

DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL STUDIES  
TRENT UNIVERSITY

**CUST 2581H: INTRODUCTION TO FILM I: WHAT IS CINEMA?**

**2019 F**  
Peterborough

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**Course Description**

This course provides a critical introduction to the fundamentals of film. The first half is focused on introducing the basic building blocks of film criticism, with weekly themes and screenings devoted to broad themes such as narrative cinema, mise-en-scène, cinematography, editing & sound. The second half delves into aspects of film theory, with weekly themes and screenings on genre, feminist and queer critique, cine-psychoanalysis, the critique of ideology and social causes, and the critique of representation.

**Course Format**

This course will be taught remotely through the Blackboard Learning System. The main components of the course include:

One weekly (pre-recorded) lecture, and one synchronous (recorded) Q&A session.

1) Weekly (pre-recorded) lectures. You will find these in digestible (10-15 minute) clips, along with other relevant material, in the sidebar pages on Blackboard.

N.B.: Each lecture page will have instructions for required media content, which will be provided either through clips that you can view directly from Blackboard, links to webpages, or links to material from the Bata Library.

2) Weekly synchronous (recorded) Zoom Q&A will be held on Wednesdays, 2:00PM-4:50PM, for the duration of the school term. You can find a link to these sessions in the Zoom Live Sessions sidebar page on Blackboard. These meetings will be led by the Professor and TAs in conversation with students. *You are strongly encouraged to attend these sessions.*

3) Tutorial sessions have been scheduled by the Registrar but will NOT be meeting. Having said that, the TA is partly responsible for evaluating your work, and they will remain a primary contact for you throughout the term. Please become familiar with your TA's name and contact information.

### **Texts and Materials**

One required textbook is available for purchase at the Trent Bookstore, with copies available online with major book retailers:

*EC – Nichols, B. (2010) Engaging Cinema: An Introduction to Film Studies, W.W. Norton & Company.*

Additional required readings are available for free on Blackboard, online, or through Trent Library's online resources, as indicated.

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### **Learning Objectives**

Upon completing the class, you will be able to:

- identify some of the key terms and themes associated with film studies.
  - effectively analyze narrative film and assess visual culture broadly speaking.
  - develop both your written and speaking abilities.
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### **Evaluation**

Your grade for this course will come from the following:

Film analysis paper	20%	Oct. 7
Tests (x3)	30%	Sep. 30, Oct. 28, Nov. 25
Video presentation	10%	Oct. 7-Dec. 2 (Sign-up)
Term assignment (2 options)	30%	TBA (Exam period)
Participation	10%	Ongoing

#### **Film analysis paper**

Due date: Oct. 7

Weight: 20%

In this writing assignment, you are required to watch at least ONE from the following list:

*Battleship Potemkin (1925)*

*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon (2000)*

*Holy Motors* (2012)  
*Man With a Movie Camera* (1929)  
*The Birds* (1963)  
*Run Lola Run* (1998)

Once you have chosen a film to focus on, you are required to write an analysis of it based on three key variables: mise-en-scene, cinematography and editing. The goal of this assignment, however, is not only to demonstrate your familiarity with key aspects of narrative cinema. The assignment is also intended for you to develop your analytical skills through the medium of *writing*. More details will be provided in class. In the meantime, you are strongly encouraged to read through our course text, *Engaging Cinema*, particularly Ch. 12, “Writing and Speaking about Film” (pp. 435-476).

The assignment must be 2,000 words in length, *not* including bibliography. You must also attach a PLOT SEGMENTATION of your chosen film. I will explain what is involved in a plot segmentation during lecture.

In addition, your assignment MUST abide to the MLA citation style as found here: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>. Please note that MLA style includes in-text references, bibliography and formatting.

This assignment will be uploaded to Blackboard prior to the deadline. It MUST be in Word (i.e .doc or .docx) format.

### **Online Tests (x3)**

Due dates: Sep. 30, Oct. 28, Nov. 25

Weight: 30% (3 x 10%)

On each due date listed above, these end-of-module tests will be made available on Blackboard and released during the second or third hour of our scheduled Zoom sessions. They are intended to evaluate your knowledge of course material, including lectures, readings, discussions and media supplements explored in the module.

### **Video presentation**

Due date: Oct. 7-Dec. 2 (Sign-up required in the “Presentations” menu)

Weight: 10%

In this assignment, you are required to sign up to deliver a 5-7 minute video presentation dedicated to the weekly theme. Please focus on the theme as opposed to summarizing the readings, since it’s expected that your audience will have read the material. Above all, you are expected to demonstrate your competency of the subject matter, but you will be also evaluated on your ability to effectively communicate to your peers. Consider taking advantage of the online video format. Capture the attention of your audience using camera angles, video inserts, short clips, and other editing techniques. Deliver unique perspectives on the subject by drawing from examples in a captivating – and perhaps even *cinematic* – way. You will submit this assignment to a dedicated forum in the “Presentations” menu where students are invited to comment.

### **Term assignment**

Due date: TBA (Exam period)

Weight: 30%

There are two streams for the term assignment. You may choose to write a conventional exam, or you may choose to develop a film, from concept to execution. You MUST inform the instructor of your choice by November 4, 2020.

### **Term assignment stream 1: Exam**

The final exam will include three sections: definitions, short-answer, and long-answer questions. It will be scheduled during the exam period – *students are expected to be available during this period*. This exam will be cumulative, i.e., it will cover all the material we have explored in class from the beginning to the end. Having said that, more emphasis will be placed on the final two weeks of class: Film history 1: Hollywood cinema, and Film history 2: Transnational cinema.

### **Term assignment stream 2: Film**

In the spirit of *Homemade* (2020), you will create a film short (10-12 minutes) using everyday digital tools (e.g. smartphones), and open access video editing software (e.g. iMovie). The content of the film is entirely up to you. The basic theme will be contemporary issues – coronavirus pandemic, police violence, social unrest/mobilization, boredom, etc. In your film you must demonstrate sufficient knowledge of basic filmmaking tools – editing, sound, cinematography. You must also demonstrate your understanding of narrative theories. In addition to a video file containing the film, you will be expected to submit a script, including a screenplay and director's notes, where appropriate.

### **Participation**

Due Date: Ongoing

Weight: 10%

Teaching remotely is not ideal, especially when it comes to evaluating a student's participation. For that reason, we have developed a number of different avenues where you can achieve a strong participation grade. Consider participating in one or more of the following:

- 1) The Discussion Board. Here you will find forums dedicated to each of the four modules in the course. Before we conclude a module, consider contributing to the forum by asking questions, and by developing conversation around the issues and concepts explored in class. These conversations will help you make sense of the material, and build community.
- 2) Engage your professor and TA during the weekly Zoom Q&A, either through audio or video conversation, or through Zoom's "chat" function.
- 3) Post on the course Discord page (invitations will be issued on Week 1). For this option, you must download the Discord app onto your computer.
- 4) Engage your professor and TA during scheduled office hours or through email. (Cf. "How to Email Your Professor": <https://medium.com/@lportwoodstacer/how-to-email-your-professor-without-being-annoying-af-cf64ae0e4087>)

### **Academic Integrity**

Academic dishonesty, which includes plagiarism and cheating, is an extremely serious academic offence and carries penalties varying from failure on an assignment to expulsion from the University. Definitions, penalties, and procedures for dealing with plagiarism and cheating are set out in Trent University's *Academic Integrity Policy*. You have a responsibility to educate yourself – unfamiliarity with the policy is not an excuse. You are strongly encouraged to visit Trent's Academic Integrity website to learn more: [www.trentu.ca/academicintegrity](http://www.trentu.ca/academicintegrity).

### **Access to Instruction**

It is Trent University's intent to create an inclusive learning environment. If a student has a disability and documentation from a regulated health care practitioner and feels that he/she may need accommodations to succeed in a course, the student should contact the Student Accessibility Services Office (SAS) at the respective campus as soon as possible.

### **Devices**

No mobile devices or laptops during screenings. No talking or disruptive behaviour during screenings.

### **Late Penalties**

I will deduct marks at a rate of 5% per day (not including weekends) for late assignments, barring instances of verifiable illness or family emergencies. Each assignment is due at the beginning of class on the day specified in the section below. Except where otherwise noted, please bring hard copies.

### **Absenteeism**

Students are responsible for completing all course requirements, including attending classes, completing examinations and meeting assignment deadlines on the dates specified on their syllabus. Specific accommodations can be implemented for students registered with Student Accessibility Services (SAS), but it is the responsibility of the student to make these arrangements in advance, and to discuss accommodations of due dates with their instructors. Adjustments to dates for assignment submissions, tests and final examinations are not automatic. Normally a doctor's note or supporting documentation is not required. However, when a student's success in the course or program is in jeopardy as determined by the instructor, documentation may be requested.

### **Tests and Exams**

Students are required to be available for all mid-terms, tests and exams that are scheduled by the instructor or the Registrar's Office and listed in their course syllabus. Students can notify the Registrar's Office of their wish to observe cultural or religious holidays during scheduled examination periods by the deadline set in the academic calendar. Vacation, job-related or any other travel plans are not acceptable reasons excuses for missing tests or exams. Adjustments and deferrals of tests and final examinations are not automatic. It is the student's responsibility to email their instructor immediately if they are unable to fulfill academic requirements. Depending

on your program, either the instructor or the chair/director may decide on alternative arrangements for exams and tests.

## **Remote Participation**

Regular participation is central to your success in the course. Courses delivered remotely may invite student participation in scheduled (synchronous) lectures and seminars via web-based platforms, such as Zoom. Students unable to participate fully (i.e., video and audio) or partially (i.e., audio only) should email their instructors at the beginning of term to make alternative arrangements for participation in these synchronous discussions.

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## **Schedule and Readings**

### **MODULE 1: FOUNDATIONS**

#### **Week 1: Introduction: Film form**

Sep. 16

Required: *EC*, pp. 3-25.

Media: *Birth of a Nation* (1915), *Homemade* (2020), *Wizard of Oz* (1939), *Workers Leaving the Factory* (1995)

#### **Week 2: Cinematography and mise-en-scene**

Sep. 23

Required: *EC*, pp. 50-69.

Media: *A Trip to the Moon* (1902), *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000), *Holy Motors* (2012)

#### **Week 3: Editing fundamentals**

Sep. 30

Required: *EC*, pp. 29-50.

Recommended: Judith Mayne (1975) "Eisenstein, Vertov, and the Montage Principle," *Minnesota Review* 5(1): 116-124 (Trent Online Periodicals)

Media: *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), *Man With a Movie Camera* (1929), *Maltese Falcon* (1941), *The Birds* (1963), *Run Lola Run* (1998), *Uncut Gems* (2019)

<<Test #1 on material from Weeks 1-3>>

### **MODULE 2: NARRATIVES (AND THEIR LIMITS)**

#### **Week 4: Art film**

Oct. 7

Required: *EC*, pp. 136-172.

Media: *Bicycle Thieves* (1948), *Breathless* (1960), *Burning* [버닝] (2018), *Chunking Express* (1994) *Citizen Kane* (1941), *Parasite* [기생충] (2019) *Stellar* (1993) *The 400 Blows* (1959), *You, Me and Everyone We Know* (2005)

<< *Film Analysis paper is due* >>

### **Week 5: Genre study**

Oct. 14

Required: *EC*, pp. 248-286.

Media: *Babadook* (2014), *Django Unchained* (2012), *Perfect Blue* [パーフェクトブルー] (1988), *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919), *The Searchers* (1959)

### **Week 6: Documentary film**

Oct. 21

Required: *EC*, pp. 99-135.

Media: *13TH* (2016), *Chronique d'un été* (1961) *Nanook of the North* (1922), *Ax Fight* (1975), *Aileen: Life and Death of a Serial Killer* (2003), *How to Survive a Plague* (2012)

### **Reading Week**

Oct. 28

### **Week 7: Digital media**

Nov. 4

Required: Shane Denson (2019) "Edge Detection," *Media Fields Journal* 14(1): 1-9. (Blackboard)

Lev Manovich (2001) "What is Digital Cinema?" (Blackboard)

Recommended: Thomas Elsaesser, "Media Archaeology as a Symptom." (Video)

Media: *Tron* (1982 & 2010), *Blade Runner 2049* (2017), *Parallel I-IV* (2012) *The Matrix* (1999)

<< *Test #2 on material from Weeks 4-7* >>

## **MODULE 3: THEORIES**

## **Week 8: The critique of ideology & social causes**

Nov. 11

Required: *EC*, pp. 287-324.

Fredric Jameson, "Reification and Utopia" (Blackboard)

Media: *Bitter Lake* (2015), *Bush Mama* (1979) *Fahrenheit 11/9* (2018), *Hour of the Furnaces* (1968), *La Jolie Mai* (1963), *The Pruitt-Igoe Myth* (2011), *You Are on Indian Land* (1969)

## **Week 9: Cine-psychoanalysis, gender, feminist and queer critique**

Nov. 18

Required: *EC*, pp. 395-431.

Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema."

<http://goo.gl/bvgntD>

Shelley Cobb and Yvonne Tasker, "Feminist Film Criticism in the 21 Century," *Film Criticism*, (2016): 40(1). (Blackboard)

Media: *No Lies* (1979); *Paris is Burning* (1990), *Semiotics of a Kitchen* (1975); *Suspiria* (1977 & 2018), *Under the Skin* (2013); *Unplanned* (2019), *Zero Patience* (1993)

## **Week 10: Critical race theory**

Nov. 25

Required: *EC*, pp. 325-358

Alison Landsberg, "Horror vérité: politics and history in Jordan Peele's *Get Out* (2017)," *Continuum*, 32:5 (2018): pp. 629-642. (Blackboard)

Media: *Boyz n the Hood* (1991), *Do the Right Thing* (1989), *Get Out* (2017) *The Jazz Singer* (1927), *Moonlight* (2014), *Tales of the Grim Sleeper* (2014), *Us* (2019)

<<Test #3 on material from Weeks 8-10>>

## **MODULE 4: HISTORIES**

### **Week 11: Film history 1: Hollywood cinema**

Dec. 2

Required: *EC*, pp. 209-247

Mark Shiel, *Hollywood Cinema and the Real Los Angeles*, London: Reaktion Books, 2012, 18-69. (Blackboard)

Media: Charlie Chaplin (excerpts), *Detour* (1945), *Jaws* (1975), *Los Angeles Plays Itself* (2003), *Mulholland Drive* (2001)

**Week 12: Film history 2: Transnational cinemas**

Dec. 9

Required: Mary Green, "Denis Villeneuve's *Incendies*: From Word to Image," *Québec Studies* 54 (Fall 2012/Winter 2013): pp. 103-110. (Blackboard)

Manjeet Ridon, "Myth and Patriarchy in Deepa Mehta's *Heaven on Earth*." *JPS* 21:2 (2016): pp. 223-244. (Blackboard)

Recommended: David Cook, "Third World Cinema." (Blackboard)

Media: *A Separation* (2011), *Heaven on Earth* (2012), *Hiroshima, mon Amour* (1959), *Incendies* (2010), *Xala* (1975)