Films are texts that can be read many different ways. This is obvious when we think of how often we have stood in the lobby of a theater and overheard conflicting opinions from people who have just seen the same film. Some loved it, some hated it, some found it just OK. Perhaps we’ve thought, “What do they know? Maybe they just didn’t get it.” What thrills one person may bore or offend another. Disagreements, however, can reveal a great deal about the assumptions underlying our various responses.

The assumptions I am speaking of are often tied to cultural norms and ideological pillars that structure our social world. Films are products of these ideologies; they reflect aspects of our culture back to us. If a film reflects ideas that we disagree with, we may react one way toward it; if it reflects ideas we support, we may react another.

But films do much more than simply relay ideas. They are products created (most often) by large groups of people. They involve highly specialized technical skills, rely on complex marketing strategies, and encourage multi-media cultural interactions. They are economic products that, when successful, make us react emotionally, physically, and intellectually. Films use a language of their own making that must be interpreted within the framework of art, narrative, and culture.

This course has two main objectives. The first is to introduce you to the language needed to understand, talk about, and decipher the way films are made. The language of editing, cinematography, mise-en-scene, sound, and narrative will become the tools we will use to discuss our texts for this class. We will use the language we learn about the technical aspects of film making to consider how meaning is made through images and sound. The second objective is to learn about various lenses through which we can view films in terms of their cultural production. We will consider the ways that aspects of gender, class, and race impact which films are made, what ideological norms they portray, and how we read them. We will approach this objective of the class from a cultural studies perspective that assumes that all of culture is tied together through ideological systems that are constantly in flux.


Grade Evaluations:

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<tr>
<th>Category</th>
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<tr>
<td>Attendance/Participation</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Viewing Journal</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shot List and Thesis</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Terms Quiz</td>
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<td>Midterm Exam</td>
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<td>Final Exam</td>
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Attendance: Attendance is mandatory. Please be in your seat at the beginning of class, as we will start our films and discussions promptly when class starts. 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. You have two absences that you may use for any reason without penalty. It does not matter whether they are used for illness, travelling, or fun. Three absences will drop your grade by one letter grade. A fourth absence will result in a failure for the course without notice. Three late entries to class will count as an absence. If you come to class after attendance has been taken, it is your responsibility to tell me, after class, that you are in attendance. If you do not, you will be considered absent. Extremely early departure or repeated disruptions will also count as an absence.

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.

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 the topic being covered in class that week. I will provide a prompt on Blackboard, to which you will respond, about a week before the due date of each journal. These assignments will be due by midnight on the Thursday of each week. They should be about 300 words long, and have a strong thesis to help direct the argument you are presenting.

Shot List: On Wednesday 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. Disrespectful comments will not be tolerated and, at minimum, you will be asked to leave class immediately.
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. Do not turn in work prepared for other classes. Document all sources consulted in preparing your work, including movies, websites and other material obtained on the Internet. If in doubt, document. 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.

If you have a disability which you believe may affect your performance in this course, please see or contact me the first week of the term so we can make the necessary arrangements for your fullest access to the course and its activities, including screenings, exams, and discussions.

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. Email that does not follow this format will not get a response, no matter how important it is.

** 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 perhaps another section of 110 might be a better fit for you. **

WEEK ONE: INTRO: WHY FILMS STUDIES?
M 1-9 Introduction and film terms.
W 1-11 Read Chapters 15 and 1. Begin screening: Vertigo (Hitchcock 1958)

WEEK TWO: FORMAL TECHNIQUES, VISUAL LANGUAGE
M 1-16 NO CLASS
W 1-18 Read Chapter 3 and Blackboard (Modleski). Finish Vertigo. FILM TERMS QUIZ

WEEK THREE: THE AUTHOR, AUTEUR THEORY, AND REALISM
M 1-23 Screening: Rope (Hitchcock 1948)
W 1-25 Read Chapters 4 and 11. JOURNAL ONE

WEEK FOUR: NARRATIVE
M 1-30 Screening: Touki Bouki (Mambéty 1973)
W 2-1 Read Chapter 2.

WEEK FIVE: GENRE: FILM NOIR AND MELODRAMA
M 2-6 Screening: Blue Velvet (Lynch 1986)
W 2-8 Read Chapter 5 and Blackboard (Shrader). JOURNAL TWO

WEEK SIX: REVIEW AND MIDTERM
M 2-13 Review for midterm
W 2-15 MIDTERM

WEEK SEVEN: GENDER AND RACE
M 2-20 Screening: In the Cut (Campion 2003)
W 2-22 Read Chapters 12 and 13. JOURNAL THREE

WEEK EIGHT: CLASS
M 2-27 Screening: The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (Hooper 1974)
W 2-29 Read Chapter 14. (Wood and Staiger) SHOT LIST/THESIS/OUTLINE DUE TODAY

WEEK NINE: SERIES, SEQUALS, AND REMAKES
M 3-5 Screening: The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (Nispel 2003)
W 3-7 Read Chapter 6 and Blackboard (Kermode). JOURNAL FOUR

WEEK TEN: GLOBALIZATION
M 3-12 Screening: Y tu mamá también (Cuarón 2001)
W 3-14 Read Chapter 16 and Blackboard (Acevedo-Munoz and Cuarón).

FINAL EXAM: Wednesday, March 21 at 3:15. There will be no rescheduling or make-up exams given.