

Introduction to Film
CMST 10100 – Section 3
Spring 2020 Annotated Syllabus

Course Conference Calls: Th 9:30 AM–10:50 AM all weeks, T 9:30 AM–10:50 AM select weeks

Instructor: Ian Bryce Jones, ijones@uchicago.edu

Office Hours: T/Th, by appointment as necessary

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is designed to introduce students to the basic terminology of film form and concepts of film analysis. Film screenings cover a wide variety of national cinemas, historical time periods, and genres—from classics of the international art cinema to Hollywood hits. Emphasis is placed on film form and style, but we also will see film as an industrial system of production, distribution, and exhibition and as a popular medium that both reinforces and challenges social and aesthetic norms. Organized primarily by topics related to film style, major interventions in film theory will supplement formal analysis of films, such as issues of materiality, realism, gender, and film as a political tool.

REQUIRED MATERIALS

All course materials will be included and/or linked to on Canvas.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Over the course of the class, students will:

- Discuss and critique films in terms of three-act structure (adherence to or deviation from)
- Define and discuss rules of classical Hollywood cinema (genre, editing, cinematography, mise-en-scène)
- Identify and discuss technical aspects of filmmaking and analyze the reasoning behind specific technical choices
- Identify, Discuss, and Critique different forms of documentary
- Identify, Discuss, and Critique different forms of animation
- Contextualize documentary and animation within classical film style

COURSE REQUIREMENTS & GRADE DISTRIBUTION

1. **Participation in course group work**, typically scheduled for Thursday class conference calls. Some sort of asynchronous participation should be evident even when attendance during synchronous class conference calls cannot be managed. (35% of final grade)
2. **Online vocabulary quiz** (10% of final grade)
3. **Scene analysis written assignment** (20% of final grade)
4. **Final group project**. The final project's form is variable; it could be a written analysis with visual accompaniment posted on the course blog, a video essay, or some other hybrid form of audiovisual analysis. (35% of final grade)

CLASS ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSION

This course is intended for all University of Chicago students, including those with mental, physical, or cognitive disabilities, illness, injuries, impairments, or any other condition that tends to negatively affect one's equal access to education. The move to online courses presents many challenges for instructors, but one benefit is that it provides the opportunity to be even more accommodating to the needs of students. If, at any point in the quarter, you find yourself not able to fully access the content and intended experience of this course, you are welcome (and not required) to contact me to discuss your specific needs. I also encourage you to contact Student Disability Services for resources and procedures: <https://disabilities.uchicago.edu>.

HARASSMENT

The University's guidelines for sexual and gender-based harassment will be strictly enforced. For reference, please see <https://studentmanual.uchicago.edu/university-policies/university-of-chicago-policy-on-harassment-discrimination-and-sexual-miscon/>. Students should be aware that the course instructor is a Title IX mandated reporter.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1, Tues, April 7: Strategic meeting on course logistics

Format: Conference call

Materials/Assignments: None

Week 1, Thurs, April 9: Introduction to film form, film style, and the film industry

Format: Zoom conference call and supplementary video lecture

Materials/Assignments:

- **Week 1 Panopto playlist**
 - *Sherlock Junior* (Buster Keaton, USA, 1924)
- **Assigned readings**
 - David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*, Ch. 1: "Film as Art: Creativity, Technology, and Business," pp 2-29
- **Pre-recorded video lecture**
 - Lecture acts as supplement to conference call. No discussion board questions.

Week 2, Tues, April 14: Mise-en-scène lecture

Format: Pre-recorded video lecture + Canvas discussion board. No Zoom conference call.

Materials/Assignments:

- **Assigned readings**
 - Bordwell and Thompson, Ch. 4: "The Shot: *Mise-en-Scène*," pp 112-154
- **Pre-recorded video lecture**
 - View lecture and respond to associated discussion board questions on Canvas.

Week 2, Thurs, April 16: Mise-en-scène group work

Format: Zoom conference call, blog post if any members of your group are unable to call

Materials/Assignments:

- **Week 2 Panopto playlist**
 - *Parasite* (Bong Joon Ho, South Korea, 2019)
- **Assigned readings**
 - André Bazin, “The Evolution of Film Language”
- **Group work (presentations or blog posts)**
 - **Group 1:** Props in *Parasite* (any objects the film’s actors pick up and manipulate)
 - **Group 2:** Décor of the Park and Kim residences in *Parasite*
 - **Group 3:** Staging and spatial logic in *Parasite*, with a special focus on how the distinction between “high-low”/”up-down” functions in the film, in the Park residence, and beyond
 - **Group 4:** Lighting in *Parasite*

Week 3, Tues, April 21: Cinematography lecture

Format: Pre-recorded video lecture + Canvas discussion board. No Zoom conference call.

Materials/Assignments:

- **Assigned readings**
 - Bordwell and Thompson, Ch. 5: “The Shot: Cinematography,” pp 165–217
- **Pre-recorded video lecture**
 - View lecture and respond to associated discussion board questions on Canvas.

Week 3, Thurs, April 23: Cinematography group work

Format: Zoom conference call, blog post if any members of your group are unable to call

Materials/Assignments:

- **Week 3 Panopto playlist**
 - *Chungking Express* (Wong Kar Wai, Hong Kong, 1994)
- **Assigned readings**
 - Maya Deren, “Cinematography: The Creative Use of Reality”
- **Group work (presentations or blog posts)**
 - **Group 1:** Speed of motion in *Chungking Express*
 - **Group 2:** Focus and depth-of-field in *Chungking Express*
 - **Group 3:** Lighting source and color in *Chungking Express*
 - **Group 4:** Camera dynamics in *Chungking Express*

Week 4, Tues, April 28: Editing – the classical continuity style lecture

Format: Pre-recorded video lecture + Canvas discussion board. No Zoom conference call.

Materials/Assignments:

- **Assigned readings**
 - Timothy Corrigan and Patricia White, *The Film Experience: An Introduction*, Ch. 4: “Relating Images: Editing,” pp 133-159
- **Pre-recorded video lecture**
 - View lecture and respond to associated discussion board questions on Canvas.

Week 4, Thurs, April 30: Editing – the classical continuity style group work

Format: Zoom conference call, blog post if any members of your group are unable to call

Materials/Assignments:

- **Week 4 Panopto playlist**
 - *Tell No One* (Guillaume Canet, France, 2006)
- **Assigned readings**
 - Karel Reisz and Gavin Millar, “Editing the Picture” (excerpt), from *The Technique of Film Editing*
- **Group work (presentations or blog posts)**
 - **Group 1:** Alex reminiscences (20:15–22:25) and how this sequence interacts/fills in gaps with what we’ve seen already
 - **Group 2:** Park scene (1:16:00–1:21:07)
 - **Group 3:** M. Laurentin’s confession (1:46:15–1:53:39) and the earlier scenes of the attack (6:42–7:47) and IDing the body (27:17–29:50)
 - **Group 4:** The end of the film (2:00:05–2:06:44) and how it interacts with everything we’ve seen so far

Week 5, Tues, May 5: Sound lecture

Format: Pre-recorded video lecture + Canvas discussion board. No Zoom conference call.

Materials/Assignments:

- **Assigned readings**
 - Michel Chion, “The Three Borders,” from *Film, a Sound Art*
- **Pre-recorded video lecture**
 - View lecture and respond to associated discussion board questions on Canvas.

Week 5, Thurs, May 7: Sound discussion

Format: Shorter Zoom conference call to allow for vocabulary quiz. Supplementary video lecture. No group work.

Vocabulary Quiz: The vocabulary quiz will be hosted on Panopto starting at 8:30 AM Chicago time. Zoom conference call start time postponed to 10:10 AM Chicago time to accommodate the quiz.

Materials/Assignments:

- **Week 5 Panopto playlist**
 - *Opus I* (Walther Ruttmann, Germany, 1921)
 - *Gravity* (Alfonso Cuarón, USA, 2013)
- **Assigned readings**
 - Sergei Eisenstein, “Form and Content: Practice,” from *The Film Sense*
- **Pre-recorded video lecture**
 - Lecture acts as supplement to conference call. No discussion board questions.

Week 6, Tues, May 12: Narrative and the 3-act structure lecture

Format: Pre-recorded video lecture + Canvas discussion board. No Zoom conference call.

Materials/Assignments:

- **Assigned readings**
 - Corrigan and White, Ch. 6: “Telling Stories: Narrative Films”
- **Pre-recorded video lecture**
 - View lecture and respond to associated discussion board questions on Canvas.

Week 6, Thurs, May 14: Narrative and the 3-act structure group work

Format: Zoom conference call. Groups will discuss their subjects informally rather than giving a formal presentation; no blog posts this week.

Materials/Assignments:

- **Week 6 Panopto playlist**
 - *Clueless* (Amy Heckerling, USA, 1995)
- **Assigned readings**
 - Syd Field, “What Is a Screenplay?” and “The Plot Point” (both chapters from *Screenplay*)
- **Group work (presentations or blog posts)**
 - **Group 1:** Draw up the boundaries of what you think Act I is in *Clueless*. What happens in the act, when does it end, and why?
 - **Group 2:** Draw up the boundaries of the first half of Act II in *Clueless*, up to the midpoint. What happens? Where does it begin? When is the midpoint, and why do you say that?
 - **Group 3:** Draw up the boundaries of the second half of Act II in *Clueless*, from the midpoint to the end. What happens? When is the midpoint, where is the end, and why?
 - **Group 4:** Draw up the boundaries of what you think Act III is in *Clueless*. What happens in the act, when does it begin, and why?

Week 7, Tues, May 19: Genre lecture

Format: Pre-recorded video lecture + Canvas discussion board. No Zoom conference call.

Materials/Assignments:

- **Assigned readings**
 - Corrigan and White, Ch. 9: “Rituals, Conventions, Archetypes, and Formulas: Movie Genres,” pp 315-350 (selections)
- **Pre-recorded video lecture**
 - View lecture and respond to associated discussion board questions on Canvas.

Week 7, Thurs, May 21: Genre group work

Format: Zoom conference call, blog post if any members of your group are unable to call

Materials/Assignments:

- **To view on NETFLIX—this is NOT uploaded onto Panopto**
 - *Atlantics* (Mati Diop, Senegal/France, 2019)
- **Assigned readings**
 - Linda Williams, “Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess”
- **Group work (presentations or blog posts)**
 - **Group 1:** Discuss *Atlantics* as a romance/love story

- **Group 2:** Discuss *Atlantics* as a horror movie/ghost story
- **Group 3:** Discuss *Atlantics* as a mystery
- **Group 4:** Discuss *Atlantics* as a social realist film about class, poverty, and labor

Week 8, Tues, May 26: Documentary lecture

Format: Pre-recorded video lecture + Canvas discussion board. No Zoom conference call.

Materials/Assignments:

- **Assigned readings**
 - Carl Plantinga, "What Is a Nonfiction Film?," from *Rhetoric and Representation in Nonfiction Film*
- **Pre-recorded video lecture**
 - View lecture and respond to associated discussion board questions on Canvas.

Week 8, Thurs, May 28: Documentary group work

Format: Zoom conference call, blog post if any members of your group are unable to call

Materials/Assignments:

- **Week 8 Panopto playlist**
 - *The Subconscious Art of Graffiti Removal* (Matt McCormick, USA, 2001)
 - *Stranger Comes to Town* (Jacqueline Goss, USA, 2007)
 - *Paris Is Burning* (Jennie Livingston, USA, 1990)
- **Assigned readings**
 - Dirk Eitzen, "When Is a Documentary? Documentary as a Mode of Reception"
- **Group work (presentations or blog posts)**
 - **Group 1:** Discuss the short *Subconscious Art of Graffiti Removal* in terms of filmmaker Matt McCormick's stance, and our interpretive frame as viewers. Does the film take an assertive stance, making a claim about the real world? If so, what is it—and, if not, how else might we categorize what the film is doing?
 - **Group 2:** Discuss the short *Stranger Comes to Town* in terms of filmmaker Jacqueline Goss' stance, and our interpretive frame as viewers. Would you characterize the film as a documentary? If so, why, if not, why not, and how do stance & frame play into this decision?
 - **Group 3:** Discuss *Paris Is Burning* in terms of filmmaker Jennie Livingston's assertive stance. Once we accept the film's assertion to be about the real world, what sort of claims can we go on to say that Livingstone is making in its construction? (Through editing choices, interviewee choices, etc?)
 - **Group 4:** Discuss *Paris Is Burning* as a historical document. (This is the one group I'm NOT asking to explicitly talk about frame/stance.) What is its value as a document? What does it rescue from historical obscurity? What kind of lasting impact has it had upon our cultural consciousness?

Week 9, Tues, June 2: Animation

Format: Zoom conference call and supplementary video lecture. No group work.

Materials/Assignments:

- **Week 9 Panopto playlist**
 - *The Skeleton Dance* (Ub Iwerks, USA, 1929)
 - *The Great Piggy Bank Robbery* (Robert Clampett, USA, 1946)
 - *Big Hero 6* (Don Hall and Chris Williams, USA, 2014)
- **Assigned readings**
 - Sergei Eisenstein, *On Disney* (excerpts)
- **Pre-recorded video lecture**
 - Lecture acts as supplement to conference call. No discussion board questions.

Final projects for graduating fourth-years due Thursday, June 4

Final projects for all other students due Tuesday, June 9