

Storytelling and Style in Cinema
MCS 273 | Section 101 | Autumn 2019
T/Th, 11:20 AM–12:50 PM, Lincoln Park Campus, Levan Center 404

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Office Hours: Th 1PM–3PM, Lincoln Park Campus, Byrne Hall 455

(Additional office hours by appointment, if scheduling conflicts make them necessary.)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

MCS 273 is designed as an introduction to thinking systematically about the basic principles of film and video and the creation of meaning. Our work throughout the term will involve both narrative theory (i.e., concepts about storytelling) and textual and visual analysis of individual films. We will maintain both a conceptual and practical approach, working on the one hand to understand the implicit “rules” governing film narrative, and on the other hand to consider how they apply in the everyday practice of filmmaking.

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 avant-garde
- Contextualize documentary and avant-garde within classical film style

REQUIREMENT FULFILLMENT:

Arts and Literature Domain of the Liberal Studies Program

This course is part of the Liberal Studies Program. It fulfills credits for the Arts and Literature domain. The central goals of the Liberal Studies Program are reflectiveness, value consciousness, critical and creative thinking, and a multicultural perspective. Courses in Arts and Literature develop critical and creative thinking about the composition, understanding, and evaluation of artistic works. They encourage reflectiveness by helping students to articulate their responses to works and by locating these responses within broader aesthetic and cultural traditions. They implicitly address fundamental questions of human value, among them creativity and discipline. Work in this domain includes literature, the visual arts, media arts, music, and theater.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS OVERVIEW

- 1) Attendance and class participation, including participation in any in-class small group work. (Unexcused absences at 2 or more class sessions will significantly lower your final grade. Continued absences will be considered reason for FX grade designation.) (25% of final grade.)
- 2) Shot description assignment, 350 words, due Week 5, Thursday, October 10 (10% of final grade)
- 3) In-class midterm quiz, conducted in-class week 6, Tuesday, October 15. (15% of final grade)
- 4) Scene analysis assignment, 900 words, due week 8, Thursday, October 31. (20% of final grade)
- 5) Third and final written assignment, 1300 words, due November 26 (30% of final grade)

A	93-100%
A-	90-92%
B+	87-89%
B	84-86%
B-	81-83%
C+	78-80%
C	75-77%
C-	72-74%
D+	69-71%
D	66-68%
F	0-65%

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND MISCONDUCT

The DePaul Student Handbook defines plagiarism as follows: “Plagiarism includes but is not limited to the following: (a) The direct copying of any source, such as written and verbal material, computer files, audio disks, video programs or musical scores, whether published or unpublished, in whole or in part, without proper acknowledgement that it is someone else’s. (b) Copying of any source in whole or in part with only minor changes in wording or syntax even with acknowledgement. (c) Submitting as one’s own work a report, examination paper, computer file, lab report or other assignment which has been prepared by someone else. This includes research papers purchased from any other person or agency. (d) The paraphrasing of another’s work or ideas without proper acknowledgement.”

Plagiarism, as defined here, will be considered grounds for failure of a given assignment, and, given repeated offenses, failure of the course.

Consult your student handbook or visit Academic Integrity at DePaul University (<http://academicintegrity.depaul.edu>) for further details.

HARASSMENT

The DePaul University’s guidelines for sexual and gender harassment will be strictly enforced. All incidents of sexual harassment or gender harassment should be reported by the complainant to either a person in a supervisory capacity or the Director, Sexual Harassment Policy Office. For these procedures and contact information go to: <http://condor.depaul.edu/~harass/>

ACCOMMODATIONS STATEMENT

Students who feel they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the course instructor privately to discuss their specific needs. All discussions will remain confidential.

To ensure that you receive the most appropriate reasonable accommodation based on your needs, contact should be made **as early as possible in the quarter**. Before approaching the course instructor, make sure that you have previously contacted the:

- PLS Program (for LD, AD/HD) at 773-325-1677, Student Center #370, and/or
- The Office for Students with Disabilities (for all other disabilities) at 773-325-1677, Student Center #370

COURSE READINGS AND ADDITIONAL STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES

There is one required textbook for the course:

Bordwell, David and Kristin Thompson. *Film Art: An Introduction*. Twelfth Edition. New York, NY: McGraw Hill, 2019.

This textbook is available at the DePaul bookstore. Copies (including used copies) can also be purchased online. Used copies are a terrific way to spend money. However, if a student is using a previous version, it is *their responsibility* to check in and make sure that they are reading the correct material for the week's reading assignments, and correcting for any re-arranging of material. I cannot keep an up-to-date guide to the difference between all additions!

Any other reading materials for the course will be made available online on D2L.

Short films and clips will be shown in. In addition to these, feature-length films will be assigned as homework, as a supplement to course readings. Since there is no official screening slot for the course, students will be expected to view these films on their own time. The logistics of access to these films may vary from week to week, but thorough instructions will always be provided in-class and on D2L.

TERMS OF ENROLLMENT

1. You agree that this syllabus is a contract, and that you are abiding by its terms and polities (including grading).
2. You understand that any issues or problems you have with grading will be dealt with through the policies laid out in the DePaul Student Handbook.
3. The course instructor reserves the right to alter course readings and/or films in response to unforeseen logistical issues concerning availability, given that 1) new versions are made readily available upon alteration, and 2) timely notification is given to students about any alterations. Nothing listed above—learning objectives, course requirements, grading, assignment due dates, or other student responsibilities—will be altered in any way.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1 – Introduction

Thursday, September 12

No reading. General introduction to the syllabus, course policies, and course goals. Viewing and discussing material in-class.

Week 2 – Film Form and the Film Industry

Tuesday, September 17

Readings: Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art*, Ch. 1: “Film as Art: Creativity, Technology, and Business”

Thursday, September 19

Take-home Viewing Assignment: *Eighth Grade* (Bo Burnham, USA, 2018)

Readings: Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art*, Ch. 2: “The Significance of Film Form”

Week 3 – The Shot, *Mise-en-Scène*, and Staging**Tuesday, September 24****Readings:** Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art*, Ch. 4: “The Shot: *Mise-en-Scène*”**Thursday, September 26****Take-home Viewing Assignment:** *Rear Window* (Alfred Hitchcock, USA, 1954)**Readings:** André Bazin, “The Evolution of Film Language,” Maya Deren, “Cinematography: The Creative Use of Reality” – PDFs on D2L**Week 4 – Cinematography and Camera Movement****Tuesday, October 1****Readings:** Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art*, Ch. 5: “The Shot: Cinematography” (first half of chapter, through section entitled “Frame Dimensions and Shape”)**Thursday, October 3****Take-home Viewing Assignment:** *Mission: Impossible – Fallout* (Christopher McQuarrie, USA, 2018)**Readings:** Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art*, Ch. 5: “The Shot: Cinematography” (remainder of chapter, starting with section “Onscreen and Offscreen Space”)**Week 5 – Editing I: The Continuity System of Classical Hollywood Style****Tuesday, October 8****Readings:** Timothy Corrigan and Patricia White, “Relating Images: Editing” (from *The Film Experience: An Introduction*) – PDF on D2L**Thursday, October 10****DUE at the START OF CLASS: Shot description written assignment, 350 words****Take-home Viewing Assignment:** *Mad Max: Fury Road* (George Miller, Australia/USA, 2015)**Readings:** Karel Reisz and Gavin Millar, “Editing the Picture” (excerpt) (from *The Technique of Film Editing*) – PDF on D2L**Week 6 – Editing II: Alternative Practices in Experimental/Avant-Garde Cinema****Tuesday, October 15****Readings:** Sergei Eisenstein, “The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram” – PDF on D2L**In-class midterm quiz****Thursday, October 17****Readings:** Abigail Child, “Locales Interview (with Michael Amnasan)” – PDF on D2L**Week 7 – Sound****Tuesday, October 22****Readings:** Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art*, Ch. 7: “Sound in the Cinema”**Thursday, October 24****Take-home Viewing Assignment:** *Gravity* (Alfonso Cuarón, USA, 2013)**Readings:** Sergei Eisenstein, “Form and Content: Practice” (excerpt) – PDF on D2L

Week 8 – Narrative and The Three-Act Structure**Tuesday, October 29****Readings:** Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art*, Ch. 3: “Narrative Form”**Thursday, October 31****DUE at the START OF CLASS: Scene analysis written assignment, 900 words****Take-home Viewing Assignment:** *Sorry to Bother You* (Boots Riley, USA, 2018)**Readings:** Syd Field, “What Is a Screenplay?” and “The Plot Point” (both chapters from *Screenplay*) – PDFs on D2L**Week 9 – Genre****Tuesday, November 5****Readings:** Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art*, Ch. 9: “Film Genres”**Tuesday, November 7****Take-home Viewing Assignment:** *Get Out* (Jordan Peele, USA, 2017)**Readings:** Linda Williams, “Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess” – PDF on D2L**Week 10 – Documentary, Nonfiction, and Actuality****Tuesday, November 12****Readings:** Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art*, Ch. 10: “Documentary, Experimental, and Animated Films” (excerpt)**Thursday, November 14****Take-home Viewing Assignment:** *Medium Cool* (Haskell Wexler, USA, 1969)**Readings:** Carl Plantinga, “What Is a Nonfiction Film?” (from *Rhetoric and Representation in Nonfiction Film*) – PDF on D2L**Week 11 – Make-up/overflow, final class discussion****Tuesday, November 19**

Readings, if any, TBA. This class section will be designated as an overflow area for any material that we fell behind with during the quarter, used as a space to explore issue that students are especially interested in and felt did not receive adequate attention, and/or used for any presenting of student project material.

DUE TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 26 at 11:59 PM: Final written assignment, 1300 words**ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS****In-class midterm quiz**

Don’t let the “midterm” designation throw you: this is mostly a simple vocabulary quiz, to make sure everyone is on top of the terms we’ve been gradually introducing over the first half of the course.

Written assignments

Students will be required to complete three written assignments, ranging from tiny (350 words) to short (900 words) to more respectably-sized (1300 words). The first two assignments will be in response to very strict prompts, first describing a shot (in week 5) and then analyzing a scene (in week 8). The third, longest assignment will be a more free-form analysis of a film chosen by the student. Students’ writing in this final written assignment should engage with the reading materials of the course, applying

methodologies studied in service of well-articulated ideas and well-crafted arguments. Points for the final written assignment will be assigned according to the **thoroughness of analysis, use of course terminology and/or conceptual frameworks, organization of argument, and style** within the paper. All three papers should display basic competence in English-language composition, and the second and third should additionally present a clear thesis.

Note that assignment lengths are given in **word counts**, rather than page counts. Assignments must **meet or exceed** the requested word count in order to qualify for full credit. If a reading from the course is directly cited or otherwise referenced, **correct citation must be adhered to**. Please refer to course policies on academic misconduct and/or University policies on plagiarism if you have any questions and concerns in this area. Since it is always better to be safe than not (and plagiarism is grounds for immediate failure of the assignment), you should feel free to email me if you have specific questions that are not addressed in either of those policies.

The first two written assignments are due by the start of class on the due dates listed in the syllabus. The final written assignment is due by 11:59 PM on November 26. All assignments are due electronically. Preferred formats include .doc, .docx, .rtf., or posting online via Google Docs. PDFs are allowed, but discouraged, as they are more difficult to add comments to.