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MAR 300.02: Visions of Film

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MAR 300 Section 2/VISIONS OF FILM

Professor: Vera Brunner-Sung (vera.brunner-sung@umontana.edu)

The Roxy Theater (718 S Higgins Ave), Wednesdays 4:10-7

Office Hours by appointment

TA: Mason Douglass (mason.douglass@umontana.edu)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This is an intermediate-level Media Arts theory and practice class, during which you will develop a deeper understanding of visual language in movies and the ideas that have developed over the last century in regard to this medium. Many theory classes are developed for those who want to think and write about films. This class is developed to assist those who also wish to make films. How does visual style relate to form and content? A shot composition, an edit, a camera movement, a play of light and dark, a visual motif, a special effect — what can these tell us about the filmmaker's intentions and influences, as well as help explain the film's context (of production, exhibition, reception by audience, influence on other filmmakers)? How do film theorists (sometimes the filmmaker, sometimes not) view the nature of film and how can their theories be upheld or disproved by your analysis of the films we view? What relationship does theory have to practice?

IN CLASS

Each week we will watch films (sometimes in their entirety, sometimes clips) and discuss them together. We will also have group critiques for your video assignments.

MOODLE

We have a Moodle site for our class, and this is where you will turn in assignments, find links to course materials, our schedule, ways to connect with your classmates, and up-to-date information on any changes in the syllabus. This is also where you'll upload assignments and take quizzes. Finally, there are also **optional weekly forums** here for the discussion of films and readings. Do you have a question? Do you want to know what your classmates think about the film, and don't want to wait til class next week? Post and/or peruse! Mason and I will check in here, as well.

THE WORK – 100 POINTS TOTAL

- 1) Vocabulary quiz. A vocabulary quiz must be completed by the third week of the course. You must receive a grade of 100%, but you may take it as many times as you want before the deadline. (5 pts)
- 2) Weekly reading assignments. For group discussion, bring in two questions on the readings weekly. There will be quizzes on readings throughout the semester (11 pts).
- 3) Video proposals. You and your partner will submit a short proposal for each of your two videos, via Moodle. (5 pts each - total 10 pts)
- 4) Two short videos. You will work in pairs to make these projects over the course of the semester. (10 pts each - total 20 pts)
- 5) Weekly 350-500 word written reflections. Some weeks, you will have a specific prompt; for others, the topic will be open. These need not be formal essays, but they are NOT stream-of-consciousness ramblings. *I want to know not only what you think, but why, and how this relates to the films AND readings*. They will always be due by 11:55pm Tuesday nights, uploaded to Moodle. We ONLY accept .DOC, .DOCX, or .PDF formats. You will receive feedback on these via Moodle, as well. (13 @ 3 pts each – total 39 pts)
- 6) Artist statement. Rough draft will be due at midterm; final draft during finals week. (Draft is 5 pts; Final 10 pts - total 15 pts)

READINGS

There is no textbook for this course, but every week you will have assigned readings. The readings will be available to you via download or link via our Moodle shell. Supplementary resources are also posted if you would like to do further research.

VIDEO ASSIGNMENT CRITERIA - with a partner.

Proposals will be due in class. See schedule.

Video 1. Choose a style or genre from those discussed in Weeks 2 through 6, and create a video in the same vein. **1-2 mins.**

Video 2: Similarly to Video 1, you must engage a genre or style addressed in class to date, but this time from at least two different sources (e.g., film noir lighting and realist camera work; screwball dialogue and new wave editing, etc.). The subject and story are up to you. **1-2 mins.**

For both assignments, you will be evaluated on the following three points:

- (1) **Quality of technique.** For example, if the camera is shaking, is it intentional, or did you just forget to use a tripod? Is it over- or underexposed so that it's hard to see what you shot? Is the video properly *finished* — opening titles, end credits, black at head and tail?
- (2) **Quality of concept.** Basically, do you have a clear, solid idea? Is it related to the assignment? Are you challenging yourself?
- (3) **Quality of execution.** How effectively does your concept come through in your video? How well do the visual/audio choices you made communicate your idea?

FILMS

Films are screened each week and also reserved at the library for additional viewings, and some (NOT ALL) are available online. YOU MUST ATTEND THE SCREENINGS. They count as class time and credit hours. Library checkout is for further study only, NOT initial viewing.

ATTENDANCE

Attendance is mandatory. TWO ABSENCES, “excused” or otherwise, are permitted. On the THIRD ABSENCE, your grade will drop ten points (one full letter grade). On the FOURTH ABSENCE your grade will drop ANOTHER ten points, etc. If you are late three times, it will count as one absence.

LATE WORK

After a deadline passes, you have a **one week grace period** for turning in assignments, regardless of circumstances. You may receive up to half the original credit (e.g., if you turn in a 3-point assignment late, you can now receive a maximum of 1.5 points). After the week has passed, late work is no longer accepted.

PLAGIARISM

The University's definition of plagiarism: “Representing another person's words, ideas, data, or materials as one's own.” Any student who plagiarizes will receive a failing grade, as well as disciplinary sanction by the University. All students must practice academic honesty. It is your responsibility to be familiar with the Student Conduct Code:

http://life.umt.edu/vpsa/student_conduct.php.

THE INSTRUCTOR RESERVES THE RIGHT TO CHANGE ANYTHING IN THE SYLLABUS. CHANGES, IF THEY ARE MADE, WILL BE ANNOUNCED VIA E-MAIL/MOODLE AND IN CLASS. THE UPDATED SYLLABUS WILL BE POSTED ON THE CLASS MOODLE PAGE.

Dates	Class Topics, Assignments, and Due Dates
Week 1 Jan. 29	Introduction. What to expect; recap vocabulary; view selected short films. Assignment due next week. Reflection 1: What inspires your creativity? Why do you care about film? Reading for next week. (1) Vocabulary review; (2) J. Hoberman, “After the Gold Rush: Chaplin at One Hundred,” (3) Walter Kerr, “The Keaton Quiet.” Assignment due wk 3. Vocabulary quiz.
Week 2 Feb. 5	Films. <i>One Week</i> (Buster Keaton/Edward F. Cline, 1920, :19); <i>Sherlock, Jr.</i> (Buster Keaton, 1924, :45); <i>Easy Street</i> (Charlie Chaplin, 1917, :25); <i>The Music Box</i> (James Parrott, 1932, :28). Assignments due next week. (1) Reflection 2: Choose a moment from one of the films that made you laugh. Use the proper vocabulary to analyze why it was funny; (2) Vocabulary quiz. Reading due next week. (1) Thomas Elsaesser, “Germany: The Weimar Years,” (2) Jonathan Rosenbaum, “Fascinating Rhythms: M”
Week 3 Feb. 12	Films. Excerpt <i>The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari</i> (Robert Wiene, 1919); <i>M</i> (Fritz Lang, 1931, 1:50); excerpt <i>Singin’ in the Rain</i> (Stanley Donen and Gene Kelley, 1952) Assignment due next week. Reflection 3. Reading due next week. Jean Renoir, <i>My Life and Films</i> (excerpt).
Week 4 Feb. 19	Film. <i>The Grand Illusion</i> (Jean Renoir, 1937, 1:54) Assignment due next week. Reflection 4. Reading due next week. Andre Bazin, “The Evolution of the Language of Cinema.” Assignment due wk 6. Video 1 proposal. Assignment due wk 9. Artist statement draft.
Week 5 Feb. 26	Film. <i>The Bicycle Thieves</i> (Vittorio de Sica, 1948, 1:29) Assignment due next week. Reflection 5. Reading due next week. (1) Thomas Schatz, “Hollywood: The Triumph of the Studio System” (2) Manny Farber & W.S. Poster, “Preston Sturges: Success in the Movies.”
Week 6 Mar. 5	Film. <i>The Lady Eve</i> (Preston Sturges, 1941, 1:33) Assignment due next week. Reflection 6. Reading due next week. (1) Rick Altman, “Noir as Adjective and Noun” (2) J.A. Place & L.S. Peterson, “Some Visual Motifs of <i>Film Noir</i> .” Assignment due wk 9. Video 1.
Week 7 Mar. 12	Film. <i>Kiss Me Deadly</i> (Robert Aldrich, 1955, 1:46) Assignment due next week. Reflection 7. Reading due next week. (1) Jim Kitses, “Authorship and Genre: Notes on the Western (2) J. Hoberman, “How the Western Was Lost”
Week 8 Mar. 19	Film. <i>Fort Apache</i> (John Ford, 1948, 2:05) Assignment due next week. (1)Video 1; (2)Artist Statement draft; (3)Reflection 8. No reading for next week.

Week 9 Mar. 26	CRITIQUE: Video 1, first draft artist statement Assignment due wk 11. Reflection 9: what was your experience of critique this week? What did you learn, and how will you prepare for the next critique? Reading due wk 11. TBD.
Week 10 April 2	SPRING BREAK
Week 11 April 9	Films. <i>Cleo from 5 to 7</i> (Agnes Varda, 1962, 1:30); excerpt from <i>Breathless</i> (Jean-Luc Godard, 1960). Assignment due wk 12. Reflection 10. Reading due wk 12. TBD Assignment due Week 13: Video 2 proposal Assignment due finals week: Video 2.
Week 12 April 16	TBD
Week 13 April 23	TBD
Week 14 April 30	TBD
Week 15 May 7	TBD
May 14	FINAL SCREENING - Video 2 & Final Artist Statement due!