

# Humanities 324: Approaches to Film Interpretation

## Fall 2014, M, 5:30pm – 8:00pm, Belknap, HM 117

Instructor: L. Andrew Cooper (lacoop05@exchange.louisville.edu)  
Bingham 201A (502-852-8820), Humanities (502-852-6805)  
Office Hours: M/W 1pm-2pm and by appointment

### Course Description

*Enrollment in HUM 324 requires sophomore standing.*

The catalog describes this course as an “in-depth study of the structural, thematic, and historical elements of film as an art form, providing a range of approaches to interpreting films in cultural contexts.” It focuses on principles of film criticism and “theory” by pairing exemplary films with essays about what film is and how films convey or create meaning. Together, these films and essays will give you not one but many approaches to interpreting and thinking critically about film. As an academic discipline, film studies draws on methods from the fine arts, literature, and theater as well as psychology, sociology, anthropology, and various forms of political critique. These different disciplinary approaches sometimes combine harmoniously, and sometimes they don’t: as you learn different approaches, you can test new combinations of ideas and develop approaches of your own as a way of shaping your voice as a scholar.

### 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*

YOU MUST WATCH ASSIGNED FILM ON YOUR OWN. You may rent (Wild and Woolly has most or all of them), stream, or buy, and most of them will be available 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 posters, 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. You will need cameras and software such as Adobe Photoshop and Premiere, but you can access these resources 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, tablets) are useful in class but not required.

#### *Additional Materials*

Some assignments might call for additional materials that involve additional expense. For example, the Distortion Display assignment requires you to print a poster (commercial services can be expensive—try

printing services at the [Miller IT Center](#), 502-852-6661, [ulprint@louisville.edu](mailto:ulprint@louisville.edu), where cost is about \$30) and mount it temporarily to a foam board or other hard backing that you provide.

## Outcomes

The table below details the learning outcomes associated with this course, with General Education and UofL’s Cultural Diversity outcomes in bold type (they’re not required for this course, but they’re good).

Emphasis	Outcomes
<p><b>Rhetoric</b>            Filmmakers and film critics use specific vocabulary and techniques to make meaning from sounds and images. Films also function as rhetorical interventions in the social construction of cultural discourses.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Communicate an understanding of vocabulary, concepts, materials, techniques, and methods of intellectual inquiry within the arts and/or humanities.</b></li> <li>• <b>Communicate an understanding of the ways in which race, ethnicity, and/or gender are socially constructed.</b></li> <li>• Critique films’ histories of and capacities for rhetorical intervention.</li> <li>• Apply methods of argumentation from different critical approaches to the analysis of specific films.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Culture, History, and Genre</b>            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"> <li>• <b>Analyze and synthesize texts, recognizing the diversity of cultures and historical contexts.</b></li> <li>• <b>Recognize that social and cultural systems develop out of adaptation to environmental and historical circumstances.</b></li> <li>• Interpret films’ significance in relation to their cultural, historical, and generic contexts.</li> <li>• Explain films’ relationships with human identity categories such as race, ethnicity, sex, gender, sexuality, age, ability, and nationality.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Critical Thinking</b>            Understanding and interpreting films requires both attention to details (such as frames) and attention to larger structures (such as sequences and diegesis).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Describe and evaluate texts using primary and secondary materials.</b></li> <li>• <b>Communicate an understanding that different cultures may hold different views of the same issues.</b></li> <li>• <b>Evaluate pertinent information and assertions for relevance, bias, stereotyping, manipulation, and completeness.</b></li> <li>• Analyze films through essays and media productions.</li> <li>• Apply critical and theoretical perspectives to cinematic texts.</li> </ul>

## Assignments

### Major Assignments

The outcomes in Table 1 refer will be assessed via the following major assignments.

1. **Image Study. (2 phases, individual efforts, 300 points for final graded poster).**
  - a. **Phase One: 24 per second** (100 points). Choose a film and create images of your own that capture varying aspects of that film’s style. Both as you take your pictures and as you “develop” then using software such as Photoshop, you might choose to focus on any or all photographic techniques available: camera angle, shot distance, coloring, saturation, grain, masking, warping, etc. Create a series (4 – 6) of images along with brief explanations of how you’ve created them using techniques related to your chosen film.
  - b. **Phase Two: Sequence sample** (200 points). Arrange your *24 per second* series into a 24”x36” poster (length vs. width optional) that combines your images with concise versions of your explanations into a sleek, presentation-ready design. Present your work during the class Poster Session.
2. **Interpretive Essay (100 points).** Write an essay that draws on assigned reading to help *interpret* how films discussed in class reflect on their specific cultural, historical, and/or generic contexts.

3. **Blog (recurring, 100 points total).** Post blog entries (one or two paragraphs) that *respond to specific, cited details* from films assigned since the last blog due date, films that you should connect to ideas from assigned readings.
4. **Short Film (group and individual efforts, 300 points total).** Create a 5-7 minute video that reflects on and demonstrates the rhetoric, techniques, and concepts discussed in class.
  - a. **Report** (individual, 50 points) In approximately half a page, summarize your video's development and how details of narrative, mise-en-scene, cinematography, editing, sound, etc. reflect meaningfully on critical and theoretical concepts discussed in class.
  - b. **Video** (group, 200 points) Fictional, documentary, experimental: create a video that reflects meaningfully on critical and theoretical concepts discussed in class.
  - c. **Evaluation** (individual, 50 points) Design explicit criteria and use them to evaluate all group members' (yours included) performances on the project. Include details about how well your video reflects on critical and theoretical concepts discussed in class.
5. **Final Exam (individual effort, 100 points).** Demonstrate your knowledge of film rhetoric, analytical technique, and the films we have studied.

### *Participation (100 points)*

Participation in class discussions and activities is mandatory. Demonstrate knowledge of the textbook and films, and share insights. You don't have to talk *all* the time to get a good grade in this category, but you do have to speak up.

## **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 results in 0 points. To calculate +/- values, round total points to the 3, 5, or 8 in your percentile range. For example, 895 – 934 points round to 93 (A-), 935 – 974 points round to 95 (A), and 975 – 1000 points round to 98 (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 for each non-freebie, undocumented absence. Being late counts as a half or whole absence, depending on how late you are. *Missing more than 25% of class meetings for any reason could result in grade penalties and/or failure.*

### *Punctual Work*

Unless I approve a deadline extension in advance, which is unlikely, 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). Plagiarized work will receive zero credit and may face further penalties.

### *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 laptop 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 and titles refer to essays 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
Mon., Aug. 25	[Introduction] "Rabbits" (Lynch, 2002)	
Mon., Sept. 1	<b>LABOR DAY – NO CLASS</b>	
Mon., Sept. 8	<i>The Pervert's Guide to Ideology</i> (Fiennes, 2012)	
Mon., Sept. 15	<i>Formalism</i> . Eisenstein, "Dramaturgy of Film Form" <b>FILM:</b> <i>Battleship Potemkin</i> (Eisenstein, 1925)	<b>Blog Response 1</b>
Mon., Sept. 22	<i>Marxism/Ideology</i> : Benjamin, "The Work of Art..." <b>FILM:</b> <i>Metropolis</i> (Lang, 1927)	
Mon., Sept. 29	<i>Psychoanalysis</i> . Metz, "From <i>The Imaginary Signifier</i> " [hardest reading of the semester]	<b>Blog Response 2</b> <b>IMAGE DRAFTS</b>
Mon., Oct. 6	<b>MID-TERM BREAK – NO CLASS</b>	
Mon., Oct. 13	<b>FILM:</b> <i>The Maltese Falcon</i> (Huston, 1941)	<b>POSTER DRAFTS</b>
Mon., Oct. 20	<i>Auteurism</i> . Sarris, "The Auteur Theory Revisited" <b>FILM:</b> <i>The 400 Blows</i> (Truffaut, 1959)	
Mon., Oct. 27	<i>Feminism</i> . Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and..." <b>FILM:</b> <i>Vertigo</i> (Hitchcock, 1958)	<b>Blog Response 3</b> <b>POSTER SESSION</b>
Mon., Nov. 3	<i>Queer Theory</i> . Edelman, "From <i>No Future</i> " [on Blackboard] <b>last day to withdraw</b> <b>FILM:</b> <i>The Birds</i> (Hitchcock, 1963)	<b>ABSTRACT</b>
Mon., Nov. 10	<i>Critical Race Theory</i> . Diawara, "Black American Cinema: The New Realism" <i>Postcolonialism</i> . Shohat and Stam, "From <i>Unthinking Eurocentrism</i> " <b>FILM:</b> <i>Boyz n the Hood</i> (Singleton, 1991)	<b>Blog Response 4</b>
Mon., Nov. 17	<i>Genre</i> . Schatz, "From <i>Hollywood Genres</i> ." <b>FILM:</b> <i>The Searchers</i> (Ford, 1956)	<b>INTERPRETIVE ESSAY</b>
Mon., Nov. 24	<i>Genre</i> . Bordwell, "The Art Cinema as..." <b>FILM:</b> <i>Tokyo Story</i> (1953)	
Mon., Dec. 1	<i>Media Studies</i> . Jenkins, "From <i>Convergence Culture</i> ." <b>FILM:</b> <i>The Matrix</i> (1999)	<b>Blog Response 5</b>
Mon., Dec. 8	VIDEO SCREENINGS and REVIEW	<b>VIDEO AND EVALUATION</b>
<b>Mon., DEC. 15</b>	<b>EXAM: 5:30pm – 8:00pm</b>	

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

**I affirm that I have read the entire syllabus and policy sheet for HUM 324 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

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print permanent address

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Date