COMM-2366.001 Media Forms & COMM-2366.101 Media Forms Lab

Fall 2015
MW 9-9:50am (Class)
MW 10:10-10:50am (Lab/Screening)
Bay Hall Rm. 205

Professor David Gurney Phone: 361-825-5991
Office: Bay Hall Rm. 326 Email: david.gurney@tamucc.edu

Office Hours: T 9am-noon, MW 2-3pm, & by appointment

Course Description:
In this course we will be exploring the aesthetics of media forms that combine moving images and sound – including feature films, television episodes, web videos, etc. We will be studying the technical, formal, and stylistic components of these various formats in order to gain an informed, critical understanding of the artistic principles of mediamaking. By the end of the course, you should be a more perceptive viewer, listener, and, if you plan to produce media content, a smarter maker.

Student Learning Outcomes:
Upon successful completion of this course, students should be able to:
1. define and apply specific analytical terms for narrative and non-narrative media forms;
2. identify and analyze the functions of specific stylistic elements, such as cinematography, editing, and sound;
3. use critical application of concepts of form and style to better understand and describe the function media form in the shaping of content; and
4. prepare and perform a group report analyzing the form and style of a sequence from a piece of media content.

Required Materials:
» Block, B. (2007). The Visual Story: Creating the Visual Structure of Film, TV and Digital Media (2nd edition.). Amsterdam and Boston: Focal Press. (Henceforth referred to as TVS. It is available through the campus bookstore and other online retailers.)
» Netflix subscription (www.netflix.com): Most film and television content screened for this class are available to stream instantly on Netflix, so the subscription will be essential for viewing the films and very helpful when analyzing them.
» All additional readings and screenings will be made available via links on Blackboard

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 25-point deduction (out of a possible total of 1000 points). Attendance will be taken starting exactly at 9:00 a.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 absences 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 a deduction in points equaling ten-percent of the points possible for the assignment for each day it is late. Late work will not be accepted more than 4 days past the original due date.

» While in class, please make sure your cell phone is off and stowed away, even during screenings.

» A note on competing media devices: Laptops are permitted for note taking and reference 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 media content: Various works screened for this course contain strong language, nudity, sexual situations, violence, controversial subjects, and complex philosophical ideas that might be disturbing to you. While I think there is great value to experiencing new (to you) media content with fresh eyes and ears, if you feel that you may be adversely impacted by certain types of content, it may be helpful to read story synopses available on the Internet Movie Database (www.imdb.com), Wikipedia (www.wikipedia.org), or other review websites in order to prepare yourself. If there are particularly acute reactions that you feel you may have, I encourage you to let me know so that I can advise you about any potential trouble spots and, if necessary, arrange for alternative screenings.

» 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. For a more expansive definition of plagiarism please see the relevant passage from the University's student handbook.) 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 Media, the Dean of the School of Arts, Media, and Communication, and the Office of Student Affairs.

» For the purposes of citation, please follow American Psychological Association (APA) Style Guide. For reference, see: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/
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 6, 2015, 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. Degree plans are prepared in the CLA Academic Advising Center. The University uses an online Degree Audit system. Any amendment must be approved by the Department Chair and the Office of the Dean. All courses and requirements specified in the final degree plan audit must be completed before a degree will be granted. The CLA Academic Advising Office is located in Driftwood #203. For more information please call 361-825-3466.

Notice to Students with Disabilities
The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please call or visit Disability Services at (361) 825-5816 in Corpus Christi Hall 116.

If you are a returning veteran and are experiencing cognitive and/or physical access issues in the classroom or on campus, please contact the Disability Services office for assistance at (361) 825-5816.

Grade Appeal Process:
Students who feel that they have not been held to appropriate academic standards as outlined in this class syllabus, equitable evaluation procedures, or appropriate grading, may appeal the final grade given in the course. A student with a complaint about a grade is encouraged to first discuss the matter with the instructor. For complete details on the process of submitting a formal grade appeal, please visit the College of Liberal Arts website, cla.tamucc.edu/students/studentinfo.html. For assistance and/or guidance in the grade appeal process, students may contact the Associate Dean’s office.
Grade Scale:
A  900-1000 points
B  800-899 points
C  700-799 points
D  600-699 points
F  599 points and below

Grade Distribution:
» Attention & Participation (100 points): 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 25-point deduction (out of your possible total of 1000 points).
» Analytical Essays (150 points each, 300 points total): Two 3-4 page papers will be assigned over the course of the semester. One analyzing basic media form will be due on Wednesday, September 30, and one analyzing style of a mediamaker or group of makers will be due on Wednesday, November 25. The particulars of these assignments will be discussed well in advance of their due dates.
» Group “Analysis of a Sequence” Presentation: (100 points): This group report will focus on a specific sequence from a piece of media content 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 (200 points): A midterm exam covering all topics discussed in the first half of the semester will be due via Blackboard on Wednesday, October 13.
» Final Exam (300 points): A final exam covering topics discussed throughout the semester (with particular emphasis on the second half) will be given on TBD.
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. Film screenings may be changed due to Netflix availability.

Week 1 (August 26) – Introduction, Course Outline, Screening
Introductions, Review of Syllabus, Preliminary Discussion
In-Class Screenings: TBD

Week 2 (August 31 & September 1) – Developing a Formal Vocabulary of Visuals: Mise-en-Scene, Cinematography, and Editing
Required Reading:
Yale Film Studies: Film Analysis Web Site 2.0 sections 1-4 (http://classes.yale.edu/film-analysis/)
Homework Screenings:
Mad Men “Smoke Gets in Your Eyes”
Breaking Bad “Pilot”
In-Class Screening:
Take this Waltz (dir. Sarah Polley, 2011, 116 min.)

Week 3 (September 9) – Visual Form: Principles and Space
Required Reading:
TVS, Chapters 1-3 (pp. 1-86)
Homework Screenings:
Jackie Brown (dir. Quentin Tarantino, 1997, 154 min.)
Leave It to Beaver “In the Soup”
Cheers “Truce or Consequences”
 Arrested Development “Pilot”
Louie “Bully”
No class meeting on September 7 for Labor Day

Week 4 (September 14 & 16) – Visual Form: Line, Shape, and Tone
Required Reading:
TVS, Chapters 4 and 5 (pp. 87-134)
Homework Screening:
Days of Heaven (dir. Terrence Malick, 1978, 111 min.)
In-Class Screenings:
Raw Deal (dir. Anthony Mann, 1948, 78 min.);
The Dot and the Line (dirs. Chuck Jones & Maurice Noble, 1965, 10 min.)

Week 5 (September 21 & 23) – Visual Form: Color
Required Reading:
TVS, Chapter 6 (pp. 135-166)
Homework Screening:
Blue Is the Warmest Color (dir. Abdellatif Kechiche, 2013, 179 min.)
In-Class Screening:
Punch-Drunk Love (dir. Paul Thomas Anderson, 2002, 95 min.)
Week 6 (September 28 & 30) – Visual Form: Movement
Required Reading:
TVS, Chapters 7 (pp. 167-196)
Homework Screening:
*Y Tu Mama Tambien* (dir. Alfonso Cuaron, 2001, 105 min.)
In-Class Screening:
*City of God* (dirs. Fernando Meirelles and Kátia Lund, 2002, 129 min.)
Analytical Essay 1 must be submitted on Blackboard before the beginning of class on 9/30.

Week 7 (October 5 & 7) – Visual Form: Rhythm
Required Reading:
TVS, Chapter 8 (pp. 197-220)
Homework Screening:
*Russian Ark* (dir. Aleksandr Sokurov, 2002, 99 min.)
In-Class Screening:

Week 8 (October 12 & 14) – Midterm Exam
Monday, October 12 will be a review session.
The Midterm Exam will be via Blackboard on from noon on Monday, October 12 to noon on Wednesday, October 14.

Week 9 (October 19 & 21) – Sonic Form
Required Readings:
*Yale Film Studies: Film Analysis Web Site 2.0* section 5;
Rene Clair, “The art of sound”;
Shoma A. Chatterji, “The culture-specific use of sound in Indian cinema”
Homework Screening: *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (dir. Aditya Chopra, 1995, 181 min.)

Week 10 (October 26 & 28) – Narrative and Form
Required Reading:
TVS, Chapters 9 & 10 (pp. 221-270)
Homework Screening:
In-Class Screening: *The Usual Suspects* (dir. Bryan Singer, 1995, 106 min.)

Week 11 (November 2 & 4) – Documentary and Form
Required Reading:
Bill Nichols, “What types of documentary are there?”
Homework Screenings:
*Girl Model* (dirs. David Redmon and Ashley Sabin, 2011, 78 min.);
In-Class Screening:
*Monica & David* (dir. Alexandra Codina, 2009, 67 min.)

Week 12 (November 9 & 11) – Group “Analysis of a Sequence” Presentations
Week 13 (November 16 & 18) – Avant-Garde and Form
Required Readings:
“Three Types of Experimental Film”;
Nick Zedd, “The cinema of transgression manifesto”
Homework Screenings:
Garden Path (dirs. Stan Brakhage and Mary Beth Reed, 2001, 7 min.)
Free Radicals: A History of Experimental Film (dir. Pip Chodorov, 2012, 82 min.)
In-Class Screenings:
Assorted shorts, including Ballet Mecanique (dirs. Fernand Leger and Dudley Murphy, 1924, 10 min.)

Required Readings:
Hollis Griffin, “Manufacturing 'massness': Aesthetic form & industry practice in the reality television contest”
Homework Screenings:
Episodes of Project Runway, Keeping Up with the Kardashians
Walk Away Renee (dir. Jonathan Cauvette, 2012, 87 minutes)
A selection of advertisements and trailers
Analytical Essay 2 must be submitted on Blackboard before the beginning of class on 11/25.

Week 15 (November 30) – Other Forms: Web Videos, Mash-Ups, Remixes, GIFs, Supercuts, and More
Required Readings:
David Gurney, “‘It’s Just Like a Mini Mall’: Textuality and Participatory Culture on YouTube.”
Homework Screenings:
Memorex (dir. Smash TV, 2013, 50 min.)
Various short form videos, including installments of Between Two Ferns and Songify This

The Final Exam will be given on TBD.

References:


