steve. "Case Study: Interpreting *Singin' in the Rain*." *Reinventing Film Studies*. Ed. Linda Williams and Christine Gledhill. London: Arnold, 2000. 53-75.  
Screening: *Singin' in the Rain* (Donen and Kelly, 1952)
- **9/22: Writing about Films**  
Reading:  
Corrigan, Timothy. "Writing about the Movies" and "Researching the Movies." *A Short Guide to Writing about Film (Seventh Edition)*. New York: Longman, 2010. 1-18, 133-163.  
Sobchack, Vivian. "*The Grapes of Wrath* (1940): Thematic Emphasis Through Visual Style." *American Quarterly* 31.5 (Winter, 1979): 596-615.  
Nugent, Frank S. "About *The Grapes of Wrath*." *The New York Times* (Jan 28, 1940): 5.  
Screening: *The Grapes of Wrath* (Ford, 1940)

### Genre and Style

- **9/29: Realism**  
Reading: Nichols Ch 5 (175-187), Ch 7.  
Neale, Steve. "Science Fiction." *Genre and Hollywood*. London/New York: Routledge, 2000. 100-104  
Jancovich, Mark (1996). "Re-examining the 1950s Invasion Narratives." *Liquid Metal: The Science Fiction Film Reader*. Ed. Sean Redmond. London/New York: Wallflower Press, 2004. 325-335.  
Screening: *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (Wise, 1951).
- **10/6: Modernism**  
Reading: Nichols Ch. 5 (188-199).  
Woolfolk, Allan. "Disenchantment and Rebellion in *Alphaville*." *The Philosophy of Science Fiction Film*. Ed. Steven Sanders. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2008. 191-205.  
Bordwell, David (1979). "The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice." *Film Theory and Criticism (Sixth Edition)*. Eds. Marshall Cohen and Leo Braudy. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. 774-782.  
Screening: *Alphaville: Une étrange aventure de Lemmy Caution* (Godard, 1965)

- **10/13: Postmodernism**

Reading: Nichols Ch. 5 (200-208).

Sobchack, Vivian (1988). "Postfuturism" (excerpt). *Liquid Metal: The Science Fiction Film Reader*. Ed. Sean Redmond. London/New York: Wallflower Press, 2004. 220-227.

Bruno, Giuliana (1987). "Ramble City: Postmodernism and *Blade Runner*." *Alien Zone: Cultural Theory and Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema*. Ed. Annette Kuhn. London/New York: Verso, 1990. 183-195.

Screening: *Blade Runner* (Scott, 1982)

## Special Topics

- **10/20: Race and Ethnicity**

Reading: Nichols Ch. 9.

Shohat, Ella and Robert Stam. "Tropes of Empire." *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*. London/New York: Routledge, 1994. 137-177.

Stam, Robert and Louise Spence (1983). "Colonialism, Racism, and Representation: An Introduction." *Film Theory and Criticism (Sixth Edition)*. Eds. Marshall Cohen and Leo Braudy. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. 877-891.

Screening: *The Four Feathers* (Kapur, 2002).

**\*\* Midterm essay is due in class\*\***

- **10/27: Gender and Sexuality: The Case of Gay Masculinity**

Reading: Nichols Ch. 10.

Leung, William. "So Queer Yet So Straight: Ang Lee's *The Wedding Banquet* and *Brokeback Mountain*." *Journal of Film and Video* 60.1 (Spring 2008): 23-42

Halberstam, Judith. "Not So Lonesome Cowboys: The Queer Western." *The Brokeback Book: From Story to Cultural Phenomenon*. Ed. William R. Handley. Lincoln/London: University of Nebraska Press, 2011. 190-201

Benshoff, Harry and Sean Griffin. "General Introduction." *Queer Cinema: The Film Reader*. New York/London: Routledge, 2004. 1-15.

Screening: *Brokeback Mountain* (Lee, 2005)

- **11/3: Feminism**

Reading: Nichols Ch. 11.

Mulvey, Laura (1975). "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Critical Visions in Film Theory: Classic and Contemporary Readings*. Ed. Timothy Corrigan et al. Boston/New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2011. 713-725.

Philaretou, Andreas G. "Learning and Laughing about Gender and Sexuality through Humor: The Woody Allen Case." *Journal of Men's Studies* 14.2 (Spring 2006): 133-144.

Screening: *Vicky Cristina Barcelona* (Allen, 2008)

- **11/10: National Identity/Cinema**

Reading:

Williams, Allan. "Introduction." *Film and Nationalism*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002. 1-22.

Higson, Andrew (1989). "The Concept of National Cinema." *Film and Nationalism*. Ed. Allan Williams. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002. 52-67

- Held, David (2002). "Culture and Political Community—National, Global, and Cosmopolitan." *Nations and Nationalism: A Reader*. Eds. Phillip Spencer and Howard Wollman. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005. 317-327.
- Smith, Murray. "Parallel Lines." *American Independent Cinema: A Reader*. Ed. Jim Hillier. London: British Film Institute, 2002. 155-161.
- Screening: *Mystery Train* (Jarmusch, 1989)

## Alternatives to Narrative Fiction Film

- **11/17: Avant-Garde Film**

Reading: Nichols Ch. 2 (80-98).

Short, Robert. "Ocular Alchemy: Surrealism's Expectations of Cinema." *The Age of Gold: Surrealist Cinema*. New York: Creation Books, 2003. 5-32.

Richardson, Michael. "Luis Buñuel and the Snares of Desire," *Surrealism and Cinema*. Oxford: Berg, 2006. 27-43.

Heath, Stephen. "Repetition Time: Notes Around 'Structural/Materialist Film.'" *Questions of Cinema*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981. 165-175.

Screening: (*nostalgia*) (Frampton, 1971); *L'Âge d'Or* (Buñuel, 1930).

- **11/24: No Class (Thanksgiving)**

- **12/1: Documentary**

Reading: Nichols Ch. 3.

Cohen, Uri S. "From Hill to Hill: A Brief History of the Representation of War in Israeli Cinema." *Israeli Cinema: Identities in Motion*. Eds. Yaron Peleg and Miri Talmon. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011. 43-58.

Kaplan, Eran. "From Hero to Victim: The Changing Image of the Soldier on the Israeli Screen." *Israeli Cinema: Identities in Motion*. Eds. Yaron Peleg and Miri Talmon. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011. 59-69.

*Waltz with Bashir* Press Kit.

Screening: *Waltz with Bashir* (Folman, 2008)

## Conclusion

- **12/8: Digital Futures**

Reading:

Bazin, André (1949). "The Ontology of the Photographic Image." *Film Quarterly* 13.4 (Summer, 1960): 4-9.

Manovich, Lev (1999). "What is Digital Cinema?" *Critical Visions in Film Theory: Classic and Contemporary Readings*. Ed. Timothy Corrigan et al. Boston/New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2011. 1060-1070.

Probst, Christopher. "A Retro Future." *American Cinematographer* 85.10 (October 2004). <http://www.theasc.com/magazine/oct04/skycaptain/index.html>

Screening: *Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow* (Conran, 2004)

- **12/12: \*\*Final essay due in the instructor's mailbox by 5pm.\*\***