Film Theory & Criticism FILM 4390 | Fall 2023
Tuesday/Thursday, 3:00 - 4:20 pm | Online via Zoom
Instructor: Gregory Beam
Email: gbeam@utep.edu
Office Hours: Monday/Wednesday, 10:00 am - 12:00 pm
COURSE DESCRIPTION
This course aims to help the student view, discuss, and write about films with greater acuity, nuance, and depth. We will investigate the nature of film as an art form, a medium of communication, and a social phenomenon; explore the role of the scholar and critic in the film world and society at large; and apply a variety of theoretical frameworks and critical methodologies to our discussion of medium.

As FILM 1390, Introduction to the Art of the Motion Picture, is a prerequisite for this course, students should already possess knowledge of a number of basic terms and concepts related to film composition, production, viewship, and history.

If you need a refresher on any of the terms that are referred to in our discussion or the reading, take a look at the reference text listed in the Readings section below (Moving Pictures). I would also recommend that you Google any terms you do not know. There are numerous websites and informational videos (some of them quite good) devoted to elucidating various subjects in film.

COURSE OBJECTIVES
- To build a deeper and more specific understanding of the formal elements of film, and to be able to identify, articulate, and evaluate the use of those elements in a variety of genres and styles.
- To investigate the philosophical dimensions and implications of film, including the ethics of filmmaking, the ontology of the cinema, and how the creation of film reflects and influences the human pursuit of knowledge.
- To practice viewing films from a variety of critical perspectives.
- To develop deep critical thinking and communication skills, both written and spoken, relating to the arts in general and film in particular.

LEARNING OUTCOMES
- Understanding of the formal elements of cinema, cinematic genres and modes, narrative theory, the philosophical and cultural dimensions of film, and other theoretical outlooks, demonstrated through a thoughtful response to the assigned reading.
- The knowledge and fluency to critique a film upon viewing, delivering clearly phrased responses to questions and prompts about the film.
- The ability to develop a significant thesis relating to the study of film and to support this thesis from a clear critical perspective, demonstrated through a well-researched and precisely argued written essay or video essay.
MATERIALS

Readings

Required

We will be looking at articles connected with our weekly viewings, all of which will be provided in the “Readings” folder on Blackboard. Please refer to the Course Schedule.

Recommended

If you need to bone up on your technical knowledge of film technique and terminology (e.g. shot types, composition, focus, lens types, elements of mise-en-scene, sound design, narrative techniques), I recommend this open-access—i.e. free—introductory textbook: Moving Pictures: An Introduction to Cinema, available at this link: https://uark.pressbooks.pub/movingpictures/?fbclid=IwAR30Pymm2XvAsjA4a3c7TiYRNntfX__JdbpsYyeDCa9hVLdyj2qoE7MLA

Keep this handy in your browser as a reference when there is a technique or term that you don’t quite recall or fully understand.

Viewings

Most of the films we watch in class are licensed through Kanopy or Swank Digital Media, both of which are available through library services in my.utep.edu. I will include links to all available titles in the Viewings folder on Blackboard.

ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING

Your final grade will be tabulated on a scale of 0-100%.

A: 90-100%
B: 80-89.9%
C: 70-79.9%
D: 60-69.9%
F: 0-59.9%
25% - Check-ins
25% - Reading Responses
50% - Project

All assignments are due at the end of the day (11:59pm) on the due date unless otherwise indicated. If you think you may need extra time for an assignment, please request an extension in advance of the due date. There is no guarantee that one will be granted, but it’s always easier to make arrangements in advance than to make them after the fact. Extension requests are unlikely to be granted for the study guides, as answers will be posted the afternoon following the due date.

If you have any kind of situation—scheduling, personal, medical—that may make it difficult for you to meet any of the deadlines or course requirements, please let me know as soon as possible so that we can discuss possible accommodations.

CHECK-INS
I will periodically give brief, ungraded quizzes on Blackboard during class. These will cover material from recent class sessions and will be used to monitor attendance, assess learning, and prepare students for upcoming graded assignments.

READING RESPONSES
A few times during the semester, you will submit a brief written response (around 500-800 words) to the reading assignments. It may be helpful to connect your thoughts about the reading with observations about the assigned viewings. While you do not need to structure your responses as formal essays, you should demonstrate substantial original thought, asking and answering probing questions about the topics covered, investigating and/or critiquing the authors’ ideas, or presenting alternative opinions. Your responses should go well beyond a report or summary of the readings.

PROJECT
You will design and deliver a project that involves a significant amount of research, theoretical inquiry, creative exploration, or criticism into a major topic in film studies. This can take a number of forms, including:

- An essay intended for publication in a scholarly journal (meeting provided publication guidelines).
- A video essay posted on-line (e.g. to YouTube or Vimeo).
- A blog, featuring one or more significant theoretical reflections on major topics in film.
- A fully produced podcast, published on-line, featuring significant theoretical reflections on major topics in film
- A creative project, such as a short film, that serves as a practical application of theoretical principles in film (with accompanying explanation).
Regardless of the medium you choose for your project, it should be well-researched, meticulously planned, and expertly crafted, and it will be assessed in reference to professional standards within the chosen medium. That is to say, a written essay will be evaluated in terms of how well it might qualify for publication in a journal, a podcast will be evaluated in comparison to professional podcasts on similar topics, etc.

Expectations relating to specific media will be provided, along with a detailed grading rubric. You will also be expected to submit a proposal for your final project several weeks in advance of the due date. The proposal will not be graded but is a requirement for successful completion of the assignment, and it offers an opportunity for me to steer you in the right direction.

**SUBJECT MATTER**

Some of the films and readings used in this course touch on mature subject matters, including violence, abuse, and sexual activity. There will be explicit language and images in some of the films. I will do my best to give you a heads up about any troubling material that may come up.

If you have concerns about viewing or discussing specific subjects, please see me to discuss possible accommodations. I expect all discussions to be conducted in a respectful and sensitive manner.

**ATTENDANCE**

Attendance at class sessions is expected. If you need to miss class, reach out to me to discuss what accommodations we can make. Whenever possible, it’s best to contact me in advance of an absence, especially if it may be more than a one-time thing.

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

You are expected to be honest in all academic work, consistent with the academic integrity policy as outlined in the Code of Student Conduct and the requirements of course assignments. All work is to be appropriately cited when it is borrowed, directly or indirectly, from another source. Unauthorized and/or unacknowledged collaboration on any work, or the presentation of someone else’s work, is plagiarism.

Content generated by an Artificial Intelligence third-party service or site (AI-generated content) without proper attribution or authorization is another form of plagiarism. If you are unsure about whether something may be plagiarism or another form of academic dishonesty, please
reach out to me to discuss it as soon as possible. Any allegation of academic dishonesty may be referred to Student Conduct and Community Responsibilities for possible review. If a student is found responsible for academic dishonesty, a grade penalty may be applied.

**ACCOMMODATIONS STATEMENT**

The Center for Accommodations and Support Services (CASS) at UTEP provides students who require them with accommodations and support services to help them pursue their academic, graduation, and career goals. If you are dealing with any kind of mental, physical, emotional, or sensory disability you are encouraged to contact them for a confidential consultation. For more information, visit [https://www.utep.edu/student-affairs/cass/](https://www.utep.edu/student-affairs/cass/) or consult the Student Handbook.
<table>
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<th>Class Meeting</th>
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| **Week 1: First Impressions - Exploring the material (and immaterial) aspects of film**  
Tuesday, August 29  
Thursday, August 31 | “Meaning in Movies” (Melissa Lenos & Michael Ryan) | Various |  |
| **Week 2: First Impressions (cont’d) - Comprehending Cinematic Meaning**  
Tuesday, September 5  
Thursday, September 7 | “Basic Concepts” (Siegfried Kracauer)  
“On the Impression of Reality in the Cinema” (Christian Metz) | Man with a Movie Camera (Dziga Vertov, 1929) |  |
| **Week 3: Film & Reality**  
Tuesday, September 12  
Thursday, September 14 | “Now You See It” (Daniel Yon) | Man with a Movie Camera (Dziga Vertov, 1929) | Reading Response 1 due Sunday, September 17 |
| **Week 4: Film & Reality**  
Tuesday, September 19  
Thursday, September 26 | “Ontological narrativity and the performativity of the Stories We Tell” (Andrea Doucet) | Stories We Tell (Sarah Polley, 2012) |  |
| **Week 5: Film & Reality (cont’d)**  
Tuesday, September 26  
Thursday, September 28 | “The Implicit Soul of Charlie Kaufman’s Adaptation” (David L. Smith) | Stories We Tell |  |
| **Week 6: Performance**  
Tuesday, October 3  
Thursday, October 5 | | Adaptation (Spike Jonze, 2002) |  |
| **Week 7: Performance (cont’d)**  
Tuesday, October 10  
Thursday, October 12 | “Audience, Actor, and Star” (Stanley Cavell) | Adaptation | Reading Response 2 due Sunday, October 15 |
| Week 8: Fantasy & Reality  
Tuesday, October 17  
Thursday, October 19 | Adaptation |
| Week 9:  
Tuesday, October 24  
Thursday, October 26 | The Pervert’s Guide to Cinema (Sophie Fiennes, 2006) |
| Week 10: Film as Mind  
Tuesday, October 31  
Thursday, November 2 | The Pervert’s Guide to Cinema |
| Week 11: Film as Mind  
Tuesday, November 7  
Thursday, November 9 | "Dream screen? The dream/film analogy in historical context," Matthias Brütsch |
| Mulholland Drive (David Lynch, 2001) | Essay Proposal due Sunday, November 12 |
| Week 12: Film and Society - Identity & Ideology  
Tuesday, November 14  
Thursday, November 16 | "The dream world of film: A Jungian perspective on cinematic communication" (Robert A. Davies, James M. Farrell & Steven S. Matthews) |
| Mulholland Drive |
| Week 13: Film and Society (cont’d)  
Tuesday, November 21 | Mulholland Drive |
| Week 14:  
Tuesday, November 28  
Thursday, November 30 | "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (Laura Mulvey) |
| Brainwashed: Sex-Camera-Power (Nina Menkes, 2022) | Reading Response 3 due Sunday, December 3 |
| Week 15:  
Tuesday, December 5  
Thursday, November 7 | Brainwashed: Sex-Camera-Power (Nina Menkes, 2022) |
| Submission Window for Film Essay opens Monday December 4 |
| Finals Week:  
Final Presentations  
Thursday, December 14, 4:00-6:45 pm | — |
| Submission Window for Film Essay closes Friday, December 15 |