

**Sichuan University – Pittsburgh Institute
HSS 4 / ENGFLM 0400**

**Introduction to Film
Late Spring 2018**

**John Rhym
johnrhym@qq.com**

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.

The goals of the class 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 under the "Course Documents" tab. You are expected to print out the reading assignments and bring them to class on the relevant days.

Screening Policy and Content

As a course that centers on cinema as its primary object of study, several of our classes will be devoted to film screenings. Attendance is required and note-taking is encouraged. Cell phone or laptop usage, along with disruptive behavior, is not allowed.

Moreover, a number of the films that we view this semester contain mature themes and what might be considered as objectionable violence, language, and sexuality. The intention is to raise questions regarding the film's use of such features; however, if you foresee genuine difficulty with viewing potentially disturbing material, please contact me for alternate arrangements.

Grading

Below is a breakdown of the course's grading scale. 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.

Attendance:	10%
Form & Narrative Quiz:	10%
Midterm Essay	20%
Final Exam	20%
Final Essay	40%

Assignments

All essays must be proofread, typed in standard 12-point font (Times New Roman), and double-spaced. Grammatical and formatting errors will result in point deductions. Citation of external sources is not required but highly encouraged.

1. **Form and Narrative Quiz (May 10):** You will be shown various clips and asked to identify specific features of its formal and narrative construction.
2. **Midterm Essay (May 29):** In a minimum of 4 pages, provide an interpretation of any film of your choice. Your paper must employ a cultural analysis and a formal analysis. That is, the paper's interpretive thesis – i.e., main argument – should address the film's representation of cultural identity (e.g., socioeconomic status, gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, age/generation, religion, disability, and so forth), and this thesis should be supported by a close reading of the formal composition (i.e., cinematography, editing, mise-en-scene, and/or sound design) of one or two key shots/scenes in the film. Examples of this will be provided in the first weeks of this term. Your paper should include answers to the following questions.
 - a. What cinematic techniques are employed in the shot(s) or scene(s)?
 - b. How do these cinematic techniques contribute to the film's representation of (and perspective on) cultural identity?
 - i. Is the film criticizing prevalent stereotypes and/or problematic norms, or is the film merely perpetuating them?
 - ii. If the former, then does the film offer a possible corrective or alternative? If the latter, what is the film symptomatic of – i.e., what does the film reveal about the audience that it serves to entertain?
3. **Final Essay (June 28):** In 6-8 pages, revise the midterm essay and expand on it by adding further support to your paper's interpretive thesis regarding the film's representation of cultural identity. That is, in addition to the midterm's formal analysis, the final paper should incorporate any one of the following analytical frameworks (your choice).
 - a. Authorship: Who is the director of the film? How does the film compare stylistically and thematically with the director's oeuvre, and how do these similarities and differences add to your essay's main interpretation?
 - b. History/Nation: When and where was the film produced and/or distributed? How are the film's formal and narrative constructions engendered by and responding to its national, industrial, and historical contexts; and how can an in-depth look at these contexts contribute to your interpretation?
 - c. Genre: What genre can the film be placed in? In what ways does the film preserve the narrative and formal conventions of the genre, and in what ways does the film diverge from them? How do these consistencies with and variations from genre conventions contribute to your interpretation?
4. **Final Exam (TBD)**

Schedule

UNIT I – FORM AND MEANING

May 8: Introduction/Narrative

- Screening
 - Trailer: *Somewhere* (Coppola, 2010)
 - Short: *Snowballs* (Korine, 2011)
- Reading
 - Corrigan, “Chapter Three: Film Terms and Topics for Film Analysis,” *A Short Guide to Writing About Film*, pp. 41-88

May 9: Formal Analysis I

- Screening
 - Clips: *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (Ford, 1962), *Citizen Kane* (Welles, 1941), *Strike* (Eisenstein, 1925), *Breathless* (Godard, 1960)
- Reading
 - Corrigan, “Chapter Three: Film Terms and Topics for Film Analysis,” *A Short Guide to Writing About Film*, pp. 41-88

May 10: Formal Analysis II

- Assignment
 - Form and Narrative Quiz (in-class)

UNIT II – CULTURAL ANALYSIS

May 15: Gender and Institution

- Screening
 - *High School* (Wiseman, 1968)
- Reading
 - Sample Student Essay #1
 - Recommended: Nemes, “Gender and Film,” *Introduction to Film Studies*, pp. 262-296
 - Recommended: Gocsik, Barsam, & Monahan, *Writing About Movies*, pp. 55-58

May 16: Gender and Institution (Discussion)

May 17: Class and Race

- Screening
 - *Attack the Block* (Cornish, 2011)
- Reading
 - Sample Student Essay #2
 - Recommended: Palmer, “*Attack the Block*: Monsters, Race, and Rewriting South London’s Outer Spaces,” *Jump Cut* 56 (Winter 2015):
<https://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc56.2014-2015/PalmerAttackBlock/>
 - Recommended: Gocsik et al., pp. 52-55, 58-60

May 22: Class and Race (Discussion)**May 23: Gender, Sexuality, and Violence**

- Screening
 - A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night (Amirpour, 2014)
- Reading
 - Begley, “Veiling and Vampirism: Imperialism and Resistance in *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night*” *Verge: Journal of Undergraduate Writing*

May 24: Gender, Sexuality, and Violence (Discussion)**UNIT III – HISTORY/NATION****May 29: Cinema and the Holocaust**

- Assignment
 - Midterm Essay (printed copy due at the beginning of class)
- Screening
 - *Night and Fog* (Resnais, 1956)
- Reading
 - Van der Knaap, “The Construction of Memory in *Nuit et Brouillard*,” *Uncovering the Holocaust: The International Reception of Night and Fog*, pp. 7-34
 - Recommended: Gocsik et al., pp. 75-85

May 30: Cinema and the Holocaust (Discussion)**May 31: The Ethics of Historical Representation**

- Screening & Discussion
 - Clip: *Hiroshima mon amour* (Resnais, 1959)
- Reading
 - Midterm Workshop Essay #1

MIDTERM ESSAY WORKSHOPS**June 5: Midterm Workshop I**

- Reading
 - Midterm Workshop Essay #2

June 6: Midterm Workshop II

- Reading
 - Midterm Workshop Essay #3

June 7: Midterm Workshop III

UNIT IV - AUTHORSHIP

June 12: Authorship – Nicolas Winding Refn

- Screening
 - *Drive* (Refn, 2011)
- Reading
 - Rogers and Kiss, “A Real Human Being and a Real Hero: Stylistic Excess, Dead Time, and Intensified Continuity in Nicolas Winding Refn’s *Drive*,” *New Cinemas* 12.1-2 (2014): pp. 43-56
 - Recommended: Pramaggiore and Wallis, “Chapter 14: Film Authorship,” *Film: A Critical Introduction*, pp. 397-414

June 13: Authorship – Nicolas Winding Refn (Discussion)

- Screening
 - Clips: *Bronson* (Refn, 2009), *The Neon Demon* (Refn, 2016)

UNIT V – GENRE

June 14: Politics and the Classical Western

- Screening
 - *High Noon* (Zinnemann, 1952)
- Reading
 - Smyth, “Chapter Three: The Un-American Western,” *Fred Zinnemann and the Cinema of Resistance*, pp. 95-121
 - Recommended: Gocsik, Barsam, & Monahan, pp. 62-74

June 19: Politics and the Classical Western (Discussion)

June 20: The Horror Film in Vietnam-Era Hollywood

- Screening
 - *Night of the Living Dead* (Romero, 1968)
- Reading
 - Harper, “*Night of the Living Dead*: Reappraising an Undead Classic,” *Bright Lights Film Journal* (November 2005): <http://brightlightsfilm.com/night-living-dead-reappraising-undead-classic/>
 - Recommended: Grant, *Film Genre: From Iconography to Ideology*, pp. 52-55

June 21: The Horror Film in Vietnam-Era Hollywood (Discussion)

- Reading
 - Final Workshop Essay #1

FINAL ESSAY WORKSHOP**June 26: Final Workshop I**

- Reading
 - Final Workshop Essay #2

June 27: Final Workshop II**June 28: Special Screening**

- Assignment
 - Final Essay (printed copy due at the beginning of class)