

MCOM 2351-02 Spring 2018 3:30–4:50pm TR Smith-Hutson Business Bldg rm 128 (Mafrige)
Dr. Grant Wiedenfeld, Mass Communication Department, Sam Houston State U.
Office Hours R 1–2pm or by appt. in DRCB 328. Email: grant.wiedenfeld@shsu.edu

FILM HISTORY AND CRITICISM

Syllabus

Course Description

This course uses the film medium to integrate cinematic history and criticism. Production elements such as lighting, sound and character development, as well as genres, themes and narrative pattern will be analyzed. Emphasis is placed on writing critically about the film. The course is organized into three units that introduce an active approach to appreciating the medium, investigate its main elements in depth, and survey its historical development and industrial organization. We will watch and discuss films from different periods and cultures, encouraging students to develop their own capacities, knowledge, and taste as viewers.

Course Objectives

1. Critical Thinking – Students will be able to demonstrate the ability to think creatively about film, inquire into the unknown, analyze content and synthesize ideas.
2. Communication – Students will be able to demonstrate the ability to effectively develop, interpret and express ideas through written, oral and visual communication.
3. Social Responsibility – Students will be able to demonstrate intercultural competence, knowledge of civic responsibility, and the ability to engage effectively in regional, national and global communities.
4. Team work – Students will be able to demonstrate the ability to consider different points of view and work effectively with others to support a joint purpose of film appreciation.

Required Materials

Barsam, Richard, and Dave Monahan. *Looking at Movies: An Introduction to Film*. 5th edition, Norton, 2016. ISBN 978-0-393-26519-4. Ebook <https://digital.wwnorton.com/movies5>

Coursework

Students are expected to read in preparation for class, where we will watch and discuss films in depth. Directly after class students will complete online forum posts that respond to specific questions. The main assignments are two two-page papers, a final exam, and a group project “dossier” that involves a critical study of a film by a collaborative group. Attendance is required, with one absence maximum excused. Work submitted after a deadline will be marked down, and may not be accepted.

Grading

15% Attendance

10% Quiz

25% Midterm

40% Dossier

25% Final Exam

Units & Weekly Schedule

(subject to change)

Unit 1: Film Form and Meaning

Unit 1 Objectives. Students should be able to:

1. Appreciate film form through active looking, and observe its invisibility to passive watchers
2. Formulate a claim interpreting the meaning of a film
3. Define narrative, documentary, and experimental modes
4. Analyze the character types and dramatic structure of a narrative film
5. Distinguish between story and plot, and differentiate diegetic from non-diegetic elements

Week 1 (Thursday, January 18) Appreciation

Read syllabus and B&M (Barsam & Monahan) chapter 1, pp. 3–19

To be screened in class: *The Godfather* (Dir. Francis Ford Coppola, USA, 1972)

Week 2 Form and Types

For Tuesday read B&M chapter 2, pp. 37–45

For Thursday read B&M chapter 3, pp. 67–85

To be screened in class: *When We Were Kings* (Dir. Leon Gast, USA, 1996)

*Quiz. 10percent due Friday 1/26 at noon, on Blackboard

Week 3 Narrative

For Tuesday read B&M chapter 4, pp. 121–135

To be screened in class: *Sherlock, Jr.* (Dir. Buster Keaton, USA, 1924)

For Thursday read B&M chapter 4, pp. 136–161

To be screened in class: *Citizen Kane* (Dir. Orson Welles, USA, 1942)

To be screened in class: *Rashomon* (Dir. Akira Kurosawa, Japan, 1950)

Unit 2: Elements of Film Form

Unit 2 Objectives. Students should be able to:

1. Define mise-en-scène and differentiate its aspects by production trade
2. Explain the relationship of acting to sound and cinematography with a historical perspective
3. Identify basic cinematographic properties: stock, lighting, lenses
4. Analyze fundamental elements of a shot: proximity, angle, movement, speed, and duration
5. Analyze continuity and discontinuity editing through different transition types
6. Distinguish between the four major types of film sound, and recognize their associated trades

Week 4 Mise-en-Scène: Design

Read B&M chapter 5, pp. 163–196

To be screened in class: *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Dir. Robert Wiene, 1920)

Watch **Ali: Fear Eats the Soul** (Dir. R.W. Fassbinder, Germany, 1974)

Week 5 Acting

Read B&M chapter 7, pp. 271–293

To be screened in class: *Singin' in the Rain* (Drs. Gene Kelly & Stanley Donen, 1952)

*Old Town Theatre screening, Thursday 2/15 6pm: *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (Dir. Woody Allen, USA, 1985)

Week 6 Mise-en-Scène: Composition

Read B&M chapter 5, pp. 197–210

Watch **Tokyo Story** (Dir. Yasujiro Ozu, Japan, 1953)

To be screened in class: *Rushmore* (Dir. Wes Anderson, USA, 1998)

Week 7 Cinematography, part 1

Read B&M chapter 6, pp. 211–232

To be screened in class: *In the Mood for Love* (Dir. Wong Kar-wai, Hong Kong, 2000)

Week 8 Cinematography, part 2

Read B&M chapter 6, pp. 233–270

To be screened in class: *Moonlight* (Dir. Barry Jenkins, USA, 2016)

*Midterm.25percent due Friday 3/9 at noon via Blackboard

Spring recess March 12–16

Week 9 Editing, part 1

Read B&M chapter 8, pp. 317–333

To be screened in class: *Breathless* (Dir. Jean-Luc Godard, France, 1960)

*Old Town Theatre screening, Thursday 3/22 *Touch of Evil* (Dir. Orson Welles, USA, 1958)

Week 10 Editing, part 2

For Monday read B&M chapter 8, pp. 334–362

To be screened in class: *Cleo from 5 to 7* (Dir. Agnes Varda, France, 1962)

Week 11 Sound, part 1

Read B&M chapter 9, pp. 363–377

To be screened in class: *M* (Dir. Fritz Lang, Germany, 1931)

To be screened in class: *Chinatown* (Dir. Roman Polanski, USA, 1974)

Week 12 Sound, part 2

Read B&M chapter 9, pp. 363–377

To be screened in class: *Psycho* (Dir. Alfred Hitchcock, USA, 1960)

*Essay.Dossier.40percent due Friday 4/13 at noon via Blackboard

Unit 3: Film History and Industry

Unit 3 Objectives. Students should be able to:

1. Distinguish historical periods and identify their major movements by culture and esthetic
2. Differentiate celluloid and digital technologies by defining their basic elements
3. Explain how a movie is produced, distributed globally, and exhibited through multiple media

Week 13 How Movies Are Made, part 1

For Monday read B&M chapter 11, pp. 457–473

To be screened in class: *His Girl Friday* (Dir. Howard Hawks, USA, 1940)

Week 14 How Movies Are Made, part 2

For Monday read B&M chapter 11, pp. 474–489

*Old Town Theatre screening, Tuesday 4/24, *Amélie* (Dir. Jean-Pierre Jeunet, France, 2001)

To be screened in class: *Slacker* (Dir. Richard Linklater, USA, 1991)

Week 15 Film History

For Monday read B&M chapter 10

To be screened in class: *Boyz in the Hood* (Dir. John Singleton, USA, 1991)

*Final.25percent due Monday 5/7 at noon via Blackboard

Use of Electronic Devices in Academic Classrooms

Devices such as laptops, smartphones, and tablets are prohibited in the classroom except for activities directed by the instructor, for disabled students, and for emergency situations. Failure to comply with the instructor's policy could result in expulsion from the classroom or with multiple offenses, failure of the course. Any use of a telephone or text messenger or any device that performs these functions during a test period is prohibited, except when expressly permitted by the instructor. These devices should not be present during a test or should be stored securely in such a way that they cannot be seen or used by the student. Even the visible presence of such a device during the test period will result in a zero for that test. Use of these devices during a test is considered de facto evidence of cheating and could result in a charge of academic dishonesty. Adapted from policy listed here: <http://www.shsu.edu/dept/academic-affairs/aps/aps-curriculum.html>

Academic Dishonesty

All students are expected to engage in all academic pursuits in a manner that is above reproach. Students are expected to maintain honesty and integrity in the academic experiences both in and out of the classroom. Any student found guilty of dishonesty in any phase of academic work will be subject to disciplinary action. The University and its official representatives may initiate disciplinary proceedings against a student accused of any form of academic dishonesty including but not limited to, cheating on an examination or other academic work which is to be submitted, plagiarism, collusion and the abuse of resource materials. For a complete listing of the university policy, see [Dean of Student's Office](#).

Copying and Pasting is a form of plagiarism. All writing for this class must be your original composition, quoting and citing other sources when used.

Student Absences on Religious Holy Days Policy:

Section 51.911(b) of the Texas Education Code requires that an institution of higher education excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. Section 51.911 (a) (2) defines a religious holy day as: "a holy day observed by a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property taxation under Section 11.20...." A student whose absence is excused under this subsection may not be penalized for that absence and shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment from which the student is excused within a reasonable time after the absence.

University policy 861001 provides the procedures to be followed by the student and instructor. A student desiring to absent himself/herself from a scheduled class in order to observe (a) religious holy day(s) shall present to each instructor involved a written statement concerning the religious holy day(s). The instructor will complete a form notifying the student of a reasonable timeframe in which the missed assignments and/or examinations are to be completed. For a complete listing of the university policy, see: www.shsu.edu/dept/academic-affairs/documents/aps/students/861001.pdf

Students with Disabilities Policy

It is the policy of Sam Houston State University that individuals otherwise qualified shall not be excluded, solely by reason of their disability, from participation in any academic program of the university. Further, they shall not be denied the benefits of these programs nor shall they be subjected to discrimination. Students with disabilities that might affect their academic performance should register with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities located in the Lee Drain Annex (telephone 936-294-3512, TDD 936-294-3786, and e-mail disability@shsu.edu). They should then make arrangements with their individual instructors so that appropriate strategies can be considered and helpful procedures can be developed to ensure that participation and achievement opportunities are not impaired.

SHSU adheres to all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and guidelines with respect to providing reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. If you have a disability that may affect adversely your work in this class, then I encourage you to register with the SHSU Services for Students with Disabilities and to talk with me about how I can best help you. All disclosures of disabilities will be kept strictly confidential. NOTE: No accommodation can be made until you register with the Services for Students with Disabilities. For a complete listing of the university policy, see:

<http://www.shsu.edu/dept/academic-affairs/documents/aps/students/811006.pdf>