

**Communication 1400**  
Introduction to Film Criticism  
**Autumn 2021**



**Class Days, Time & Place:** Monday &  
Wednesday, 5-7 PM in San Ignacio Hall  
Auditorium

**Prerequisite:** English 1900

**Credits:** 3.0

**Instructor:** Brian M. Goss, Ph.D.

**Instructor's Email:** [brian.goss@slu.edu](mailto:brian.goss@slu.edu)

**Office Hours:** Monday, 3:30-4:30, Tuesday &  
Thursday, 2-4; Tuesday 6:30-7:30

## **Course Description**

This course presents a survey of film as an art form and as a medium of mass communication while it broadly orients students to the fundamentals of film studies. We will examine the formal aspects of film that constitute its “language” (i.e., narrative, cinematography, *mise-en-scene*, editing, sound). Alongside reading films, the course will introduce fundamentals of film theory (e.g., auteurism, genre), the political economy of the industry, and present background on the conditions under which films on the syllabus were produced. The films that will be screened span across decades and range from commercially viable to “art house” films. The films are also drawn from an eclectic array of national film industries (i.e., United States, Argentina, United Kingdom, South Korea, Spain, Colombia) and are distinct with respect to genre.

## **Course Goals and Student Learning Outcomes**

In this course, we will strive to

- Analyze films as text and social context;
- Utilize formal language of film analysis (e.g., narrative, *mise-en-scene*, cinematography);
- Employ some essential film theories (e.g., genre, auteurism);
- Exhibit enhanced knowledge of film across time periods, genres, and national cinemas.

## **Required Texts and Materials**

Beyond the films, and the scanned and internet readings, the following text is required: *Film Art* (12th Edition/International) by David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson & Jeff Smith. The text is available via the SLU-Madrid bookstore, via online vendors, or the reserve shelf in the SLU-Madrid Library.

## **Course Requirements and Grading Rationale/System**

The final grade will be calculated by the following scheme (900 points total):

Journal ... 30 points

Mid-Semester Exam & *Mise-en-Scene* Exercise ... 130 points (*mise-en-scene* exercise) & 100 points (take-home identifications) = 230 points  
10-12 Quizzes ... 160 points  
Final Exam ... 160 points  
Final Paper ... 160 points  
Engagement (Attendance, Participation, Attentiveness) ... 160

Assignments will be described in greater detail as they arise during the course. Late work will be marked down at the instructors' discretion if it is not completed by the specified deadline. Written work is not accepted more than two weeks late.

Quizzes will be given at the start of class on Wednesday of most every week and will be collected by 5:15; if you are late, you are out of luck. Quizzes will cover material from the film text and assigned readings and are weighted heavily to underscore the importance of being prepared for class. Under no circumstances are "make-up quizzes" administered.

### **Omnibus Warning on Content**

The films on the syllabus depict some of the very worst of human behavior, in some cases allusively and in other cases graphically. That said, I will not itemize what kinds of behavior appear or are suggested in the film (e.g., profanity, violence, gender violence, violence with weapons, murder, terrorism) as this could reduce the film to a carnival of macabre shocks while warnings may in themselves generate extended anxiety or distraction. Despite the frequently severe content, all the films have artistic merit that was the basis of their selection for the course. While I will not engage with "trigger warnings" for the whole class, I can entertain specific inquiries from students on request.

### **Engagement Policy**

The campus is committing to the pre-2020 "normal" of the fully in-person and synchronous instructional model following last year's hybrid endeavors. However, depending on the path of the ongoing pandemic and associated government directives, we may need to alter the planned delivery of the course. In any event, students will be informed in writing of all procedures or changes to them.

Written work will be returned to students promptly, typically by the next class session. Emails will be answered within a day during the week. Students are expected to do the readings faithfully and have substance to contribute at each class session. Informed student presence is the heart of the course—so be a contributor and be constructive with your peers and professor. Attendance will be recorded at all class meetings.

### **Further Policies**

By virtue of being enrolled in this course, the student *by definition* firmly grasps all policies described in this syllabus. In particular, students must be familiar with the following mores:

—*Email*: Campus and course announcements will often be handled by e-mail. Students will need to check their “@slu.edu” e-mail account on at least a daily basis. Canvas should also be consulted with regularity as readings and assignments will be distributed through it platform.

—*Late Work*: Written work that is submitted late without an acceptable excuse will be penalized, the magnitude of which will be at my discretion. If written work is not submitted within two weeks of the due date, it will be assigned a grade of zero.

—*Attendance & Classroom Conduct*: Aside from excused absences (documented illness, university-sponsored events), attendance is expected and will be recorded at all class meetings.

The student is obligated to plan appointments and personal excursions outside of class time. Early exits from class session always present poor etiquette; do not show up for class unless you plan to stay the whole period.

Students are expected to be prepared, attentive, participatory, and courteous with the people with whom they share the academic milieu.

Laptops are tolerated during lecture/discussion, provided that they are used for class-salient activity. I can, will, and have marked students absent for demonstrable lack of attention and am empowered to investigate what happens in my classroom as needed.

Further readings may be added to the syllabus and other adjustments to the plan, if they occur, will be communicated in writing.

Notice that before each class session, I need to prepare audiovisual materials. Please do not approach me with questions until I have the materials ready for the whole class' benefit.

—*Further Course and Campus Salient Information in Appendices*: The “Final Grading Scale” and “Autumn 2021 Academic Calendar” can be found in Appendices at the end of this document.

Further Appendices are available at:

[plantilla.madrid.slu.edu/index/index/p/50](http://plantilla.madrid.slu.edu/index/index/p/50)

These further appendices address: “Assessment of Student Learning”, “Academic Honesty/Integrity”, “Diversity and Inclusion”, “Disability Accommodations and Learning Resources”, “Needs Security Statement”, “Trip Policy” and “GDPR Norms Concerning Class Recordings”.

## **AUTUMN 2021 COURSE OUTLINE:**

### *MODULE 0: INTRODUCTION*

Goals: Discover who is who in the class, watch illustrative clips, inaugurate a successful semester of oscillating between learning & enjoyment

Wednesday 1 September: Introduction to the Course

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### *MODULE 1: ESSENTIALS OF FORMAL ANALYSIS: NARRATIVE*

Goals: Introduce and apply essentials of narrative

Monday 6 September

—Screening of *Arrival* (Dir: Denis Villeneuve, USA-Canada-India, 2016)

Wednesday 8 September

—Discuss *Arrival*

—Read Bordwell, Thompson & Smith, 12<sup>th</sup> edition, pp.72-100 (“Chapter 3: Narrative Form”)

—Journal Entry Assigned—

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MODULE 2: ESSENTIALS OF FORMAL ANALYSIS: MISE-EN-SCENE.

Goals: Introduce and apply essentials of *mise-en-scene*, the fundamental visual language of film

Monday 13 September

—Screening of *The Secret in Their Eyes / El secreto de sus ojos* (Dir: Juan José Campanella, Argentina-Spain, 2009)

Wednesday 15 September

—Discuss *The Secret in Their Eyes*

—Read Bordwell, Thompson & Smith, 12<sup>th</sup> edition, pp.112-140 (“Chapter 4: The Shot: *mise-en-scene*”)

—Internet: Matt Losada, “*The Secret in Their Eyes*”, at:

<https://www.cineaste.com/winter2010/the-secret-in-their-eyes-historical-memory-production-models-and-the-foreign-film-oscar-web-exclusive>

—Thursday 16 September: Journal Entry Due—

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MODULE 3: ESSENTIALS OF FORMAL ANALYSIS: CINEMATOGRAPHY

When: Monday 21 September & Wednesday 23 September

Goals: Introduce and apply essentials of cinematography, a defining feature of a film

Monday 20 September

—Screening of *Children of Men* (Dir: Alfonso Cuarón, USA-UK-Japan, 2006)

Wednesday 22 September

—Discuss *Children of Men*

—Read Bordwell, Thompson & Smith, 12<sup>th</sup> edition, pp.159-203 & pp.210-215 (“The Shot: Cinematography”)

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MODULE 4: ESSENTIALS OF FORMAL ANALYSIS: EDITING

Goals: Introduce and apply essentials of editing, another defining feature of a film

Monday 27 September

—Screening of *La piel que habito / The Skin I Live In* (Dir: Pedro Almodóvar, Spain-France, 2011)

Wednesday 29 September

—Discuss *The Skin I Live In*

—Read Bordwell, Thompson & Smith, 12<sup>th</sup> edition, pp.216-262 (“Chapter 6: The relation of shot-to-shot: editing”)

—Scanned Reading: Paula Willoquet-Maricondi, “Introduction”

—Distribute Take-Home Component of Mid-Term Examination—

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#### MODULE 5: ESSENTIALS OF FORMAL ANALYSIS: SOUND

Goals: Introduce and apply essentials of sound in film that plays on the “second sense”

Monday 4 October

—Screening of *The Florida Project* (Dir: Sean Baker, USA, 2017)

Wednesday 6 October

—Discuss *The Florida Project*

—Read Bordwell, Thompson & Smith, 12<sup>th</sup> edition, pp.263-299 (“Chapter 7: Sound in the Cinema”)

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#### MODULE 6: SYMPTOMATIC MEANING

Goals: Peel back the levels of meanings in films

Monday 11 October

—Screening of *A Quiet Place* (Dir: John Krasinski, USA, 2018)

Wednesday 13 October

—Discuss *A Quiet Place* (First Hour) & IN-CLASS COMPONENT OF MID-TERM EXAM (Second Hour)

—Read Bordwell, Thompson & Smith, 12<sup>th</sup> edition, pp.58-60 (“Form & Meaning”)

—Scanned Reading: Robin Wood, “The American Nightmare”

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MODULE 7: THEORIZING GENRE (DOCUMENTARY)

Goals: Analyze genre with an accent on documentary

Monday 18 October

—Screening of *When We Were Kings* (Dir: Leon Gast, United States, 1995) and *Hotel 22* (Dir: Elizabeth Lo, United States, 2014)

Wednesday 20 October

—Discuss *When We Were Kings* and *Hotel 22*

—Read Bordwell, Thompson & Smith, 12<sup>th</sup> Edition, pp.328-358 (Chapter 9: “Film Genres”)

—Internet reading: Justine Smith, “How *When We Were Kings* Enshrined Muhammad Ali’s Legacy”, at: [lwlies.com/articles/when-we-were-kings-muhammad-ali-legacy/](http://lwlies.com/articles/when-we-were-kings-muhammad-ali-legacy/)

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MODULE 8: SPECTACLE TO BE ANNOUNCED

Goals: Enact a field trip to a film theater or other surprise, on or about Monday 25 October or Wednesday 27 October

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MODULE 9: BUILDING FILM CULTURE

Goals: Transcending being “Dazed & Confused” about organizing film culture

Monday 1 November: CAMPUS HOLIDAY—*Día de todos los santos*

Wednesday 3 November

—Screening & Discussion of *Dazed and Confused* (Dir: Richard Linklater, United States, 1993)

—Internet reading: Chris Hughes, “How Richard Linklater Changed the Texas Film Scene Forever”, at: <https://www.austinmonthly.com/how-richard-linklater-changed-the-austin-film-scene/>

— Final Paper Assigned —

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MODULE 10: THEORIZING AUTEURS: CHRISTOPHER NOLAN

Goals: Consider the auteur theory, including its limitations



Monday 8 November

—Screening of *The Prestige* (Dir: Christopher Nolan, USA-UK, 2006)

Wednesday 10 November

—Discuss *The Prestige*

—Scanned Reading: Robert Stam, “The Author”

—Scanned Reading: Janey Place, “Women in Film Noir”

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MODULE II: WOMEN & FILM -AND- GRADIENTS OF REALISM

Goals: Orienting to women in the director’s chair and evaluating what is meant by “realism”

Monday 15 November

—Screening of *The Rider* (Dir: Chloé Zhao, United States, 2018)

Wednesday 17 November

—Discuss *The Rider*

—Scanned Reading: Robert Stam, “The Question of Realism”

—Scanned Reading: Martha M. Lauzen, “Who Are the Film Directors (Who Happen to be Women)?”

—Internet Reading: Amy Nicholson, “Wild Horses”, at:

<https://www.rollingstone.com/movies/movie-features/wild-horses-how-the-rider-became-the-breakout-movie-of-2018-629297/>

— Final Paper Due —

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MODULE 12: PULLING IT TOGETHER

Goals: Integrate what we have covered all term with fun & illuminating films

Monday 22 November

—Screening of *The Handmaiden / Ah-ga-ss* (Dir: Chan-wook Park, South Korea, 2016)

Wednesday 24 November

—Discuss *The Handmaiden*

—Internet reading: Chi-Yun Shin, “In Another Time & Place”, at:

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17564905.2018.1520781>

Monday 29 November

—Screening of *El abrazo de la serpiente / Embrace of the Serpent* (Dir: Ciro Guerra; Colombia-Venezuela-Argentina; 2015)

Wednesday 1 December

—Discuss *Embrace of the Serpent*

—Scanned Reading: John Fiske, “Structuralist Theory and Applications”

Monday 6 December: CAMPUS HOLIDAY—*Día de la Constitución*

Wednesday 8 December

—Screening of *Knives Out* (Dir: Rian Johnson, USA, 2019)

Friday 10 December

—Discuss *Knives Out*

Monday 13 December

Activity: Screening & Discussion of *The Guilty (Den Skyldige)* (Dir: Gustav Möller, Denmark, 2018)

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**TUESDAY 21 DECEMBER @ 3:30 : FINAL EXAMINATION**

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## APPENDICES

### Final Grade Scale:

91.5% or above: “A”; 89.0-90.9%: “A-”; 86.0 - 88.9%: “B+”; 83.0 - 85.9%: “B”; 80.0-82.9: “B-”; 77.0 - 79.9%: “C+”; 73.0 - 76.9%: “C”; 70.0 - 72.9: “C-”; 61.5 - 69.9%: “D”; Less than 61.5%: “F”

### Autumn 2021 Calendar:

Sunday, August 29	First-year and transfer student arrival and move-in day
Monday, August 30	First-year and transfer student welcome sessions Study abroad student move-in day
Tuesday, August 31	Class of 2025 Convocation ceremony Study abroad student welcome sessions
Wednesday, September 1	First day of classes
Wednesday, September 8	Mass of the Holy Spirit
Sunday, September 12	Last day to drop a class without a grade of W and/or add a class Last day to choose Audit (AU) or Pass/No Pass (P/NP) options Application deadline for fall semester degree candidates
Tuesday, October 12	<i>Fiesta Nacional de España</i> (Madrid Campus closed)
Friday, October 15	Last day to submit Transfer Application for spring semester
Sunday, October 24	Professors' deadline to submit midterm grades
Monday, November 1	<i>Día de Todos los Santos</i> (Madrid Campus closed)
Wednesday, November 3	Registration for spring semester begins
Sunday, November 7	Last day to drop a class and receive a grade of W
Tuesday, November 9	<i>Día de la Almudena</i> (Madrid Campus closed)
Friday, November 26	Academic English last day of classes
Monday, December 6	<i>Día de la Constitución</i> (Madrid Campus closed)
Wednesday, December 8	<i>La Inmaculada Concepción</i> (Madrid Campus closed)
<b>Friday, December 10</b>	<b>All Monday classes meet</b>
Tuesday, December 14	Last day of classes
Wednesday-Tuesday, December 15-21	Final exams
Tuesday, December 21	Midyear Commencement
Wednesday, December 22	Host family housing move-out date