

HUM 524: Special Topics in Film Study
Film Theory: Critical Perspectives on (Mostly) Major Works
Spring 2012, TR, 11:00am – 12:15pm, Belknap, HM 221

Instructor: L. Andrew Cooper (lacoop05@louisville.edu)
Bingham 201A (502-852-8820), Humanities (502-852-6805)
Office Hours: T/R 10am – 11am, 2:30 – 3:30pm, and by appointment

Course Description

Enrollment in HUM 524 requires junior standing.

U of L's course catalog specifies that HUM 524 is "an in-depth study on a specific topic" that "may be repeated up to three times for different topics." This course focuses on film theory and criticism, reading essays about what film is and how films convey or create meaning. We will also watch films to which the ideas in these essays may or may not apply—while the selected films might help to illustrate essayists' claims, they might also challenge those claims and provoke alternative visions. Ultimately, this course advocates no particular theory. It gives you a foundation to approach films critically and to formulate theories of your own.

Course Materials

Required Textbook

Critical Visions in Film Theory, ed. Timothy Corrigan and Patricia White, with Meta Mazaj. Boston: Bedford / St. Martin's, 2011.

Films

The films we watch and discuss in this course are readily available to rent, stream, or buy, and some of them might be available on reserve at the library. 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 iMovie and Final Cut 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 Theoretical Visions 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 DVDs.

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
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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate comprehension and mastery of theoretical articulations of film's semantic processes, including conceptions of film as a language (as well as possible challenges to such conceptions). • Apply theories and critical perspectives through arguments that explain how others' claims support original theses about specific films. • Articulate distinct understandings of what film is and how it works.
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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyze and explain constructions of "culture," "history," and "genre" as they relate to and are informed by film. • Discuss how identities—including categories such as race, ethnicity, sex, gender, sexuality, nation, and class—emerge through film discourse. • Interpret films' significance in relation to specific historical and cultural contexts as well as historically- and culturally- inflected theories.
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).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyze films through papers, presentations, and web pages. • Critique the language and claims of film theorists and critics, considering strategies for creating plausible and authoritative visions. • Critique films as purveyors of, reflections on, and challenges to specific ideologies. • Synthesize perspectives and information through unified theoretical arguments

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 Blogosphere: Everyone's a Critic (weekly individual effort, 10 blog posts at 20 points each, 10 blog responses at 10 points each, 300 points total).** In Blackboard's blogging tool, respond to the week's film and reading assignments. By Thursday's meeting you should post your own blog entry (about 250 words) that shares your reactions and makes a claim about the (lack of) validity, value, and/or sense you find in that week's film(s) and essays. By the following Tuesday's meeting, respond to a classmate's blog entry (about 100 words), explaining why you agree or disagree with a specific point.
2. **Theory in Practice (group effort, 100 points).** Sign up for a week in which you will join two other students in a presentation that explains how the week's assigned readings do and/or do not apply to the week's assigned film. Present your own ideas informally (about 10 minutes) and then lead discussion (about 10 more minutes). The presentation should combine visuals (such as a PowerPoint or Prezi) with oral argument. Before giving your presentation, meet with me at an appointed time to discuss your ideas.
3. **Theoretical Visions (group and individual efforts, 200 points total).** In a group of three students, create a 5-minute video that examines a specific theory or school of thought. 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 your instructor can't presently predict, but be sure to get his 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. **Summa Theo-Filmica (individual effort, 200 points).** Write an essay (about 1500 words) that articulates your own theory of what film is and how it makes meaning. Your theory should relate to others we have discussed during the semester. Cite and analyze assigned readings to show how you would combine, qualify, and/or challenge others' ideas to support your own. At least a week before the due date, submit an abstract of your essay and discuss it with me through email or a face-to-face meeting.

Participation (200 points total)

Participation in class discussions and activities is mandatory. Demonstrate your knowledge of the readings and films, and share your insights. During class on unannounced (but usually predictable) occasions, you will complete quizzes that assess your knowledge of assigned readings. 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-.

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, which is unlikely but possible, I will not accept major assignments after the deadline. You are responsible for all information covered 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: Names followed by numbers refer to authors and pages in *Critical Visions in Film Theory*.

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

Week	Reading and Viewing Assignments	Due Dates
Tue., Jan. 10	[Intro] "Mothlight" (Brakhage, 1963, in class)	
Thurs., Jan. 12	<i>Man with a Movie Camera</i> (Vertov, 1929) Vertov, 257 – 261; Eisenstein, 262 – 278	
Tue., Jan. 17	<i>Metropolis</i> (Lang, 1927) Kuleshov, 135 – 144; Comolli & Narboni, 478 - 486	
Thurs., Jan. 19	Arnheim, 279 – 289; Kracauer, 289 – 308	Blog 1 (all), Presentation (group 1)
Tue., Jan. 24	<i>Modern Times</i> (Chaplin, 1936); Bazin, 309 – 325	Blog Response 1 (all)
Thurs., Jan. 26	Benjamin, 229 – 252 Adorno & Horkheimer, 1015 – 1031	Blog 2 (all), Presentation (group 2)
Tue., Jan. 31	<i>Lessons of Darkness</i> (Herzog, 1992) Grierson, 657 – 667	Blog Response 2 (all)
Thurs., Feb. 2	<i>Helvetica</i> (Hustwit, 2007); Trinh, 691- 704	Blog 3 (all)
Tue., Feb. 7	<i>Night of the Hunter</i> (Laughton, 1955) Metz, 17 – 33	Blog Response 3 (all)
Thurs., Feb. 9	Baudry, 34 – 45	Blog 4 (all), Presentation (group 3)
Tue., Feb. 14	<i>Vertigo</i> (Hitchcock, 1958); Freud, 708 – 713	Blog Response 4 (all)
Thurs., Feb. 16	Mulvey 715 – 725; Modleski, 375 – 386	Blog 5 (all), Presentation (group 4)
Tue., Feb. 21	<i>Alphaville</i> (Godard, 1965); Aristotle 446 – 453	Blog Response 5 (all)
Thurs., Feb. 23	Schatz 453 - 465; Altman, 487 – 496	Blog 6 (all), Presentation (group 5)
Tue., Feb. 28	<i>Poison</i> (Haynes, 1991); Bordwell, 558 – 573	Blog Response 6 (all)
Thurs., Mar. 1	Rich, 767 – 774; Williams 774 – 788	Blog 7 (all), Presentation (group 6) LAST DAY TO WITHDRAW
Tue., Mar. 6	<i>The Descent</i> (Marshall, 2005)	Blog Response 7 (all)
Thurs., Mar. 8	Dyer, 465 – 478; Clover, 511 – 530	Blog 8 (all), Presentation (group 7)
Tue., Mar. 13	SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS	
Thurs., Mar. 15	SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS	
Tue., Mar. 20	<i>Decameron</i> (Pasolini, 1971) Sarris, 354 – 361; Wollen 361 – 375	Blog Response 8 (all)
Thurs., Mar. 22	ONLINE ACTIVITY: no meeting Barthes, 345 – 349; Corrigan 416 – 429; Christensen 429 – 440	[complete online activity]
Tue., Mar. 27	<i>Adaptation</i> (Jonze, 2002)	
Thurs., Mar. 29	Todorov, 534 – 541; Stam 541 – 557	Theoretical Visions (all groups)
Tue., Apr. 3	<i>Eve's Bayou</i> (Lemmons, 1997); Diawara 594 – 609	
Thurs., Apr. 5	Shohat and Stam 800 – 822; Bambara 871 – 886	Blog 9 (all), Presentation (group 8)
Tue., Apr. 10	<i>The Matrix</i> (Wachowskis, 1999) Nakamura 1041 – 1058	Blog Response 9 (all)
Thurs., Apr. 12	Jameson, 1031 – 1041; Jenkins, 618 – 644	Blog 10 (all), Essay Abstract (all)
Tue., Apr. 17	<i>Run, Lola, Run</i> (Tykwer, 1998) Manovich, 1058 – 1070	Blog Response 10 (all)
Thurs., Apr. 19	Rodowick 1109 – 1126	Summa Theo-Filmica (all)

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 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