

## COMM 160: Introduction to the Art of Film

### Course Description

This course provides foundational training in the critical analysis of film and video texts. The first half of the course focuses on technical aspects of the moving image: composition, lighting, cinematography, editing, sound, and narrative. Then we'll look at a broader range of issues and films: genre, type, and context.

Our primary objectives in this course are to learn the concepts and terms most commonly used in film analysis, and learn how to use these concepts and terms when writing and talking critically about the moving image arts. In addition to this, though, we will seek to understand film as an industry, as a complex medium for artistic expression, and as a product of its historical, cultural, and social context.

### Learning Outcomes

COMM 160 is a GEP Investigation Level Arts course. Students who commit themselves to active learning and engagement with the course content and completion of course assignments will be able to:

- Define the fundamental principles of film form and style, including narrative features, mise-en-scene, cinematography, editing, and sound;
- Recognize the basic formal elements of several film genres and film types;
- Use the language of film analysis to describe what they see and hear when they watch a movie and to discuss and write critically and effectively about *meaning* in film, and the ways films move us aesthetically, intellectually, and emotionally.

### Requirements (total of 100)

Online discussion posts (	6 @ 2.5% each)	15%
Week 4 discussion post (1 @ 5%)		5%
Outside Film Response (1 @ 20%)		20%
Quizzes (5 @ 5% each)		25%
Cumulative Final		35%

### Grading Scale

A: 94-100	B-: 80-83	D+: 67-69
A-: 90-93	C+: 77-79	D: 64-66
B+: 87-89	C: 74-76	F: 0-63
B: 84-86	C-: 70-73	

### Readings

Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction, 11<sup>th</sup> ed.* is available via rental. Upon occasion, supplemental readings will be posted on D2L. Make sure to check the syllabus and D2L and keep up with both *Film Art* and the supplemental readings. Readings should be completed by the unit under which they're listed.

### Course Work

#### Quizzes

One of the big goals of this class is to establish a common vocabulary for analyzing audiovisual texts, and quizzes are essential for testing that understanding. You will have five quizzes to complete in the first three weeks of class: week one will have one quiz, and weeks two and three will have two quizzes each. **You are highly advised to complete the assigned readings for each week/unit before taking the quiz.** Review any "terms to be defined" (see course schedule), main ideas/concepts, and note any extended or in-depth examples presented in the text. You will be able to **RETAKE** the quiz once; I advise you to 1) do the reading, 2) review key terms, 3) take the quiz, 4) watch the lectures, and then 5) retake the quiz if desired. All quizzes will be open from Monday morning (12am) to 11:59pm the following Sunday. That is, you have one full week to complete the required quizzes.

**Keep up with the readings and the quizzes.** You may not make up missed quizzes except in the case of a verifiable severe illness or family emergency.

## Screenings

You are responsible for watching **two movies on your own per week**. All films will be available as streaming files on the library's website, here: [https://mypoint.uwsp.edu/library/coursepages/CoursePage.aspx?grp\\_id=10026434](https://mypoint.uwsp.edu/library/coursepages/CoursePage.aspx?grp_id=10026434) (or, alternatively, you can go to the library's main site, <http://www.uwsp.edu/library/Pages/default.aspx>, click on eReserves near the bottom of the column on the left, and log in to see the course files. There are many movies listed, but **NOT ALL** the films are required. Make sure to **follow the syllabus** to make sure you're watching the appropriate movie on the appropriate week.

**A note about picture quality:** some of the videos are not in HD, but this is something over which I have no control. If this bothers you (it would bother me!) I encourage you to access the film via other means—some are on Netflix or Hulu (and FilmStruck has the entire Criterion collection), some are available via Amazon Prime, and all of them can be checked out at the library (we have a reserve shelf for this class). Life is too short to settle for subpar video unless you absolutely have to.

## Film Discussion Posts

One of the best habits a film analyst can establish is the practice of **taking notes during a film**, and jotting down immediate reactions throughout, and as soon as it's over. (The other important habit a film analyst should cultivate, of course, is watching things over and over again.) To encourage this, each streaming film will have a worksheet associated with it in D2L. I will not be collecting these worksheets, but I want you to use them as the basis for your short discussion posts.

Each student will be responsible for **two discussion posts** on D2L a week, at 200-300 words each. I will put you into groups of five, so make sure to post in your group (names will be listed clearly on each thread). You have two options for your posts:

- A) Write a short discussion of what you think the film was about, and how it relates to one of the concepts we're covering that week, including at least one specific example from the film that illustrates the point you want to make about how film creates meaning. For example, say I want to talk about the use of color in *Wizard of Oz*, because I think the color of Oz suggests that an imaginary world can be far more vivid than the real world. I will start with the above statement rephrased as a thesis (In *The Wizard of Oz*, the use of color suggests that an imaginary world can be far more vivid than the real world), and then use examples to support that thesis (once Dorothy enters her dream world, it's in color). This is a simplistic example, but you get the idea? Please don't hesitate to ask questions.
- B) Respond to someone else's post. Not just "I agree," but build upon their idea. You might provide another example that supports their point about the relationship between the film's style and its meaning, or you might give an example that refutes their point. Either way, make sure you are addressing their point with a substantive response.

Since we're watching two movies a week, you can, in theory, do two option As a week. Or, if you're the sort of person that enjoys building on the ideas of others, you can do two option Bs a week. Either way, I need two discussion posts per week, completed by Sunday at 11:59pm. I will respond to posts in a video response on Mondays.

On the final week, you will have ONE discussion post on *Citizen Kane*, due by Tuesday of week 4 at midnight. (If you are attempting to complete work on the weekends, I strongly advise you to watch the film and complete your response early.) I will respond to your posts in a video response on Wednesday.

## Outside Film Response

In addition to the film discussion posts, at one point throughout the course, students will be required to complete a short (300-400 word) response to a film **screened on your own**. You may choose one of the films on the course's eReserve site **that you are NOT otherwise required to watch** (i.e., you can't write your outside response on *Rear Window*, since we're all required to watch that one, but you CAN write on *Attack the Block*), or you can choose an entirely different film. Either way, your essay should demonstrate attention to the film's style and form, **especially the elements we're focusing on that week**. Responses will be graded on the quality of analysis and the relevance to the elements we are covering in a given week. You can complete this assignment **at any time** throughout the course, and turn it in via Dropbox on D2L. More information on film responses will be provided in a separate handout.

## Final Exam

Your final exam will be cumulative, and will be open between Wednesday, 8/16 and Friday, 8/18. It will consist of multiple choice and short essay questions.

## CLASS SCHEDULE

### Week One: Storytelling and Narrative (7/24-7/30)

- Film form and pattern recognition
- Principles of narrative form
- Narration

*The Wizard of Oz* (1939, Victor Fleming, 102 min)

*The Virgin Suicides* (2000, Sofia Coppola, 97 min)

Readings:

Smith, "It's Just a Movie" (on D2L)

B&T, Ch. 2

B&T, Ch. 3

**Terms/concepts to know (Ch. 2):** form, suspense, surprise, convention, meaning (referential, explicit, implicit, symptomatic), ideology, function, similarity/repetition, motif, parallels, difference/variation, development, segmentation, unity/disunity, pattern

**Terms/concepts to know (Ch. 3):** narrative, plot, story, diegesis, cause/effect, temporal order, temporal duration, temporal frequency, flashback/flashforward, exposition, backstory, climax, change in knowledge, resolution, classical Hollywood cinema, narration, range of story narration (restricted, unrestricted), depth of story narration (perceptual subjectivity, mental subjectivity), sound perspective, point of view, protagonist, narrator

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### Week Two: Mise-en-Scene and Cinematography (7/31-8/6)

- Mise-en-scene: setting, costume, lighting
- Mise-en-scene: staging, movement, and performance
- Cinematography: lens, static framing
- Cinematography: mobile framing

*Pan's Labyrinth* (2006, Guillermo del Toro, 119 min)

*Rear Window* (1954, Alfred Hitchcock, 112 min)

Readings:

B&T, Ch. 4

B&T, Ch. 5

**Terms/concepts to know (Ch. 4):** mise-en-scene (lighting, setting, costume/makeup, props, staging), lighting terms (quality: hard, soft; direction: top, bottom, side, front, under, back; source: key, fill, three-point; color), individualized and stylized performance, types, typecasting, aerial perspective, depth cues (size diminution, overlap, volume and planes), acting and camera distance, compositional balance, shallow space and deep space composition

**Terms/concepts to know (Ch. 5):** shot, focal length (wide angle, telephoto, depth of field, deep focus, racking focus), aspect ratio, offscreen space, masking, angle (high, low, straight on), level (even, canted), height (high, low, straight on), distance (extreme close up, close up, medium close up, medium shot, medium long shot, long shot, extreme long shot), pan, track, crane, tilt, reframing, hand-held, zoom, long take

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### Week Three: Editing and Sound (8/7-8/13)

- Editing: the basics
- Editing: continuity editing and narrative space
- Sound in cinema

*The Cutting Edge: The Magic of Movie Editing* (2004, Wendy Apple, 98 min)

*The Prestige* (2006, Christopher Nolan, 130 min)

Readings:

B&T, Ch. 6

B&T, Ch. 7

**Terms/concepts to know (Ch. 6):** cut, fade, dissolve, wipe, graphic match, graphic contrast, elliptical editing, overlapping editing, continuity editing (180 degree system, axis of action, screen direction, establishing shot/reestablishing shot, eyeline match, shot/reverse shot, match on action, crosscutting, montage sequence), jump cut, discontinuity editing, nondiegetic insert

**Terms/concepts to know (Ch. 7):** loudness/volume, pitch, timbre, fidelity, dialogue overlap, sound perspective, sound motifs, rhythm, diegetic/nondiegetic sound, external/internal diegetic sound, synchronous/asynchronous sound, simultaneous/nonsimultaneous sound, sound bridge

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#### Week Four: Style, Film Form, Genre (8/14-8/18)

- Putting it all together: style and film form
- Genre and cinematic modes
- Avant-garde and documentary

*Citizen Kane* (1941, Orson Welles, 119 min)

*La Jetée* (France, 1962, Marker, 28 min)

Readings:

B&T, Ch. 8

B&T, Ch. 9

**Terms/concepts to know (Ch. 8):** style, creative choices, creative constraints; for quiz, be familiar with the examples B&T use in this chapter.

**Terms/concepts to know (Ch. 9):** genre, subgenre, conventions, iconography, cycles, social functions of genres, iconography and conventions of the western, the horror film, the crime film, the sci-fi film, and the musical

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#### FINAL EXAM (To be taken during Week Four)