

**Sichuan University – Pittsburgh Institute**  
**Introduction to Film Genres**  
**HSS Elective 8**  
**Spring 2019**

<b>Instructor:</b>	<b>John Rhym</b>	<b>Credits:</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Email:</b>	<b>johnrhym@scu.edu.cn</b>	<b>Location:</b>	<b>Zone 4-204</b>
<b>Office:</b>	<b>Zone 4-227</b>	<b>Time:</b>	<b>W (6:00-8:35 PM)</b>
<b>Office Hours:</b>	<b>M (1:30-5:00 PM)</b>		
	<b>W (1:30-5:00 PM)</b>		
	<b>F (2:00-5:00 PM)</b>		
	<b>&amp; By Appointment</b>		

Course Description

Cinematic representation is thoroughly pervasive in our contemporary world not only as a mode of entertainment but also as a mode of communication, instruction, and aesthetic practice. For this reason, analytically situating films – both in their narrative and formal constructions – within cultural, political, and theoretical contexts can equip us with the critical questions necessary for examining and challenging the conditions that operate in the formation and circulation of many of our values, beliefs, and interests.

While serving as an introduction to the historical development and cultural significance of a variety of film genres, this course’s primary aim will be to critically examine how processes of normalization and the possibilities of resistance are articulated through the reiterations and variations of genre. More specifically, we will think through the ways in which such difference and repetition are mobilized through affective registers – i.e., how cinematic genres map various political commitments, social agendas, and cultural anxieties on the body (of the film, of the characters, and of the viewer).

The goals of the course are to equip each student with the ability to (1) analyze a variety of films as examples of audiovisual art and write critically about them from various thematic and cultural perspectives, (2) construct a critical position in evaluating films in relation to popular reviews, scholarly essays, and industry categories, and (3) demonstrate a critical understanding of the role film plays in society as an audiovisual art, an industry, and a complex set of ideological constructs.

Principle Texts

All readings will be made available as PDF files in the class’s Blackboard website (<https://learn.scupi.cn/>) under the “Course Documents” tab. You are expected to print out the reading assignments and bring them to class on the relevant days. Being prepared for each class by reading the assigned materials will enable you to do well on your short response papers, presentation, and final research paper.

### Grading

Unless discussed with me previously, late assignments will not be accepted, and the failure to complete your work will result in a failing grade.

Each unexcused absence will bear a penalty of a third of a letter grade (e.g., from a B to a B- or from a B- to a C+). More than three unexcused absences will result in a failing grade. If you are feeling unwell or need to miss a class, inform me ahead of time, and I will excuse absences on a case-by-case basis.

Weekly Short Response BB Forum Posts (10 total):	3 points each for a total of <b>30</b> points
Presentation:	<b>20</b> points
Research Paper Proposal:	<b>10</b> points
Final Paper:	<b>40</b> points
Discussion Contributions:	Extra Credit (amount to be determined on a case-by-case basis)

### Academic Integrity Policy

Cheating/plagiarism will not be tolerated. Students suspected of violating academic integrity will be reported, and a minimum sanction of a failing grade on the particular assignment will be imposed.

### Email Communication Policy

Each student is issued a University email address (student\_number@stu.scu.edu.cn) upon admittance. This email address may be used by the University for official communication with students. Students are expected to read e-mail sent to this account on a regular basis. Failure to read and react to University communications in a timely manner does not absolve the student from knowing and complying with the content of the communications. Students that choose to forward their e-mail from their university email address to another address (qq.com, 163.com, etc.) do so at their own risk. If email is lost as a result of forwarding, it does not absolve the student from responding to official communications sent to their University email address.

**Additionally, when emailing me, include "HSS8" in the subject field, and remember to provide your full name and student ID number somewhere in the body of your message.**

### Assignments

All essays must include your name and student ID number. Additionally, the essays should be proofread, typed in standard 12-point font (Times New Roman), formatted according to MLA or IEEE guidelines, numbered (pagination), and double-spaced. I highly encourage you to take advantage of the assistance offered by SCUPI's new Writing Center.

1. **Weekly Blackboard Forum Posts (3 points each):** Each week, you will be required to write a short response that answers a question about that week's film screening and reading assignment. Each week's question will be posted on Blackboard as a new discussion forum, and you will be required to write and post your answer as a thread. There will be 12 forums in total, but you will be exempted from responding to the two questions assigned for the unit during which your group gives a presentation. Therefore, every student will be required to write 10 out of the 12 short responses. Each post should be 150-250 words and needs to be posted by its deadline.
2. **Presentation (20 points):** I will divide the class into twelve small groups. Each student will be assigned to a small group, and each group will be assigned a presentation date and designated as either a "Y" or "Z" group. Because each unit will have two films, Group Y presentations will be on the unit's first film, and Group Z presentations will be on the unit's second film.
  - i. Y Groups: choose a clip (or a set of still images) to show from the assigned film, identify how it typifies the genre, and offer an interpretation of the film based on its conformity to the genre (i.e., how is its genre conformity significant to understanding the film's meaning?).
  - ii. Z Groups: choose a clip (or a set of still images) to show from the assigned film, identify how it deviates from the conventions of its genre, and offer an interpretation of the film based on its deviation from the genre (i.e., how is its genre deviation significant to understanding the film's meaning?).

All presentations need to be 10-15 minutes and will include a brief Q & A session.

3. **Research Paper Proposal (10 points):** Must be 2-3 properly formatted pages (submitted as a hard copy in class on Wednesday, April 24 and uploaded as a Word document to Blackboard). Your proposal needs to clearly include the following:
  - i. The film that you've chosen
  - ii. The thesis: your interpretation how the film reflects or critiques society/culture.
    - a. Avoid general interpretive claims about "love" or "freedom" or "doing the right thing"; instead, your thesis should be specific and grounded in historical, political, or cultural insight.
    - b. Example
      1. WEAK: "Doug Liman's *The Bourne Identity* (2002) is an action thriller about a man's pursuit of freedom and redemption."
      2. ADEQUATE: "Doug Liman's *The Bourne Identity* (2002) is an action thriller that criticizes government surveillance."
      3. STRONG: "Doug Liman's *The Bourne Identity* (2002) is a definitive example of post-9/11 Hollywood action thrillers that criticize the American government's surveillance apparatus."

- iii. A detailed description of how you will carry out a genre analysis of the film that examines how its conformity to – and/or deviation from – genre conventions directly supports your thesis. The genre analysis must fulfill two requirements:
    - a. It should draw on external sources that offer informed overviews and insights on the genre about which you're writing (in a way that supports your interpretation).
    - b. It should develop a close reading of one or two other representative examples of the genre that will be compared and contrasted to the film you've chosen (in a way that supports your interpretation).
  - iv. An annotated bibliography of three external sources that you will be engaging with for the purpose of deepening your research and strengthening your argument. Only one of these sources can be a reputable online reference site (e.g., *Oxford Bibliographies*), but at least one source must be a popular/trade publication (e.g., film review in a magazine or newspaper) and at least one must be an academic publication (e.g., academic journal article or book). Annotated bibliographies will be discussed in a workshop on properly finding, using, and citing sources for research.
4. **Research Paper (40 points):** In 8-10 pages (approximately 2,000 words excluding the bibliography), develop an interpretation of your chosen film by way of a genre analysis. Your interpretation should be backed by a close examination of the film's narrative and/or formal construction as well as a genre analysis that is fortified by research and comparative readings. The grading of your paper will be largely determined by **structural clarity and coherence** (i.e., your paper should provide a clear thesis, and it needs to maintain a strong sense of conceptual coherence by making sure that each body paragraph remains relevant to the further development of your thesis) as well as **conceptual depth and veracity** (i.e., your interpretation of the film should be insightful/compelling, and it should be sufficiently supported by a genre analysis that conveys depth, detail, and precision). The research paper is due on Friday, May 31 by 5PM as a Word document that is uploaded to Blackboard.

Schedule

[The following schedule is subject to change based on the needs of the class at the instructor's discretion.]

<i>Date</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Assignment Due</i>
Week 1 (Feb. 27)	Introduction to Film Genres; Syllabus Overview; Group Assignments	

**Unit I: The Disaster Film**

Week 2 (March 6)	Screening: <i>Snowpiercer</i> (Bong, 2013)	<b>At-home viewing:</b> <i>Independence Day</i> (Emmerich, 1996)  <b>Reading:</b> "The Bug in the Rug: Notes on the Disaster Genre" (Yacowar)  <b>Forum Post #1:</b> due Monday, March 4 by 9 PM
Week 3 (March 13)	<b>Group 1-Y Presentation</b> on <i>Independence Day</i>  <b>Group 2-Z Presentation</b> on <i>Snowpiercer</i>  Lecture/Discussion	<b>Forum Post #2:</b> due Monday, March 11 by 9 PM

**Unit II: The Western**

Week 4 (March 20)	Screening: <i>There Will Be Blood</i> (Anderson, 2007)	<b>At-home viewing:</b> <i>Red River</i> (Hawks, 1948)  <b>Reading:</b> <i>Hollywood Genres</i> (Schatz, pp. 45-63)  <b>Forum Post #3:</b> due Monday, March 18 by 9 PM
Week 5 (March 27)	<b>Group 3-Y Presentation</b> on <i>Red River</i>  <b>Group 4-Z Presentation</b> on <i>There Will Be Blood</i>  Lecture/Discussion	<b>Forum Post #4:</b> due Monday, March 25 by 9 PM

**Unit III: The Zombie Film**

Week 6 (April 3)	Screening: <i>Juan of the Dead</i> (Brugués, 2010)	<p><b>At-home viewing:</b> <i>Dawn of the Dead</i> (Romero, 1978)</p> <p><b>Reading:</b> “The Zombie as Barometer of Cultural Anxiety” (Dendle)</p> <p><b>Forum Post #5:</b> due Monday, April 1 by 9 PM</p>
Week 7 (April 10)	<p><b>Group 5-Y Presentation</b> on <i>Dawn of the Dead</i></p> <p><b>Group 6-Z Presentation</b> on <i>Juan of the Dead</i></p> <p>Lecture/Discussion</p> <p>Proposal Workshop</p>	<p><b>Forum Post #6:</b> due Monday, April 8 by 9 PM</p>

**Unit IV: Film Noir**

Week 8 (April 17)	Screening: <i>Mulholland Drive</i> (Lynch, 2001)	<p><b>At-home viewing:</b> <i>Sunset Boulevard</i> (Wilder, 1950)</p> <p><b>Reading:</b> “Notes on Film Noir” (Schrader)</p> <p><b>Forum Post #7:</b> due Monday, April 22 by 9 PM</p>
Week 9 (April 24)	<p><b>Group 7-Y Presentation</b> on <i>Sunset Boulevard</i></p> <p><b>Group 8-Z Presentation</b> on <i>Mulholland Drive</i></p> <p>Lecture/Discussion</p>	<p><b>Forum Post #8:</b> due Monday, April 29 by 9 PM</p> <p><b>Research Paper Proposal Due</b> (print out to submit in class and upload a Word document copy to Blackboard)</p>
Week 10 (May 1)	HOLIDAY (NO CLASS)	

**Unit V: The Musical**

Week 11 (May 8)	Screening: <i>Dancer in the Dark</i> (Von Trier, 2000)	<b>At-home viewing:</b> <i>The Sound of Music</i> (Wise, 1965) <b>Reading:</b> “The Musical” (Altman) <b>Forum Post #9:</b> due Monday, May 6 by 9 PM
Week 12 (May 15)	<b>Group 9-Y Presentation</b> on <i>The Sound of Music</i> (Wise, 1965) <b>Group 10-Z Presentation</b> on <i>Dancer in the Dark</i>  Lecture/Discussion  Research Paper Workshop	<b>Forum Post #10:</b> due Monday, May 13 by 9 PM

**Unit VI: The Gangster Film**

Week 13 (May 22)	Screening: <i>Ash is Purest White</i> (Jia, 2018)	<b>At-home viewing:</b> <i>A Better Tomorrow</i> (Woo, 1986) <b>Reading:</b> <i>Hong Kong Cinema</i> (Teo, pp. 230-242) <b>Forum Post #11:</b> due Monday, May 20 by 9 PM
Week 14 (May 29)	<b>Group 11-Y Presentation</b> on <i>A Better Tomorrow</i> <b>Group 12-Z Presentation</b> on <i>Ash is Purest White</i>  Lecture/Discussion  Research Paper Workshop	<b>Forum Post #12:</b> due Monday, May 27 by 9 PM

**The Research Paper is due on Friday, May 31 by 5PM as a Word document that is uploaded to Blackboard. Late submissions will not be accepted.**

Appendix: Scoring Rubrics

**Weekly Short Response BB Forum Posts**

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|--------|---|
| 3 pts. | Insightful and excellently crafted post on the film and assigned reading.   |
| 2 pts. | Adequately thoughtful post on the film and assigned reading with only minor issues with coherence, clarity, and grammar/structure.                          |
| 1 pt.  | Post lacks accuracy and depth regarding either the film or reading (or both), and/or there are major issues with coherence, clarity, and grammar/structure. |
| 0      | No (or late) submission   |

**Presentation**

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|------------|--|
| 20 pts.    | Presentation offers excellent observations on how the film conforms to (Y Groups) or deviates from (Z Groups) genre conventions as well as providing a thoughtful interpretation of why the film's genre conformity (Y Groups) or genre deviation (Z Groups) is significant.             |
| 18-19 pts. | Presentation offers adequate observations on how the film conforms to or deviates from genre conventions as well as providing an adequate interpretation of why the film's genre conformity or genre deviation is significant. Each member of the group contributes to the presentation. |
| 15-17 pts. | Presentation offers adequate observations on how the film conforms to or deviates from genre conventions but does not provide a sufficient interpretation of why the film's genre conformity or genre deviation is significant.  |
| 10-15 pts. | Presentation lacks adequate observations on how the film conforms to or deviates from genre conventions and does not provide a sufficient interpretation of why the film's genre conformity or genre deviation is significant.   |
| <10 pts.   | The group fails to deliver a presentation or has entirely misunderstood the requirements.  |
- Each member of the group should contribute to the presentation. Any student who doesn't contribute will individually be penalized and receive a zero for the assignment.

*NOTE: Scoring rubrics for the proposal and final paper will be provided on a later date.*