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ENGCOMP 205 / CRN 12160
Tue/Thurs 11-12:15
Cathedral of Learning 352

**“Realism and Representation”
Seminar in Composition: Film
Spring 2006
Syllabus**

Required text:

A grammar/style handbook

Recommended: *LB Brief* or *Rules for Writers*

Either of these is available at the Pitt Bookstore or other bookstores. You will be required to bring your handbook to class with you on designated days.

Required films:

Lumiere and Melies films (1885-1905; shown in class), DVD-431

Night and Fog (Alain Resnais, French, 1955; shown in class), DVD-1494 or V-485

Roger & Me (Michael Moore, 1989), DVD-1201 or V-1144

Bicycle Thief (Vittorio de Sica, Italian, 1948), DVD-437 or V-2373

Saving Private Ryan (Steven Spielberg, 1998), DVD-423

Forrest Gump (Robert Zemeckis, 1994), DVD-2161

The Matrix (Andy and Larry Wachowski, 1999), DVD-50 or DVD-887

You are required to watch these outside of regularly scheduled class time, unless noted. See “Viewing the Films” below for more info.

****WARNING:** Some of these films may contain disturbing scenes of violence. If this is a problem for you, please see me or consider taking another section of this course.

Required readings:

Bazin, Andre. “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” in his *What is Cinema?* vol. 1 (p. 9-16) and “*Bicycle Thief*” from his *What is Cinema?* vol. 2 (p. 47-60)

Gunning, Tom. “The Cinema of Attraction: Early Film, Its Spectator, and the Avant-Garde,” in *Film and Theory: An Anthology*, edited by R. Stam and T. Miller (p. 229-235)

Menand, Louis. “Nanook and Me: *Fahrenheit 9/11* and the Documentary Tradition,” *The New Yorker*, 8/9/2004

Prince, Stephen. “True Lies: Perceptual Realism, Digital Images and Film Theory,” in *The Film Cultures Reader*, edited by Graeme Turner (p. 115-128)

*Other articles will be added as we go along.

**Your own writing will also regularly be presented—anonously—for class discussion or peer review. You should therefore write not just for your instructor but for a larger audience of your peers. If you would not like a particular piece of writing to be shared, please let me know.

Course Description

This course examines realism in relation to the cinema. Is film as a medium inherently realistic? Or do contemporary advances in digital technologies reveal that cinema should be thought of as entirely artificial and constructed? We will examine these questions in relation to a number of classic films from the history of cinema and a group of readings that seek to understand exactly what cinema is and how it affects the spectator. First, we will look at two models for understanding cinema from the very early days of film: *actualités* made by the Lumiere brothers and the fictional and painterly early films of magician Méliès. Throughout the course we will ask which of these two models provides a more accurate understanding of the essence of cinema.

The first section of the course is called Film as Record: Documentary. In this unit, we will watch documentary films and explore the idea that film has a strong, intrinsic link to reality. In the next unit, Film Styles and Realism, we will observe how different stylistic choices made by directors can affect how the film is perceived as realistic. In the final section, Film Technologies and Realism, we will explore how cinematic technologies—all the way from the beginning of sound to color to widescreen and now to CGI and digital technology—affect how we judge the realism of cinema.

Viewing the Films

Since we only meet for 2 ½ hours a week, there is not enough time to view films in class. Although a couple of short films will be shown during our regular class time, you are responsible for watching the remaining films outside of class before we discuss them together. There are a few ways to get a hold of these films:

- Buy them: All of the films are available on DVD and cost around \$20 or less.
- Watch them at Hillman Library: There is at least one copy of each film at the Media Resource Center located on the ground floor of Hillman. To get there, go inside Cup & Chaucer and follow the sign to the right. Give the attendant the name and number (the DVD- or V- number in the list above) of the film you want to see. You have to watch the film there on one of their monitors during their regular hours (they close at 8:30 pm every day but Friday when they close at 5 pm).
- Rent them: Try these nearby video stores:
 - Blockbuster Video**, Oakland, 3804 Forbes, (412) 325-0777
 - Classic Video**, Shadyside, 735 Copeland St, (412) 621-3232
 - Heads Together**, Squirrel Hill, 2127 Murray Ave, (412) 521-3700
 - Dreaming Ant** (inside Crazy Mocha), Bloomfield, 4525 Liberty Ave, (412) 683-7326
 - Netflix.com**

Reading Assignments

You are required to obtain and read the assigned articles before we discuss them in class. Most of the articles are available via the Hillman Library eReserves. To access these, you must be signed in to the Pitt network. Go to PittCat, click on Course Reserves, and then search for my name under Instructor. You will need to enter a password that I will give to you in class in order

to get the readings. Please print them out on your own and bring them to class with you on appropriate days.

Writing Assignments

There are three kinds of writing assignments that you will do for this course: response papers, essays, and a final project. The course is broken up into three sections. For each of these sections, you will write two response papers and an essay. At the end of the course, you will turn in a final project. This amounts to six response papers, three essays, and the final project. All papers should be typed and double-spaced. *No late work will be accepted.*

Response papers: These are informal 2-3 page (double-spaced) papers that express your reactions to texts, your ideas, and the connections that you can draw with other texts from this class and from your outside experience. There is no required format to these papers, though you should still use correct grammar and spelling and work on polishing your writing technique.

Essays: These are 5-7 page (double-spaced) academic essays that respond to a specific prompt that will be provided. Essays are more formal than response papers in that they should have a strong focus that is spelled out for the reader and an easily followed structure. In this class, we will break open the 5-paragraph essay model that many of you learned in high school, while retaining what is necessary for a successful academic paper: a central question or idea that is made explicit, a logical organizational structure, and a connection between the specific examples you examine to a larger set of ideas that have relevance beyond this course (the “so what? who cares?” factor). Revision is an important part of writing an essay, and this is built into the course. For each of the three essays you write, you will first turn in a rough draft that will receive comments either from me or one of your peers before you turn in a final draft.

Final Project: This is a creative project: a reality-based film, storyboard/screenplay, or story/essay. You will also have to write a brief analysis of your project. It is due at the end of the semester, but you should work on it throughout the term. Deadlines are provided for a proposal, a rough draft, and a final draft. You will be graded on creativity, effort, awareness of the choices you made as an author, and the quality of your analysis of your choices.

Policies

Attendance and Participation

Attendance and participation are required. You are allowed only **three** absences *for any reason* (there’s no difference between “excused” or “unexcused” absences). More than three absences will negatively affect your final grade. Excessive absences can result in failure for the course. Please respect the class and arrive on time.

Submitting Writing Assignments

Assignments must be turned in the day they are due in class. I will not accept work via e-mail. Late work will not be accepted. If you cannot come to class, you must make arrangements to get the work to me the day it is due.

Plagiarism

Using the words or ideas of others without citing them properly can result in failure on the assignment, failure of the course, and/or university disciplinary action. I will teach you proper rules for citation, but ignorance is not an excuse. If you have questions, please ask me. If I catch plagiarism, I will pursue the university's maximum penalty.

Writing Center

M2 Thaw Hall, (412) 624-6556

The Writing Center is an excellent resource for working on your writing with an experienced consultant. Their services are free, but you should check on-site or call ahead to make an appointment. The Writing Center is available to all students, not just Composition or Composition Tutorial students.

Composition Tutorial

Some of you may have also been placed in Composition Tutorial, a one-credit course that helps you primarily with paragraph-level issues (grammar, sentence structure, etc.). If you are enrolled in Composition Tutorial, you need to attend every session and bring with you the materials from this seminar (syllabus, assignments, drafts of papers, teacher's comments, etc.). *Remember: if you have been placed into Composition Tutorial, you must pass it in order to pass Seminar in Composition.*

Grading

Paper Grades: I will comment extensively on each paper you write, making suggestions and asking questions to further your thinking. My comments are geared toward revision; even if you will not revise this particular paper, you should try to use my comments to improve all of your writing, not just this one paper.

Response papers will be graded on a check system. You will receive a check-minus for something hastily written and sloppy; a check for a good, solid effort; and a check-plus for an excellent engagement with the texts and ideas of the course. Rough drafts of essays will be reviewed by either myself or your classmates and will not receive grades, just suggestions for improvement. Final drafts of essays will receive letter grades along with comments. The final project will also receive a letter grade.

Final Grade: Your final grade will be based on the quality of your writing, class participation, effort, and improvement. Around mid-term, I will schedule a mini-conference with each of you to discuss your work in the class and give you an estimate of your grade so far. I will compute your final grade using this approximate percentage system:

Participation/Attendance	20%
Response Papers	20%
Essays (15% each)	45%
Final Project	15%

Seminar in Composition—Film Course Schedule

UNIT 1: FILM AS RECORD—DOCUMENTARY		
Week 1	Thurs 1/5	Introduction to course, in-class diagnostic essay
Week 2	Tues 1/10	Watch Lumiere/Melies films in class, discussion
	Thurs 1/12	Gunning reading due, learn basic film terminology
Week 3	Tues 1/17	Response paper #1 due , bring grammar handbook to class
	Thurs 1/19	Writing workshop
Week 4	Tues 1/24	Watch <i>Night and Fog</i> in class, read Bazin "Ontology" by today
	Thurs 1/26	Response paper #2 due
Week 5	Tues 1/31	Watch <i>Roger & Me</i> and read Menand article by today
	Thurs 2/2	Essay #1 rough draft due
Week 6	Tues 2/7	Writing workshop
	Thurs 2/9	Essay #1 final draft due
UNIT 2: FILM STYLES AND REALISM		
Week 7	Tues 2/14	Watch <i>Bicycle Thief</i> and read Bazin " <i>Bicycle Thief</i> " by today
	Thurs 2/16	Response paper #3 due
Week 8	Tues 2/21	Watch <i>Saving Private Ryan</i> and read article (TBA) by today
	Thurs 2/23	Response paper #4 due
Week 9	Tues 2/28	Writing workshop
	Thurs 3/2	Proposal for final project due
Week 10	3/5-3/11	SPRING BREAK
Week 11	Tues 3/14	Essay #2 rough draft due
	Thurs 3/16	Essay #2 final draft due
UNIT 3: FILM TECHNOLOGIES AND REALISM		
Week 12	Tues 3/21	Watch <i>Forrest Gump</i> and read Prince article by today
	Thurs 3/23	Response paper #5 due
Week 13	Tues 3/28	Rough draft of final project due
	Thurs 3/30	Watch <i>The Matrix</i> and read article (TBA) by today
Week 14	Tues 4/4	Response paper #6 due
	Thurs 4/6	Essay #6 rough draft due
Week 15	Tues 4/11	Writing workshop
	Thurs 4/13	Essay #6 final draft due
Week 16	Tues 4/18	Course wrap-up <i>Evaluations at end of class</i>
	Thurs 4/20	Final project due , last day of class