

ENGLISH 478-SECTION 101: STUDIES IN FILM

“Cinema History I: Inventing a Medium
and Its Audiences”

University of South Alabama
Spring Semester 2006
Class Discussion: Wednesday, 12:20-
3:05 PM in Humanities 160
Screening Schedule: TBA

Dr. Lincoln Shlensky
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Course Web site: www.overleaf.org

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Students enrolled in this course will receive a general introduction to the history of film in its multiple strands of development from the late nineteenth century to approximately World War II, as obtained through the interpretation and analysis of assigned films screened inside and outside of the classroom. The course will impart a more comprehensive understanding of cinematic forms and visual rhetorical modes by presenting selected history, theory, and criticism. Assigned readings from the textbook and other selected essays will elaborate on formal, social, and thematic elements that contributed to the advancement of film as a popular medium. The course will concentrate on the history of film aesthetics, the social context in which these aesthetics developed, and the specific innovations of some of the major filmmakers associated with specific film forms. Students will gain knowledge of film history and formal developments through screening and re-screening films, reading assigned material,

consistently attending lectures and participating in class discussion, and taking and reviewing detailed preparatory and lecture notes. Evaluation will take the form of regular quizzes, seven peer-reviewed reader response essays, a midterm and a final in-class oral presentation, a midterm essay, and a final essay due on the scheduled final examination date.

REQUIREMENTS

- 2-4 hours of required evening film screenings per week (schedule to be arranged)
- 3 hours of classroom discussion per week
- Required course readings as assigned
- In-class presentation before the midterm, and a 1200-word midterm essay (20% of grade) due March 8.
- In-class presentation before the final, and a 2400-word essay due on the date of the final exam (40% of grade)
- Screening reports (seven reports x 350 words each, blogged to kinographic.blogspot.com), and seven constructive comments on others' blog entries (20% of grade). For writing guidelines, see “Response Essay Guidelines” under Assignments at www.overleaf.org.
- Periodic “pop” quizzes (10% of grade)
- Attendance and participation in class (10% of grade)

Note: Students will be given adequate notification should it become necessary to change course requirements or the schedule of assignments.

In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, students with bona fide

disabilities will be afforded reasonable accommodations. Please contact the Office of Special Student Services, which is located in the Student Center, Room 270, tel. 460-7212.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell, *Film History: An Introduction* (2nd Ed., 2003)

Other assigned readings will be made available as course reserve materials at the library or on the course Web site.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

More than three (3) absences shall result in reduction of the student's grade by half-a-grade per absence. Please set all cellular phones to the "off" position during class.

COMPUTER ACCESS POLICY

Students are required by the University to have regular access to a computer. The instructor will make some required materials for the course available on the course Web site, and will expect students to check e-mail at least twice a week and to post to the course blog regularly. Please alert the instructor immediately of any e-mail address changes.

UNIMPEDED LEARNING

Due to the nature of artistic forms and intellectual discussion, course materials and discussion will at times include topics and images that some may find disturbing or offensive. If a student should feel uncomfortable with course materials, discussion, or the behavior of anyone in the class, it is the student's responsibility to alert the instructor as soon as possible so that the instructor may address the matter.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

USA is committed to the fundamental value of academic honesty. The student handbook, *The Lowdown*, defines plagiarism as a form of academic misconduct "subject to investigation and disciplinary action through appropriate university procedures." Plagiarism is using somebody else's writing or ideas in your own writing without correctly identifying the sources. By enrolling in this course, students agree that all assignments may be subject to some form of originality review. Any student who commits plagiarism will receive a failing grade for the course.

ESSAY FORMAT

Course essays must be submitted to the instructor in *both* electronic and printed form. The printed version must be typed and double-spaced, with 1-inch margins. Students are responsible for keeping an extra copy of all submitted materials; failure to do so will result in denied credit should the submitted materials be lost or subject to spontaneous combustion.

LATE WORK

If writing assignments are submitted after the beginning of the class period during which they are due, credit will be deducted by one grade (or the equivalent) per day, starting with the due date. Response essays must be posted to the course blog by the morning of the due date. Because response essays can be posted from any computer, late essays will be given full credit only by prior permission.

WRITING IMPROVEMENT

If a student exhibits writing difficulties in course-related assignments, the instructor may request that the student

seek assistance at the Writing Center. The Writing Center office is located in room 207 of Alpha Hall East. To schedule an appointment with a writing consultant, call the Writing Center at 460-6480.

SCHEDULE OF ASSIGNMENTS

Week 1: Origins of the film apparatus

January 11

Introduction: The early (or “primitive”) cinema

Required: Open a free user account at www.blogger.com. After you open the blogger account, send an email message to: shlensky@jaguar1.usouthal.edu with EH478 in the subject line, and with your name and phone number in the message body. You will shortly receive an invitation to join the class blog, “Kinographic.”

In class:

Muybridge, Lumière, Méliès, Edison, *Great Train Robbery and Other Primary Works* (VHS-2897-1)

Auguste, Antoine, and Louis Lumière, *The Lumière Brothers' First Films* (VHS-2896)

Georges Méliès, *Films of George Méliès*. Volume #1 (VHS-2891)

Georges Méliès, *The Magic of Méliès* (VHS-2897-4)

Week 2: Early silent narrative and the nation

January 18

Reading assignment due today: Thompson and Bordwell, pp. 11-54, 68-77.

Screening assignment due today: D. W. Griffith, *Birth of a Nation* (USA 1915, 125 min., VHS-1435).

Required: Bring a copy of the course syllabus to class. Be sure to follow the instructions for opening a Blogger account and emailing the instructor prior to this class period (see Week 1).

In class:

D.W. Griffith's *Biograph Shorts* (DVD-000190)

Buster Keaton, *Buster Keaton Collection* (DVD-000805)

Charlie Chaplin, *The Chaplin Mutuals* (DVD-000128)

Week 3: German Expressionism

January 25

Thompson and Bordwell, pp. 101-18, 158-62.

Fritz Lang, *Metropolis* (Germany 1927, 153 min., DVD-000308)

In class:

Robert Wiene, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Germany 1919, 77 min., DVD-000032)

Week 4: Soviet Cinema and social filmmaking

February 1

Thompson and Bordwell, pp. 119-42. Sergei Eisenstein, *Battleship Potemkin* (Soviet Union 1925, 74 min., DVD-000544)

In class:

Dziga Vertov, *Man with a Movie Camera* (Soviet Union 1929, 68 min., DVD-000009)

Dziga Vertov, *Kino-Eye* (DVD-000094)

Week 5: The late silent era

February 8

Thompson and Bordwell, pp. 143-66.

F. W. Murnau, *Sunrise* (USA 1927, 95 min., DVD-000807)

In class:

King Vidor, *The Crowd* (USA 1928, 104 min., VHS-2470)

Charles Chaplin, *The Circus* (USA 1928, 72 min., DVD-000043)

Buster Keaton, *The General* (USA 1927, 106 min., VHS-0853 or VHS-2885-1)

Week 6: The International Style

February 15

Thompson and Bordwell, pp. 167-73.

Carl Theodor Dreyer, *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* (aka *The Passion of Joan of Arc*) (France 1928, 82 min., DVD-000010)

In class:

Carl Theodor Dreyer, *Vampyr* (France/Germany 1931, 75 min., VHS-1478)

Week 7: Experimental and Avant Garde Film

February 22

Thompson and Bordwell, pp. 173-80.

Luis Buñuel, *L'Age d'or* (France 1930, 64 min., VHS-3340)

In class:

Maya Deren, *Meshes of the Afternoon* (USA 1943, 18 min., VHS-2592)

Salvador Dalí and Luis Buñuel, *Un Chien Andalou* (France 1928, 17 min., VHS-3346)

Avant Garde: experimental cinema of the 1920s and '30s (DVD-000841)

Week 8: Documentary and the city film

March 1

Thompson and Bordwell, pp. 181-90.

Robert Flaherty, *Nanook of the North* (USA/France 1922, 69 min., VHS-1598-B)

In class:

Walter Ruttmann, *Berlin, Symphony of a Great City* (Germany, 1927, 65 min., DVD-000207)

Week 9: Ethnic Cinemas and Audiences

March 8

Midterm Essay Due

Thompson and Bordwell, pp. 162-3; J. Hoberman, *Bridge of Light* (excerpt)

Alan Crosland, *The Jazz Singer* (USA 1927, 89 min., VHS-0368)

In class:

Oscar Micheaux, *Within Our Gates* (USA 1919, 79 min., VHS-2052-1)

Eleanor Antin, *The Man Without a World* (USA 1991, 98 min., VHS-3444)

Pearl Bowser and Bestor Cram, *Midnight Ramble: Oscar Micheaux and the History of Race Movies* (USA, 1994, 56 min., INTERLIBRARY LOAN)

Week 10: Emergence of the sound film

March 22

Thompson and Bordwell, pp. 191-212.

Fritz Lang, *M* (Germany 1931, 110 min., DVD-000025)

In class:

Gene Kelly, *Singin' in the Rain* (USA 1951, 103 min., VHS-0110)

Week 11: The Classic Hollywood Studio System and Genre: Comedy and Western

March 29

Thompson and Bordwell, pp. 147-9, 213-28.

Howard Hawks, *His Girl Friday* (USA 1940, 92 min., VHS-2482) **and also:**

Julie Dash, *Illusions* (USA 1982, 34 min., VHS-3016)

In class:
John Ford, *Stagecoach* (USA 1939, 98 min., VHS-0206)

Week 12: Classical Hollywood Cinema:
American humanism and loss of innocence

April 5
Thompson and Bordwell, pp. 228-38;
further readings TBA.
Frank Capra, *Meet John Doe* (USA 1941, 122 min., INTERLIBRARY LOAN)

In class:
Preston Sturges, *Sullivan's Travels* (USA 1941, 90 min., VHS-2517)

Week 13: Humanist Cinema in Europe

April 12
Readings TBA.
Jean Renoir, *La Règle du jeu* (aka *Rules of the Game*) (France 1939, 110 min., VHS-0079)

In class:
Jean Renoir, *La Grande Illusion* (aka *Grand Illusion*) (France 1937, 114 min., DVD-000047)

Week 14: Orson Welles and Alfred Hitchcock: Memory

April 19
Thompson and Bordwell, pp. 239-46;
further reading TBA.
Orson Welles, *Citizen Kane* (USA 1941, 120 min., VHS-0001)

In class:
Alfred Hitchcock, *Rebecca* (USA 1940, 132 min., VHS-2163)

Week 15: American Populism

April 26
Thompson and Bordwell, pp. 303-22.

John Ford, *The Grapes of Wrath* (USA 1940, 128 min., VHS-0073)

In class:
William Wyler, *Dead End* (USA 1937, 93 min., INTERLIBRARY LOAN)

The final essay of 2400 words is due on the date of the scheduled final exam, at the beginning of the exam period (there will be no final exam).