Department of English

Film and Media Studies Minor

Spring 2016 Course Descriptions

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Information is subject to change
What Was the Hip-Hop Generation?

Instructor: Rich Purcell

Meetings: TR 12:00 p.m. – 1:20 p.m.
M 6:30 p.m. – 9:20 p.m. (Screening)

Prerequisite: 76-101 Interpretation & Argument

This course will attempt to answer a simply stated but not so simply answered question: What is (or was) the “hip-hop” generation? Bakari Kitwana gives us a very broad but useful rubric to understand whom that generation was in his 2002 book, The Hip-Hop Generation: Young Blacks and the Crisis of African-American Culture. For Kitwana it defines the first generation of African-American youth that grew up in post-segregation America. While useful, Kitwana’s definition is also quite provocative since many of the earliest practitioners (and consumers) of what would eventually be called “hip-hop” were not all African-Americans but Greeks, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Jamaicans, Germans, Trinidadians, Mexicans, etc..., many of whom lived in America but also encountered hip-hop elsewhere on the planet. In our class we will take a broad, global perspective on the question of “what is/was the hip-hop generation” through scholarly and popular works by Kitwana. Jeff Chang, Tricia Rose and many others. Given the significant media studies components of this course our class will lean heavily on musical, cinematic and televisual sources. Not only will you watch early fictional films about hip-hop like Wildstyle and Krush Groove but others like Matthieu Kassovitz’s La Haine and Rick Famuyima’s Brown Sugar which are influenced by hip-hop culture. We will also watch music videos as well as listen to singles and select albums like Queen Latifah’s All Hail the Queen, Kendrik Lamar’s To Pimp A Butterfly, Die Antwoord’s Tension as well as read memoirs such as Jay-Z’s Decoded.

Introduction to Film Studies

Instructor: David Shumway

Meetings: MW 12:00 p.m. – 1:20 p.m.
T 6:30 – 9:20 p.m. (Screening)

Prerequisite: 76-101 Interpretation & Argument

This course is an introduction to the history, technology, aesthetics and ideology of film. The main focus will be on the narrative fiction film, but we will also discuss documentaries, avant-garde work and animation. At the same time, we will be attentive to the ways in which our conceptual understanding of film has impacted the development of successive waves of visual media. The central organizing principle is historical, but there are a number of recurring thematic concerns. These include an examination of the basic principles and terminology of filmmaking, the development of film technology, the definition of film as both art and business, the history of film as an object of critical and cultural study, and the importance of film as the precursor of newer formats. The course has four key goals. First, to provide students with a solid grounding in the key issues and concepts of film studies. Second, to expand their ability to knowledgeably critique individual cinematic works and the relationship of those works to the larger culture. Third to provide students with experience in expressing those critiques in verbal, written and visual forms. Lastly, to provide them with an understanding of the central role of film history and film studies in the development of newer media.

Survey of Forms: Screenwriting

Instructor: S. Dilworth

Meetings: TR 9:00 a.m. – 10:20 a.m.

Prerequisite: 76-101 Interpretation & Argument

It is not so difficult to learn the format or even to master the style of the screenplay—the challenge lies in writing image-driven stories with believable dialogue, vivid characters, and a coherent, well-structured plot. To that end, students will
view short and feature-length films, paying special attention to such fundamentals as character development and story structure. Students will read screenplays to see how scripts provide the blueprints for the final product, and write analytical papers. To gain experience and confidence, students will work on a number of exercises that will lead them toward producing a polished short screenplay by the end of the semester.

76-339  The Films of Spike Lee  
Instructor: Rich Purcell  
Meetings: TR 3:00 p.m. – 4:20 p.m.  
W 6:30 – 9:20 p.m. (Screening)  
Prerequisite: 76-101 Interpretation & Argument

With sixty-three directorial credits to his name, Spike Lee is undoubtedly one of the most prolific, influential as well as controversial black directors in contemporary American cinema. This class will be a survey of many of Lee's most iconic films like She's Gotta Have It, Do The Right Thing and Malcolm X and Bamboozled. However, we will also look at his more explicit commercial genre work (Inside Man), remakes (Old Boy), his dabbling in horror (Da Sweet Blood of Jesus), documentaries (4 Little Girls, When The Levees Break, and Kings of Comedy), commercials and music videos. While Lee's vast corpus of work will be the singular focus of the course we will also contextualize Lee within the profound economic and aesthetic changes to the Hollywood studio system (and time-base media making generally speaking) since the 1960s and 70s. Especially with films like Do The Right Things and Malcolm X we will also look at many of the controversies that Lee's films have provoked, many of which are a reminder of the way conflicts about race, gender, sexuality and culture are unavoidable in a mass media form like cinema.

76-463  The Visual Story: Filmmaking for Screenwriters  
Instructor: Ralph Vituccio  
Meetings: MW 3:00 – 4:20 p.m.

It's said that a movie is made three times: once through a script, once on set, and finally in the edit room. In this class students will experience this process first hand by using their previously written scripts as blueprints and transforming them into visual stories. The focus will be on understanding the basic visual components —using space, tone, line, shape, color, movement and rhythm— and how they are used to visually tell a story. These visual components are used to define characters, communicate moods, emotions, thoughts and ideas. When they are used well within a film we are not consciously aware of them but they are critical in establishing the relationship between story structure and visual structure. Through readings, film screenings, shooting assignments and critiques this class will help each student translate their creative story into a short final film.

76-469  Advanced Screenwriting Workshop  
Instructor: J. Bernstein  
Meetings: TR 3:00 – 4:20 p.m.  
Prerequisites: Grade of A or B in 76-269 Survey of Forms: Screenwriting. A student who received a C in 76-269 may enroll in 76-469 only with the permission of the 76-469 professor. A student who received a D or R in 76-269 may not take 76-469.

This semester will begin with a review of the fundamentals of screenwriting, including character development, scene construction, dialogue, and story structure. Student work will include exercises that encourage writers to take creative risks with genre, tone, character, and structure, one collaborative project, and two short scripts. We will also view mainstream, personal, and experimental narrative films in both American and international cinema.
Films dealing with criminal activities and criminal justice have always been popular at the box office. From the gangsters of the Thirties and the film noir of the Fifties to the more recent vigilante avenger films of Liam Neeson, the film industry has profited from films about crime and its consequences. How those subjects are portrayed, however, tells us a great deal about larger trends in American history and society. Every imaginable type of criminal activity has been depicted on screen, as have the legal ramifications of those acts. But these films raise profound questions. What is the nature of crime? What makes a criminal? Are there circumstances in which crime is justified? How do socioeconomic conditions affect the consequences? How fair and impartial is our justice system? Perhaps most importantly, how do depictions of crime and justice in popular media influence our answers to these questions? This class will utilize a variety of films to discuss the ways in which popular media portrays the sources of crime, the nature of criminals, the court and prison systems, and particular kinds of criminal acts. Films to be screened may include such titles as The Ox-Bow Incident, Out of the Past, 12 Angry Men, Young Mr. Lincoln, Brute Force, The Equalizer, Jack Reacher and Minority Report. By thoroughly discussing these films and related readings we will be able to trace the various changes in attitude towards crime and justice in America over the last century.

Taught in English. This course aims to provide a meaningful platform to explore sociocultural developments in East Asia (China, Japan, and Korea), one of the most vibrant regions today in the world, through their cinematic traditions. The main focus of this course is on genre films. Popular genres have often been dismissed to be formulaic and commercially oriented, which has hampered our perceptions around the complex ways in which genre cinema has engaged with historical changes. Breaking away from the conventional view, this course reads genre films as an important venue to inquire into sociocultural formations. More specifically, this course takes genre cinema to be a contact zone where a variety of narrative and formal orientations intersect, compete, and negotiate with one another: nationalism and transnationalism, convention and innovation, the traditional and the modern, official memory and counter history, realism and imagination, and so on. This course, in other words, pivots around the ambition to enrich our understanding of the convoluted ways in which popular film genres in East Asian societies have evolved in conjunction with recent social and cultural changes in the region.

This course explores how the art of storytelling is in tandem with the vicissitudes of the human condition as illustrated in Japan's variety of fictions, non-fictions, and films in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Analyses of each storytelling not only reveal the cultural dynamics behind Japanese modernity, but also invite students to find new insights into Japanese culture and their ways of perceiving our globalized world. What kind of cultural exchanges took place between modern Japan and the West? How are Japan's traditional values transformed in the face of modern
technicalization and industrialization, compared to the modernization of other countries? And, in turn, what kind of impact has modern Japanese culture had on today's world? Tackling these questions among others, the course also extends to such issues as the legacy of traditional Japanese culture, the modern Emperor system, World War II experiences, emerging voices of minorities, and popular culture (e.g., anime and subculture). This course is taught in English.

(The Languages of French Cinema)
Instructor: Michael J. West.
Meetings:  TR 3:00-4:20 p.m.
Prerequisite: Completion of three third-year French courses (82-303, 82-304, and 82-305) or consent of instructor.

Taught in French. This course presents an introduction to French cinema and film studies, through the metaphor of languages. We examine different cinematic and critical languages through various films, including:

- The language of the purely visual or silent film: Abel Gance, Napoléon
- The languages of psychoanalysis and Surrealist film: Salvador Dalí/Luis Buñuel, Un Chien Andalou, L'Âge d'or; Buñuel, Le Charme discret de la bourgeoisie
- The languages of masculinity and warfare: Jean Renoir, La Grande Illusion, La Règle du jeu
- The languages of Nazi Occupation Cinema, or, talking about the war without talking about it: Marcel Ophuls, Les Enfants du Paradis; Henri-Georges Clouzot, Le Corbeau; Jean Cocteau, La Belle et la Bête
- The language of French Film Noir: Henri-Georges Clouzot, Les Diaboliques, Le Salaire de la peur.
- The languages of the French New Wave: François Truffaut, Les Quatre Cent Coups; Jean-Luc Godard, À Bout de souffle, Alphaville, Masculin féminin; Alain Resnais, Hiroshima mon amour; Chris Marker, La Jetée
- Post-New Wave, Postmodern cinematic languages: the current state of French and francophone video voices, or, Blockbusters and Beyond.

Student work includes film viewings, readings on film criticism and critical theory, class discussions, analytical papers and a final project that could be analytical or creative in nature.