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FILM 300.01: The History of Film

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HISTORY OF FILM

FILM 300-01

Instructor: Tobin Addington E-mail: tobin.addington@mso.umt.edu Office Hours: M 3:30-5:00 & by appointment in McGill 234	Day & Time: M/W 1:00-3:20 Room: Native American Center 009
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Readings:

Flashback: A Brief History of Film, by Giannetti

Additional readings posted on Moodle or handed out in class

Assignments:

Regular reflection papers, a larger research paper, a midterm exam, and an in-class comprehensive final exam.

Course Goals/Objectives:

Born more than a century ago, circa 1895, film was the medium of the 20th century; and, by all indications, moving pictures (in some form) will continue to dominate our culture in the 21st century. Among the fine arts, however, cinema is distinct— in addition to its understanding as an art form, film quickly developed into a powerful mass entertainment medium.

This course offers an historical survey of some of the major cinema movements that have contributed to the development of cinematic grammar, style, and form, from late 19th-century pre-cinema optical experiments to today's digital films. Through screenings, lectures, readings, and discussion, students will learn about the origin and development of various film practices, trends and their connection to national and trans-national cinema movements. Over the course of the semester, students will develop aesthetic standards to analyze the specific techniques and effects employed by filmmakers. With any luck, this will lead students to enjoy cinema in new and meaningful ways.

Course Notes:

1. Each absence beyond 3 will drop your final grade by one letter.
2. Punctuality and participation are mandatory and will significantly affect your final grade.
3. Late assignments and papers are eligible for only 50% of the original grade and will only be accepted up to one week late. All papers must be typed and proofread.
4. Violations of the Policy on Academic Integrity will not be tolerated – all work must be your own. If you have questions about what counts as plagiarism, please don't hesitate to ask!

Grade Determination:

30 points (15%) Attendance and Participation
 30 points (15%) Reflection Papers
 30 points (15%) First Draft – Research Paper
 30 points (15%) Midterm Exam
 40 points (20%) Final Draft – Research Paper

40 points (20%) Final Exam

Class Participation (15%)

Students will arrive to class on time, having read and/or viewed all relevant material, and will participate in class discussions of the text and films.

Reflection Papers (15%)

Students will write short, casual papers that reveal their engagement with the readings, films, lectures and class discussions through observations and questions. Reflection papers are your space to keep a written account of what you find most compelling and/or difficult in the coursework. You are encouraged to use quotations from the readings or specific scenes from the films we screen for class as departure points for your comments.

If you find yourself frustrated by a particular film, this is your place to voice that – and then dig into why you felt that way. What techniques did the filmmaker use or withhold that affected your viewing experience? Similarly, if you find yourself particularly intrigued, interested, or excited by a film, reading, or discussion, consider why and articulate it.

Reflection papers should be no fewer than three pages typewritten, double-spaced. They will be collected approximately every two weeks. These are a place to comment on how you are experiencing the substance of the course. The deeper you dig into your own reactions, the more points you will earn.

Students will receive a **check minus** ✓ -- (worth 4 points) *indicating acceptable work but could have shown more in-depth engagement/try to read more closely/pose more questions/offer more commentary*; a **check** ✓ (worth 5 points) *indicating solid work/keep it up*; or a **check plus** ✓ + (worth 6 points) *indicating truly outstanding reflection and revelation of your thought process on both readings, films and discussions*.

First Draft – Research Paper (15%)

Students will write a paper researching an area of film history that particularly interests them. This grade will include several sub-assignments: a thesis statement, the paper itself, and a peer review of someone else's first draft.

Midterm Exam (15%)

The Midterm will include multiple choice, short answer, and brief essay questions covering the readings, films, and lectures.

Final Draft – Research Paper (20%)

Students will significantly revise their Research Paper based on instructor and student feedback to their first draft.

Final Exam (20%)

The Final will include multiple choice, short answer, and brief essay questions covering the readings, films, and lectures. The exam is cumulative, but will concentrate on material covered after the Midterm.

Grading System:

188-200 points (94 to 100%)	A
180-186 points (90 to 93%)	A-
174-178 points (87 to 89%)	B+
168-172 points (84 to 86%)	B
160-166 points (80 to 83%)	B-
154-158 points (77 to 79%)	C+
148-152 points (74 to 76%)	C
140-146 points (70 to 73%)	C-
130-138 points (65 to 69%)	D+
120-128 points (60 to 64%)	D
Under 120 points (Under 60%)	F

Class Schedule

WEEK #1: August 29 & 31

FILM BEGINNINGS: 1895-1914

When the first films were created in the mid-1890s, no one knew that cinema would evolve into the forms we take for granted today: with narrative fiction film, especially American films, dominating the world market. We will examine the development of cinema as a technological, economic, cultural, and aesthetic form, as well as the early filmmakers who experimented with the medium and established a film language. Two central tendencies in cinema (one toward “realism” and documentary represented by the Lumiere Brothers; the other toward narrative and fantasy exemplified by Georges Méliès) can be found from these beginning days of cinema.

SCREENINGS:

Clips from: *Landmarks of Early Film, Vol. 1* (1886-1913/compiled by Alice Guy), includes silent shorts by: Lumiere, Méliès, Edison, Porter

READINGS for Aug 31:

- Giannetti, Chapter 1 *Beginnings*
- Münsterberg, “The Means of the Photoplay”

WEEK #2: September 7

THE FEATURE ARRIVES

How are films put together and why do they affect us as they do? What techniques do filmmakers use to engage us? How do filmmakers use their (and our own) experience and expectations to their advantage? What layers of meaning do filmmakers employ to elicit emotional and intellectual responses from the viewer? We will answer these questions and more, as we examine the work of director D.W. Griffith, who is credited with the innovation of many narrative techniques of cinema, as well as with the shift from one-reel shorts to feature-length films. We will view selected clips of his exceptionally racist but groundbreaking *Birth of a Nation*, noting the various innovative techniques as we explore the film’s cultural and economic ramifications on society and the film industry. To close, we will watch a clip from Buster Keaton’s own southern/Civil War-themed film just 12 years later.

SCREENINGS:

Clips from: *Birth of a Nation* (1915/dir. D.W. Griffith); *The General* (1927/B. Keaton)

READINGS for Sept 7:

- Giannetti, Chapter 2 *Griffith and his Contemporaries: 1908-1920*
- Giannetti, Chapter 3 *American Cinema in the 1920s* – pgs. 35-7

WEEK #3: September 12 & 14

GERMAN EXPRESSIONISM

We will examine the specific developments, techniques, and use of mise-en-scene – everything the filmmaker places before the camera to give a shot meaning. We will explore German Expressionism, one of the early great cinema movements of Europe, which developed during the intellectual flowering of the Weimar Republic after World War I, and was characterized by using specific mise-en-scene techniques to convey the internal psychology of the characters.

SCREENINGS:

The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (1921/dir. Robert Wiene)

READINGS for Sept 12:

- Giannetti, Chapter 4 *European Cinema in the 1920s* – “Germany” pgs. 63-8

ASSIGNMENT due Sept 12:

- Reflection papers due (for weeks 1 & 2)

WEEK #4: September 19 & 21**MAKING THE CUT: SOVIET CINEMA**

We will consider the use of editing – particularly the discontinuity of the Soviet Montage style –as it was used to convey not just narrative, but also socio-political meaning. We will examine the work of the early Soviet filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein and his contributions to the theories and practice of editing. We will attempt a shot-by-shot analysis of the famous “Odessa Steps” sequence from Eisenstein’s *Battleship Potemkin*. In addition we will watch a portion of Dziga Vertov’s *Man With a Movie Camera*, a revolutionary film which took a different approach to Soviet Montage. Given time, we will look at Luis Bunuel’s disturbing but brilliant Surrealist short, *Un Chien Andalou*.

SCREENINGS:

Battleship Potemkin (1921/dir. Sergei Eisenstein)

Clips from: *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929/dir. Dziga Vertov); *Un Chien Andalou* (1929/dir. Luis Bunuel, w/ Salvador Dali)

READINGS for Sept 19:

- Giannetti, Chapter 4 *European Cinema in the 1920s* – “Soviet Union” pgs. 58-63

WEEK #5: September 26 & 28**THE FRENCH IMPRESSIONISTS**

We will discuss the importance of cinematography, specifically the use of cinematographic techniques to achieve certain emotional and psychological effects on the audience. From the work of the early Impressionists who experimented with first person point-of-view, to the narratively complex works of Jean Renoir, this period continued the development of cinema into both an art form and industry.

SCREENINGS:

Clips from *La Roue* (1923/dir. Abel Gance); *Beauty and the Beast* (1946/dir. Jean Cocteau)

Rules of the Game (1939/dir. Jean Renoir)

READINGS for Sept 26:

- Giannetti, Chapter 7 *European Cinema in the 1930s* – pgs. 125-133

ASSIGNMENT due Sept 26:

- Reflection papers due (for weeks 3 & 4)

WEEK #6: October 3 & 5**WHAT’S SO GREAT ABOUT CITIZEN KANE?**

What makes this film “the greatest film of all time?” We will explore the various narrative, technical, and sociological innovations of *Citizen Kane*, completed when its director-star was just 24 years old. Synthesizing many of the developments of the previous fifty years, it is a catalogue of stylistic and narrative techniques – revolutionary in their combination and execution, if not their conception – and (based on the life of publishing giant William Randolph Hearst) stands as a profound cultural and political comment on its era.

SCREENINGS:

Citizen Kane (1941/dir. Orson Welles)

READINGS for today:

- Giannetti, Chapter 8 *American Cinema in the 1940s* – “Decline of the Studio System” and “World War II” pgs. 135-8 & “Orson Welles” pgs. 148-152

WEEK #7: October 10 & 12**MIDTERM EXAM: Oct 10**

SCREENING: *To Be or Not To Be* (1942/dir. Ernst Lubitsch)

WEEK #8: October 17 & 19**GENRE FILMS: COWBOYS, GUMSHOES, AND TAPPERS**

How and why are films categorized into genres? Why do genre films continue to appeal to our experience and expectations? What made them such a perfect fit for the height of the American Studio System? How did artists use them to examine deeper socio-economic issues? We will enjoy and discuss the rise and staying power of film genres -- specifically the noir, the western, and the musical.

SCREENINGS:

Double Indemnity (1944/dir. Billy Wilder)

READINGS for Oct 17:

- Giannetti, Chapter 8 American Cinema in the 1940s – pgs. 144-8
- Braudy, “Genre: The Conventions of Connection”

ASSIGNMENTS for Oct 17:

- Reflection papers due (for weeks 5 & 6)
- Assign Final Paper

WEEK #9: October 24 & 26**WAR-TIME AND POST-WAR CINEMA: ITALIAN NEO-REALISM**

We will study how the lack of studio facilities, shortages of film stock and equipment, technical advancements, and the war itself stimulated the development of the Italian Neo-realist film movement. Distinguishing themselves sharply from Hollywood by moving production from the studio to real-life locations and by focusing on the lives of ordinary people as heroes rather than using stars, these filmmakers produced works that stand in stark stylistic and narrative contrast to the genre films of America at the time.

SCREENINGS:

Open City (1945/dir. Roberto Rossellini)

READINGS for Oct 24:

- Giannetti, Chapter 9 *European Cinema in the 1940s* – pgs. 168-176

WEEK #10: October 31 & November 2**POST-WAR JAPANESE CINEMA**

We will screen Akira Kurosawa’s classic *Rashōmon* and discuss the use of narrative and camera techniques used to tell this most unusual and striking story. Japanese cinema after World War II, particularly the work of Akira Kurosawa, Yasujiro Ozu, and Kenji Mizoguchi, reflects different cultural, economic, political, and aesthetic influences on the development of narrative film form, and yet their influence continues to reverberate throughout the film world.

SCREENINGS:

Rashōmon (1950/dir. Akira Kurosawa)

READINGS for Oct 31:

- Giannetti, Chapter 11 *International Cinema in the 1950s* – pgs. 200-212

ASSIGNMENT for Oct 31:

- Reflection papers due (for weeks 8 & 9)

ASSIGNMENT for Nov 2:

- Research Paper Topic & Thesis Statement

WEEK #11: November 7 & 9**FILM CRITICISM AND THE FRENCH NEW WAVE**

We will employ all the tools of analysis we have collected over the semester in our examination of the French New Wave, a movement that emerged after World War II, led primarily by independent filmmakers, many of whom began as film critics. Their

innovations in editing, narration, and other stylistic devices began as an attempt to distance their films from what they saw as the formulaic works of Hollywood and the stale cinema of the French film establishment.

SCREENINGS:

Breathless (1960/dir. Jean-Luc Godard)

READINGS:

- Giannetti, Chapter 13 *European Cinema in the 1960s* – “France” pgs. 246-256
- Sarris, “Notes on the Auteur Theory”

ASSIGNMENTS for Nov 7:

- Research Paper Topics & Thesis Statements returned

WEEK #12: November 14 & 16

NEW AMERICAN CINEMA

In the 1970s a group of young misfits, egomaniacs, and film school graduates with an appreciation for cinema history and foreign films began making films of their own within the American studio system. These exhilarating and often personal films spanned many genres, budgets, and levels of success, and have become touchstones for filmmakers ever since. This is the birthplace of Coppola, Scorsese, Spielberg, De Palma, Polanski, Cimino, Ashby, Nichols, Pakula, and many more.

SCREENINGS:

The Heartbreak Kid (1972/dir. Elaine May)

Clips from: *The Graduate*, *All the President's Men*, *The Deer Hunter*, *The Last Detail*, *Easy Rider*, *Bonnie and Clyde*, *Rosemary's Baby*, etc.

READINGS:

- Giannetti, Chapter 14 *American Cinema in the 1970s*

ASSIGNMENTS:

- Reflection papers due (for weeks 10 & 11)

WEEK #13: November 21

THE 1980S

Predominantly thought of as a time of blockbuster excess – ushered in by the overwhelming financial success of films like *Jaws* and *Star Wars* – American cinema asserted worldwide dominance in the 1980s. Nevertheless, smaller and more idiosyncratic voices continued to emerge, both in the U.S. and abroad. We will focus on those voices this week, as we seek to further develop our understanding of the cultural cross-pollination of global cinema culture.

SCREENINGS:

Blue Velvet (1986/dir. David Lynch)

Clips from: *The Vanishing* (1988/dir. George Sluizer), *Fitzcarraldo* (1982/dir. Werner Herzog), *Akira* (1988/dir. Katsuhiro Ôtomo)

ASSIGNMENT for Nov 21:

- Email paper draft to peer reviewer (and instructor) by the start of class Nov 21

WEEK #14: November 28 & 30

AMERICAN INDEPENDENT CINEMA

A new generation of American filmmakers, lead by the likes of Steven Soderbergh, Quentin Tarantino, Spike Lee, and the Coen Brothers, joined with a growing number of mini-studios (Miramax, Artisan, etc) to revitalize a more risky, expressive, and experimental cinema. Drawing strongly on international film traditions (especially European and Asian cinema of the 1960s) and consciously modeling themselves on the

New American Cinema movement of the 1970s, many of these filmmakers transitioned into working for major studios while still largely retaining their independent vision.

SCREENINGS:

Boogie Nights (1998/dir. Paul Thomas Anderson)

READINGS:

- Giannetti, Chapter 18 American Cinema in the 1990s – “The Independent Cinema” pgs. 375-381

ASSIGNMENT for Nov 28:

- Email notes back to the person whose paper you are peer reviewing by the start of class Nov 28

WEEK #15: December 5 & 7

CONTEMPORARY IRANIAN CINEMA

The late Abbas Kiarostami stood at the forefront of the Iranian New Wave, a cinematic movement borrowing heavily from the Italian Neorealists, that brought post-revolution Iranian cinema to the world stage. Beginning the 1990s with the acclaimed “Koker trilogy,” his film *A Taste of Cherry* won the Palme d’Or at Cannes in 1995. Following on Kiarostami’s heels were a phalanx of fresh voices eager to bring their stories to a global audience. In 2012, Asghar Farhadi came to prominence with his domestic thriller *A Separation*, a film that would go on to win an Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film – the first Iranian film to win that award in Oscar history.

SCREENINGS:

- *A Separation* (2011/dir. Asghar Farhadi)

READINGS for today:

- Hamid, “Freedom and Its Discontents”

- Bell, “Scenes from a Marriage”

ASSIGNMENT due Dec 7:

- Final Paper due.

December 12

Review for Final Exam

December 16, 1:10-3:10

FINAL EXAM