

# introduction to film

**Course #:** THEAT 040  
**Instructor:** adam wadenius  
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**Office Hours:** By email or appointment  
**Semester:** Spring 2016  
**Day & Time:** Tuesday, 6pm - 9:55pm  
**Building:** Visual Arts Bldg., VPA #115

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## course description

This course is an introduction to the language of film, and its various forms, styles, and genres. We will be studying a wide variety of film texts (canonic Hollywood films, documentaries, short films, independent and experimental films) as a means toward furthering our understanding of the visual, aural, and narrative conventions by which motion pictures address social and aesthetic experience. Through the class lectures, readings, and films, you will be introduced to the formal and stylistic methods for understanding how films function, conventional and alternative ways of reading a film text, as well as the critical tools necessary for thinking and writing about film both as an art form, and as a medium that reflects popular culture.

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## student learning outcomes

- ~ Demonstrate an understanding of the fundamentals of film as a performing/visual art form.
- ~ Think critically about the significance of film as a reflection of popular culture.
- ~ Identify and explain the various formal and stylistic elements involved in the filmmaking process.
- ~ Articulate the core concepts of narrative storytelling and character development in popular film forms (Hollywood, independent, documentary, and avant-garde filmmaking).
- ~ Identify the various genres and styles of films that have evolved over the course of film history.

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## course requirements

**Lectures & Screenings:** You are responsible for attending the class lectures every week. Each week is structured to introduce you to a particular theme or concept, which will elucidate the formal strategies and stylistic innovations of the film screened in class. There is no talking/discussion during the films or clips. I will dismiss you from the course if you become a disruption during the film screenings. If at any time you decide that you do not wish to continue with the course, it is your responsibility to drop, as I do not take it upon myself to drop anyone from the roster at any time.

I encourage you to use your personal computer, iPad, or other learning tool during class time if you are using it appropriately (viewing class slides, taking notes), however, be sure to turn off any noisemaking functions on those and any other electronic devices such as cell phones, iPods, etc. Please keep the brightness levels on all LED screens at low intensity. There is no food allowed in class at any time (drinks are okay). Copies of all the lectures are available on the course website for download and review.

**Readings:** It is incumbent upon you to be prepared, and you should come to class each Tuesday having read the reading assignment posted on the schedule. We will be spending as much time discussing the readings as the films, and a firm understanding of them will benefit your overall understanding/interpretation of the film texts. All readings are located in the course textbook, or on the course website for download and review.

**Exams:** There will be three exams for this course. Exam #1 will cover all of the material in the *Film Form & Aesthetics* section, exam #2 will cover all of the material in the *Film Narrative & Style* section, and exam #3 will cover all of the material in the *Representing Culture in Film* section. All exams are closed-note.

**Discussion:** You are encouraged to be actively involved in the class discussions, as your participation is key to the success of this course. My goal is to aid in the development of your analytical/critical skills, and I expect everyone to maintain an open mind, and take a creative approach to the material. Be respectful of your fellow classmates when addressing and critiquing conflicting viewpoints.

**Essay Guidelines:** You are required to write two 4-5 page essays this semester. There are three assigned essays overall, and you only need complete two of them to receive credit. All papers are due on the designated due dates without exception, and no late papers will be accepted. I do not accept physical papers, so please email all of your assignments to [adam@apwadenius.com](mailto:adam@apwadenius.com). All emergency situations leading to late papers will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. There will be no opportunity for re-writes after grading, as good writing skills are a must in this course. Each of the essay questions, as well as an example of an *A* paper are located on the course website. It is required that you visit the website to view the example paper, as there are additional guidelines for writing successfully in this course.

**\*\* Note \*\*** *Plagiarism and other issues concerning academic integrity will not be tolerated, and are grounds for an automatic failure in the course. Acknowledge all reading and research sources with appropriate footnotes and bibliography.* Keep all copies of your essays, exams, and notes until you have received a final grade for this class.

**Film Notes & Participation:** Your attendance is expected at each of the film screenings, and missing or leaving the film screenings early will result in a lowered participation grade. To compliment any notes you may be taking on the lectures and discussions, you will be required to keep a separate notebook with your notes on each of the films (one page per each film). This is a good habit to practice when watching and analyzing films, as it will help you to remember important narrative and stylistic elements to be used as supportive examples in your writing. This notebook will be checked on the final week of the semester (May 24<sup>th</sup>), and must be submitted in one of two ways:

- 1) as an electronic document (word, pdf, text, pages, etc.)
- 2) as a packet of individual sheets of paper, assembled and stapled together

Do not turn in any three-ring binders or spiral/binded notebooks with your notes in them, as they will not be accepted.

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assessments

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Film Notes & Participation	20%
Three Exams	30%
Two 4-5 page Essays	50%

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texts & materials

1. Bill Nichols, Engaging Cinema: An Introduction to Film Studies, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010.
2. Additional reading materials posted on the course website @ [www.apwadenius.com](http://www.apwadenius.com).
3. All films screened in class, as well as any excerpt screened during the lectures.

*Please remember that if you have any questions about the films, readings, or any of the course materials, that I am readily available to help answer them. I can be reached through the email address above, or by placing a note for me in my box in the department office.*

~ *Film Form & Aesthetics* ~

**week #1 ~ (Feb. 2<sup>nd</sup>) ~ why do we study films?**

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Lecture: Intro to Course & Film as a Cultural Medium  
 Reading: Engaging Cinema, "Introduction"  
 Reading: Engaging Cinema, "Ch. 12 - Writing and Speaking About Film"

**week #2 ~ (Feb. 9<sup>th</sup>) ~ film language and editing**

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Reading: Engaging Cinema, "Ch. 1 - Film as a Language," pgs. 29-50  
 Screening: *Shadow of a Doubt*, dir. Alfred Hitchcock (1943)

**week #3 ~ (Feb. 17<sup>th</sup>) ~ cinematography and the image**

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Reading: Engaging Cinema, "Ch. 1 - Film as a Language," pgs. 50-59  
 Screening: *Do the Right Thing*, dir. Spike Lee (1989)

**week #4 ~ (Feb. 23<sup>rd</sup>) ~ the elements of mise-en-scène**

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Reading: Engaging Cinema, "Ch. 1 - Film as a Language," pgs. 60-64  
Engaging Cinema, "Ch. 5 - Three Fundamental Styles," pgs. 176-183  
 Screening: *City Lights*, dir. Charlie Chaplin (1931)

**week #5 ~ (Mar. 1<sup>st</sup>) ~ sound and sound design**

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Reading: Engaging Cinema, "Ch. 1 - Film as a Language," pgs. 64-69  
 Screening: *The Sixth Sense*, dir. M. Night Shyamalan (1999)

**week #6 ~ (Mar. 8<sup>th</sup>) ~ first exam**

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**\*\* First exam due \*\***

~ *Film Narrative & Style* ~

**week #7 ~ (Mar. 15<sup>th</sup>) ~ the principles of film narrative**

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Reading: Engaging Cinema, "Ch. 4 - Storytelling and Narrative Fiction Film," pgs. 136-147  
 Screening: *Some Like It Hot*, dir. Billy Wilder (1959)

**\*\* First 4-5 pg. essay due \*\***

**week #8 ~ (Mar. 22<sup>nd</sup>) ~ no class**

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**\*\* Spring break \*\***

**week #9 ~ (Mar. 29<sup>th</sup>) ~ the classical Hollywood style**

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Reading: Engaging Cinema, "Ch. 4 - Storytelling and Narrative Fiction Film," pgs. 160-172

Engaging Cinema, "Ch. 5 - Three Fundamental Styles," pgs. 181-187

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

**week #10 ~ (Apr. 5<sup>th</sup>) ~ art cinema narration**

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Reading: Engaging Cinema, "Ch. 4 - Storytelling and Narrative Fiction Film," pgs. 147-160

Engaging Cinema, "Ch. 6 - The Institutional and National Contexts," pgs. 213-216

Screening: *Death Proof*, dir. Quentin Tarantino (2007)

**week #11 ~ (Apr. 12<sup>th</sup>) ~ avant-garde cinema**

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Reading: Engaging Cinema, "Ch. 2 - Cinematic Engagement and the Avant-Garde," pgs. 80-98

Screening: *Waking Life*, dir. Richard Linklater (2001)

**week #12 ~ (Apr. 19<sup>th</sup>) ~ documentary film**

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Reading: Engaging Cinema, "Ch. 3 - Documentary Film"

Clips: *Regen*, dir. Joris Ivens (1929)

*Why We Fight: Prelude to War*, dir. Frank Capra (1942)

*Salesman*, dirs. Albert & David Maysles (1968)

*Roger & Me*, dir. Michael Moore (1989)

*Las Hurdes*, dir. Luis Buñuel (1933)

*I Am A Sex Addict*, dir. Caveh Zahedi (2005)

**week #13 ~ (Apr. 26<sup>th</sup>) ~ second exam**

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**\*\* Second exam due \*\***

*~ Representing Culture in Film ~*

**week #14 ~ (May 3<sup>rd</sup>) ~ sex and gender in film**

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Reading: Engaging Cinema, "Ch. 10 - Gender and Masculinity," pgs. 359-388

Engaging Cinema, "Ch. 11 - Feminism and Film," pgs. 395-422

Screening: *Real Women Have Curves*, dir. Patricia Cardoso (2002)

**\*\* Second 4-5 pg. essay due \*\***

**week #15 ~ (May 10<sup>th</sup>) ~ race and ethnicity in film**

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Reading: Engaging Cinema, "Ch. 9 - Race and Ethnicity in Film"

Screening: *Dope*, dir. Rick Famuyiwa (2015)

week #16 ~ (May 17<sup>th</sup>) ~ Other sexualities in film

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Reading: Engaging Cinema, "Ch. 10 - Gender and Masculinity," pgs. 388-394

Engaging Cinema, "Ch. 11 - Feminism and Film," pgs. 422-431

Screening: *The Kids Are All Right*, dir. Lisa Cholodenko (2010)

week #17 ~ (May 24<sup>th</sup>) ~ final class session

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**\*\* Final exam due \*\***

**\*\* Third 4-5 pg. essay due \*\***

**\*\* Film notebooks due for review \*\***

**\*\* Please note that the final exam will be held on May 24<sup>th</sup> at the usual class time and location. \*\***