The second century of moviemaking is well underway, and the narrative feature film has claimed an unchallenged place as the dominant storytelling mode of contemporary society. As a kind of pan-art—one that integrates elements of literature, theatre, art, architecture, sound, music, and photography—film is perhaps the most collaborative and commercial of media. When film engages or arouses us, it is because of hundreds of decisions made that determine what we see onscreen—decisions regarding narrative, composition, design, cinematography, acting, editing, and sound.

The goal of the course is to help students become skilled and sophisticated interpreters of these details—viewers, that is, who can both (1) enjoy the aesthetic, visceral appeals of narrative film and (2) interpret its formal elements, thematic meanings, and ideological positions. The course features a variety of films from different directors, eras, origins, and sources: they have in common not only provocative cinematic techniques, but also challenging thematic meanings. Throughout, students can expect to develop an understanding of a number of important foreign, Hollywood, and independent films; of narrative dynamics; of technical concepts in producing and viewing film; of the film industry and its origins; and of theoretical approaches to understanding film.

UNIVERSITY STUDIES INFORMATION

Humanities 140, Approaches to Film, is an elective course designed to count for Humanities credit in the Arts and Sciences Core of the University Studies Program. Humanities courses explore the search for meaning and value in human life by examining its expression in cultural forms and texts, literature and the arts. Approaches to Film includes requirements and learning activities that promote students’ abilities to …

a) identify and understand specific elements and assumptions of a particular Humanities discipline—through study of the formal elements and complexities of narrative film, as required in viewing films, “labwork” assignments, weekly quizzes, class discussions and lectures, and examinations.
b) understand how historical context, cultural values, and gender influence perceptions and interpretations—through discussion and evaluation of the roles history, culture, and gender play in the analysis and interpretation of film, both in response to discussion questions and on exam essays.
c) understand the role of critical analysis in interpreting and evaluating expressions of human experience—through the study and practice of interpreting and evaluating narrative film, with special emphasis on response to discussion questions and on exam essays.

FILMS

Battleship Potemkin (Russia, 1925)
M (Germany, 1931)
Stagecoach (USA, 1939)
Citizen Kane (USA, 1941)
Bicycle Thieves (Italy, 1948)
On the Waterfront (USA, 1954)
The Seventh Seal (Sweden, 1956)
North by Northwest (USA, 1959)
The Godfather (USA, 1972)
Do the Right Thing (USA, 1989)
The Piano (New Zealand, 1993)
Run Lola Run (Germany, 1998)
Boys Don’t Cry (USA, 1999)
Juno (USA, 2007)
Persepolis (France, 2007)

TEXTS & SUPPLIES

Barsam, Looking at Movies Ebook 2E (w/DVD)
  • additional readings available on D2L
  • access to required films
    • via screening, rental, purchase, or library borrowing

GRADING

Course grades will be determined by the average of…

1. cumulative percentage on unit quizzes
2. class participation/activities/labwork
3. midterm exam (100 points)
4. final exam (100 points)

≥90% = A, ≥80% = B, ≥80% = C, <60% = D OR F

grades not meeting these totals to be awarded solely at the instructor’s discretion; no extra credit is available
Desire2Learn
Assignments, activities, grades, and resources will be posted on our D2L coursesite at https://winona.ims.mnsu.edu/. If you are new to D2L, your login is the same as it is for registration.

Course Support
Additional reading and some media will be posted on our D2L coursesite, but students can expect to make considerable use of each of the following course support materials, some of which will be required for exams and other assignments.

- The Looking at Movies DVDs feature nearly four hours of content. Disc 1 offers content corresponding to each chapter in the text, including film clips and frame sequences. Disc 2 includes an anthology of 12 short films, ranging from 5 to 30 minutes in length.
- The Writing About Movies guide by Karen Gocsik provides excellent advice and support for essay and exam writing.
- The Looking at Movies student website (http://www.wwnorton.com/college/film/movies2/) features short illustrated essays (signaled in the text by web icons), practice quizzes, and sample film analyses.

Ground Rules
We will be studying some experimental, provocative, and challenging films. Purposeful, tactful, prepared discussion will be necessary to understanding them; hence the following ground rules.

- Some works will affirm your beliefs; others will challenge them. Some will affront your sensibilities; others will appease them. Some will tax your intellectual abilities; others will merely prod them. Approach them all with the goal of learning about life and art, and you’ll find your open mind rewarded.
- Anyone addressing an entire group or the entire class will be given the courtesy of undivided, uninterrupted attention—and that courtesy will be returned.
- Seek always to understand others’ points of view, to ask questions prompting a more developed response, to use body language to indicate your interest. Do not monopolize the conversation, diminish others’ interpretations, or shut down the dialogue.
- Show up for class both on time and well-prepared: assignments read, questions and interpretations articulated. The reading load is not burdensome, so read carefully, critically, and well.

Screening Sessions
Each Monday evening at 7 pm in Minné 363, we’ll screen a feature film relevant to the course concepts and readings, one that will serve as the focus of ensuing discussion sessions the following class days. I’ve scheduled these screening sessions to provide an experience where you can see each film uninterrupted and in its entirety on a large projection screen, in its original aspect ratio. So that all can focus undivided attention on the film, make sure to extend your colleagues a few basic courtesies: close your laptops, turn off cell phones, refrain from talking and eating, and remain seated for the duration of the show. If you need to view the film with closed captions enabled, please contact me to make separate arrangements to do so. If you are unable to attend a screening, DVD copies of each will be available at the Krueger Library Reserve desk. The content of each film screening is required for ensuing quizzes, discussions, and exams.

Attendance
If you must miss a single class session, simply do the work required of you, and return well-prepared for the next session. If you miss consecutive class sessions due to a serious emergency, I may be able to work out an alternate schedule, but I’m not obligated to do so if notified only “after the fact.” If injury, illness, or emergency will require you to miss an exam, you must make alternative arrangements before the absence, or you will forfeit your opportunity to take the exam. Finally, regular attendance is vital not only to your participation grade, but also to your ability to learn the material of the course.
**Exams**

The exams (100 points each) will test your knowledge of the assigned films, readings, and lectures. They will consist of (1) matching and/or multiple choice questions that apply textbook concepts to the films we’ve studied, and (2) short-answer and/or essay questions that test your powers of analysis. They are also certain to include questions on the required reading and media.

**Labwork**

The purpose of the “labwork” assignments is to provide opportunity for close engagement with course content, putting film technique under a microscope. Such assignments, when closely connected to the intellectual work of the course and offering a range of possible activities and responses, immerse students in the content of the course and deepen their knowledge of course concepts as they apply to various films.

- **During the course of the semester, you can complete many of these labwork assignments in class (and you will be able to skip one or two without penalty). However, no credit will be given assignments submitted after the announced deadline.**
- **Instructions for each assignment will be announced in class as the semester progresses.**

**A Note on Plagiarism**

Unacknowledged or unauthorized use of the words or ideas of others constitutes plagiarism, which is punishable at least by automatic failure of the assignment (i.e. a score of zero) and possible failure of the course, depending on the degree and circumstances of the infraction. Plagiarism on an exam essay will result a score of zero on the whole exam. Additionally, the University may impose additional sanctions.

**Additional Resources**

- **Student Support Services and the Inclusion and Diversity Office:** Both offices are dedicated to helping students of all races, ethnicities, economic backgrounds, nationalities, and sexual orientations. They can facilitate tutoring and point you to a wide range of resources. Student Support Services ([www.winona.edu/studentsupportservices/](http://www.winona.edu/studentsupportservices/)) is in Howell Hall 133, and they can be reached at 457-5465. The Inclusion and Diversity Office is in Kryzsko Commons Room 122, and they can be reached at 457-5595.

- **WSU Disability Resource Center:** If you have a documented disability that requires accommodation, please contact your professor as soon as possible. If you suspect you may have a disability, you are encouraged to visit the DRC as soon as possible. The DRC staff can document it for your professors and facilitate accommodation. Their office is in Maxwell Hall, 3rd floor, and they can be reached at 457-2391.

- **The Counseling Center:** WSU’s Counseling Center provides assistance with a wide range of difficulties, ranging from sexual assault, depression, and grief after the loss of a loved one to stress management, anxiety, general adjustment to college, and many others. Their office is located in Wabasha Hall 220, and they can be reached at 457-5330.

- **WSU’s Writing Center:** The English Department’s Writing Center, located in Minné 348 and staffed primarily by graduate assistants in English, offers WSU students free, individualized instruction in all aspects of writing. You may visit the center on your own or on the recommendation of a teacher; you may drop in or sign up for a scheduled appointment. Call x5505 or check the schedule and sign-up sheet posted on the Writing Center door. **Note:** Humanities 140-01 students may solicit Writing Center assistance with take-home essays for exams in this class.

- **WSU Library:** Using WSU’s Library website, you can browse and search Library databases and make interlibrary loan requests. WSU’s Library homepage is [http://www.winona.edu/library](http://www.winona.edu/library).
# Approaches to Film

## Course Calendar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Of</th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7. Composition</td>
<td>10/6</td>
<td>Exam review 7 pm: <em>The Piano</em> (1993)</td>
<td>FIRST EXAM (100 PTS). Essays due at class time.  NO CLASS: MIDTERM BREAK DAY</td>
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<tr>
<td>16. Exams Week</td>
<td>12/8, MONDAY 1-3 PM: FINAL EXAM PERIOD. Essays due at exam period.</td>
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The specifics of daily labwork, supplemental reading, and other course content will be announced in class. This calendar is subject to change as events warrant.
SAMPLE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: BOYS DON'T CRY

1. **Narrative elements**: Review the basic elements of narrative from Barsam ch. 2—story/plot, order, events (hubs and satellites), duration, suspense/surprise, frequency, characters, setting, point of view, and scope—as they function in *Boys Don't Cry*. In what ways is the basic narrative similar to other films we've seen? (A)

2. **Creative license**: When adapting films from real-life events, filmmakers must compromise between factual accuracy and creative license. Go to D2L’s “Content” area for an article on the “real story” of Teena Brandon here, and then evaluate the dramatic approach and the cinematic effects of *Boys Don't Cry*. What changes were made from the "real" story of Teena Brandon, and to what effect? Were the changes warranted, disclaimed, or simply deceptive? (B)

3. **Story and plot**: Even when working with established facts (the *story* of Brandon’s life), filmmakers still have a remarkable number of decisions to make (the results of which become the *plot*). Why do you think Peirce chose to tell a strictly chronological narrative, beginning with the first night of Brandon’s "passing" and concluding with his death? What might have been the effects of beginning earlier (with the seeds of his transformation, a la Jekyll and Hyde) or later (with his outing, rape, or death)? (A, B, C)

4. **Casting and performance**: In terms of casting, what kinds of decisions did the director, Kimberly Peirce, have to make? Why did she choose Swank instead of someone more recognizable? Who else might have been able to play the role? What do you find impressive or interesting about Hilary Swank's portrayal of Brandon Teena? What kinds of choices did she make as an actor, and to what effect? How has the role since affected Swank’s career? (A, B, C)

5. **The indie novice**: Consider the limitations of a first-time director’s budget, and the effects of those limitations on casting, visual design, setting, score, and effects. What kinds of compromises or choices does a director like Peirce have to make to get this story told? (A)

6. **“Outed!”:** Go to D2L’s “Content” area for a clip of the scene where Brandon is finally, conclusively outed by Tom and John. Examine the scene carefully in terms of its relevance to the narrative, its mise en scene and design, its cinematography, and its editing and sound design. (A)

7. **Ain’t that America**: Set in 1990s mid-America, *Boys Don’t Cry* has much to say about the values, practices, and limitations of small-town life. What are Peirce’s choices intended to tell us? (A, B, C)

8. **Theme and meaning**: Thematically, *Boys Don’t Cry* seems to be "about" identity transformation, sexual ambiguity, androgyny/transsexuality, violence, and intolerance. What do you think the film says about any one of these topics? Support your claims with evidence from the film. (C)

9. **Critical reception**: Go to D2L’s “Content” area for an analysis of *Boys Don’t Cry* by Carol Siegel in the online journal *Genders*. According to Siegel, the success of *Boys Don’t Cry* was predictable for many reasons: (1) it rode a 1990s wave of films and other cultural products that argued for tolerance of sexual diversity; (2) it cashed in on our Springer-showlike fascination with lurid true crime stories and exposés of sexual and gender transgressions within poverty cultures; and (3) the film tells a beautiful and dramatic love story. Yet Siegel also accuses the film of “selling” lesbianism as soft-core eroticism (with its images of Swank and Sevigny kissing and fondling). What other factors might have accounted for the critical success of the film? What do you make of Siegel’s assertion about its commercialization of lesbianism? (B)

10. **“Not Yet Rated”:** Go to D2L’s “Content” area for a clip from the recent documentary *This Film Is Not Yet Rated*. Did *Boys Don’t Cry* deserve its initial NC-17 rating? What were the reasons behind its having been assigned the NC-17? What do you make of Peirce’s assertions about the rating board’s decisions? (If you have not seen this documentary, I highly suggest it.) (C)
FINAL EXAM: INFORMATION & INSTRUCTIONS

Part I, Take-Home Essays (2 @ 25 pts. each) due at final exam period, 1 pm Mon., Dec. 8

Write short analytical essays of about 500-700 words on each of the two topics below. Single-spaced in 12-point font with one-inch margins, each essay must fit on one side of an 8-1/2x11 sheet of paper. Put only your TECH ID (not your name) in the upper right-hand corner of each sheet, along with other information identifying the essay.

Your task is to demonstrate your powers of observation and interpretation as well as your understanding of film form. Since you have only limited space in which to do so, do not use lazy, imprecise, or inefficient language; instead, use focused paragraphs, concise sentences, and precise naming. Choose your topics and evidence carefully, so that the resulting essays adequately demonstrate the depth and breadth of your knowledge. Last, but not least, underline your thesis statement(s); use and boldface terms from the Barsam text; cite the source if and when referring to published material; and follow other conventions for writing about film as presented in class (e.g. italicizing film titles, parenthesizing release dates and actors' names, etc.).

1) Study the use of cinematography, editing, and sound to convey narrative meaning in ONE of the following:
   ▶ from Boys Don’t Cry: “Brandon’s Outing” (DVD ch. 19, 1:20.55-1:23.57)
   ▶ from On the Waterfront: “I Coulda Been a Contendah” (DVD ch. 20, 1:10.23-1:15.57)
   ▶ from Battleship Potemkin: “Preparing for Battle” (Kino DVD ch. 19 59.40-1:07.12)
   ▶ from The Godfather: “Baptism and Murder” (DVD ch. 21, 2:36.20-2:41.40)
   ▶ from M: “Elsie’s Disappearance” (DVD ch. 1, 00.50-08.20)
   ▶ from Do the Right Thing: “Raheem’s Radio” (DVD ch. 26, 1:29.57-1:35.15)

2) Apply ONE of the critical approaches presented in chapter eight to EITHER Citizen Kane or Persepolis.

Notes:
   ▶ Regardless of the topic, every essay ought to provide (1) an introduction with helpful historical, technological, and/or narrative context; (2) an insightful thesis that transcends the merely obvious or factual; and (3) a conclusion that speculates on the importance of the topic.
   ▶ All students are welcome to consult the Writing Center, Minné 341, for assistance with these exam essays. The Writing Center closes for the semester on the last day of classes.
   ▶ All course films are available at Krueger Library Reserve. Video files of the above scenes—and a sample exam essay—will be made available on D2L.
   ▶ I may accept alternative topics for essay (2) above, but only if proposed and approved by December 5.

Part II, Matching and/or Multiple Choice (50 items @ 1 pt. each).

Part II of the exam will be given at 1 pm. Monday, Dec. 8. Questions will address:
   ▶ lecture and discussion material from weeks 8-15
   ▶ assigned readings from weeks 8-15: chs 5-8 of Barsam; Barsam’s Appendix A; additional reading from Bordwell, Barsam, and DeNitto and Hoffman as assigned
   ▶ the required course films On the Waterfront; Boys Don’t Cry, Battleship Potemkin; The Godfather; Do the Right Thing; M; Citizen Kane; Persepolis; and scenes or short films to be shown during the final exam period itself.

Post-Course Notes:
   ▶ Be sure to complete the Post-Course Survey on D2L.
   ▶ Final Exam and Final Course grades will be posted in D2L by December 12.
Barsam ch. 5
alienation/distancing effect
bit player
cameo
character role
extra
improvisation
major role
method acting
minor role
movie star
naturalistic/nonnaturalistic
option contract
screen test
stand-in
stunt person
typecasting
walk-on

Barsam ch. 6
180-degree system
assembly edit
classical editing
continuity editing
cutting/splicing
discontinuity editing
dissolve/lap dissolve
double-/multiple-exposure

Barsam ch. 6 cont’d.
editing
elipsis
establishing shot
eyeline-match cut
fade-in/fade-out
final cut
final print
fine cut
flashback/flashforward
freeze frame
graphic match cut
intertitles
iris-in/iris-out
jump cut
match cut
match-on-action cut
montage
mood
parallel editing
point-of-view editing
rhythm
rough cut
separation editing
shot/reverse shot
slow disclosure
split-screen

et cetera:
intensified continuity
average shot length

Barsam ch. 7
ambient sound
amplitude
asynchronous sound
boom
dialogue
diegetic sound
Doppler effect
e external sound
Foley sounds
frequency
harmonic constitution
internal sound
loudness
narration
nondiegetic sound
offscreen sound
onscreen sound
pitch
postproduction sound
postsynchronization
production sound
quality
sound bridge
sound design
sound effects
synchronous sound

Barsam ch. 8
eesthetic approach
auteur/au
teurism
binary oppositions
catharsis
cultural studies
dualism
economic approach
explicit meaning
feminism
film criticism/film theory
film history
formalist theory
Freudianism
genre study
hybridization
ideological meaning/theories
implicit meaning
Marxism
mimesis
oedipal
parody
psychological theories
realist theory
reception theory
remake
sequel
social history approach
taboo
technological approach
unconscious
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Boys Don't Cry</strong></th>
<th><strong>Battleship Potemkin</strong></th>
<th><strong>Do the Right Thing</strong></th>
<th><strong>Citizen Kane</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christine Vachon (producer)</td>
<td>Sergei Eisenstein (director, co-writer, editor)</td>
<td>Spike Lee (director, script, actor: Mookie)</td>
<td>Orson Welles (director; co-screenwriter; actor: Charles Foster Kane)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kimberley Peirce (director)</td>
<td>Edward Tisse (cinematography)</td>
<td>Danny Aiello (Sal)</td>
<td>Herman Mankiewicz (co-screenwriter)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hilary Swank (Brandon Teena)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bill Nunn (Radio Raheem)</td>
<td>Gregg Toland (cinematography)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chloe Sevigny (Lana Tisdel)</td>
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<td>Giancarlo Esposito (Buggin’ Out)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Peter Sarsgaard (John Lotter)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ruby Dee (Mother Sister)</td>
<td>Joseph Cotten (Jed Leland)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brendan Sexton III (Tom Nissen)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ossie Davis (Da Mayor)</td>
<td>Everett Sloane (Bernstein)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**On the Waterfront**

Elia Kazan (director)

Leonard Bernstein (music)

Marlon Brando (Terry Malloy)

Eva Marie Saint (Edie Doyle)

Karl Malden (Father Barry)

Lee J. Cobb (Johnny Friendly)

Rod Steiger (Charley Malloy)

**The Godfather**

Francis Coppola (director, co-writer)

Mario Puzo (novel, co-writer)

Marlon Brando (Don Vito Corleone)

Al Pacino (Michael Corleone)

James Caan (Sonny Corleone)

Robert Duvall (Tom Hagen)

Diane Keaton (Kay Adams)

Gordon Willis (cinematography)

William Reynolds, Peter Zinner (editing)

Nino Rota (score)

**The Battleship Potemkin**

Edward Tisse (cinematography)

**Do the Right Thing**

Spike Lee (director, script, actor: Mookie)

Danny Aiello (Sal)

Bill Nunn (Radio Raheem)

Giancarlo Esposito (Buggin’ Out)

Ruby Dee (Mother Sister)

Ossie Davis (Da Mayor)

Ernest Dickerson (cinematography)

Barry Brown (editing)

Bill Lee (score)

Public Enemy (“Fight the Power”)

**M**

Fritz Lang (director, writer)

Thea Von Harbou (co-writer)

Peter Lorre (Hans Beckert)

Fritz Wagner (cinematography)

**Persepolis**

Marjane Satrapi (co-director, co-writer, comic novel)

Vincent Parannoud (co-director, co-writer)

Catherine Deneuve, Iggy Pop, Gena Rowlands, Sean Penn, and Chiara Mastroianni (voice)

**Note:** While the final exam is not cumulative in the traditional sense of the word, it will nonetheless operate on the assumption that students are familiar with the cinematic terms, concepts, texts, and figures presented earlier. For instance, exam items on *Kane* may well assume knowledge of cinematic (e.g. deep focus, long take, wide angle) or narrative (protagonist, hub/satellite, time-setting/Scope) terms as applied to that film.