

**Portland State University  
Department of Theatre and Film**

---

**UNDERSTANDING MOVIES**

TA 331u  
Fall 2013  
Tue 6-9:35 pm  
LINCOLN HALL 331

PROFESSOR: Scott Selberg  
EMAIL: selberg@pdx.edu  
OFFICE HOURS: Thur 3-5 pm  
OFFICE: Lincoln Hall 313c  
TA: Ruby -- kendal2@pdx.edu

**Course Objectives:**

This is an introductory course in film appreciation with special emphasis on cinema as a dramatic art. We will pay careful attention to film's formal properties, its institutional production, and its historical reception. There will be a heavy emphasis on watching short and feature films such that we can more rigorously dissect their formal grammar in light of historical context. By the end of the course, students can expect to be familiar with: the basic language of film analysis and composition (editing, mise-en-scene, cinematography); a range of scholarship and epistemology specific to film (auteur theory, documentary, genre, star studies); and the broad social, institutional, and historical developments of the medium.

**Required Readings:**

You have one required textbook for this class, Richard Barsam and David Monahan's *Looking at Movies* (4<sup>th</sup> edition, 2013). It is available at the bookstore, or you are free to purchase it elsewhere online. Other required readings are available on D2L. All reading assignments are to be completed for the day they appear in the syllabus.

**Required Screenings:**

We will watch a film (or a series of short films) at the beginning of every class. Attendance at these screenings is mandatory. Please note, some of the films we watch for this class may contain offensive material, language, violence, etc. You should not take this class if you have a problem watching this required material.

**METHODS OF EVALUATION:**

***Attendance and Participation***

**15%**

From time to time, you may be asked to write in class on a topic of concern to the course. These in-class writings are required as part of your class participation and they cannot be made up should you miss class. More than one unexcused absence will automatically result in a lower grade. Chronic lateness and early departures will also be reflected in the evaluation of participation. An attendance sheet will circulate before the film screening, and again at the end of class, and it is your responsibility to sign your name on the sheet both times. Regardless of the reason for your absence, you will be responsible for any missed work.

**Screening Journal****15%**

The screening journal is designed to help you to engage critically with the films we watch in class. Each week, you will take notes that respond to the "Screening Checklists" at the end of each chapter of your textbook. Bring your journal to every class. You must hand in this journal on the date of the final exam (before the exam begins). You are welcome to use any kind of media to take notes, but it should be legible to an outside reader when you turn it in. If you want your journal returned to you, please give it to me in a self-addressed, stamped envelope, and I will send it to you after it is graded.

**Midterm Exam****30%**

There will be a midterm exam on February 11<sup>th</sup> at the beginning of class. It will be composed of multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, and true/false questions. The exam will cover all lectures, assigned readings, screenings, and any additional material covered in class through the February 4<sup>th</sup> class period.

**Final Exam****40%**

You will be responsible for completing a final examination on March 18, from 7:30-9:20 pm. It will be composed of multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, true/false questions, and essays. The exam will cover all lectures, assigned readings, screenings, and any additional material covered in class. It will be comprehensive.

**POLICIES:**

**General Decorum:** Slipping in late or leaving early, sleeping, text messaging, surfing the internet, snacking, etc. are distracting and disrespectful to all participants in the course. Avoid such behavior. Do not eat in class.

**Academic Dishonesty and Plagiarism:** Please be sure that you have read and understand the information about plagiarism in PSU's Student Code of Conduct. If you have any questions concerning plagiarism in general, be certain that you ask. Please note that plagiarism is grounds for automatic failure of this course.

**Students With Disabilities:** "Accommodations are collaborative efforts between students, faculty and the Disability Resource Center (DRC). Students with accommodations approved through the DRC are responsible for contacting the faculty member in charge of the course prior to or during the first week of the term to discuss accommodations. Students who believe they are eligible for accommodations but who have not yet obtained approval through the DRC should contact the DRC immediately at 503-725-4150" (DRC).

**COURSE SCHEDULE:****January 7: Introductions, Foundations**

Read: none

Class Screening: *Fred Ott's Sneeze* (Edison, 1894); *The Kiss*; (Edison, 1896); *L'arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat/Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat* (Lumiere, 1895); *L'Arroseur Arose/The Waterer Watered* (Lumiere, 1895); *La Sortie des usines Lumière à Lyon/Exiting the Factory* (Lumiere, 1895); *Voyage dans la Lune/Trip to the Moon* (Melies, 1902), *The Great Train Robbery* (Porter, 1903); *La Fée aux Choux/The Cabbage Fairy* (Guy-Blache,1896)

**January 14: Film Form**

Read: Barsam and Monahan, Chapters 1-2  
Class Screening: *Wizard of Oz* (Fleming, 1939)

**January 21: Documentary and Experimental Films**

Read: Barsam and Monahan, Chapter 3 (pp. 66-83)  
Rose and Corle, "A Trademark Approach to the Past..." (pdf)  
Class Screening: *Grizzly Man* (Herzog, 2005)

**January 28: Genre**

Read: Barsam and Monahan, Chapter 3 (pp. 83-119)  
Class Screening: *Dead Man* (Jarmusch, 1995)

**February 4: Narrative**

Read: Barsam and Monahan, Chapter 4  
Class Screening: *Citizen Kane* (Welles, 1941)

**February 11:—Midterm Exam, Mise-en-Scène**

Read: none  
Class Screening: *The Piano* (Campion, 1993)

**February 18: Mise-en-Scène, Cinematography**

Read: Barsam and Monahan, Chapter 5-6  
Class Screening: *Fantastic Mr. Fox* (Anderson, 2009)

**February 25: Acting, Stars**

Read: Barsam and Monahan, Chapter 7  
Class Screening: *The Kid* (Chaplin, 1921)

**March 4: Editing, Sound**

Read: Barsam and Monahan, Chapter 8-9  
Class Screening: *The Birds* (Hitchcock, 1963)

**March 11: History and the Whole Equation**

Read: Barsam and Monahan, Chapter 10-11  
Class Screening: *Man With a Movie Camera* (Vertov, 1929)

**March 18: Final exam**

**7:30-9:20, Lincoln Hall 331**