Introduction to Film Art

Fall 2012
T 2-3:15pm and R 2-4:45pm
Island Hall Rm. 157

Professor David Gurney
Office: Bay Hall Rm. 326
Office Hours: T 12:30pm-1:30pm, W 10am-Noon, R 9am-11am & by appointment

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Course Description:
In this course we will be exploring the aesthetics of film art, with some attention to the production process. We will be studying the technical, formal, and stylistic components of different kinds of films in order to gain an informed, critical understanding of the artistic principles of filmmaking. By the end of the course, you should be a more perceptive film viewer, and, if you plan to make films, perhaps a smarter filmmaker.

Student Learning Outcomes:
Upon successful completion of this course, students should be able to:
1. describe each phase of the production process;
2. define and apply specific analytical terms for narrative and non-narrative film forms;
3. identify and analyze the functions of specific stylistic elements, such as cinematography, editing, and sound; and
4. write analytical essays applying concepts of film form and film style; and
5. take part in a group report analyzing the stylistic elements in a film scene.

Required Materials:
» Netflix subscription (www.netflix.com): Most films screened for this class are available to stream instantly on Netflix, so the subscription will be helpful in reviewing the films and when analyzing them. The only exceptions are The Wizard of Oz, Citizen Kane, and Once, which are available on reserve at the library.

Course Policies:
» Attendance is required – both physically and mentally. Unexcused absences will have a direct effect on your final grade for this course, with each one equaling a five-point deduction (out of a possible total of 100 points). Attendance will be taken starting exactly at 2:00 p.m. Arrivals after that time will be considered late. Late arrivals and departures prior to the finish of the class period will count as half-absences, meaning that two of either type will be counted as a full absence.
» You are allowed two fully excused absence throughout the semester. These are to be employed at your discretion but should be used to cover illness, a religious holiday observance, or most any other event or circumstance that causes you to miss class. Only extreme hardship with back-up documentation (e.g., a doctor’s note) will allow for consideration of any additional absences being excused. Classes missed due to university-approved activities (athletic teams, student government, etc.) will also be considered excused. For those absences, please make me aware, and, in addition, I will need official TAMUCC documentation. If appropriate, you may arrange to make up quizzes or exams missed due to excused absences, but it will be your responsibility to get any information from a missed class lecture from one of your classmates.
» All absences not fitting into the excused categories described immediately above, will be considered unexcused. Any work missed due to an unexcused absence cannot be made up.
» Late work will be penalized by ten points (all assignments will be on 100-point scales) for each day it is late.
» While in class, please make sure your cell phone is off and stowed away, even during screenings.
A note on competing media: Laptops are permitted for note taking purposes during lecture only, but please do not abuse this privilege. While you may personally feel capable of multitasking during class while still paying attention to lecture and discussion, your surrounding classmates will more likely find your in-class extracurricular activities distracting, so please, for the sake of your peers, respect this restriction. No laptop use will be permitted during screenings.

A note on film content: Various films shown in this course contain strong language, nudity, sexual situations, violence, controversial subjects, and complex philosophical ideas that might be disturbing to you. I will try to highlight any potentially disturbing material before screenings and if you feel that you will be unable to view a specific film, please speak to be about arranging for an alternative screening.

Please remember to check your Islander email account regularly during the week and monitor the course Blackboard site for any course updates.

If you would like to discuss any course readings, lectures, screenings, or assignments outside of class, you should feel free to contact me via email or by arranging to visit me during my office hours. If you need to schedule a time to meet outside of office hours, please let me know.

All writing for this course must be composed using a standard, 12-point font size, and with standard 1" margins.

**Academic Integrity:**
University students are expected to conduct themselves in accordance with the highest standards of academic honesty. Academic misconduct for which a student is subject to penalty includes all forms of cheating, such as illicit possession of examinations or examination materials, falsification, forgery, complicity or plagiarism. (Plagiarism is the presentation of the work of another as one's own work.) In this class, academic misconduct or complicity in an act of academic misconduct on an assignment or test will result in a failing grade (F) for the assignment, at the very least, or a report to the Chair of the Department of Communication and Theatre, the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts, and the Office of Student Affairs.

For the purposes of citation, please follow Modern Language Association (MLA) Style Guide. For quick reference, see: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/

**Dropping a Class:**
I hope that you never find it necessary to drop this or any other class. However, events can sometimes occur that make dropping a course necessary or wise. Please consult with me before you decide to drop to be sure it is the best thing to do. Should dropping the class be the best course of action, you must initiate the process to drop by going to the Student Services Center and filling out a course drop form. Just stopping attendance and participation WILL NOT automatically result in your being dropped from the class. November 2, 2012, is the last day to drop a class with an automatic grade of “W” this term.

**Classroom/Professional Behavior:**
Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, as an academic community, requires that each individual respect the needs of others to study and learn in a peaceful atmosphere. Under Article III of the Student Code of Conduct, classroom behavior that interferes with either (a) the instructor’s ability to conduct the class or (b) the ability of other students to profit from the instructional program may be considered a breach of the peace and is subject to disciplinary sanction outlined in article VII of the Student Code of Conduct. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior may be instructed to leave the classroom. This prohibition applies to all instructional forums, including classrooms, electronic classrooms, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc.

**Academic Advising:**
The College of Liberal Arts requires that students meet with an Academic Advisor as soon as they are ready to declare a major. The Academic Advisor will set up a degree plan, which must be signed by the student, a faculty mentor, and the department chair. The College’s Academic Advising Center is located in Driftwood 203E, and can be reached at 361.825.3466.
**Notice to Students with Disabilities**
Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act in making reasonable accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. If you need disability accommodations in this class, please see me as soon as possible. Please have your accommodation letter from Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi Disability Services (DS) Office with you when you come see me. If you suspect that you may have a disability (physical impairment, learning disability, psychiatric disability, etc.), please contact the Disability Services Office (located in 116 Corpus Christi Hall) at 361.825.5816.

**Grade Appeal Process:**
As stated in University Rule 13.02.99.C2, Student Grade Appeals, a student who believes that he or she has not been held to appropriate academic standards as outlined in the class syllabus, equitable evaluation procedures, or appropriate grading, may appeal the final grade given in the course. The burden of proof is upon the student to demonstrate the appropriateness of the appeal. A student with a complaint about a grade is encouraged to first discuss the matter with the instructor. For complete details, including the responsibilities of the parties involved in the process and the number of days allowed for completing the steps in the process, see University Rule 13.02.99.C2, Student Grade Appeals, and University Procedure 13.02.99.C2.01, Student Grade Appeal Procedures. These documents are accessible through the University Rules Web site at http://www.tamucc.edu/provost/university_rules/index.html. For assistance and/or guidance in the grade appeal process, students may contact the Office of Student Affairs.

**Grade Scale:**
- A 90-100
- B 80-89
- C 70-79
- D 60-69
- F 59 and below

**Grade Distribution:**
- Attention & Participation (10%): Each student is expected to be attentive toward lecture and willing to participate in class discussion when appropriate. This grade will reflect how well you accomplish these goals.

  **Reminder:** Attendance is required. It is assumed that you will be present for all class meetings and screenings unless you have a valid excuse. Unexcused absences will have a direct effect on your FINAL GRADE (not only the Attention & Participation component) for this course, with each one equaling a five-point deduction (out of a possible total of 100 points).

- Analytical Essays (15% each, 30% total): Two 3-4 page papers will be assigned over the course of the semester. One analyzing film form will be due on Thursday, September 27, and one on film style will be due on Tuesday, November 27. The particulars of these assignments will be discussed well in advance of their due dates.

- Group Scene Analysis: (10%): This group report will focus on a specific scene from a film of your choice. Your goal will be to analyze the use of key stylistic elements in the scene, and each group member should take part in the presentation. These will be discussed well in advance of the presentations which will take place during Week 12.

- Midterm Exam (20%): A midterm exam covering all topics discussed in the first half of the semester will be given in-class on Thursday, October 11.

- Final Exam (30%): A final exam covering topics discussed throughout the semester (with particular emphasis on the second half) will be given on Thursday, December 6.
Course Schedule:
Required readings and homework screenings are to be completed prior to the first class meeting in the week under which they are listed. This schedule is subject to change at the discretion of the professor.

Week 1 (August 23) – Introduction, Course Outline, Screening
Introductions, Review of Syllabus, Preliminary Discussion
In-Class Screening: Adaptation (dir. Spike Jonze, 2002, 114 min.)

Week 2 (August 28 & 30) – Film Art and Filmmaking
Required Reading: FA, Ch. 1. “Film as Art: Creativity, Technology, and Business”
In-Class Screening: The Wizard of Oz (dir. Victor Fleming, 1939, 101 min.)

Week 3 (September 4 & 6) – Film Form
Required Readings: FA, Chapter 2. “The Significance of Film Form”
In-Class Screening: Memento (dir. Christopher Nolan, 2000, 113 min.)

Week 4 (September 11 & 13) – Film Narrative
Required Readings: FA, Chapter 3. “Narrative as a Formal System”
Homework Screening: Reservoir Dogs (dir. Quentin Tarantino, 1992, 99 min.)
In-Class Screening: The Big Lebowski (dir. Joel Coen, 1998, 117 min.)

Week 5 (September 18 & 20) – Film Technique: Mise-en-Scène
Homework Screening: The Thin Red Line (dir. Terrence Malick, 1998, 170 min.)
In-Class Screening: Detour (dir. Edgar Ulmer, 1945, 67 min.)

Week 6 (September 25 & 27) – Film Technique: Cinematography
In-Class Screening: Me and You and Everyone We Know (dir. Miranda July, 2005, 92 min.)
Analytical Essay 1 must be submitted on Blackboard before the beginning of class on 9/27.

Week 7 (October 2 & 4) – Film Technique: Editing
Required Reading: FA, Chapter 6. “The Relation of Shot to Shot: Editing”
In-Class Screening: Punch-Drunk Love (dir. Paul Thomas Anderson, 2002, 95 min.)

Week 8 (October 9 & 11) – Midterm Exam
Tuesday, October 9 will be a review session.
The Midterm Exam will be given in class on Thursday, October 11.

Week 9 (October 16 & 18) – Film Technique: Sound
Required Reading: FA, Chapter 7. “Sound in the Cinema”
In-Class Screening: Citizen Kane (dir. Orson Welles, 1941, 119 min.)

Week 10 (October 23 & 25) – Film Style
Required Reading: FA, Chapter 8. “Summary: Style as a Formal System”
Homework Screening: Drive (dir. Nicolas Winding Refn, 2011, 100 min.)
In-Class Screening: Bicycle Thieves (dir. Vittorio de Sica, 1948, 89 min.)
Week 11 (October 30 & November 1) – Film History
Required Readings: \textit{FA}, Chapter 12. “Film Art and Film History”
\textbf{No official class meeting on November 1 so that groups may meet to make final preparations for scene analysis presentations}

Week 12 (November 6 & 8) – Group Scene Analysis Presentations

Week 13 (November 13 & 15) – Film Genres
Required Readings: \textit{FA}, Chapter 9. “Film Genres”
Homework Screening: \textit{Xanadu} (dir. Robert Greenwald, 1980, 96 min.)
In-Class Screening: \textit{Once} (dir. John Carney, 2006, 85 min.)

Week 14 (November 20) – Experimental and Animated Film
In-Class Screenings: various short form experimental and animated films
\textbf{No class meeting on November 22 in observance of Thanksgiving}

Week 15 (November 27 & 30) – Documentary
In-Class Screening: \textit{Winnebago Man} (dir. Ben Steinbauer, 2009, 85 min.)
Analytical Essay 2 must be submitted on Blackboard before the beginning of class on 11/27.

Week 16 (Tuesday, December 4) – Final Exam Review Session

The Final Exam will be given on Thursday, December 6 from 1:45pm-4:15pm.