

MCOM 281.02 – ART OF THE MOTION PICTURE
SUNY Oneonta, Department of Communication & Media
Fall 2019

Class Meetings: Monday, Wednesday, and Friday 9:00–9:50 AM, Fitzelle Hall 304

Instructor: Dr. Andrew Bottomley

Office Location: IRC B-9

Office Hours: Monday & Wednesday 11:00 AM – 12:45 PM, or by appointment

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Course Description

Film is an art form with a language and aesthetic all its own. This is an introductory course designed to familiarize you with the fundamental concepts and tools of film analysis. You will learn to isolate, describe, and analyze elements of film style and narrative. With these skills, you will better understand how motion pictures are designed to guide audiences' experiences and create particular effects. These skills will help you excel in more advanced media studies courses at SUNY Oneonta, as well as prepare you for working within the professional media industries. I also hope that this course will mark the beginning of a lifetime of watching and listening to movies with a deeper interest, understanding, appreciation, and enjoyment.

While primarily focusing on the formal elements of film aesthetics and style, this course will also consider movies as commercial products and vehicles for cultural ideas about gender and sexuality, race and ethnicity, social class, and so on. We will use classical and contemporary Hollywood feature-length narrative films as our primary case studies, though we will also address other cinematic modes such as art cinema, experimental film, and animated film.

Course Objectives & Learning Outcomes

Over the course of the semester, you will:

- Cultivate engaged viewing habits for watching movies critically, analytically, empathetically, and without distraction
- Identify, describe, and apply elements of audiovisual style and narrative form
- Critically assess film and media depictions of cultural identity (race, gender, etc.)
- Evaluate your own position in the politics and economics of the media industries
- Collaborate with classmates during in-class exercises and presentations
- Grow as a writer by practicing an intensive process of critical textual analysis

Required Materials

There is one required textbook for this course, titled *Film Art*. It can be purchased on campus at Damascene Book Cellar or through online retailers such as Amazon for approximately \$100 brand new (used copies run closer to \$80 and rentals are about \$30). It is essential that you purchase the **11th edition** of the book. Also, make sure to buy the paperback/hardcopy version, not the “loose leaf” version. You do not need the extra online “Connect” subscription.

David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson, and Jeff Smith, *Film Art: An Introduction*, 11th edition (New York: McGraw Hill Education, 2017).

Please bring this book with you to class every day. In addition to reading on schedule, you must watch all of the assigned screenings. Each week, you are responsible for finding 1.5 to 3 hours to watch the films on your own time. It will be clearly evident from the screening notebook, classroom engagement activities, and quizzes and exams whether or not you are watching the assigned movies and reading along. You must watch the films closely and in their entirety, and you are required to actively take notes either during or immediately after the viewing. You do not need to purchase DVD/Blu-ray/Digital copies of the movies – everything is provided for streaming online via the Office 365 Stream app connected to your SUNY Oneonta user account.

Online Materials

The *myOneonta* Blackboard site contains the course page that you will use to check class news, take quizzes and upload electronic copies of most assignments, and track your grades. As much as possible, this is a paperless course. Films are available through Office 365 Stream.

Attendance

It is expected that you will attend all class meetings. Your attendance and participation are integral to the success of this course, as well as your own individual achievement in it. A good grade is impossible to achieve without regular attendance, since much of the assessment is based on your understanding of materials covered in the classroom. Nevertheless, stuff happens, so if you need to miss class then reach out to me – the sooner, the better. For illnesses, doctor appointments, field trips, and other non-emergencies, you must always notify me in writing beforehand (via email); do not miss class and expect that your absence will be excused retroactively. Maintaining clear communication about your (non-)attendance is key.

Attendance Policy: Attendance is not graded of itself; that is, there are no dedicated points for attendance alone. However, being in this class means being in the classroom, and attendance and participation significantly impact your Class Engagement assignment grade (see below). Acceptable attendance in this course means three (3) or fewer unexcused absences and three (3) or fewer tardies. Anything over five (5) unexcused absences and tardies is deemed excessive absence, and will greatly reduce your chances of success in this course.

Tardiness: A tardy is anything that pulls you away from active engagement in the entire class period: arriving late; departing early; leaving the classroom any time during the period without instructor permission; and displaying distracted or disruptive behavior such as talking to neighbors out of turn, using your smartphone, and sleeping. Coming to class any time after I finish taking attendance or leaving before I dismiss the class is considered tardiness.

Excused Absences: Of course, excused absences are exempt from the above policies. As per the College Handbook, religious holidays, official university activities (field trips, intercollegiate athletics, etc.), serious illness or injury, jury duty, military leave, and the like are considered legitimate excused absences. Realize that giving me an excuse does not automatically mean the absence is excused. Absences are only excused with my consent, meaning you must talk with me directly if you encounter hardships affecting your attendance. Face-to-face chats about attendance are welcome, though I request that you communicate the reason for your absence to me in writing (via email) – that way there is a searchable record of it for later reference. If you experience a prolonged absence of multiple classes, please visit me during office hours so we

can have an in-person conversation to ensure that you do not fall behind in the course. You will never be excused for work, including media production or schoolwork for another course.

Missed Work: If you are absent, get in touch with a trusted classmate to help you get caught up. All class materials and notes are your responsibility; lecture slides are posted to Blackboard, though you must obtain lecture notes, video clips, et al yourself. You are personally responsible for everything that happens in class, including any announcements and exam or assignment overviews presented in the classroom. Ignorance of announced examination, assignment, and/or schedule changes will not be accepted as an excuse for incomplete work in this course.

Grading

Grades in this course are calculated on a 1,000-point scale. The breakdown is as follows:

<u>Grade Letter</u>	<u>Points</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
A	930-1,000	93-100%
A-	900-929	90-92%
B+	870-899	87-89%
B	830-869	83-86%
B-	800-829	80-82%
C+	770-799	77-79%
C	730-769	73-76%
C-	700-729	70-72%
D+	670-699	67-69%
D	630-669	63-66%
D-	600-629	60-62%
E	0-599	59% and below

Your final grade in this course will be determined according to the following scale:

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>Possible Points</u>	<u>Percentage of Final Grade</u>
Class Engagement	100	10%
Screening Notebook	100	10%
Shot Analysis Exercise	200	20%
Quizzes	200	20%
Midterm Exam	200	20%
Final Exam	200	20%

Each assignment will be evaluated based on the specific criteria outlined below and in the individual assignment sheets. Generally speaking, the letter grades translate as follows:

A/A-	Outstanding, thoughtful, and enthusiastic work
B+/B	Average or above-average work, demonstrating good insight into assignment
B-/C+	Needs improvement on ideas, argument, and follow-through
C & below	Fulfills only the bare minimum requirements and/or shows a rudimentary or incomplete understanding of the material

Assignments & Exams

Class Engagement (10%): Routinely throughout the semester, you will be called upon to participate in a variety of classroom activities that will familiarize you with key concepts and allow you to demonstrate your knowledge of the lectures, readings, and screenings. Sometimes these will be quick writing activities prompting you to reflect on the day's lesson. Frequently you will pair with your neighbors to privately express your thoughts on a discussion question. Other times you will engage in extended cooperative learning exercises inviting you to work in teams to critically analyze a reading or clip. Additional forms of Class Engagement include participating in whole-class discussions, asking questions, and listening attentively. Trust that I will help everyone participate, even those of you who have difficulty speaking in public. Your responsibility here is to offer regular, informed contributions to class meetings. Importantly, your Class Engagement grade is not a freebie. Ultimately, it is your academic achievement that is the basis for this grade, and thus to get credit you need to be both physically present in class and a truly **active participant** in the lesson. It is in your best interest to attend class regularly and always arrive prepared to participate constructively (do the reading, watch the movie, bring your screening notes, etc.). There is no way to make-up for missed Class Engagement. Grading for this assignment is holistic, meaning not every in-class writing assignment or impromptu presentation will be graded individually. Rather, I will track your contributions over the span of the semester and assess the whole of your activity at the very end. If you have a satisfactory attendance record (i.e. no more than 3 unexcused absences) and you make a meaningful contribution to every class session (e.g. active and thoughtful speaking, writing, listening), then you are guaranteed at least a "B" grade on the Class Engagement assignment. If you are excessively absent, show up to class unprepared, or do not adequately participate, then you will earn a Class Engagement grade of "C" or lower. It is up to you.

Screening Notebook (10%): You must keep a screening notebook throughout the semester: an actual pen-and-paper spiral notebook. In it, you will document your observations on the assigned weekly film screenings, focusing on the relation between each individual film and the topics covered in that week's assigned reading. For instance, in Week 3 the topic is *mise-en-scène* and the film is *Stagecoach*; therefore, your screening notes should highlight the elements of *mise-en-scène* that you observe in *Stagecoach*. This means you need to make a habit of actively writing notes while you watch the films. Identify specific formal, narrative, or stylistic elements utilized in each film (e.g. types of shots or edits), and mark the timecode for when they appear in the video. Keep track of recurring motifs that you think might be important. And so on. These are simply notes, and not essays, but they should nevertheless be extensive, thoughtful, and clearly organized. There are 13 assigned film screenings during the semester, and you must keep notes on all of them. For each film, it is expected that you will write at **minimum 2 pages** of handwritten notes in your notebook. Your notes will come in handy for class discussions of the films (so make sure to bring your notebook to class, especially on Fridays), as well as prepare you for the quizzes and exams. The notebook will be periodically spot-checked every few weeks (see schedule below) and assigned a point value. Each one of the 5 graded spot-checks is worth up to 20-points. Additional guidelines will be provided in class.

Shot Analysis Exercise (20%): Your assignment is to compose a short paper (2-3 pages) containing a detailed description and brief analysis of film style and form in a single scene, using the vocabulary developed over the first few weeks of the semester. You will examine one of two pre-selected film options, providing a comprehensive breakdown of the shots and a short

analysis of your observations regarding elements of staging, lighting, shot duration, camera movement, functional relationships between shots, and so on. This assignment is designed to train your eye to the finer points of mise-en-scène, cinematography, and editing and to prepare you for the Midterm Exam. A fuller explanation of the assignment will be provided at a later date.

Quizzes (20%): There will be weekly online quizzes designed to gauge your comprehension of the assigned reading and screening materials. Administered through Blackboard, these are open-book, untimed quizzes. **These quizzes must be completed before each Friday (F) class period.** They will cover both the week's reading and screening, meaning you will need to make a habit of studying on schedule. In total, **12 quizzes will be given and the 10 highest scores will be counted** toward the final assignment grade. That is, the 2 lowest scores will be dropped, making each of the 10 graded quizzes worth up to 20 points. No late or make-up quizzes will be permitted.

Midterm Exam (20%): There will be one **take-home exam** given two-thirds of the way through the semester. It will be an open book and open note written test administered online via Blackboard. You must view the assigned film *The Shining*, then answer multiple short and long **essay questions** asking you to apply concepts of film form and style to the movie. Additional instructions and grading criteria will be provided closer to the exam date.

Final Exam (20%): The final will be a **cumulative exam** covering material from across the entire semester. It will be a **multiple-choice** exam that evaluates your comprehension of key terms and concepts from the *Film Art* textbook and class lectures. Like the Midterm Exam, this will be an open book and open note test; however, this test will be timed and administered in the classroom. Further details will be provided at a later date.

Academic Dishonesty and Misconduct

According to SUNY Oneonta's Code of Student Conduct: "the term 'cheating' includes, but is not limited to: (1) use of any unauthorized assistance in taking quizzes, tests, or examinations; (2) dependence upon the aid of sources beyond those authorized by the instructor in writing papers, preparing reports, solving problems, or carrying out other assignments; or (3) the acquisition, without permission, of tests or other academic material belonging to a member of the College faculty or staff. The term 'plagiarism' includes, but is not limited to, the use, by paraphrase or direct quotation, of the published or unpublished work of another person without full and clear acknowledgment. It also includes the unacknowledged use of materials prepared by another person or agency engaged in the selling of term papers or other academic materials."

Academic dishonesty in this course will be addressed quickly and severely. If I find you responsible for misconduct, you will receive zero (0) points (grade letter "E") on the assignment and potentially an "E" for the entire course. A report of the incident will also be made to the Office of Community Standards and the Department of Communication & Media. For more information, refer to the College's Code of Student Conduct:

<http://www.oneonta.edu/communitystandards/documents/code.pdf>

Classroom Accommodations

If you have a disability or any circumstance that may impact your ability to perform in this class, you are encouraged to speak with me privately as soon as possible. Disclosure of a disability is always voluntary. However, in order to receive official academic services such as testing accommodations, you are required to provide documentation of a disability to the Office of Accessibility Resources (607-436-2137). All students with pertinent documentation will be provided the necessary accommodations as determined by Accessibility Resources.

Emergency Evacuation Procedures

If there is an emergency in Fizzle Hall during class time, the prolonged evacuation site (ES) is the IRC Lobby. In the case of an evacuation, be sure to assist persons with disabilities, including visually impaired persons, people with hearing limitations, people using crutches/canes/walkers, or anyone else who has difficulty leaving the building on their own. Other general evacuation procedures are outlined at:

<http://www.oneonta.edu/security/documents/EmergencyEvacuationProcedures.pdf>

Course Schedule

This schedule is a guide and it is subject to change. **All readings must be done before the Monday (M) class meeting. Film screenings must be watched before the Friday (F) class meeting.** Unless announced otherwise, the weekly online Quizzes are due on Friday (F) before the start of class (Friday 9:00 AM).

Week 1 (August 26–August 30): The Trailer – Course Overview

Reading: *Film Art*, Chapter 1 “Film as Art: Creativity, Technology, and Business,” pp. 2-48

Screening: None

Week 2 (September 4–September 6): Film Form

⊗ **No Class on M, September 2 – Labor Day**

Reading: *Film Art*, Chapter 2 “The Significance of Film Form,” pp. 50-71

Screening: *Citizen Kane* (1941, Dir. Orson Welles, USA)

→ **Due F, September 6: Quiz #1**

Week 3 (September 9–September 13): Film Style – Mise-en-Scène I

Reading: *Film Art*, Chapter 4 “The Shot: Mise-en-Scène,” pp. 112-131

Screening: *Stagecoach* (1939, Dir. John Ford, USA)

→ **Due F, September 13: Quiz #2**

Week 4 (September 16–September 20): Film Style – Mise-en-Scène II

Reading: *Film Art*, Chapter 4 “The Shot: Mise-en-Scène,” pp. 131-158

Screening: *The Grand Budapest Hotel* (2014, Dir. Wes Anderson, USA/Germany)

→ **Due M, September 16: Screening Notebook Check #1**

→ **Due F, September 20: Quiz #3**

Week 5 (September 23–September 27): Film Style – Cinematography I

Reading: *Film Art*, Chapter 5 “The Shot: Cinematography,” pp. 159-209

Screening: *Do the Right Thing* (1989, Dir. Spike Lee, USA)

→ Due F, September 27: Quiz #4

Week 6 (September 30–October 4): Film Style – Cinematography II

Reading: *Film Art*, Chapter 5 “The Shot: Cinematography,” pp. 209-215

Screening: *Birdman* (2014, Dir. Alejandro Iñárritu, USA)

→ Due F, October 4: Quiz #5

Week 7 (October 7–October 11): Film Style – Editing I

Reading: *Film Art*, Chapter 6 “The Relation of Shot to Shot: Editing,” pp. 216-252

Screening: *Whiplash* (2014, Dir. Damien Chazelle, USA)

→ Due M, October 7: Screening Notebook Check #2

→ Due F, October 11: Quiz #6

Week 8 (October 16–October 18): Film Style – Editing II

⊗ **No Class on M, October 14 – Columbus Day**

Reading: *Film Art*, Chapter 6 “The Relation of Shot to Shot: Editing,” pp. 252-262

Screening: *Eternal Sunshine of a Spotless Mind* (2004, Dir. Michel Gondry, USA)

→ Due F, October 18: Quiz #7

Week 9 (October 21–October 25): Film Style – Sound

Reading: *Film Art*, Chapter 7 “Sound in the Cinema,” pp. 263-302

Screening: *WALL-E* (2008, Dir. Andrew Stanton, USA)

→ Due M, October 21: Shot Analysis Exercise

→ Due F, October 25: Quiz #8

Week 10 (October 28–November 1): Film Style Summation + Midterm Exam

Reading: *Film Art*, Chapter 8 “Summary: Style and Film Form,” pp. 303-324

Screening: *The Shining* (1980, Dir. Stanley Kubrick, USA/UK)

→ Due M, October 28: Screening Notebook Check #3

→ Due F, November 1: Midterm Exam

Week 11 (November 4–November 8): Narration I

Reading: *Film Art*, Chapter 3 “Narrative Form,” pp. 72-96

Screening: *Arrival* (2016, Dir. Denis Villeneuve, USA)

→ Due F, November 8: Quiz #9

Week 12 (November 11–November 5): Narration II

Reading: *Film Art*, Chapter 3 “Narrative Form,” pp. 87-97

Screening: *The Big Lebowski* (1998, Dir. Joel Coen, USA/UK)

→ Due F, November 15: Quiz #10

Week 13 (November 18–November 22): Classical Hollywood Narrative

Reading: *Film Art*, Chapter 3 “Narrative Form,” pp. 97-110

Screening: *Back to the Future* (1985, Dir. Robert Zemeckis, USA)

→ **Due M, November 18: Screening Notebook Check #4**

→ **Due F, November 22: Quiz #11**

Week 14 (November 25): Intensified Continuity

Reading: *Film Art*, Chapter 6 section on “A Closer Look: Intensified Continuity,” pp. 246-250

Screening: None

⊗ **No Class on W, November 27 and F, November 29 – Thanksgiving**

Week 15 (December 2–December 6): Art Cinema Narrative

Reading: David Bordwell, “The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice” (PDF on Blackboard)

Screening: *Mulholland Dr.* (2001, Dir. David Lynch, USA/France)

→ **Due F, December 6: Quiz #12**

Week 16 (December 9): The Last Scene – Final Exam Review

No Reading or Screening

→ **Due M, December 9: Screening Notebook Check #5**

Final Exam

F, December 13, 8:00–10:30 AM (regular classroom location: Fitzelle Hall 304)