

Form, Style, and Meaning in Cinema

Cinema Studies 101/English 173

Spring 2005
Tu/Th 11:00 am-12:15 pm [in King 106]
Weekly screenings: Wednesday 7-10 pm
[in Mudd 050]
CRN 11163 (Cine 101)/CRN 11996 (Engl 173)

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Required Texts:

David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, Film Art: An Introduction (7th edition, McGraw-Hill, 2003)
John Mercer and Martin Shingler, Melodrama: Genre, Style, Sensibility (Wallflower, 2004)
Additional course readings on electronic reserve

Course Description: This course will provide you with a precise set of tools with which to analyze and understand images in film and photographic media. The course will focus on formal analysis of image, sound, and editing as well as on historical and social issues. We will also introduce you to a range of key concepts in film theory and criticism. Finally, we will study the interplay between artistic and social conventions and the role of ideology in shaping the meaning of media texts.

While the course will not instruct you in the technical or industrial aspects of media production, it will give you a critical understanding of the ways media texts are constructed and received. You will learn a vocabulary of terms and concepts that will enable you to perform careful formal analysis of these texts. Each week, we will view and critique a feature film in class, and we will supplement our discussions with analysis of clips from other films as well as photographs.

In the second half of the term, we will shift from a broad analysis of the film medium and photography to a narrow focus on a specific film genre, the melodrama (also known colloquially as the woman's film or the weepie, and more recently, the chick flick). We will look primarily at the rich body of Hollywood melodramas of the 1930s, 40s, and 50s, as well as the complex and insightful criticism surrounding the genre. We will also view and critique a recent U.S. melodrama and one melodrama from the New German Cinema of the 1970s.

Assignments: Class assignments will include weekly film viewings, extensive readings, four short response papers, short Blackboard postings from viewing groups (which you'll join later), two longer essays, and a midterm and final exam. Your grade will be determined as follows:

Essay 1 (photograph analysis; 4-5 pages)	15%
Essay 2 (film analysis; 5-6 pages)	20%
Critical Responses (1-2 pages each)	10%; 2.5% each
Midterm Exam	20%
Final Exam	20%
Viewing group postings, participation, and in-class work	15%

Critical Response Papers: Throughout the term, students will submit short responses to the film and/or readings studied that week. Responses will be due via Digital Drop Box (on the course's Blackboard page) on Tuesday of each week specified. (For example, the first response, due Tuesday of week 3, should deal with the film M and should apply concepts from the week's readings where applicable.) Responses incorporating more than one text should draw points of comparison or consider ways the articles contribute to differing or complementary interpretations of course films.

Essays: You will write two major papers, the first analyzing a photograph, and the second analyzing a sequence from a film studied in class. I will provide a broad range of essay topics for consideration. You may develop paper topics outside this range if you consult briefly with me at least one week before the essay is due. (All written work submitted must be typed, double-spaced, with 1" margins.)

Assignment Due Dates and Late Work: Submitting assignments on time is essential. Late work will be penalized at the rate of one letter grade per day late. You must complete all assignments to pass the course. **The two major essays must be submitted in printed form;** critical responses will be submitted electronically.

Attendance: Regular attendance is crucial to your success in this course. An attendance sheet will be distributed at the beginning of each class. Please consult with me in advance if you must miss class, and make arrangements to get notes or other missed material from a classmate. After more than two absences, your participation grade decreases by one letter grades for each additional absence. If you miss six or more classes, you will not pass the course.

The Honor Code: All course assignments are subject to the provisions of the Honor Code. Please write and sign the Honor Pledge ("I affirm that I have adhered to the Honor Code in this assignment") for all papers submitted in the course. Violations of the Code will be painful for both you and your professor, but mostly for you. We will discuss acceptable and unacceptable citation and collaboration in the course; please consult with me if you have questions regarding plagiarism and original work.

Schedule of Assignments: Wednesday-night screenings are noted for each week; remember that critical responses due on Tuesdays should deal with the *previous* week's film. For other films and readings, you will be notified of any changes to the schedule well in advance.

Abbreviations: FA = Bordwell and Thompson's Film Art

WEEK 1: INTRODUCTION TO FILM STYLE: Visions of Light (U.S., Arnold Glassman/Todd McCarthy/Stuart Samuels, 1992) [Wednesday at 7 pm in Mudd 050, as for subsequent films]

Tues 2/8 Course Introduction. No assigned reading.

Thurs 2/10 **Reading:** FA Ch. 2, "The Significance of Film Form"

WEEK 2: GERMAN EXPRESSIONISM: M (Germany, Fritz Lang, 1931)

Tues 2/15 **Reading:** FA Ch. 12 (pp. 472-474 only)

Thurs 2/17 **Reading:** FA Ch. 6, "The Shot: Mise-en-Scène"

WEEK 3: IMAGE ANALYSIS/JAPANESE CINEMA: Rashomon (Japan, Akira Kurosawa, 1950)

Tues 2/22 **Reading:** William Dubois and Barbara Hodik, "The Act of Seeing a Photograph" (reserve)
Critical Response 1 due

Thurs 2/24 **Reading:** Herbert Zettl, "The Two-Dimensional Field: Forces Within the Screen" (reserve)

WEEK 4: EXPERIMENTS IN MONTAGE: The Man With the Movie Camera (USSR, Dziga Vertov, 1929)

Tues 3/1 **Reading:** FA Ch. 7, “The Shot: Cinematography”

Thurs 3/3 **Reading:** FA Ch. 11 (pp. 443-446 only); FA Ch. 12 (pp. 478-481 only)
Class meets at Allen Art Museum’s Print Study Room for photography print viewing.

WEEK 5: THE FRENCH NEW WAVE: Breathless (France, Jean-Luc Godard, 1960)

Tues 3/8 **Reading:** FA Ch. 8, “The Relation of Shot to Shot: Editing”
Critical Response 2 due

Thurs 3/10 **Reading:** FA Ch. 11 (pp. 428-433 only); FA Ch. 12 (pp. 486-489 only)

WEEK 6: DOCUMENTARY FILM: The Thin Blue Line (U.S., Errol Morris, 1988)

Tues 3/15 **Reading:** FA Ch. 9, “Sound in the Cinema”
Essay 1 (photograph analysis) due

Thurs 3/17 **Reading:** FA Ch. 5, “Documentary, Experimental, and Animated Films” (pp. 128-145 only); FA Ch. 11 (pp. 446-452 only)

WEEK 7: EXPERIMENTAL CINEMA: Ballet Mécanique (France, Fernand Léger/Dudley Murphy, 1924), Meshes of the Afternoon (U.S., Maya Deren, 1942), A Movie (U.S., Bruce Conner, 1958), Scorpio Rising (U.S., Kenneth Anger, 1964), Mothlight (U.S., Stan Brakhage, 1963), Dog Star Man (U.S., Brakhage, 1961-64), It Wasn’t Love (U.S., Sadie Benning, 1992) [other films TBA]

Tues 3/22 **Midterm Exam**

Thurs 3/24 **Reading:** FA Ch. 5, “Documentary, Experimental, and Animated Films” (pp. 146-162 only); FA Ch. 10 (pp. 407-412 only)

[3/29, 3/31 Spring break. No class.]

WEEK 8: CLASSICAL HOLLYWOOD MELODRAMA: Blonde Venus (U.S., Josef Von Sternberg, 1932)

Tu 4/5 **Reading:** FA Ch. 3, “Narrative as a Formal System”

Th 4/7 **Reading:** FA Ch. 4, “Film Genres” (pp. 108-118 only); FA Ch. 12 (pp. 481-484 only)

Week 9: MELODRAMA AND FILM NOIR: Mildred Pierce (U.S., Michael Curtiz, 1945)

Tues 4/12 **Reading:** Thomas Schatz, “The Family Melodrama” (reserve)
Critical Response 3 due

Thurs 4/14 **Reading:** Melodrama Introduction (pp. 1-3) and Ch. 1, “Genre” (pp. 4-37)
Optional reading: Christine Gledhill, “The Melodramatic Field: An Investigation” (reserve)

WEEK 10: DOUGLAS SIRK AND THE FAMILY MELODRAMA: Written on the Wind (U.S., Douglas Sirk, 1956)

Tues 4/19 **Reading:** Melodrama Ch. 2, “Style” (pp. 38-77)

Thurs 4/21 **Reading:** Laura Mulvey, “Notes on Sirk and Melodrama” (reserve); FA Ch. 10, “Style as a Formal System” (pp. 389-394 only)
Optional reading: Thomas Elsaesser, “Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama” (reserve)

WEEK 11: CONFUSED TEENAGERS: Rebel Without a Cause (U.S., Nicholas Ray, 1955)

Tues 4/26 **Reading:** Melodrama Ch. 3, “Sensibility” (pp. 78-112), and Conclusion (pp. 113-115)
Critical Response 4 due

Thurs 4/28 **Reading:** Chuck Kleinhans, “Notes on Melodrama and the Family under Capitalism” (reserve)
Optional reading: Richard De Cordova, “A Case of Mistaken Legitimacy: Class and Generational Difference in Three Family Melodramas” (reserve)

WEEK 12: U.S. INDEPENDENT-FILM MELODRAMA AND THE SIRK HOMAGE: Far From Heaven (U.S., Todd Haynes, 2002)

Tues 5/3 **Essay 2 (film analysis) due.** No additional reading.

Thurs 5/5 **Reading:** TBA [critical essays on Far From Heaven]

WEEK 13: MELODRAMA IN NEW GERMAN CINEMA: Ali: Fear Eats the Soul (Germany, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, 1974)

Tues 5/10 **Reading:** TBA
Optional reading: Katherine Woodward, “European Anti-Melodrama: Godard, Truffaut, and Fassbinder” (reserve)

Thurs 5/12 Course conclusion and exam review. No additional reading.

EXAM PERIOD

Wed 5/18 **Final Exam, 2-4 pm**