

**English 304: Forms of Cinema:
Five American Filmmakers**

Fall 2011

Professor Lloyd Michaels

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Office Hours: MW 10:00-11:30, TTh 10:00-11:00, 4:15-5:00; and by appointment

Overview:

Following introductory classes in which we will define film as a narrative art by surveying its formal elements as they developed through the first half century (from the earliest silent films through Welles' *Citizen Kane*, 1941) and discuss the emergence of "The New Hollywood" that emerged in the late 1960s, the course will focus on the significant works of five contemporary American filmmakers: Terrence Malick, Martin Scorsese, Woody Allen, Spike Jonze/Charlie Kaufman, and Joel and Ethan Coen. More than most, as we shall see, these directors (counting the collaborators as one) have retained control over the overall design of their work, usually by writing or editing the script and having authorized the final cut. In the process, they have defined themselves not simply as artists but as a *brand* that serves to market each new production. (This summer, for example, *The Tree of Life* caused a buzz merely by being the latest film from the reclusive Malick, while *Midnight in Paradise* marked the rather surprising return of Woody Allen to commercial success.) As a result, these filmmakers are ripe subjects for applying the *auteur* theory, which defines the director as the "author" of a movie. Many of their films explore changing American cultural values, particularly embodied in images of social corruption and decay and the performance of masculinity.

Because the required reading is relatively light—Timothy Corrigan's concise text plus study guides and weekly topical essays in the CoursePack—students will be expected to view carefully not only the twelve features on the syllabus but also several additional examples of a director's body of work—his oeuvre—available on reserve. Until very recently, the cinema has been a *communal* as well as a collaborative art; therefore, **students are required to attend all Monday evening screenings in the Vukovich Center**. More than one absence from these screenings will result in grade penalty; more than three absences from class meetings will also adversely affect your final grade.

Course Objectives:

- To understand and appreciate the significance of film as a narrative art form as well as a vehicle of popular entertainment
- To think critically and write and speak clearly about film form and meaning
- To know the broad shape of film history and appreciate the variety of cinematic styles and genres
- To learn how to use scholarly and internet resources in conducting film research
- To study in depth five significant American directors who have created a significant body of work, an oeuvre
- To become lifelong connoisseurs of creative, seriously intended filmmaking

Grading Criteria:

There will be two required short papers (3-5 pp.) during the first half of the semester and one longer essay (7-10 pp.) involving research due in December plus a mid-term and final exam. It is impossible to assign exact percentages to each of these graded assignments because I factor in many subjective factors—most prominently curiosity, consistency, and *commitment* as well as quality of class participation and improvement in determining a final grade. The second half of the semester will certainly weigh more heavily than the first half.

Students occasionally complain about my exams in this particular course. They are unaccustomed to objective (multiple choice, matching) tests in English classes and object to both the “mickeymouse” and “picky” aspects of the mid-term and final. I continue to give exams in English 304 for two reasons: 1) it is the only way I have found to assure that students remain attentive to and take seriously the actual *texts*—secondary readings as well as films—under scrutiny in the course; 2) it provides a balanced evaluation that rewards students who are careful note-takers and retain important information as well as those who are skillful essay writers. Moreover, the close analysis of particular scenes I call for on exams requires you to put into practice the critical vocabulary and viewing skills that are at the heart of the course.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism, whether intentional or not, constitutes a kind of intellectual theft. Plagiarism occurs when you use another author’s language or specific ideas without giving proper credit. It is a violation of Allegheny’s Honor Code and will be treated accordingly.

The internet is loaded with blogs, fanzines, and other questionable sources about movies. I frequently consult www.imdb.com to check credits and www.metacritic.com for reviews (www.rottentomatoes.com is slightly less authoritative because it relies so heavily on blogs), but almost never use these sources for my scholarly work. You, too, should be wary. I recommend scrolling down the Recommended Links at the *Cineaste* website http://www.cineaste.com/recommended_links for an authoritative list of journals, blogs, and archives. Be very careful when taking notes, either from print or Web sources, to distinguish between your own words and thoughts and those that originate elsewhere. I am interested in responding to your insights and will deal harshly with any cases of unattributed quotation or borrowed ideas. When in doubt, consult me; when I am not available, err on the safe side and document the source. Be certain to cite all secondary sources, both in the text and at the end in a list of Works Cited. (In this class, MLA documentation style is required. See the Learning Commons link <http://library.duke.edu/research/citing/> for more about acknowledging sources and avoiding plagiarism.)

Students with Disabilities:

Any student who feels the need for an accommodation based on a documented disability should contact me as well as John Mangine in the Learning Commons (john.mangine@allegheny.edu, 332-2898). The Learning Commons arranges reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities.

Syllabus

<u>Tu-Th</u>	<u>Films and Topics</u>	<u>Readings</u>
9/6-9/8	Selections from the Silent Era Cinephilia The Auteur Theory	Corrigan, chaps. 1-3 Sontag, "The Decay of Cinema" Doherty, "The Death of Film Criticism" Sarris, "Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962" Kael, "Circles and Squares" Kawin, "Authorship, Design, and Execution"
9/13-9/15	Welles, <i>Citizen Kane</i> , 1941 (9/11) [Penn, <i>Bonnie and Clyde</i> , 1967] The Gangster Film	Corrigan, chap. 4 Peter Lehman and William Luhr, " <i>Citizen Kane</i> : An Analysis" Giannetti, "Synthesis: <i>Citizen Kane</i> " Scott, "Two Outlaws, Blasting Holes in the Screen" Warshow, "The Gangster as Tragic Hero"
9/20-9/22	Malick, <i>Badlands</i> , 1973 (9/18) The Anti-Hero	Corrigan, chaps. 5-6 Michaels, "Badlands," from <i>Terrence Malick</i>
9/27-9/29	Malick, <i>Days of Heaven</i> , 1979 (9/25) [Malick, <i>The New World</i> , 2005]	King, "The Last Good Time We Ever Had" Doherty, "Hollywood's Pre-Blockbuster Golden Era" Michaels, "Days of Heaven," from <i>Terrence Malick</i>
10/4-10/6	Scorsese, <i>Taxi Driver</i> , 1976 (10/2) Masculinity	Fuchs, "Taxi Driver"
10/11-13	Scorsese, <i>Raging Bull</i> , 1980 (10/9) The Boxing Movie [Scorsese, <i>Goodfellas</i> , 1990]	Hemmeter, "The Word Made Flesh: Language in <i>Raging Bull</i> " Grindon, "Body and Soul"
FALL BREAK		
10/20	Mid-Term Exam	
10/25-27	Allen, <i>Annie Hall</i> , 1977 (10/23) Film Comedy [Allen, <i>Manhattan</i> , 1979]	Hirschberg, "The Two Hollywoods: Woody Allen, Martin Scorsese" Schatz, " <i>Annie Hall</i> and the Issue of Modernism"
11/1-11/3	Allen, <i>Crimes and Misdemeanors</i> , 1989, (10/30) Hybrid Genre	Ebert, "Crimes and Misdemeanors"

11/8-10	Coen brothers, Fargo , 1996 (11/6)	Denby, "Killing Joke"
11/15-1	Coen brothers, No Country for Old Men , 2007 (M, 11/13)	James, "Blood Money: The Coen Brothers" Mellen, "Spiraling Downward" Bruns, "The Map is not the Country"
	[Coens, <i>A Serious Man</i> , 2009]	Stone, "Badlands"
	America Post-9/11	Schatz, "New Hollywood, New Millenium"

11/22 Review

THANKSGIVING BREAK

11/29-12/1	Kaufman/Jonze, Being John Malkovich , 1999 (M, 11/28)	Berg, "A Taxonomy of Alternative Plots in Recent Films" Shaw, "On Being Philosophical"
	Complex Narratives/Puzzle Films	
12/6-12/8	Kaufman/Jonze, Adaptation , 2002 (12/4)	Rizzo, "(In)fidelity Criticism and the Sexual Politics of <i>Adaptation</i> "
12/13	Recapitulation	

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Terrence Malick
Martin Scorsese
Woody Allen
Joel and Ethan Coen
Spike Jonze and Charlie Kaufman

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