

HUM 524/624: Special Topics in Film Study
Film Theory: Image, Reality, Perception
Spring 2014, Tues., 4:00pm – 6:45pm, Belknap, LF 102

Instructor: L. Andrew Cooper (lacoop05@louisville.edu)
Bingham 201A (502-852-8820), Humanities (502-852-6805)
Office Hours: Tu 2:30 – 3:30pm, W 3 – 4pm, and by appointment

Course Description

Enrollment in HUM 524 requires junior standing.

U of L's course catalog specifies that HUM 524 or HUM 624 is "an in-depth study on a specific topic" that "may be repeated up to three times for different topics." This course's topic is "film theory," which, as your professor (hereafter "I") sees it, is a convenient term for a collection of ideas that lead to methods for understanding film's significance. Film theory is basically a bucket of books about movies, and so is this class. I made a mental list of the books I think are fundamental to the way academics study film, and then I picked some that

- (1) follow a trajectory related to developing ideas about the relation between film and questions of ontology, epistemology, and phenomenology as well as
- (2) provide a survey but with depth; you might note that all of these books' authors appear in my textbook for my 300-level survey, although I didn't assign them all, in part because
- (3) I don't know them well enough to come to every class with strong notions about where our analyses of these texts and films will take us.

This class is an exercise in fishing in the bucket together.

Course Materials

Required Texts

Assigned texts are available at campus bookstores and elsewhere, in new, used, and electronic editions. With the exception of Cavell's *The World Viewed*, for which you need the *expanded* version, I am unaware of major differences in editions that would cause problems serious enough to pay full price for all the newest editions (if doing so is unattractive).

Films

Most or all of the movies are or will soon be on reserve at Ekstrom, most or all are at Wild and Woolly to rent, and you can stream most or all from Hulu (which has Criterion films, and everything on my list released through 1965 is available via Criterion), and Amazon. *Looking for Langston* may be difficult to find; if so, we may set up an out-of-class screening. Although you are not required to purchase copies of the films, you will need copies you can use for screen shots to include in papers and other assignments. I also recommend seeing the films in groups. Solo viewing has recently become more common, but film is still an intrinsically social art form, so seeing the films with others might enhance your appreciation.

Computer and Software

You need a computer with word processing and presentation software, such as Microsoft Word and Microsoft PowerPoint. You also need a media player capable of capturing still images from films, such as

the VLC media player, which is available online to download for free. Digital editing software such as Final Cut and Premiere is useful but not required because you can access it at Ekstrom Library’s Digital Media Suite. You must also regularly check your U of L email and review materials on this class’s Blackboard site. Portable computing devices (e.g. laptops) are useful in class but not required.

Additional Materials

Some assignments might call for additional materials that involve additional expense. For example, the Theory in Practice assignment requires creating a video. You may check out cameras for free at the library, but you might need to buy your own memory card(s) and blank DVD(s).

Outcomes

The table below details the learning outcomes associated with this course. Emphases are not mutually exclusive. For example, virtually all outcomes relate directly or indirectly to critical thinking.

Emphasis	Outcomes
<p>Rhetoric Filmmakers and film critics use specific vocabulary and techniques to make meaning from sounds and images. Films also function as rhetorical interventions in cultural discourses.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply theories and critical perspectives through arguments that explain how others’ claims support original theses about specific films. Students in 624 should demonstrate some mastery of relevant disciplinary trends. • Analyze the development of book-length arguments in comparison to excerpts and essays. Students in 624 should help humanize “theorists” by discussing their own work with long-form arguments. • Participate in discussions that develop “theoretical” (analytic/synthetic) thinking. Students in 624 should use rhetoric appropriate for professional forums (such as scholarly publication).
<p>Culture, History, and Genre Films reflect the diverse cultures that produce and receive them, and they relate to the history of film as a whole as well as the conventions of specific film genres.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interpret specific books in relation to their immediate historical and cultural contexts, and determine how that relation affects application of their ideas to cultural artifacts (historical and contemporary) today. • Consider “theory” as a genre of writing as well as a genre of filmmaking. • Understand film history within a broader context of mediated expression. Students in 624 should connect texts and perspectives, as relevant, to their thesis/dissertation specializations.
<p>Critical Thinking Understanding and interpreting films requires both attention to details (such as frames and shots) and attention to larger structures (such as sequences and diegesis).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyze how ideas and exemplary analyses from influential arguments evolve into methods, methodologies, and disciplines. Students in 624 should relate their work to methods and methodologies in their fields. • Synthesize books and films by considering whether films have privileged or special relationships with the philosophical concerns underlying both • Critique films from the multiple perspectives provided by course books, from peers, and from personal insights. Students in 624 should relate critiques to disciplinary concerns and perspectives as well.

Assignments

Major Assignments (800 points total)

The outcomes in the table above refer to the following major assignments, which we will discuss in more detail during class:

1. **The Blog Mind (individual effort, 100 points, 10 posts, 10 points each):** Due before class on the date listed, each entry should (1) Ask at least two questions about the most recently assigned reading you *legitimately want answered in order to help you understand* [if you understand everything, say so, but kindly answer at least two questions posted by others by commenting on their blog posts]; (2) Either answer *ALL* unanswered questions posted earlier or explain *why* you don’t understand each specific question either; (3) Briefly discuss two ways you could relate the reading to *any* assigned film. Note that this assignment gets bigger the longer you wait to do it.

2. **Proselytizing (group effort, 100 points).** Sign up for a week in which you will join two other students in a presentation that highlights key ideas from the week's assigned readings and films. Present ideas informally (about 10 minutes) and then lead discussion (about 10 more minutes, longer if it goes well). The presentation should combine visuals (such as a PowerPoint or Prezi) with oral argument (feel free to critique the ideas you present). The discussion leadership should draw explicitly from classmates' postings for the Blog Mind assignment. Before giving your presentation, meet with me at an appointed time to discuss your ideas.
3. **Theory in Practice (group effort, 200 points).** In a group of three students, create a 5-minute video that demonstrates your reactions either to an assigned book or to the combination of an assigned book with an assigned film. You may use a documentary (which might apply theoretical claims to analyzed scenes from a specific film), fictional (which might put a theory into action), or experimental style (which might do something I can't presently predict, but be sure to get my approval first). While your group must collaborate on the video's production, each individual should submit a short paper that argues for the video's theoretical significance.
4. **The First Step (individual effort, 400 points).** This is the obligatory Big Essay assignment. In 524, write ~2500 words; in 624, write ~ 5000 words. Topics for 524 should involve either an extended critique/response of/to a single author/work or an application of a set of ideas to an assigned film. Topics for 624 should involve ideas of assigned authors and relate to work on the thesis/dissertation. Students in 624 must have a conference with the professor about the paper (sooner is better). Conferences for students in 524 are optional but encouraged.

Participation (200 points total)

Participation in class discussions and activities is mandatory. Demonstrate your knowledge of the readings and films, and share your insights. Maintaining class decorum is part of participation: noisy cell phones, disrespectful behavior, and other intrusions lower productivity and, therefore, your grade. "Disrespectful behavior" includes harassment of any kind, directed either at peers or at the instructor. This course will foster discussions of sensitive issues such as gender, race, and sexuality. All viewpoints are welcome, but as individuals express themselves, they should avoid abusive or insulting language.

Course Policies

Grading

Each assignment has a point value. Assignments add up to a total of 1000 points. The following list shows the letter grades linked to percentages of available points earned, with a description of the work:

- A** (90-100), Exceeds expectations for argument, evidence, organization, and design
- B** (80-89), Meets expectations, with notable merit in some of the categories listed above
- C** (70-79), Meets expectations
- D** (60-69), Meets most expectations, with some problems or omissions
- F** (0-59), Meets few expectations, with significant problems or omissions

Failure to complete an assignment will result in 0 points. +/- grades are +/- 3 points from the center of the grade's range. For example, a 95 is an A, a 98 is an A+, and a 92 is an A-. When assignments are the same, students enrolled in 624 face a higher standard than students enrolled in 524.

Attendance

Attendance is required. If you must miss class, email me ahead of time. You have only two “freebie” days, classes you may miss without grade penalties. For other absences, you must have made a prior arrangement with me or have official documentation of an illness, injury, legal obligation, or university-sponsored activity or event that keeps you from class. I will deduct 25 points from your grade for each non-freebie, undocumented absence. Being late to class counts as at least a third of an absence, depending on how late you are. Showing up late is usually better than not showing up. *Missing more than 25% of our class meetings for any reason could result in automatic failure.*

Punctual Work

Unless I approve a deadline extension in advance, I am unlikely to accept major assignments after the deadline. You are responsible for all information during every class meeting.

Academic Conduct

Academic dishonesty is prohibited at the University of Louisville. It is a serious offense because it diminishes the quality of scholarship, makes accurate evaluation of student progress impossible, and defrauds those in society who must ultimately depend upon the knowledge and integrity of the institution and its students and faculty. For more information, see the [Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities](#) (Sections 5 and 6).

Using Laptop Computers and Other Digital Devices

You may only use your laptop and other digital devices for class activities and note-taking. Using such devices during class for other activities—such as email, web-surfing, social media, or games—is rude and strictly prohibited. Inappropriate device use may result in grade penalties and/or expulsion from class.

Access

The University of Louisville is committed to providing access to programs and services for qualified students with disabilities. If you are a student with a disability and require accommodation to participate and complete requirements for this class, notify me immediately and contact the Disability Resource Center (Stevenson Hall, Room 119, 852-6938) for verification of eligibility and determination of specific accommodations.

Religious Holy Days and Observances

If your religious observances might require an adjustment in course work, please submit your request(s) to me in writing during the first two weeks of the semester.

Sexual Harassment

The University of Louisville strives to maintain the campus free of all forms of illegal discrimination as a place of work and study for faculty, staff, and students. Sexual harassment is unacceptable, and unlawful conduct and will not be tolerated in the workplace and the educational environment. Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment, even when carried out through computers or other electronic communications systems. See the [Affirmative Action policy](#), the [Student Code of Conduct](#), and the U of L [Computer Account Usage Agreement](#).

Diversity

The University of Louisville strives to foster and sustain an environment of inclusiveness that empowers us all to achieve our highest potential without fear of prejudice or bias. We commit ourselves to building an exemplary educational community that offers a nurturing and challenging intellectual climate, a respect for the spectrum of human diversity, and a genuine understanding of the many differences—

including race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity/expression, sexual orientation, age, socioeconomic status, disability, religion, national origin or military status—that enrich a vibrant metropolitan research university. We expect every member of our academic family to embrace the underlying values of this vision and to demonstrate a strong commitment to attracting, retaining and supporting students, faculty and staff who reflect the diversity of our larger society.

The Fine Print

I reserve the right to alter this syllabus when necessary to meet learning objectives, to compensate for missed classes, or for similar reasons. I exercise this right rarely, but I often provide more detailed information during class. This syllabus is your guide. Keep it. Know it. Love it.

Schedule of Meetings and Assignments

NOTE: Viewing and reading should be completed *prior* to the class meeting for which they are indicated.

Week	Reading and Viewing Assignments	Due Dates
Wed., Jan. 8	[Intro]	
Wed., Jan. 15	Arnheim, <i>Film as Art</i> , with <i>The Gold Rush</i> (Chaplin, 1925)	Blog Mind 1
Wed., Jan. 22	Bazin, <i>What is Cinema? Vol. 1.</i> , with <i>The Passion of Joan of Arc</i> (Dreyer, 1928)	Blog Mind 2 Proselytizing 1
Wed., Jan. 29	Kracauer, <i>Theory of Film</i> , with <i>La Strada</i> (Fellini, 1954)	Blog Mind 3 Proselytizing 2
Wed., Feb. 5	Kracauer, <i>Theory of Film</i> , with <i>La Strada</i> (Fellini, 1954)	Blog Mind 4 Proselytizing 3
Wed., Feb. 12	Cavell, <i>The World Viewed</i> , with <i>Alphaville</i> , (Godard, 1965)	Blog Mind 5 Proselytizing 4
Wed., Feb. 19	De Lauretis, <i>Alice Doesn't</i> , with <i>Secretary</i> (Shainberg, 2002)	Blog Mind 6 Proselytizing 5
Wed., Feb. 26	Mercer, <i>Welcome to the Jungle</i> [selections TBA], with “Thriller” and <i>Looking for Langston</i> (Julien, 1989)	Blog Mind 7 Proselytizing 6
Wed., Mar. 5	Staiger, <i>Media Reception Studies</i> , with <i>Mulholland Drive</i> (Lynch, 2001)	Blog Mind 8 Proselytizing 7
Wed., Mar. 12	SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS	
Wed., Mar. 19	Staiger, <i>Media Reception Studies</i> , with <i>Mulholland Drive</i> (Lynch, 2001)	Theory in Practice Due
Wed., Mar. 26	Deleuze, <i>Cinema 2: The Time-Image</i> , with <i>Last Year at Marienbad</i> (Resnais, 1961)	Blog Mind 9
Wed., Apr. 2	Deleuze, <i>Cinema 2: The Time-Image</i> , with <i>Last Year at Marienbad</i> (Resnais, 1961)	Blog Mind 10 Proselytizing 8
Wed., Apr. 9	Rodowick, <i>The Virtual Life of Film</i> , with <i>Gravity</i> (Cuaron, 2013)	
Wed., Apr. 16	[conclusion]	The First Step Due

PLEASE READ, SIGN, AND RETURN THESE STATEMENTS TO DR. COOPER.

I affirm that I have read the entire syllabus and policy sheet for HUM 524/624 and understand the information and the responsibilities specified.

print name

signature

date

DIRECTIONS: Read carefully and check all that apply.

- I give my instructor, Dr. L. Andrew Cooper, permission to use copies of the work I do for this course as examples in this and other courses, as examples in presentations, and in print and electronic publications. I understand that permission is optional and will have no influence on my grade.
- I only give my instructor, Dr. L. Andrew Cooper, permission to use copies of the *collaborative* work I do in this course, such as documents and videos I create through cooperation with other students. I understand that permission is optional and will have no influence on my grade.
- I do NOT give my instructor, Dr. L. Andrew Cooper, permission to use copies of the work I do for this course as examples in this and other courses, as examples in presentations, and in print and electronic publications. I understand that permission is optional and will have no influence on my grade.

Please indicate whether you want to be acknowledged if your work is used:

- Please use my name in association with my work.
- Please use my work, but do NOT acknowledge me.

If your instructor decides to use your work, he may wish to contact you. Please provide your contact information below:

print name

signature

email address

phone number

print permanent address

Date