

Film Analysis

**Jeremy C. Justus**

MTThF 12:20-1:50

jej39@pitt.edu

Summer II 2016

Office: Biddle 233C

Phone: 269-7214

Room 248 Biddle Hall

Office Hours: MTTh 2-4; F 11-12

I'm also available M-F by appointment

## **Introduction**

Underlying our course in Film Analysis is my belief that the study of the aesthetics, narrative structures, generic conventions, history, and production of film broadens our ability to critically engage the world around us. In much the same way that literature enables us to better understand ourselves and each other and to gain deeper insight into culture, politics, prevailing beliefs, etc., so too does film give us similar opportunities to critically engage our worlds. We will focus on “reading” film as literature, and we will also think of the films we watch as historical documents, cultural time capsules, objects of art, statements and/or subversions of prevailing cultural beliefs, and as unique media with multisensory appeal. Most importantly, we will practice critically analyzing film from multiple, critical perspectives.

During the course of this summer session, we will focus on three, significant components of film: visual composition, sound (both diegetic and non-diegetic), and narrative perspective. And, throughout the semester, we will discuss these formal components in the context of conducting critical analyses. We will consider the history of film alongside the history of popular culture. We will examine the ways in which film can function as a proverbial mouthpiece for pervasive ideologies, and we will look at ways in which film can subvert ideology. We'll discuss the ways in which cultural constructs of subjectivity, particularly gender as a subject position, manifest in film. And we'll repeatedly question the relationship between observation and narrative, particularly in the context wherein a viewer's position – be it literal or metaphorical – has an influence on the thing, event, or person being observed.

## **(Some of Our) Course Objectives**

1. To enhance students' appreciation for film, with an emphasis on elements of visual composition, sound design, narrative framework, and perspective
2. To further students' understanding of the conventions of film genre
3. To teach students the language and key concepts of critical film analysis
4. To enhance students' writing skills by requiring them to regularly write about film
5. To give students opportunities to practice public speaking by leading class discussions
6. To enable students to become more attentive listeners, more thoughtful readers and viewers of film, more skilled writers, and more critical thinkers

While there are no required texts for this class, please note that there *will* be several assigned readings, all available digitally through Courseweb.

A long list of films, in four categories, appears on the next page. We will watch some of these films in their entirety, as detailed on the course calendar. Others are films that you might choose to watch on your own or we as a class might choose to watch together. Note that you are not required to own copies of these films; however, there are some films you'll be required to watch outside of class. We'll discuss your viewing options further during our first class meeting.

## Visual Composition:

- *The Searchers* (1956). Dir. John Ford. Starring John Wayne, Jeffrey Hunter, and Natalie Wood.
- *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). Dir. Stanley Kubrick. Starring Keir Dullea and Gary Lockwood.
- *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006). Dir. Guillermo del Toro. Starring Ivana Baquero, Sergi López, and Maribel Verdú.
- *There Will Be Blood* (2007). Dir. P. T. Anderson. Starring Daniel Day-Lewis and Paul Dano.
- *Upstream Color* (2013). Dir. Shane Carruth. Starring Amy Seimetz and Shane Carruth.
- *The Grand Budapest Hotel* (2014). Dir. Wes Anderson. Starring Adrien Brody, Willem Defoe, Jeff Goldblum, Jude Law, Bill Murray, Edward Norton, and Tilda Swinton.

## Sound:

- *The Conversation* (1974). Dir. Francis Ford Coppola. Starring Gene Hackman, John Cazale, Cindy Williams, and Harrison Ford.
- *Dazed and Confused* (1993). Dir. Richard Linklater. Starring Jason London, Rory Cochrane, Matthew McConaughey, Parker Posey, and Ben Affleck.
- *I'm Not There* (2007). Dir. Todd Haynes. Starring Christian Bale, Cate Blanchett, Richard Gere, and Heath Ledger.
- *Birdman or (The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance)* (2014). Dir. Alejandro G. Iñárritu. Starring Michael Keaton, Zach Galifianakis, Edward Norton, Emma Stone, and Naomi Watts.

## Narrative / Perspective:

- *Rashomon* (1950). Dir. Akira Kurosawa. Starring Tashiro Mifune and Masayuki Mori.
- *Rear Window* (1954). Dir. Alfred Hitchcock. Starring James Stewart and Grace Kelly.
- *The Usual Suspects* (1995). Dir. Bryan Singer. Starring Stephen Baldwin, Gabriel Byrne, Benicio del Toro, Kevin Pollak, and Kevin Spacey.
- *Adaptation* (2002). Dir. Spike Jonze. Starring Nicolas Cage, Meryl Streep, and Tilda Swinton.
- *The Royal Tenenbaums* (2002). Dir. Wes Anderson. Starring Gene Hackman, Anjelica Huston, Bill Murray, Gwyneth Paltrow, and Ben Stiller.
- *Stranger than Fiction* (2006). Dir. Marc Forster. Starring Will Ferrell, Maggie Gyllenhaal, Dustin Hoffman, and Emma Thompson.

## Ideology / Identity:

- *The Truman Show* (1998). Dir. Peter Weir. Starring Jim Carrey, Laura Linney, and Noah Emmerich.
- *Boys Don't Cry* (1999). Dir. Kimberly Peirce. Starring Hilary Swank, Chloe Sevigny, Peter Sarsgaard, and Matt McGrath.
- *The Virgin Suicides* (1999). Dir. Sofia Coppola. Starring James Woods, Kathleen Turner, Kirsten Dunst, and Danny DeVito.
- *Minority Report* (2002). Dir. Steven Spielberg. Starring Tom Cruise, Colin Farrell, and Samantha Morton.
- *Persepolis* (2007). Dir. Marjane Satrapi and Vincent Paronnaud. Starring Chiara Mastroianni and Catherine Deneuve.
- *The Wrestler* (2008). Dir. Sarren Aronofsky. Starring Mickey Rourke, Marisa Tomei, and Evan Rachel Wood.
- *Black Swan* (2010). Dir. Darren Aronofsky. Starring Natalie Portman, Vincent Cassel, Mila Kunis, and Winona Ryder.
- *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015). Dir. George Miller. Starring Tom Hardy, Charlize Theron, Nicholas Hoult, and Hugh Keays-Byrne.

**Assignments:**

See calendar for due dates.

Assignment	Description	Number of Pages	% of Final Grade
<b>Responses to films / concepts</b>	Engage with films and concepts by entering a critical “conversation” with them: Ask questions, make objections, formulate and articulate your perspective, etc. Ten total (but you may do an additional response for extra credit). <b>Note:</b> One of these responses will be to a film we choose as a class, and one will be to a film of your own choosing.	1 each (300 words minimum)	25
<b>Lead the Discussion of One Film</b>	Each of you will launch the discussion of one film. Be sure to include significant historical details, information about production, an overview of the critical response, and other pertinent and interesting details.		5
<b>Exam 1</b>	Exam 1 will cover key terms, ideas, and films. It will contain a mixture of multiple choice questions, short answer questions, and short essay questions.		25
<b>Exam 2</b>	Exam 2 will be a take-home essay exam requiring you to conduct a sequence analysis focusing on visual composition and use of sound as well as a critical analysis of a film’s narrative, perspective, and/or characters.		25
<b>Group Project</b>	For this project, you will work with a group of fellow students to write, perform, film, and present a short, original filmic example of visual composition, sound design, and/or narrative perspective.		10
<b>Attendance and Participation</b>	<u>Participation means much more than just being in class.</u> Make thoughtful and meaningful contributions to class discussions, to the work of your peers, and to the larger academic community.	---	10

**All work must be completed in order to complete and pass this course.**

**Late work:** Unless you have a legitimately excusable reason for submitting late work, I will not accept it. Please note that I reserve the right to determine what is excusable and what isn’t.

**Grading Scale**

A = 90-100

B = 80-89

C = 70-79

D = 60-69

F = below 60

**Plagiarism:** Plagiarism involves “representing the words or ideas of someone else as one’s own in any academic exercise.” Thus, all writing you do for this course must be your own and must be exclusively for this course, unless I – your instructor – stipulate differently. Please pay special attention to the quotes, paraphrases, and documentation practices you use in your papers. If you have any questions about

plagiarism, please ask me. If you plagiarize, I reserve the right to grant you a failure for the course. We will discuss plagiarism in greater detail in class.

**Office Hours:** My office hours, posted at the top-right corner of the first page of this syllabus, are times for us to meet one on one. While I prefer that you schedule a meeting in advance, you may drop in to discuss any questions or concerns regarding your work for this course.

**Communication:** If you need to email me, you may. However, do not email me drafts or attachments unless I ask you to do so. I will usually reply to emails Monday through Friday within 48 hours of receiving your message. **Please note:** To most usefully discuss your work in the class, your best bet is to visit my office hours.

**Classroom Community:** Community is important in a small, Humanities class; we will work together to create an environment that promotes collaborative learning and effective, critical discussion.

### Film Analysis Class Schedule

☞ *Subject to revision as needed*

☞ Keep up with the syllabus in the event of class delay or cancellation

Week	Day	In Class	To Do For Today
1	M, 6/27	<b>Course Introduction / Overview</b>  We'll look over course readings, important terms, required assignments.	<b>Read:</b> Syllabus and list of key terms (see glossary); "Some Basic Issues and Concepts"
	T, 6/28	<b>Scenes from <i>The Searchers</i></b>  We'll watch and discuss scenes from this film together in class.	<b>Read:</b> "Looking at Movies" and "Film Terms and Topics for Film Analysis"  <b>In Class:</b> Practice conducting critical analyses
	Th, 6/30	<b><i>The Searchers</i></b>  We'll watch this together in class	<b>Read:</b> Robert B. Pippin, "What is a Western? Politics and Self-Knowledge in John Ford's <i>The Searchers</i> ."
	F, 7/1	<b><i>The Searchers</i></b>  We'll watch this together in class	<b>Write:</b> Sue Matheson, "'Let's Go Home, Debbie': The Matter of Blood Pollution, Combat Culture, and Cold War Hysteria in <i>The Searchers</i> ."  <b>Write:</b> Response to <i>The Searchers</i> (R1)
2	M, 7/4	<b>No Class</b> <b>Independence Day</b>	
	T, 7/5	<b>Discuss <i>Grand Budapest Hotel</i></b> Watch Scenes from <i>2001: A Space Odyssey</i>	<b>Watch:</b> <i>Grand Budapest Hotel</i> BEFORE our class meeting <b>Read:</b> "Analyzing Film" <b>Write:</b> Response to <i>Grand Budapest Hotel</i> (R2)

	Th, 7/7	<b><i>The Conversation</i></b>	<p><b>Read:</b> Jay Beck, “Citing the Sound: <i>The Conversation</i>, <i>Blow Out</i>, and the Mythological Ontology of the Soundtrack in ‘70s Film.”</p> <p><b>Write:</b> Response to <i>The Conversation</i> (can be turned in on Monday)</p>
	F, 7/8	<p><b><i>The Conversation</i></b></p> <p>Finish and discuss film in class.</p>	<p><b>Read:</b> Review “Sound” in “Film Terms and Topics...”</p> <p><b>Write:</b> Response to <i>The Conversation</i> (R3)</p>
3	M, 7/11	<b><i>Birdman</i></b>	<p><b>Read:</b> “Storytelling and Narrative Fiction”</p> <p><b>Watch:</b> <i>Birdman</i> BEFORE our class meeting.</p> <p><b>Write:</b> Response to <i>Birdman</i> (R4)</p>
	T, 7/12	<p><b><i>Rashomon</i></b></p> <p>We will watch and discuss this in class</p>	<p><b>Read:</b> Dolores Martinez, “Where the Human Heart Goes Astray: <i>Rashomon</i>, <i>Boomtown</i>, and Subjective Experience.”</p> <p><b>Research:</b> The Rashomon Effect</p> <p><b>Write:</b> Response to <i>Rashomon</i> (R5, can be turned in on Thursday)</p>
	Th, 7/14	<p><b>Discuss Perspective</b></p> <p><b>Scenes from <i>Rear Window</i></b></p> <p><b>Prepare for Exam 1</b></p>	<p><b>Read:</b> “Beginning to Think, Preparing to Watch, and Starting to Write”</p>
	F, 7/15	<b><i>Exam 1</i></b>	
4	M, 7/18	<b><i>The Usual Suspects</i></b>	<p><b>Watch:</b> <i>The Usual Suspects</i> BEFORE our class meeting.</p> <p><b>Write:</b> Response to <i>The Usual Suspects</i> (R6)</p>
	T, 7/19	<p><b><i>The Truman Show</i></b></p> <p><b>We will watch and discuss this together in class</b></p>	<p><b>Read:</b> “Ideology and Cinema”</p> <p><b>Write:</b> Response to <i>The Truman Show</i> (can be turned in on Friday)</p>
	Th, 7/21	<p><b><i>The Truman Show</i></b></p> <p><b>We will watch and discuss this together in class</b></p>	<p><b>Read:</b> Tony E. Jackson. “Televisual Realism: <i>The Truman Show</i>”</p> <p><b>Recommended:</b> Joel and Ian Gold, “The ‘Truman Show’ Delusion: Psychosis in the Global Village”</p> <p><b>Write:</b> Response to <i>The Truman Show</i> (R7)</p>

	F, 7/22	<b><i>Mad Max: Fury Road</i></b>	<p><b>Read:</b> “Gender and Masculinity”</p> <p><b>Watch:</b> <i>Mad Max: Fury Road</i> BEFORE our class meeting.</p> <p><b>Write:</b> Response to <i>Mad Max: Fury Road</i> (R8)</p>
5	M, 7/25	<b><i>Adaptation</i></b>	<p><b>Read:</b> David L. Smith, “The Implicit Soul of Charlie Kaufman’s <i>Adaptation</i>”</p> <p><b>Write:</b> Response to <i>Adaptation</i> (due on Thursday)</p>
	T, 7/26	<b><i>Adaptation</i></b>	<p><b>Read:</b> Joshua Landy, “Still Life in the Narrative Age: Charlie Kaufman’s <i>Adaptation</i>”</p> <p><b>Write:</b> Response to <i>Adaptation</i> (R9)</p>
	Th, 7/28	<b>Discuss / Plan Group Project</b>	
	F, 7/29	<b>Assign Exam 2</b>	<b>Write:</b> Response to film of your choice (R10).
6	8/1	<b>Film to be determined in class</b>	<p><b>Read:</b> To be determined</p> <p><b>Write:</b> Response to film (due on Thursday)</p>
	8/2	<b>Film to be determined in class</b>	<p><b>Read:</b> To be determined</p> <p><b>Write:</b> Response to film (R11)</p>
	8/4	<b>Leeway for Group Project</b>	
	8/5	<p><b>Exam 2 is due</b></p> <p><b>Presentations of Group Project</b></p>	<b>Write:</b> Response to film of your choice. Remember that your tenth response is to a film of your choice.