

Introduction to Cinema
ENGL 202, Sections 01 and 02

Professor Rashna Richards

Office: 307 Palmer

Office Hours: T 10:00-1:00 and by appt.

Office Phone: 843-3399

Email: richardsr@rhodes.edu

Semester: Fall 2015

Class: MWF 10:00-10:50 (01); MWF 11:00-11:50 (02)

Room: 206 Palmer

Screening: W 7:00-9:30

Room: FJ-B

Course Description

While the cinematograph was a product of scientific innovation, film quickly became the most popular and influential cultural medium of the twentieth century. Only a decade after its invention, cinema had spread to all parts of the globe, and the motion pictures became a way of telling our stories to ourselves while simultaneously transporting us away from our lives to what Maxim Gorky called "the Kingdom of Shadows." Since then, films have intrigued and frustrated, perplexed and inspired billions of viewers worldwide. The issues that preoccupied the earliest film critics continue to puzzle later generations: What is cinema? Is it an art? Is it a language? What do movies reveal about the underlying ideologies of the cultures that produce them? How do they address, exploit, and satisfy various audience desires? This course offers an introduction to film analysis. We will learn and practice close reading of films through an examination of various cinematic elements, such as *mise en scène*, cinematography, sound, lighting, editing, and so on. Using different interpretive approaches, we will also consider questions of film styles, genres, and industrial contexts as well as issues of ideology, race, gender, sexuality, and representation. By focusing on its formal and social contexts, we will develop an understanding of cinema as an art and an industry, an imaginary pleasure and a symbolic language. Overall, we will acquire critical tools to analyze cinema's aesthetic and cultural significance.

Standard of Work: This course offers an introduction to film analysis by enabling students to develop a set of critical skills to explicate, interpret, and interrogate cinematic texts. It is not a course in film appreciation. Our primary focus will be on interpretation and analysis; we will not be making evaluative claims or trying to judge whether a film is "good" or "bad." The readings are intellectually challenging, as are the films. Some films are black-and-white, and some are subtitled. You will need to take careful notes on the films, readings, and in-class discussions. In addition, this is a rigorous writing course. Assignments will expect you to read significant cinematic details, use film terminology to analyze scenes, make interpretive claims about a film's themes or motifs, and participate in the ongoing scholarly conversation about film history and criticism. We will never write popular reviews, engage in a thumbs up-thumbs down appraisal of films, or treat films as mere entertainment. Therefore, you are encouraged to think seriously about your commitment to the course.

Course Policies

Note 1: These policies will be applied without exceptions. In the interest of fairness to fellow students, please don't expect or ask for special accommodations or exemptions.

Note 2: Failure to remember or follow any of these policies will result in severe penalties to your professionalism grade.

Attendance: You are required to attend all classes. Do not email me about your absences. If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to get information and/or handouts from a classmate. If you miss a screening, it is your responsibility to find and watch the film. You are allowed six absences (including classes and screenings), no questions asked. Save these absences for athletics, extracurricular activities, or medical/personal emergencies. After six absences, you will fail the course.

Tardiness: You are required to be on time. Habitual tardiness, even if it's only a couple of minutes, will hurt your participation/professionalism grade.

Late Work: I do not accept late work. Paper copies of all assignments are due at the beginning of class on the deadline. Computer glitches or printing problems are not legitimate excuses for late work. If you do not plan on being here when an assignment is due, it must be in my mailbox before the deadline. You will receive a zero on an assignment if it is not turned in when it is due. Please note that you are required to complete all assignments in order to receive a passing grade.

Class Participation: You are required to come to class prepared with the assigned reading for that day. I expect constructive verbal contribution to each class meeting. Fair warning: if you do not volunteer, you will be called on to contribute to class discussions. A student who disrupts class or in any way creates a hostile environment will be subject to disciplinary action. A student who reads or does homework for another class, chats with a neighbor, leaves the classroom, or simply dozes off should expect a very low participation grade. I will likely say nothing at the time of the incident, but disruptive behavior will adversely affect your professionalism grade; you may also be marked absent for that day.

Screenings: We will view a wide variety of films in class. You may find these films intellectually challenging or troubling. Learning how to watch and analyze them critically will be an important part of our discussions and assignments.

Electronic Devices: The use of all electronic devices is forbidden in this class. You should turn off all electronic devices, including laptops, before class begins. If you are observed texting, you will be marked absent for that day.

Food or Drink: I don't mind if you bring something to drink, but please avoid bringing any food into the classroom.

Consultation: I'll be happy to talk with you about any questions or concerns you have about the class. You don't need to make an appointment to stop by during my office hours. If those times

don't work, see me after class so we can set up another time that is mutually convenient. Appointments cannot be made by email.

Email: It is always preferable to meet in person to discuss any questions or concerns. Email should be reserved for emergencies, when your question cannot wait to be answered until the next time we meet. Please regard email correspondence as formal communication and abide by rules of professional etiquette. Email is absolutely not the medium for negotiating special requests, addressing grade concerns, or discussing ideas for assignments; those issues must be handled in person.

Format of Assignments: All written assignments need to be typed and double spaced, in 12 pt. font, using Times New Roman, with one-inch margins on all sides. The format and citations must conform to MLA specifications, or the assignment may not be accepted. You do not need a title page; instead, include your name, my name, course name/number, and date in the top left corner of the first page. Be sure to number and staple your pages; also, proofread your work before printing up the final draft. I do not accept any assignments via email.

Intellectual Honesty: All work is assumed to be the student's own and produced exclusively for the course in which it is submitted. Papers written for one course, even if revised, are not to be submitted in another without prior approval. Borrowing of ideas or language from other sources (including published material, other student papers, google or other electronic resources, etc.) must be carefully documented. You are advised against posting your work on the internet, since doing so may lead to suspicion of plagiarism. You are also advised to save drafts of your work to verify its originality. Cases of suspected plagiarism will be referred to the Honor Council, and, if convicted, the student will receive an F in the course in addition to sanctions assigned by the Council. Carelessness in documenting sources, even if not technically plagiarism, will be penalized as appropriate. If you are uncertain about how or whether to document sources, please consult me.

Disability Issues: Students with documented disabilities may be entitled to specific accommodations. Please contact the office of Student Disability Services for more information. In every case, it is your responsibility to provide me with an official letter from SDS.

Course Evaluation

Grade Distribution

| | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------|--------------------|
| Participation/Professionalism | 10% | 100 points |
| Quizzes | 5% | 50 points |
| Response Papers | 20% | 200 points |
| Scene Analysis Paper | 15% | 150 points |
| Film Analysis Paper | 20% | 200 points |
| Research Paper | 30% | 300 points |
| Total | 100% | 1000 points |

Assignments (Additional guidelines will be provided when each assignment is introduced.)

Participation/Professionalism: You are required to contribute comments and questions that further class discussion. Simply agreeing or disagreeing with your classmates and/or the readings is not enough. You are expected to add thoughtful ideas to the debate by engaging with the texts in a sophisticated manner. Participation will be evaluated in terms of quantity and quality. Active engagement will be rewarded, and disengaged behavior will be penalized. Failure to follow any course policies or guidelines will hurt your professionalism grade.

Quizzes: From time to time, you will be quizzed or asked to respond to specific short-answer questions on the day's film or reading. Quizzes are always unannounced, and they cannot be made up.

Response Papers (1 page x 4): Over the course of the semester, you will write four responses to the screenings. Prompts will be provided.

Scene Analysis Paper (2-3 pages): For this short paper, you will analyze a specific scene by discussing particular aspects of individual shots, such as setting, cinematography, editing, sound, and so on, and exploring how those elements contribute to the creation of meaning.

Film Analysis Paper (4-5 pages): For this essay, you will trace an idea, theme, or motif as it develops over the course of an entire film. Your paper will make an argument about the film and analyze isolated passages to show how they illustrate your thesis.

Research Paper (9-10 pages): For the final project, you will write a research paper that makes an argument about a series of films united by genre, star, auteur, ideology, and so on. You will be given several general prompts to help you arrive at your thesis. Your paper will be evaluated on the originality of your argument, the rigor of your analysis, and the quality of your research.

Grading Guidelines

A = 100-94; **A-** = 93-90; **B+** = 89-87; **B** = 86-84; **B-** = 83-80
C+ = 79-77; **C** = 76-74; **C-** = 73-70; **D+** = 69-67; **D** = 66-64; **D-** = 63-60; **F** < 60

A range (100-90): Excellent work; exemplary in argument and organization; professionally presented; free of mechanical errors.

B range (89-80): Good, solid work; substantive in argument and organization; meets all requirements, but needs some revisions; no more than five mechanical errors.

C range (79-70): Satisfactory work; addresses the assignment adequately, but requires some significant revisions of content and/or mechanics.

D range (69-60): Below average work; misses one or more central aspects of the assignment; inadequate focus and/or development; awkwardly written; requires extensive rewriting.

F range (< 60): Unacceptable work; fails to meet the requirements of the assignment; incomplete or irrelevant material; lack of focus or development.

Course Text

Nichols, Bill. *Engaging Cinema: An Introduction to Film Studies*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2010. Print.

Course Schedule (subject to change)

Week 1: Introductions

Wed., Aug. 26 Introduction to the course

No Screening

Fri., Aug. 28 Discussion

Clips: Lumière, *Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat* (1895); Cronenberg, *At the Suicide of the Last Jew in the World in the Last Cinema in the World* (2007)

Week 2: Formal and Social Contexts

Mon., Aug. 31 Nichols, 3-12

Clips: Lynch, *Blue Velvet* (1986)

Wed., Sept. 2 Nichols, 12-25

Clips: Griffith, *Birth of a Nation* (1915); Spielberg, *Schindler's List* (1993)

Screening Siegel, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956)

Fri., Sept. 4 Discussion

Introduction to Response Papers

Week 3: Film Grammar I

Mon., Sept. 7 No classes: Labor Day

Wed., Sept. 9 Nichols, 50-56 and 60-64

Clips: Welles, *Citizen Kane* (1941); Coppola, *The Conversation* (1974)

Screening Scorsese, *Taxi Driver* (1976)

Fri., Sept. 11 **Response Paper #1 due**

Nichols, 57-59, 64-66

Clips: Wilder, *Double Indemnity* (1944)

Week 4: Film Grammar II

Mon., Sept. 14 Nichols, 38-50

Clips: Godard, *Breathless* (1960)

Wed., Sept. 16 Contd.

Clips: Eisenstein, *Battleship Potemkin* (1925)

Screening Hitchcock, *Rear Window* (1954)

Fri., Sept. 18 Pye, "Enter Lisa" (handout)

Introduction to Scene Analysis Paper

Week 5: Narrative Cinema

Mon., Sept. 21 Nichols, 136-153

Clips: Benton, *Kramer vs. Kramer* (1979)

Wed., Sept. 23 Contd.
Clips: Wiene, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920); Varda, *Cléo from 5 to 7* (1962)

Screening De Sica, *Bicycle Thieves* (1948)

Fri., Sept. 25 **Response Paper #2 due**
Nichols, 153-172
Clips: Hitchcock, *Vertigo* (1958)

Week 6: Documentary Cinema

Mon., Sept. 28 Nichols, 99-114
Clips: Flaherty, *Nanook of the North* (1922); Pennebaker, *Dont Look Back* (1967)

Wed., Sept. 30 Nichols, 114-135
Clips: Marsh, *Man on Wire* (2008); Schwartz, *Little White Lie* (2014)

Screening Welles, *F for Fake* (1975)

Fri., Oct. 2 Discussion
Workshop for Scene Analysis Paper

Week 7: Avant-Garde and Experimental Cinema

Mon., Oct. 5 **Scene Analysis Paper due**
Clips: Deren, *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943)

Wed., Oct. 7 Nichols, 80-98
Clips: Buñuel, *L'Age d'Or* (1930); Brakhage, *The Act of Seeing with One's Own Eyes* (1971)

Screening Allen, *Deconstructing Harry* (1997)

Fri., Oct. 9 Discussion
Clips: von Trier, *The Five Obstructions* (2003)

Week 8: Film Styles

Mon., Oct. 12 Nichols, 175-199
Lumière, *Workers Leaving the Factory* (1895); Méliès, *A Trip to the Moon* (1902)

Wed., Oct. 14 Nichols, 200-208
Clips: Resnais, *Night and Fog* (1955); Nolan, *Memento* (2000)

Screening Haynes, *Far from Heaven* (2002)

Fri., Oct. 16 Discussion
Clips: Ozu, *Tokyo Story* (1953)

Week 9: Film Genres

Mon., Oct. 19 No classes: Fall Recess

Wed., Oct. 21 Nichols, 248-267
Clips: Porter, *The Great Train Robbery* (1903); Stevens, *Shane*, (1953)

Screening Vinterberg, *The Hunt* (2012)

Fri., Oct. 23 **Response Paper #3 due**
Nichols, 267-286
Introduction to Film Analysis Paper

Week 10: Institutional and National Contexts

- Mon., Oct. 26** Nichols, 209-228
Clips: Ulmer, *Detour* (1945)
- Wed., Oct. 28** Nichols, 229-247
Clips: Preminger, *The Man with the Golden Arm* (1955); Powell, *Peeping Tom* (1960)
- Screening** Hopper, *Easy Rider* (1969)
Fri., Oct. 30 Discussion
Clips: Stone, *Natural Born Killers* (1994)

Week 11: Ideology

- Mon., Nov. 2** Nichols, 287-297
Clips: Capra, *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946)
- Wed., Nov. 4** Nichols, 297-324
Clips: Godard, *Vivre sa Vie* (1962)
- Screening** Fassbinder, *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* (1974)
Fri., Nov. 6 **Response Paper #4 due**
Discussion
Introduction to Research Paper
Workshop for Film Analysis Paper

Week 12: Race and Ethnicity

- Mon., Nov. 9** Nichols, 325-345
Clips: Fleming, *Gone with the Wind* (1939); Kramer, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (1967)
- Wed., Nov. 11** Nichols, 345-358
Clips: Sembene, *Black Girl* (1966)
- Screening** Lee, *Do the Right Thing* (1989)
Fri., Nov. 13 **Film Analysis Paper due**
Discussion

Week 13: Gender and Sexuality I

- Mon., Nov. 16** Nichols, 359-394
Clips: Ray, *Rebel without a Cause* (1955); Allen, *Annie Hall* (1977)
- Wed., Nov. 18** Nichols, 395-412
Clips: Negulesco, *How to Marry a Millionaire* (1953); Scott, *Thelma and Louise* (1991)
- Screening** Altman, *3 Women* (1977)
Fri., Nov. 20 Discussion

Week 14: Gender and Sexuality II

- Mon., Nov. 23** Nichols, 412-431
Clips: Dunye, *The Watermelon Woman* (1996)
- Wed., Nov. 25** No classes: Thanksgiving Recess
Fri., Nov. 27 No classes: Thanksgiving Recess

Week 15: New Media Landscape

- Mon., Nov. 30** Mittell, "Narrative Complexity in Contemporary American Television"
(handout)
Clips: Sorkin, *The West Wing* (1999-2006); David, *Curb Your Enthusiasm*
(2000-)
- Wed., Dec. 2** Contd.
Clips: Gilligan, *Breaking Bad* (2008-13); Willimon, *House of Cards*
(2013-)
- Screening** Weiner, *Mad Men* (2007-15)
- Fri., Dec. 4** Discussion

Week 16: The End

- Mon., Dec. 7** Workshop for Research Paper
- Wed., Dec. 9** Conferences for Research Paper
- No Screening**
- Fri., Dec. 11** **Research Paper due by noon (leave in box on office door—307
Palmer)**