Class details

CORE-UA9750002 Expressive Culture: Film
Spring 2016
Time: Tuesday 1-5 PM
Location: B101

Instructor Details

Matthew Noble-Olson
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OFFICE LOCATION: TBA
OFFICE HOURS: by appointment

Class Description

Cinema has been infatuated with the city since its earliest days. But in the context of American film Washington, DC is uniquely underrepresented in comparison to such paragons as New York, Los Angeles, or San Francisco. While it appears often in film and television, Washington serves primarily as a backdrop for political drama or national security crisis while ignoring the specific character of the city that has been so central to the depiction of other cinematic cities. This course will introduce the critical study of film with a focus on the filmic and televisual representation of Washington, DC, emphasizing this specific feature of Washington’s representation in American film and examining iconic counterexamples of cinematic depictions of other cities, such as Spike Lee’s Brooklyn and Jean-Luc Godard’s Paris. We will study film’s technological evolution and cultural impact over the course of its history, focusing on how different film technologies affect the movies’ social and political significance in the US and how changing viewing patterns, such as the introduction of television and digital technologies, transform cinema and our understanding of it. In addition to reading important texts and learning key concepts of film studies, we will examine how filmic and televisual representations of Washington, DC and the city generally have expressed concerns about war, race, gender, sexuality, and nation.

As a part of the Expressive Culture component of the College Core Curriculum this course is intended to introduce you to the study and appreciation of human artistic creation and to foster your ongoing engagement with the arts. Through critical engagement with primary cultural artifacts, it introduces you to formal methods of interpretation and to understanding the importance of expressive creation in particular social and historical contexts. It is designed to extend your education beyond the focused studies of your major, preparing you for your future life as a
thoughtful individual and active member of society.

**Desired Outcomes**

- The student will demonstrate knowledge of historical and theoretical perspectives on film.
- The student will be able to recognize major figures, films, and genres associated with American film.
- The student will gain an understanding of the importance of race, gender, and sexuality as they relate to the study of film and media.
- The student will learn about a range of ways in which Washington, DC has been represented in American film.
- The student will learn about the importance of representations of the city in the history of film.

**Assessment Components**

**Formal Analysis:** a 900-word essay analyzing a 2-3 minute sequence of your choice from *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington, The Day the Earth Stood Still, or Do The Right Thing*. Your analysis should describe how the mise-en-scène, cinematography, editing and sound design work together in the sequence to produce meaning. (Due February 23) – 10%

**Critical Essay:** a 1500-word essay that critically responds to the readings that we have discussed in class. This essay will ask you to develop your own original perspective on this material. It is meant to be a sustained and argumentative engagement with the texts that demonstrates your own understanding. (Due April 5) – 20%

**Final Essay:** a 3000-word essay that brings together the skills of formal analysis and critical thinking to present an argument about how cinema represents Washington, DC and the city. (Due May 17) – 25%

**Presentation:** you will be responsible for one 15-minute presentation on one of the course readings. This presentation should offer a brief synopsis of the reading followed by a contextualization of the reading within that week’s topic and screening. Finally, you should offer some questions on the material to begin the discussion for that day – 10%

**Quiz One and Two:** Each quiz will focus on the Bordwell and Thompson reading. These quizzes will be short reviews of the language of formal film analysis that is being introduced in *Film Art*. – 20% (each worth 10%

**Participation:** this includes attendance but also active participation in discussion and all aspects of the course. It also includes the timely completion of all assignments. – 15%

Failure to submit or fulfill any required course component results in failure of the class.
### Assessment Expectations

**Grade A:** The grade of A marks extraordinary academic performance in all aspects of the course and is reserved for clearly superior work.

**Grade B:** The grade of B represents good work in all aspects of the course—enthusiastic and active participation, demonstrated improvement, and apparent effort.

**Grade C:** The grade of C denotes satisfactory work—regular attendance, ordinary effort, a minimum of demonstrated improvement across the semester.

**Grade D:** The grade of D marks poor work and effort and a need for improvement.

**Grade F:** The grade of F indicates failure to complete the requirements for a course in a creditable manner. It marks a judgment about the quality and quantity of a student’s work and participation—not about the student—and is therefore in order whenever a student fails to complete course requirements, whatever his or her intentions or circumstances may be.

The temporary mark of **I (Incomplete)** is given only when sudden and incapacitating illness, or other grave emergency, prevents a student from completing the final assignment or examination for a course. The Incomplete must be requested by the student in advance; all other course requirements, including satisfactory attendance, must have been fulfilled; and there must be a reasonable expectation that the student will receive a passing grade when the delayed work is completed. Students must make arrangements with the faculty member to finish the incomplete work as soon as circumstances permit within the following semester. If not completed, marks of I will lapse to F.

### Attendance Policy

Study abroad at Global Academic Centers is an academically intensive and immersive experience, in which students from a wide range of backgrounds exchange ideas in discussion-based seminars. Learning in such an environment depends on the active participation of all students. And since classes typically meet once or twice a week, even a single absence can cause a student to miss a significant portion of a course. **To ensure the integrity of this academic experience, class attendance at the centers is mandatory, and unexcused absences will affect students' semester grades. A failing grade may be assigned to any student with two or more absences.** Students are responsible for making up any work missed due to absence. Repeated absences in a course may result in failure. At all Global Academic Centers, unexcused absences will be penalized with a two percent deduction from the student’s final course grade.

To seek an excused absence for medical reasons, students must email or discuss with the Academic Program Coordinator in advance of their missed class. For an excused absence, students must
produce a doctor’s note dated with the exact dates of the missed class and/or exam.

Non-medical absences must be discussed with the Academic Program Coordinator prior to the date(s) in question, who will communicate the absence to all relevant faculty members. If faculty members do receive notification, the student has not procured an excused absence.

NYU Washington, DC expects students to arrive to class promptly (both at the beginning and after any breaks), to be attentive, and to remain for the duration of the class. If full class attendance and participation becomes a problem, it is the prerogative of each instructor to apply the rule for unexcused absences, which may include a two percent deduction from the student’s final course grade.

Students are responsible for making up any work missed due to absence. This means they should initiate email and/or office hour discussions to discuss any missed lectures and assignments and arrange a timeline for submitting missed work.

Please note that for classes involving a field trip or other external visit, transportation difficulties are never grounds for an excused absence. It is the student’s responsibility to arrive at the announced meeting point in a punctual and timely fashion. Staff members may always be reached by cell phone for advice regarding public transportation.

### Late Submission of Work

1) Written work due in class must be submitted during the class time to the professor.

2) Late work should be emailed to the faculty as soon as it is completed.

3) Late work is accepted but it will be reflected in the participation grade.

4) Assignments due during finals week that are submitted more than 3 days without previously arranged extensions will not be accepted. Any exceptions or extensions for work during finals week must be discussed with the Site Director.

### Students with Disabilities

Accommodations are available for students with documented disabilities. Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at +1-212-998-4980 or see their website (http://www.nyu.edu/life/safety-health-andwellness/students-with-disabilities.html) for further information.

### Plagiarism Policy

As a student at New York University, you have been admitted to a community of scholars who value free and open inquiry. Our work depends on honest assessment of ideas and their sources; and we
expect you, as a member of our community, likewise to maintain the highest integrity in your academic work. Because of the central importance of these values to our intellectual life together, those who fail to maintain them will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University.

Plagiarism consists in presenting ideas and words without acknowledging their source and is an offense against academic integrity. Any of the following acts constitutes a crime of plagiarism.

- Using a phrase, sentence, or passage from another person’s work without quotation marks and attribution of the source.

- Paraphrasing words or ideas from another’s work without attribution.

- Reporting as your own research or knowledge any data or facts gathered or reported by another person.

- Submitting in your own name papers or reports completed by another.

- Submitting your own original work toward requirements in more than one class without the prior permission of the instructors.

Other offenses against academic integrity include the following.

- Collaborating with other students on assignments without the express permission of the instructor.

- Giving your work to another student to submit as his or her own.

- Copying answers from other students during examinations.

- Using notes or other sources to answer exam questions without the instructor’s permission.

- Secreting or destroying library or reference materials.

- Submitting as your own work a paper or results of research that you have purchased from a commercial firm or another person.

Particular emphasis is placed on the use of papers and other materials to be found on the World-Wide Web, whether purchased or freely available. In addition to having access to the same search engines as students, faculty also have at their disposal a number of special websites devoted to detecting plagiarism from the web.

Plagiarism and other cases of academic fraud are matters of fact, not intention. It is therefore
crucial that you be diligent in assuring the integrity of your work.

• Use quotation marks to set off words that are not your own.

• Learn to use proper forms of attribution for source materials.

• Do your own original work in each class, without collaboration, unless otherwise instructed.

• Don’t use published sources, the work of others, or material from the web without attribution.

• For further information, consult the College of Arts and Science website on academic integrity at http://cas.nyu.edu/page/academicintegrity.

For guidelines on academic honesty, clarification of the definition of plagiarism, examples of procedures and sanctions, and resources to support proper citation, please see:

http://www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/academic-integrity-for-students-at-nyu.html

http://gls.nyu.edu/page/gls.academicintegrity

http://cas.nyu.edu/page/academicintegrity


**Religious Observances**

Students observing a religious holiday during regularly scheduled class time are entitled to miss class without any penalty to their grade. This is for the holiday only and does not include the days of travel that may come before and/or after the holiday.

Students must notify their professor and the Office of Academic Support in writing via email at least one week in advance before being absent for this purpose.

**Required Text(s)**

David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction, 10th Edition* (978-0073535104)

**Session 1: February 2**

TOPIC: Introduction
VIEWING: *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (Capra 1939)
READING: Bordwell and Thompson, Glossary

**Session 2: February 9**
TOPIC: How does cinema make meaning?

VIEWING: The Day the Earth Stood Still (Wise 1951)
READING: Bordwell and Thompson, Chapter 1-Film as Art

Eric Avila, “Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Film Noir, Disneyland, and the Cold War (Sub)urban Imaginary” in Journal of Urban History (20 pp.)

Session 3: February 16

TOPIC: Cinema creates its world.

VIEWING: Do The Right Thing (Lee 1989)
READING: Bordwell and Thompson, Chapter 2-The Significance of Film Form


Session 4: February 23

TOPIC: Cinema faces the world.

VIEWING: Being There (Ashby 1979)
READING: Bordwell and Thompson, Chapter 3-Narrative as a Formal System


Formal Analysis (3 pages) Due at the start of class

Session 5 March 1

TOPIC: A corporeal cinema?

VIEWING: The Exorcist (Friedkin 1973)
READING: Bordwell and Thompson, Chapter 4-The Shot: Mise-en-Scene

Creed, “Woman as Possessed Monster: The Exorcist,”

Quiz One

Session 6: March 8

TOPIC: Who sees in cinema?

VIEWING: Strangers on a Train (Hitchcock 1951)
READING: Bordwell and Thompson, Chapter 5-The Shot: Cinematography


**Session 7: March 22**

TOPIC: A corporeal cinema?

VIEWING: *Breathless* (Godard 1960)
READING: Bordwell and Thompson, Chapter 6-The Relation of Shot to Shot: Editing

Giuliana Bruno, “City Views: The Voyage of Film Images” in *The Cinematic City*, 47-60.

**Session 8: March 29**

TOPIC: Cinema listens to the world.

VIEWING: *All the President’s Men* (Pakula 1976)
READING: Bordwell and Thompson, Chapter 7-Sound in the Cinema


**Session 9: April 5**

TOPIC: Thinking the world.

VIEWING: *The Manchurian Candidate* (Frankenheimer 1962)
READING: Bordwell and Thompson, Chapter 8-Summary: Style as a Formal System

**Critical Essay (5 pages) Due at the Start of Class**

**Session 10: April 12**

TOPIC: Digital Memories

VIEWING: *Minority Report* (Spielberg 2002)
READING: Bordwell and Thompson, Chapter 9-Film Genres


**Quiz Two**

**Session 11: April 19**

TOPIC: Documentary
READING: Bordwell and Thompson, Chapter 10-Documentary, Experimental, and Animated Films


**Session 12: April 26**

TOPIC: Film and History

VIEWING: *Lincoln* (Spielberg 2012)
*The Birth of a Nation* (Griffith 1915) (recommended)


**Session 13: May 3**

TOPIC: Contemporary Film and Contemporary Politics

VIEWING: *White House Down* (Emmerich 2013)

John Orr, “The City Reborn: Cinema at the Turn of the Century” in *Screening the City*, 284-298.

**Session 14: May 10**

TOPIC: Television and the Ends of the City


**Session 15: May 17**

**Final Critical Essay (10 pages) Due.**

**Classroom Etiquette**
Required Co-curricular Activities

Suggested Co-curricular Activities

Your Instructor

Matthew Noble-Olson received his Ph.D. from Brown University in Modern Culture and Media. His research focuses on experimental film and media, American cinema, early cinema, the historicity of media, representations of nature, and the relation between art and cinema. He is currently working on a manuscript titled *Late Cinema: Avantgarde, Medium, Capital* and has forthcoming essays on the art of Douglas Gordon and Philip Solomon. He has taught numerous courses on film and media, art history, and critical theory at Brown University, Georgetown University, The Corcoran College of Art and Design, and the Maryland Institute College of Art.