ENGLISH 260: MEDIA AESTHETICS

Course Objectives: This course aims to develop your media literacy by providing you with a precise set of critical tools for analyzing photographic, cinematic and televisual texts. Although our primary focus will be on the formal analysis of image and sound rather than media history or social issues, we will study the interplay between artistic, economic, and social conventions and the role of ideology in shaping the meaning of texts. We will view and critique numerous film and television clips, as well as several feature-length films. Panel presentations will enable students to shape course content by choosing media clips that illustrate concepts covered by readings and lectures. While not oriented toward the technical or industrial aspects of media production, the course builds skills that are beneficial to both media producers and consumers.

In addition to a Blackboard account, the following materials are also required:
Looking at Movies, 3rd Ed., Barsam/Monahan + DVD Set + Writing about Movies (2010)

Evaluation:
1. Participation and Presentation 10%
2. Discussion Board Posts (x10) 15%
3. Vocabulary Worksheet and shot list 10%
4. Formal sequence analysis and shot list 25%
5. Exams (x3) 40%

Attendance, late work and other policies: No incompletes will be given and no late papers accepted unless you contact me in advance about a serious illness or family emergency that can be verified. Three absences will lower your grade by one-third letter, without notice. Four absences will lower your grade by one letter, without notice. Five absences will result in failure for the course. Frequent tardiness will be counted as an absence. Get notes from classmates and email me if you miss class.

This is an English Department course, as such your writing will meet the highest standards. Unless otherwise noted, all work must be typed, in 12 point Times New Roman, one-inch margins.

Each Tuesday by noon post a 600-word response to the week’s readings & accompanying dvd clips.

You will prepare two group presentations during the term. Take advantage of these opportunities to prepare creative projects that illustrates your group’s understanding of the topic.

Active participation is required. To facilitate discussion, read the assigned material before class. You are also required to attend one outside film screening or lecture on campus this term.

Fair warning: this course contains R rated films. See me immediately if this is a problem for you.

If you have a documented disability and anticipate needing accommodations in this course please meet with me as soon as possible to make necessary arrangements for your success in this course.

Academic honesty: All assignments must adhere to standards of academic honesty outlined in the Student Handbook. Documented plagiarism will result in course failure and additional sanctions.
Course Schedule

**Week 1: Cinematography**
- **T** Introduction and *Visions of Light* (AFI, 1992); Post reading response by noon on Thursday
- **Th** Discussion: B/M: Chapters 1 & 2 (+ accompanying DVD clips) + PDF: “Visual Grammar”

**Week 2: Genre and Narrative**
- **T** Discussion: B/M: Chapters 3 & 4 + PDF: “The Shot Tells the Story”
- **Th** *The Great Train Robbery* (1903) and *Tabu* (1931);

**Week 3: Mise en Scène and Cinematography**
- **T** Discussion: B/M: Chapters 5 & 6, *Groups 1 & 2 on mise en scene and cinematography*
- **Th** *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, 1941), **Shot List #1 Due**

**Week 4: Performance & Editing**
- **T** Discussion: B/M: Chapters 7 & 8 + PDF: “Montage”; followed by **Exam 1**
- **Th** *Manhattan* (Woody Allen, 1980)

**Week 5: Sound and Production**
- **T** Discussion: B/M: Chapter 9 + 11, *Groups 3 & 4 on sound and editing*
- **Th** *Black Hawk Down* (Ridley Scott, 2001)

**Week 6: Film History**
- **T** Discussion: B/M: Chapter 10 + Writing about Film Booklet
- **Th** **Exam 2**, followed by *Meng ying tong nian* (*Electric Shadows*) (Jiang Xiao, 2004)

**Week 7: Documentary and Avant-garde Film**
- **T** Discussion: PDFs: “EcoCinema”; **Shot list #2 draft and essay introduction w/ thesis due**
- **Th** *Wot the Ancient Sod, sleep furiously, Koyaanisqatsi, “Cruel Camera”* (CBC Television)

**Week 8: TV: Narrative and Non-Narrative**
- **T** Discussion: Butler 1 **Shot list and Formal Analysis Essay due**
- **Th** Discussion: Butler 2 & 3: *Groups 5 & 6 on sit-coms & reality TV*

**Week 9: Non-Narrative TV; More TV Genres**
- **T** Discussion: Butler 4 & 5, *Groups 7 & 8 on news and sports*
- **Th** Discussion: Butler 11 & 12; *Groups 9 & 10 on commercials and cartoons*

**Week 10: Conclusions**
- **T** New Media: Readings TBA, Final Discussion Board Post Due
- **Th** **Exam 3**

**Finals Week:** Revised Formal Analysis Essays & Shot Lists Due Monday at 5pm to PLC 274