

## **MCS 273 – STYLE & STORYTELLING IN CINEMA (Fall 2015)**

Prof. Blair Davis

Email: [bdavis47@depaul.edu](mailto:bdavis47@depaul.edu)

Office: 1102 / Phone: 312-362-7704

Office hours: Tues/Thurs, Noon – 1

### **Course Description:**

This course is designed as an introduction to thinking systematically about the basic principles of cinema as a medium and the creation of meaning therein. Our work throughout the term will involve both narrative theory (i.e., concepts about storytelling) and textual and visual analysis of individual films. We will maintain both a conceptual and practical approach, working on the one hand to understand the implicit “rules” governing film narrative, and on the other hand to consider how they apply in the everyday practice of filmmaking. Through lectures, screenings and discussions, students will engage with issues of film technique, style and form in order to develop the skills with which to analyze films of different eras, countries and genres.

### **Course Objectives:**

- Discuss and critique films in terms of three-act structure (adherence to or deviation from)
- Define and discuss rules of classical Hollywood cinema (genre, editing, cinematography, mise-en-scène)
- Identify and discuss technical aspects of filmmaking and analyze the reasoning behind specific technical choices
- Identify, Discuss, and Critique different forms of documentary
- Identify, Discuss, and Critique different forms of avant-garde
- Contextualize documentary and avant-garde within classical film style

### **Required Text**

David Bordwell & Kristin Thompson. *Film Art*. McGraw-Hill. 10th Edition (*earlier editions acceptable*)

### **Assignments:**

**Professionalism – 15%** - *includes such things as contribution to class discussions, attendance/being on-time, engagement with class activities, etc. Also includes creating two discussion questions each week – one based on the current week’s reading, and one based on the previous week’s film. Questions must be submitted to the appropriate D2Lforum by 6 am the day of class in order to give me enough time to read and correlate.*

Presentation – 20% - students will be assigned a film and/or topic in connection with a given week's subject, and will share their observations with the class in a short presentation.

Short 'Warm Up' Assignment (2 pages) – 15% - a brief engagement with a single film in which you will critically argue its merits.

Shot Analysis (5-7 pages) – 20% - For this paper you will create a shot-by-shot breakdown of a given scene that identifies the technical choices made (I.e. editing, camera, sound, etc.), and briefly analyze the function of these features in relation to the chosen scene and/or the film's overall narrative.

Analytic Paper (5 pages) – 30% - For this paper you will analyze the narrative and or stylistic aspects of a single film. You will receive a more thorough description of your options for this paper at least three weeks in advance of its due date.

## **COURSE ACTIVITIES AND FORMAT**

Lecture/Discussion Sessions: Each week's session begins with lecture material synthesizing the topic of focus for that week. Lectures presentations will integrate visual materials such as film clips and photographs, and I will pose various discussion questions to you to create a participatory learning environment.

We will also discuss the week's film, readings, and your discussion questions. In selected weeks of the quarter following this discussion, students will give short presentations on selected topics.

Screening/Lab Sessions: All screenings are online, done on your own time, available via links on D2L. In certain weeks, shorter films will be screened during class time if unavailable for streaming. Students who miss these classes must make arrangements to find the film on their own.

## **Grade Scale**

93-100 A, 90-92 A-, 88-89 B+, 83-87 B, 80-82 B-, 78-79 C+, 73-77 C, 70-72 C-, 68-69, D+, 60-67 D, 0-59 F

## **SYLLABUS POLICY**

### **NOTE TAKING**

Taking notes during the lecture/discussion periods and the weekly screening/lab sessions is a key part of succeeding in this course. You should write down more than just the key points listed in my Powerpoint slides and also add your own thoughts, questions and observations. The same is true during screenings of clips and films - you will probably not remember everything about them later unless you take notes as

you watch. While taking notes in the dark while trying to watch the screen may seem difficult at first, it is a key skill for film students to learn and gets easier with practice.

## **CELLPHONES**

With the exception of scheduled breaks, the use of cellphones not permitted in class, including screenings. Please turn off your cell phones prior to the start of class unless you have the permission of the instructor. Cellphone use of any kind in class will negatively affect your Professionalism grade.

## **PREPARATION & READING STRATEGIES**

Please complete all readings assigned for a given week prior to the start of class, so that you will already have a context for understanding the course material before we discuss it. I recommend taking notes while you read, such as key ideas and concepts, as well as making a list of questions regarding aspects of the material that are unclear to you or that you find interesting, challenging or enlightening. Note that completing the readings prior to each class is part of your professionalism grade. If it becomes clear to me during class that you haven't done the readings you will lose part of that grade.

## **ATTENDANCE**

Class attendance is required. Promptness is expected as a general rule. If you are consistently late to class your grade will be negatively affected. Attending class means arriving on time and staying until class is finished. Arriving late to class or leaving class early will negatively affect your Professionalism grade, and two such instances will count as one absence. Changes in work schedules, personal celebrations (e.g., birthdays, etc.), assignments due in other classes, car problems/transit congestion, etc. are NOT considered to be legitimate reasons for being late/missing class/missing deadlines, etc. Please allow extra time in your travel schedule to accommodate things like transit delays, traffic, etc.

If you miss a class, even due to illness, I am not able to give you the lecture notes, so please make arrangements with someone in the class to get their notes from them.

You are allowed one unexcused absence in this class, and two absences total if at least one of those is excused (e.g., you have documentation about a medical illness/emergency, legal issue/civic responsibility, or due to an official DePaul function). Further absences will result in the following actions:

2 absences                      Professionalism marks lowered by two letter grade (i.e., A- => B)

3 absences                      Professionalism marks lowered by three letter grades (i.e., A- => B-)

*Students who miss more than three days of class will receive a zero on their Professionalism grade.*

## MAKE-UP EXAMS, TESTS, QUIZZES, ETC.

There will be NO makeup tests, exams, presentations, quizzes or other class activities. If you miss a class activity you will receive zero marks. Exceptions may be made at the instructor's discretion for legitimate and unforeseen *documented* medical reasons or extenuating circumstances such as a death in the family or official DePaul function. In such a case, it is the responsibility of the student to inform the instructor immediately and make arrangements to provide any required documentation (I.e. a doctor's note, death certificate, etc.). Exceptions cannot be made if the student does not submit such documentation within a reasonable time frame.

Note that alternative arrangements for scheduled final exams will NOT be made for anything other than unforeseen *documented* medical reasons or extenuating circumstances such as a death in the family. Travel plans such as vacations, family functions, or the need to book a less expensive travel ticket are not legitimate excuses and will not be accommodated. If you are unable to write an exam during the scheduled time you should choose another course that better fits your schedule.

## ASSIGNMENT REQUIREMENTS/DEADLINE

Assignments must be handed in on time, at the start of the class in which they are due. Assignments handed in after the start of class will be considered late. Late penalties will be applied at the instructor's discretion to any assignments handed in late. ***You will lose one letter grade per day late on the assignment.***

***Assignments that are more than one week late will NOT be accepted and you will receive a zero.***

Please allow yourself sufficient time to complete the last-minute details and to arrive in class on time: late assignments due to computer and printing problems and transportation troubles will unfortunately not be exempt from receiving a late penalty.

All papers should be typed, double-spaced throughout the entire essay, and use a consistent style (e.g., MLA, APA, etc.). Use one-inch margins and 12-point font.

***All assignments must be submitted to the appropriate D2L dropbox. Assignments will automatically be run through a plagiarism detector.***

***Assignments will typically be graded/returned to you within one week of their due date.***

## ACCOMODATION FOR DISABILITIES

Students who feel they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately to discuss their specific needs. All discussion will remain confidential. To ensure that you receive the most reasonable accommodation based on your needs, contact me as early as possible in the quarter (preferably within the first week or two of the course – note that accommodations cannot be made retroactively once assignments, exams etc. have already been completed) and be sure to contact the following office for support and additional services:

Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD)

#370, Student Center, LPC, 773.325.1677

## **RESPECTFUL BEHAVIOR**

Please respect the contributions of others in the classroom and/or online by not using insulting/inflammatory or discriminatory rhetoric. Class space (both in person and online) is intended to be a safe space for personal reflection and growth, so it is essential that the opinions of others be treated respectfully even if you do not agree with them. Students must therefore engage in respectful and professional in-class and online conduct (which also includes the use of proper grammar when replying online - I.e. please avoid excessive use of abbreviations, emoticons, etc. – full sentences should be used.)

When the instructor or another student is addressing the class, everyone else in the room is expected to listen attentively and to refrain from engaging in conversations or any other activities that constitute distractions. Students who do not abide by this guideline will not be permitted to continue with the course.

## **E-MAIL**

I often send e-mail announcements to the class. You need to (1) make sure your preferred email address in Campus Connect is the address you check regularly so messages do not bounce back and (2) make sure my email address will pass through your spam filter. Please be aware that to avoid DePaul's spam filters, it is recommended that you send me messages using a DePaul email account, as messages sent through Hotmail, Yahoo and other such accounts regularly get quarantined.

I typically respond to emails within 24 hours, Monday to Friday. I do my best to respond to emails on the weekend, but this time is reserved first and foremost for my family, so cannot guarantee an immediate response. If you have not heard from me within this timeframe, you should assume that your email has not reached me and resend.

## **ONLINE EVALUATIONS**

One of your responsibilities in this course is to complete an online teaching evaluation for this class. This course will be available for you to review during the 9th and 10th week of the quarter. Close to that time, you will receive a notification to this effect via email.

As instructors, we really appreciate learning what we are doing well in the classroom and where we can continue to improve. Your feedback really makes a difference.

## **DEPAUL UNIVERSITY ACADEMIC INTEGRITY POLICY**

DePaul University is a learning community that fosters the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas within a context that emphasizes a sense of responsibility for oneself, for others and for society at large. Violations of academic integrity, in any of their forms, are, therefore, detrimental to the values of DePaul, to the students' own development as responsible members of society, and to the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas. Violations include but are not limited to the following categories: cheating; plagiarism; fabrication; falsification or sabotage of research data; destruction or misuse of the university's academic resources; alteration or falsification of academic records; and academic misconduct. Conduct that is punishable under the Academic Integrity Policy could result in additional disciplinary actions by other university officials and possible civil or criminal prosecution. Please refer to your Student Handbook or visit <http://studentaffairs.depaul.edu/homehandbook.html> for further details.

The DePaul Student Handbook defines plagiarism as follows: "Plagiarism includes but is not limited to the following: (a) The direct copying of any source, such as written and verbal material, computer files, audio disks, video programs or musical scores, whether published or unpublished, in whole or in part, without proper acknowledgement that it is someone else's. (b) Copying of any source in whole or in part with only minor changes in wording or syntax even with acknowledgement. (c) Submitting as one's own work a report, examination paper, computer file, lab report or other assignment which has been prepared by someone else. This includes research papers purchased from any other person or agency. (d) The paraphrasing of another's work or ideas without proper acknowledgement." If you are unsure of how to cite a source, please ask!

Violations of DePaul's Academic Integrity Policy will be reported to the Academic Integrity Board. Violation will result in severe penalty, up to and including failure of the assignment/exam or the entire course, at the instructor's discretion.

## **CITATION STYLE**

Students must cite in their papers according to the Chicago Manual of Style, which is the primary citation style in the field of media studies. The use of other citation styles are not permitted. See the following website for specific examples of how to cite your sources using Chicago Style:

[http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools\\_citationguide.html](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html)

## **POLICY ON INCOMPLETE (IN) GRADES**

Undergraduate and graduate students have two quarters to complete an incomplete. At the end of the second quarter (excluding summer) following the term in which the incomplete grade was assigned, remaining incompletes will automatically convert to "F" grades. In the case of the Law School incompletes must be completed by the end of the semester following the one in which the incomplete was assigned. Ordinarily no incomplete grade may be completed after the grace period has expired. Instructors may not change incomplete grades after the end of the grace period without the permission of a college-based Exceptions Committee. This policy applies to undergraduate, graduate and professional programs.

NOTE: In the case of a student who has applied for graduation and who has been approved for an Incomplete in his or her final term, the incomplete must be resolved within the four-week grace period before final degree certification.

## **ASSISTANCE WITH WRITING**

For help with organizing your ideas, grammar, citing sources, and avoiding plagiarism, I encourage you to consult DePaul's Center for Writing-Based Learning. The center offers both on-campus and online tutoring. See <http://condor.depaul.edu/~writing/>

## **CLASS SCHEDULE:**

### **Week 1 - Sept. 10 – Introduction to Cinema / Classical Hollywood**

Screening: *A Personal Journey With Martin Scorsese Through American Cinema*

Clips from: *A Trip to the Moon* (1902); *The Searchers* (1958); *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968); *Time Code* (2000).

Readings: Film Art Ch. 1

### **Week 2 - Sept. 15 – Narrative Structure**

Screening: *The Fountain* (2008) OR *The Lego Movie* (2014)

Clips from: *Star Wars* (1977); *Rashomon* (1950); *Psycho* (1960);

Readings: Film Art Ch. 2, 3

### **Week 3 - Sept 22– Camera & Sound**

Screening: *Birdman* (2014)

Clips from: *Lady in the Lake* (1944); *Russian Ark* (2002); *The Sacrifice* (1986); *Double Indemnity* (1944); *Pierrot le Fou* (1964); *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974)

Readings: Film Art Ch. 5 & 7

\*\*\* Short Assignment due (Tues. Sept 22)

#### **Week 4 - Sept 29 – Editing**

Screening: *Requiem for a Dream* (2000) OR *Edge of Tomorrow* (2014)

Clips from: *Battleship Potemkin* (1925); *Casablanca* (1942); *The Lady From Shanghai* (1948); *Psycho* (1960); *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968); *Moulin Rouge* (2001); *Noah* (2014)

Readings: Film Art Ch. 6

#### **Week 5 - Oct 6 –Mise-en-scene**

Screening: *Citizen Kane* (1941)

Clips from: *Rashomon*; *Rebel Without a Cause*; *Lawrence of Arabia*; *Notorious*, *Night of the Living Dead*

Readings: Film Art Ch. 4

#### **Week 6 - Oct 13– Genre**

Screening: *Guardians of the Galaxy* (2014)

Clips: *The Phantom Empire* (1935); *Man of Steel* (2013)

Readings: Film Art Ch. 9

#### **Week 7 - Oct 20 – Documentary**

Screening: *The Kid Stays in the Picture* (2002)

Clips from: *Nanook of the North*; *Roger & Me*; *Andy Warhol's Eat*

Readings: Film Art pp. 350-369; pp.429-438

\*\*\* Shot Analysis due

#### **Week 8 - Oct 27 – Film Spectatorship: Mind Vs. Body**

Screening: *REC* (2007) OR *Cat People* (1942)

Clips: *Arrival of a Train*(1895); *Ballet Mechanique* (1924); *Touch of Evil* (1958); *The Shining* (1980); *Cat People* (1942); *Halloween* (1978)

Readings: Thomas Sutcliffe, “Watching;”



**Week 9 - Nov 3 – Avant Garde**

Screening: *Elephant* (2002 – Note: Screened in-class, not available on D2L)

Clips from: *Solaris*; *The Sacrifice*; *Norman McLaren: Selected Films*;

Readings: Film Art pp.369-386

**Week 10 - Nov 10– Film Art Vs Film Trash**

Screening: *Faster Pussycat! Kill! Kill!* (1968) OR *Plan 9 From Outer Space* (1959)

Clips from: Various 1950s B-movies; *Mystery Science Theatre 3000*; *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls* (1969)

Readings: Jeffrey Sconce, “Trashing the Academy”

**Week 10.5 – Nov 17- Conclusions**

\*\*\* Final essay due