English 260: Media Aesthetics
Monday and Wednesday, 12:1-50
McKenzie Hall 214

Instructor: Anthony Hayt
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Office Hours: Tuesday 10-1, and by appointment.

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Course Description and Objectives: English 260 is one of four required courses that make up the Fundamentals of the Cinema Studies major. The course will focus on helping you build the critical skills to understand, analyze, and interpret visual media texts. It will do so by highlighting the fundamental formal elements of film, television, and video games and using this vocabulary, we will explore the complex interplay of technical design, social influence, and cultural conventions that shape our media production and consumption experiences.

Grade Evaluations:

Attendance/Participation: 10%
Viewing Journal: 20%
Shot List and Thesis: 20%

Group Presentation: 10%
Midterm Exam: 20%
Final Exam: 20%

Attendance: Attendance is mandatory. Please be in your seat at the beginning of class, as we will start our films and discussions promptly at 12:00. Interruptions of either can be very distracting, so please be respectful of others if you need to enter or exit the room during the class period. If you do miss a class, you will be responsible for finding the viewing material on your own. Three absences will drop your grade by 10%. A fourth absence will result in a failure for the course without notice. All cell phones must be off and away. You may use laptops to take notes during discussion, but not during screenings. If you are not paying attention because of your laptop, I will ask you to close it. Please do not bring food to class.

Group Presentations: Each group will consist of two people. Each group’s presentation need only be approximately ten minutes long (though many will extend longer), and will consist of video clips, commentary, and questions for discussion. These presentations will help facilitate our class conversations for our Wednesday meetings. One group each week will be responsible for presenting material related to that week’s film; the other group will be responsible for applying each week’s terms, readings, and topics to media other than our in-class screenings. Please see me at least a week ahead of your presentation to discuss particulars.

Viewing Journal: On weeks 3, 5, 7, and 9 you will be required to turn in a short journal entry on Blackboard that reflects on a movie or TV show of your choosing by relating it to the topic being covered in class that week. These assignments will be due by midnight on the Thursday of each week. They should be about a page long, and have a thesis to help direct them.

Shot List: Monday of Week 8, you will have a shot list and thesis/outline due. We will cover the shot list specifics in class during week 5, but in summary, a shot list is a breakdown of all the technical aspects of a film sequence, presented shot by shot, in a spreadsheet type of format. To accompany your shot list, you will write an introduction and thesis to an essay that you would write about your selected clip and how it relates to the film overall, accompanied by an outline of the essay you would write to support your thesis.

Classroom Standards: Our class will be a space of productive thought and inquiry. Please feel free to express any thoughts or comments about our subject matter in a respectful way. Listen to others when they are talking, do not engage in side conversations, and be courteous even when disagreements arise.

All written work should be typed and formatted with 12pt, Times New Roman font, and double-spaced. It should have proper grammar, punctuation, and sentence structure. Failure to present your work as such will be grounds for a reduced grade. All assignments must adhere to standards of academic honesty outlined in the Student Handbook. Plagiarism will result in failure for the course and additional sanctions determined by the director of Student Judicial Affairs. No late work will be accepted unless arrangements are made with me ahead of time. Emailed work will not be accepted.

While I strive to maintain a relaxed attitude in class to help facilitate discussion, I request that your email correspondence with me maintain a professional etiquette. Please use proper spelling and punctuation, and include a greeting and salutation.


Selected Readings from Blackboard

This class will screen media that contains explicit depictions of sex, violence, adult themes, coarse language, and material that many might find offensive. If you think that this might be a problem, please come talk to me about whether we can find a solution, or if this is the best class for you.
Week One: Cinematography
September 26: Introductions, Watch Visions of Light

September 28: Read C/W Chapters 4 and 14.
   Robert Kolker. ‘The Film Text and Film Form.’
   Review syllabus, cover terms, discuss reading, and make film choices.

Week Two: Mise-en-scène

October 5: (Last day to drop w/o ‘W’) Read C/W Chapters 1,2, and 3.
   Jean Oppenheimer. ‘Boys from Brazil.’ American Cinematographer. Vol. 84, no. 2. 2003. 82-90.
   Elsaesser, Thomas. “Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama.” Imitations of Life: A Reader on

Week Three: Editing
October 10: Watch Mulholland Dr. (2001) or The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (1974)

October 12: C/W Chapter 5. Groups 3 and 4 present.

Week Four: Sound
October 17: Watch Y Tu Mama También (2001) or The Talented Mr. Ripley (1999)

October 19: C/W Chapter 6.

Week Five: Midterm, then Documentary and Experimental Film
October 24: Midterm, followed by Exit Through the Gift Shop (2010) or Grey Gardens (1975)

October 26: Read C/W Chapters 8 and 9. Groups 5 and 6 present.

Week Six: Narrative and Genre
October 31: Chungking Express (1994) or The Last House on the Left (1972)

November 2: C/W Chapters 7 and 10. Groups 7 and 8 present.

Week Seven: TV: Systems and Structure
November 7: Selections from The Honeymooners, I Love Lucy, Seinfeld, It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia

November 9: Read Butler Chapter 1. Groups 9, 10, and 11 present. (Nov. 13 is last day to drop)

Week Eight: TV Narrative
November 14: Mad Men, Breaking Bad, or others TBA. Shot List Due.

November 16: Butler Chapter 2. Groups 12, 13, and 14 present.

Week Nine: Beyond Narrative: ‘Reality’ on Television (including commercials)
November 21: Selections from The Office, Arrested Development, Criss Angel Mindfreak and more TBA.

November 23: Butler Chapter 4. Groups 15, 16, and 17 present.

Week Ten: New Media: Visual Language and Intertextuality/Animation
November 28: Readings and Media TBA.

November 30: Butler Chapter 11. Animation selections and closing thoughts. Groups 18, 19, and 20 present.

Final Exam: 10:15 Friday, December 9. There will be no exceptions or re-scheduling.