



ENG 332U: History of Cinema and Narrative Media I – Fall 2014
Prof. Josh Epstein



Course Description:

ENGL 332U "[s]urveys the history of cinema and narrative media from the late 19th-century moving image through the Second World War" (*PSU Bulletin*). We'll study film as an intervention into the aesthetic and social history of the early twentieth century, examining (for example) how early cinematic developments overlap with the cultural currents of modernism. Topics include the "cinema of attractions" (Méliès, Lumière, Porter); serial melodrama (*The Perils of Pauline*); slapstick (Chaplin, Keaton); montage (Lang, Eisenstein); avant-gardism (Vertov; Buñuel, Léger); the feature film (Griffith); the studio system (Fleming); and "classical" and alternative cinemas (Curtiz, Welles).

*** Quick Email Notes:

- (1) Email is my preferred mode of communication, especially for short administrative questions. Longer conversations (e.g. paper drafts, grades, etc.) are better held in person.
- (2) I will use email to communicate with the class. Please check your @pdx.edu address daily.
- (3) To preserve my sanity, I only respond to emails during business hours (Monday-Friday, 9-5).
- (4) Please **read the syllabus** prior to emailing with a policy question.
- (5) Please write emails with appropriate professional courtesy (<http://bit.ly/emailprof>).

Readings and Viewings:

Readings: Our main textbook will be Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell's *Film History: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (ISBN 978-0073386133). Additional readings made available online as PDF files. You should print out these readings and bring them to class with you.

Films: Most of the required films will be screened in class; you will be asked to watch a few on your own time using Amazon's "Watch Instantly" feature (other methods/formats are also ok). For your final paper, you will compare one required film with one "comparison film," watched on your own time (most can be viewed via Amazon, with one or two exceptions, which I'll put on reserve).

Required Films (required for everyone)

Short films by Lumière, Méliès, Porter, et al.
The Perils of Pauline (1914)
Feuillade, *Les Vampires* (1915-1916)
Griffith, *Birth of a Nation* (1915)
Eisenstein, *Battleship Potemkin* (1925)
Léger, *Ballet Mécanique* (1924)
Buñuel, *Un chien andalou* (1928-9)
Vertov, *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929)
Lang, *Metropolis* (1927)
Chaplin, *Modern Times* (1936)
Keaton, *Sherlock Jr* (1924)
Fleming, *Gone with the Wind* (1939)
Welles, *Citizen Kane* (1941)
Curtiz, *Casablanca* (1942)

Comparison Films (watch at least one).

Scorsese, *Hugo* (2011)
Assayas, *Irma Vep* (1997)
Marshall, *Perils of Pauline* (1947)
Griffith, *Intolerance* (1916)
Micheaux, *Body and Soul* (1925)
Wiene, *Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919)
Eisenstein, *Alexander Nevsky* (1938)
Murphy, *The Emperor Jones* (1933)
Chaplin, *City Lights* (1931)
Stahl, *The Imitation of Life* (1934)
Sirk, *The Imitation of Life* (1959)
Ford, *Stagecoach* (1939)
Renoir, *The Rules of the Game* (1939)
Tati, *Mon Oncle* (1958)
Kurosawa, *Rashomon* (1950)

Required Coursework:

Participation:

Our classes will combine lecture, discussion, group work, and in-class writing. You are to come to class having done the reading and ready to offer questions, arguments, ideas, etc. I know that not everyone is a "talker," and so you can supplement your participation through the online forum (see below). Please note that the forum is not a *substitute* for speaking in class—you are still expected to be attentive and responsive during discussion. With that said, doing extra postings *may* slightly boost your participation grade, depending on how effectively they enhance our discussions.

Viewings: It is essential that you **take notes as you watch the films**. The notes you take during your first viewing will shape your thinking about the film later on and will allow you to contribute more constructively during class. Consider setting aside a notebook for film viewings.

Readings: As you read film criticism and theory, which can sometimes be a bit opaque, write down questions, answers, ideas, and *specific passages* that can help us to engage in class with the essay's claims. Here are a few questions you can ask of a critical essay as you read:

- **What historical context is the essay bringing to bear?** What does it have to say about the historical circumstances of the film—or about the film's relationship to *other* films?
- **How is the writer interpreting the film's meaning? The film's form** (framing, cinematography, acting, sound, etc.)? The relationship between form and meaning?
- How is the critic merging political/cultural history with an interpretation of the film itself?
- **What theoretical assumptions is the writer applying or challenging?** How does the essay test broader concepts of what film is, or what cultural or ideological work it performs?
- **What scenes from the film itself** does the essay address (if any)? How could they be read differently? What examples can *you* draw on to challenge or to extend the essay's claims?

Online Forum: To extend our conversations and to generate ideas for the final paper, we will use the forum on D2L. *You are encouraged to use ideas and writing from your own postings in the paper.* Each student must submit **four** postings; **two** replies to classmates' postings; and one **synthesis** posting.

Postings must be done on time--*late/make-up postings will not receive credit* (though you're welcome to keep the conversation going). It is your responsibility to keep track of how many posts you've done and how many you have left. This includes technology snafus; if D2L is not working, email me your posting before the deadline, and then post it online once D2L is back up and running.

Max **one posting per week**; max **one reply per week**; and **no replying to your own posts**.

Finally: forum postings and replies can be written more informally than (say) a research paper, but I expect them to reflect college-level intellectual rigor, grammatical correctness, and expressive clarity.

Postings: Post **four** responses, each of 600-700 words. The schedule offers eight posting opportunities, of which you must do four. (If you do extra, your best four will count.) Prompts for these postings will be offered beforehand; you may invent your own prompts, if you'd prefer. Your task is to analyze the film(s)/reading(s) so as to *develop your own arguments and interpretations*. You could focus on a specific scene in an illustrative way, tackle an intriguing claim or conceptual tangle from the readings, etc. ***Cite specific examples*** from the film and/or reading.

Replies: At least **two times** this quarter, write a 300-word **reply** to a posting from the previous week. (If you do more than two, your best two will count.) Your reply should engage with a

classmate's ideas by considering new evidence, developing counterarguments, or adding new perspectives (how do this week's materials change our thinking about last week's materials?). One tip: don't merely summarize or "grade" your classmate's posting ("Jim, you did a great job!"); rather, aim to engage with their ideas, push them further, and contribute your own.

Synthesis Posting: A wrap-up posting in which you pull together previous postings and replies into a cohesive synthesis. The goal of this is to lend our class continuity by finding overarching themes and threads. I'll explain more as the date approaches; my current thinking is that this synthesis will be ~1000 words, drawing on postings/replies from at least four different weeks.

Grading: I will grade each posting/reply +, √+ (check-plus), √, √-, -, 0. I'll look at overall trends before assigning letter grades to these, but in general you can think of a √ as roughly a low B. Each posting will be worth two replies, and the synthesis worth two normal postings.

Seminar Paper: A paper of at least 2000 words in which you address **one** film from the "required" list and **one** film from the "comparison" list. (On the schedule I have suggested comparisons, but you may pair them up differently if you'd like.) Compare and contrast these two films in a cohesive essay with a focused, complex, and original argument; cite and analyze specific examples from both films in support of your argument. The topic is up to you: you could compare and contrast thematic elements, address some relevant historical/ideological question, use a conceptual or theoretical model we discussed in class, etc. Additionally, each student should draw on at least **three** scholarly sources—articles, books, etc.—to add historical, theoretical, critical, or other context to your discussion. (You can use other sources, e.g. web sites or readings we discussed in class, but they do not count toward your three.) Further details will be provided. MLA format guidelines should be followed closely. Grading guidelines for formal essays can be found on D2L.

Screenshots: You can use screenshots to supplement your writing about film <<http://www.take-a-screenshot.org>>. Screenshots are not included in the word/page count of any assignment.

Policies:

Office Hours/Skype: You are cordially invited to office hours to discuss any course-related matter. If my office hours do not work for you, please email me to set up an appointment. Don't be shy. *During office hours only*, I can be reached via Skype at the username "jepsteinpdx" (no quotes). (If I don't answer you, I'm probably with another student—send me a message and I'll get back to you.)

Attendance: I will not arbitrate which absences are or aren't "excused." If you're not here, you're not participating—frequent absences, whatever the reason, will hurt your participation grade. If you have an emergency or a co-curricular commitment that will keep you out of multiple classes, by all means let me know. Otherwise, you don't owe me an excuse or an apology for missing class. **If you are absent, please contact a classmate for notes, assignments, etc.**

Late Papers: Unexcused late papers will be docked half a letter grade per day, including weekends. Again, forum postings will not be accepted late. N.B. *Computer crashes, Internet failures, etc. do not excuse late work.* Your work is your responsibility—take care of it.

Extensions: No extensions for forum postings. For the final paper, I will consider reasonable extension requests made in writing at least 48 hours before the deadline. Write me an email naming a

day when you can have it done. Until you've heard back from me, please do not assume that you've been granted an extension. It would probably be wise to assume the opposite.

Decorum/Civility: I prefer to keep class relatively relaxed and informal, but we have work to do. Avoid distracting behaviors (side-conversations, texting, noisy computer use, etc.) and avoid using sexist, racist, or homophobic (etc.) language. While some of our films are volatile, or downright offensive, we can discuss these matters openly while being civil and intellectually responsible.

Cell phones: Moloch-machines. Turn off your phone and put it away. If you anticipate needing to take a call, please *let me know before class begins*, put your phone on vibrate, and take the call outside.

Late? Lateness is just the worst! If you're running more than 10 minutes late, I ask that you not enter the classroom. If you need to leave early, please let me know before class begins.

Recording Lectures: Please don't.

Academic Integrity: Please read the PSU English Department's statement on academic integrity (<http://www.english.pdx.edu/pdf/AcademicIntegrity.pdf>). Any incident of plagiarism or cheating, no matter how minor it may seem, will result in a grade of zero on the assignment and will be reported to the Student Conduct Office. In all assignments, no matter how formal or informal, you must properly acknowledge any use of outside source materials, whether paraphrased or quoted directly. You may not resubmit writing from other courses, taken at PSU or elsewhere, for credit in this class. **If you are not sure what constitutes academic misconduct, please ask me *prior to submitting the assignment*.** Uncertainty about the rules is not an excuse for violating them.

Students with Disabilities: If you have a disability or other physical or cognitive condition that may affect your classroom performance, please talk with me individually, and contact the Disability Resource Center (www.pdx.edu/drc/) for documentation. I am happy to make appropriate accommodations *in advance* of when they are needed.

Assessment:

Grades will be determined holistically based on the above assignments. Your online postings (combined) will be worth roughly 40% of your grade; the final seminar paper worth roughly 40%; and in-class participation worth the remaining 20%. If your final grade is on the cusp, I will consider the consistency of your in-class participation *throughout the quarter* (i.e. not just during the last two weeks of class—I don't believe in the last-minute melodramatic "race to the rescue").

Note that grades are based solely on *the quality of your work*; I do not give extra credit, nor do I give grades based on personal GPA needs, future hopes and dreams, etc.

There's more to say, but most of it's boring and sanctimonious. If you have questions, feel free to ask. Though I do not negotiate grades, I am happy to discuss strategies for improving your work.

The course schedule follows on the next page.

Schedule:

"T&B" = Thompson & Bordwell, *Film History*, 3rd ed. Readings marked (x) posted online.

Week 1: Attractions

M, 9/29: Intros. In class: Lumière, *L'arrivée d'un train*; Porter, *Uncle Josh at the Moving Picture Show*.
 W, 10/1: Read T&B, pp.1-21; Gunning, "The Cinema of Attraction" (x). In class: watch and discuss Méliès, *Voyage dans la lune*, *Les Cartes Vivantes*; Porter, *Great Train Robbery*
 [Suggested comparison Film: Martin Scorsese, *Hugo*. Amazon link: <http://bit.ly/hugo-amzn>]

Week 2: Serials

M, 10/6: **Posting 1 due.** Screen excerpts from *Perils of Pauline* and *Les Vampires*. Readings for this week: T&B, ch. 2 (especially pp.31-39); T&B ch. 3 through p.51. Ben Singer, "Modernity, Hyperstimulus, and Popular Sensationalism" (x). (We won't discuss the readings until Wednesday—but please don't save all the reading for Tuesday night!)
 W, 10/8: **Posting 2 due.** Discuss *Perils*, *Les Vampires*, and readings.

[Suggested comparison films: Marshall, *Perils of Pauline* (1947; <http://bit.ly/perils1947>); Assayas, *Irma Vep* (<http://amzn.com/B0024QQMY6>)]

Week 3: Births

M, 10/13. Watch *Birth of a Nation* prior to class (<http://amzn.com/B005DWASMK>). Readings: Finish T&B, ch. 3; Michael Rogin, "The Sword Became a Flashing Vision" (x). *Replies to posting 1 due.*
 W 10/15 Continue discussing *Birth of a Nation*. **Posting 3 due.** *Replies to posting 2 due.*

[Suggested comparison films: Micheaux, *Body and Soul* (bit.ly/bodysoul-youtube); Griffith, *Intolerance* (bit.ly/intolerance-amzn)]

Week 4: Montages

M, 10/20 Screen *Battleship Potemkin* in class. Readings: T&B, ch. 6; Eisenstein, "Dialectic Approach to Film Form" (x).
 W 10/22 Discuss *Potemkin*. **Posting 4 due;** *replies to posting 3 due.*

[Suggested comparison film: Eisenstein, *Alexander Nevsky* (<http://bit.ly/nevsky-amzn>)]

Week 5: Avant-Gardes

M, 10/27 In class, screen *Ballet Mécanique*; *Un chien andalou*; *Man with a Movie Camera*. Readings: T&B ch. 8 (esp. pp.158-70); Turvey, "The Avant-Garde and the 'New Spirit'" (x).
 W 10/29 **Posting 5 due;** *replies to posting 4 due.* Discuss avant-garde stuffs. For Monday, watch *Metropolis* on your own time.

[Suggested comparison film: Murphy, *The Emperor Jones* (<http://bit.ly/emperor-amzn>).]

Week 6: Metropolis

M, 11/3 Discuss *Metropolis*. Read T&B ch. 7 (128-143); ch. 10 (195-208).
 W 11/5 **Class cancelled** (professor at Modernist Studies Association conference). **Posting 6 due by 14:00**; replies to posting 5 due. Use class time to watch Chaplin, *Modern Times* and Keaton, *Sherlock Jr.*

[Suggested comparison film: Wiene, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (<http://bit.ly/caligari-amzn>)]

Week 7: Pratfalls

M, 11/10 Discuss Chaplin, Keaton. Read Gunning, "Chaplin and the Body of Modernity" (x)
 W, 11/12 **Posting 7 due**; replies to posting 6 due. Continue discussion; if time permits, screen Keaton, *The Electric House*. **Before class on Monday, please watch *Gone With The Wind*** (<http://amzn.com/B002W7DSLW>).

[Suggested comparison films: Chaplin, *City Lights* (<http://bit.ly/citylites>); Tati, *Mon Oncle* (reserve)]

Week 8: Hungers

M, 11/17 Discuss *Gone with the Wind*. (No reading due—watching the film will be plenty!)
 W, 11/19 **Posting 8 due**; replies to posting 7 due. Discuss *GWTW*. Readings: Finish (and review) ch. 10; Tom Brown, "Spectacle/Gender/History" (x); look at Hays Code (x).

Before class on Mon., 11/24: (a) watch *Citizen Kane* (<http://amzn.com/B005MMY5RK>); (b) listen to *War of the Worlds* (x); and (c) read Altman essay listed below.

[Suggested comparison films: Stahl, *The Imitation of Life* (1934; <http://bit.ly/stahl1934>); Sirk, *The Imitation of Life* (1959; <http://bit.ly/sirk1959>); Ford, *Stagecoach* (<http://bit.ly/fordstage>)]

Week 9: Hearst So Good

M, 11/24 Discuss *Citizen Kane*, *War of the Worlds*. Altman, "Deep-Focus Sound" (x).
 W, 11/26 **No Class. Replies to posting 8 due by class time.** Gobble gobble!

[Suggested comparison films: Kurosawa, *Rashomon* (bit.ly/rash-amzn); Renoir, *Rules of the Game* (bit.ly/renoirrules)]

Week 10: Play It Again

M, 12/1 Screen *Casablanca* in class. **Synthesis posting due before class.** Reading: P.A. Anderson, "The World Heard" (x).
 W 12/3 Discuss *Casablanca*. Wrap-ups.

[Suggested comparison film: Curtiz, *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (on reserve)]

Final Paper Due Monday, Dec. 8, by 5:00 p.m.