

# **CFA 300 — Film Theory & Criticism**

## ***Sample Syllabus***

Class: Monday and Wednesday, 12-1:15 p.m.  
Screenings: Tuesday, 6-8:30 p.m.  
Location: Caterpillar Global Communications Center XXX

Instructor: Dr. Cory Barker  
Office: Caterpillar Global Communications Center 307  
Email: cabarker@bradley.edu  
Phone: 309-677-4262  
Office hours: TBA

### ***REQUIRED MATERIALS***

- Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, editors. *Film Theory & Criticism* (Seventh or Eighth Edition). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009/2016.
- Other readings will be posted to the course Sakai page.

### ***COURSE DESCRIPTION***

This course surveys the major areas of film theory and criticism. Students will be introduced to significant approaches to studying film form and its ideological function, including formalism, realism, psychoanalysis, genre theory, auteur theory, and audience and spectatorship. Students will also learn how film theory has evolved with the evolution of film, with an eye on digitization and globalization. By applying these scholarly lenses to both historical and contemporary films, students will learn to interpret film within technical, industrial, and sociocultural contexts.

### ***LEARNING OBJECTIVES***

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Define the key terminology related to film theory and criticism
- Describe the basic historical trajectory of film and film theory
- Analyze individual components of the filmmaking process and their role in making meaning
- Critique arguments about film and other media based on their relationship to existing film theory and criticism
- Construct an informed argument about film and other media using scholarly approaches

### ***WORKLOAD & EXPECTATIONS***

My goal for this course is to deepen your knowledge and appreciation of film. I intend to do that with engaged, individualized instruction to help you meet the above learning objectives. However, it is important to know a few things about this class at the outset:

There is a **significant amount of reading**, much of it dense, theoretical, and philosophical. You must complete and take notes on the readings to participate in class discussions and complete assignments. It will likely be difficult at first, but I can help you build the necessary critical reading skills to thrive.

The **screenings are essential**. You are required to attend our weekly screening sessions. You will need to see them before the next class. Screening materials will be addressed in class and part of your graded assignments. I advise you to develop an efficient note-taking system for screenings.

Your **class participation is central** to the group learning environment. While I will unpack the readings, particularly early in the semester, I expect you to be ready to assist in that process. Dense readings + dry lecture = unfulfilling class for everyone, including me. I respect that not everyone is comfortable speaking regularly. I will not force you to speak. Instead, I'll try to facilitate conversations in smaller groups and other low-stakes moments to build your confidence with the material. But I need you to be attentive and open to engage with the readings and screenings.

**Writing expectations are also high** in this course. Film analysis requires attention to detail and a clear synthesis of others' work. I will help you build the necessary skillset, but be ready to write persuasively throughout the semester. Your work should also present a baseline of credibility. Proofread for style and grammar mistakes.

### ***ASSIGNMENTS & GRADE BREAKDOWN***

**Professionalism** (10 percent of your final grade) will be established through meeting the above expectations regarding preparation, respect for colleagues, active participation, integrity, and a willingness to offer and receive constructive criticism. It also accounts for attendance.

**Response papers** (20 percent) will help students stay on track with readings and screenings. Specific prompts will vary, but you can expect to summarize the main arguments of readings, pose discussion questions, and/or connect readings to screening material in no more than one page. All students will complete eight reading responses — four before the midterm and four after.

The **critique the critics project** (15 percent) requires you to evaluate selected work from a popular film critic. Working in small groups, you will describe the critic's perspective, including potential common analytical approaches, arguments, references, etc. You will also be asked to place the critic within a proper context—e.g., time period, publication, audience, and personal identity. The goal is to investigate how popular criticism differs from scholarship without valorizing one or the other. Groups will deliver their analysis through a 10-minute oral presentation and handout.

The **midterm exam** (15 percent) will ask you to synthesize the early approaches to film in take-home essay form. You will apply one or more of the theories to a film scene or scenes selected by me. All students will be given one week to complete the exam.

You will work in pairs to complete an **annotated bibliography** (20 percent) late in the semester. Pairs will select a strand of film/media theory and trace its intellectual history through a dozen works of scholarship. You will summarize the key arguments and contributions of each artifact in one or two paragraphs.

The **National Film Registry essay** (20 percent) asks you to choose a film and write a memo to the National Film Registry at the Library of Congress explaining what about its artistic contributions or innovations marks this film as deserving of preservation for posterity. To make your case, you will do a close read of the film using at least one of the approaches discussed in class. You may choose more than one reading to develop your ideas, but your essay should demonstrate how theory can help viewers understand the artistic merits of a film. Each student will write about a different film not currently in the film registry in a six-page essay. *H/T to Dr. Caetlin Benson-Allot for this idea.*

### **GRADING SCALE**

Grades are assigned based on the following scale:

Percent	Grade
90-100	A
80-89	B
70-79	C
60-69	D
0-59	F

### **COURSE POLICIES**

I encourage you to use **technology** (also including tablets, cell phones, and recording devices) in whatever ways that best facilitate your learning. However, please be mindful of instances that your technology use might interfere with the learning of others. I will, for instance, occasionally ask that you close your laptops and participate in other, non-technological ways. Distracting technology use will be noted and impact professionalism scores. Let's keep an open dialogue about this throughout the semester.

Although much of our communication will occur in the classroom or in office hours, there will be moments where you need to contact me outside of the GCC. In those cases, please keep a basic level of **professional communication etiquette** in mind. Emails should be addressed to me and use proper grammar. I will do my best to respond within 24 hours. Do not send numerous follow-ups expecting that will help your case.

**Attendance** will be taken every day. You have **three** absences to utilize for any reason. You do not need to provide documentation for these absences. I understand that there may be certain points of the semester where you need to prioritize other classes, your job or something else. If you are regularly late to class, it will impact your professionalism grade and, if warranted, count as a full absence. Each absence after the third will negatively affect your professionalism score by 10 percent.

If you do miss class, it is your responsibility to acquire any notes from a peer or assignment prompts from me. Please do not email me simply asking for a slide deck or if you “missed anything important.” Missed in-class work **cannot** be made up.

The **late policy** for CFA 300 is stringent. You will have 24 hours to submit any late assignments. Late assignments submitted in the first 12 hours will receive a 25 percent grade penalty; those submitted within the next 12-hour window will receive a 50 percent grade penalty. There are few legitimate excuses for late assignments, but keep me in the loop at all times.

### ***ACCOMODATIONS & ACCESSIBILITY***

I want this all things related to this course to be fully accessible to everyone. If you have any concerns regarding learning accommodations, religious considerations or the like, please communicate those to me as soon as possible. I am happy to work out a satisfactory alternative, but not at the absolute last moment.

Specific disabilities requiring alternative classroom arrangements must abide by university policy. If you have a documented disability and require accommodations in this course, please contact me privately to discuss your specific needs. You must be registered with the [Office of Student Access Services](#). The SAS is located in Heitz Hall 100 and can be reached by phone at 309-677-3654. If you need help with this, let me know—I am happy to guide you through the process however I can.

[Bradley University’s Counseling Center](#) offers mental health guidance to address students’ personal, social and career challenges. Services include confidential mental health assessment, counseling (individual and group), and referrals. The Counseling Center can be found in Markin Center 52 from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, and from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday and Thursday. It can also be reached by phone at 309-677-2700, and after hours at 309-677-3200. Please do not hesitate to talk to me for assistance. I will even walk you to the Counseling Center if you would like.

It can be challenging to do your best in class if you have trouble meeting basic needs like nutrition, safe shelter, and sleep. If you have difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day or lack a safe and stable place to live, I urge you to contact [Student Support Services](#) or me. We are here to help.

### ***ACADEMIC INTEGRITY***

Any breaches of university standards will be treated severely and, [as per the undergraduate handbook](#), will be reported to Residential Living and Leadership. Instances of academic misconduct may result in, though are not limited to, a zero on the assignment, failure of the course and further potential discipline as determined by the university, up to and including the possibility of expulsion. If there are questions or concerns about the academic integrity standards, I will be more than happy to clarify expectations. Uncertainty about academic misconduct policies will not be considered valid justification for an offense.

*If tempted to commit an instance of academic dishonesty, please contact me. Rather than commit an intellectual crime, we can explore alternatives—possibly an extension or some other solution that doesn't involve risking your academic welfare.*

### **TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE/READINGS**

Weekly screenings materials TBD based on material/classroom availability.

Page numbers from *Film Theory & Criticism* Seventh Edition.

#### **WEEK 1: Film Language I**

*Read:*

- Sergei Eisenstein, “Beyond the Shot” (13-23)

#### **WEEK 2: Film Language II**

*Read:*

- André Bazin, “The Evolution of Language of Cinema” (41-53)
- Christian Metz, “Some Points in the Semiotics of Cinema” (65-70)
- David Bordwell, “Classical Hollywood Cinema” (Sakai) (TK)

#### **WEEK 3: Film & Reality I**

*Read:*

- Siegfried Kracuer, “Basic Concepts” (147-158)
- André Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” and “The Myth of Total Cinema” (159-166)

#### **WEEK 4: Film & Reality II**

*Read:*

- Jean-Louis Baudry, “The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in Cinema” (171-188)
- Noël Carroll, “Jean-Louis Baudry and ‘The Apparatus’” (189-205)
- Gilles Deleuze, “The Origin of Crisis: Italian Neo-Realism and the French New Wave” (218-226)

## **WEEK 5: Film Medium I**

*Read:*

- Siegfried Kracuer, “The Establishment of Physical Existence” (262-271)
- Béla Balász, “The Close-Up” and “The Face of Man” (273-281)

## **WEEK 6: Film Medium II**

*Read:*

- Noël Carroll, “The Specificity Thesis” (292-298)
- Stanley Cavell, “Photograph and Screen,” “Audience, Actor, and Star,” “Types: Cycles as Genres,” and “Ideas of Origin” (304-314)
- Mary Ann Doane, “The Voice in the Cinema: The Articulation of Body and Space” (318-330)

## **WEEK 7: Film Narrative**

*Read:*

- Leo Braudy, “Acting: Stage vs. Screen” (356-362)
- Sergei Eisenstein, “Dickens, Griffith, and Ourselves” (363-371)
- Tom Gunning, “Narrative Discourse and the Narrator System” (390-401)

## **WEEK 8: Film Authorship**

*Read:*

- Andrew Sarris, “Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962” (451-454)
- Peter Wollen, “The Auteur Theory” (455-470)
- Thomas Schatz, “The Whole Equation of Pictures” (523-528)

## **WEEK 9: Film Stardom**

*Read:*

- Richard Dyer, Excerpt from *Stars* (480-485)
- James Naremore, “Katherine Hepburn in *Holiday*” (486-500)
- Molly Haskell, “Female Stars of the 1940s” (501-514)

## **WEEK 10: Film Genre I**

*Read:*

- Leo Braudy, “Genre: The Conventions of Connection” (535-551)
- Rick Altman, “A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre” (552-563)
- Robin Wood, “Ideology, Genre, Auteur” (592-601)

## **WEEK 11: Film Genre II**

*Read:*

- Linda Williams, “Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess” (602-616)
- Tania Modleski, “The Terror of Pleasure: The Contemporary Horror Film and Postmodern Theory” (617-626)
- Cynthia A. Freeland, “Feminist Frameworks for Horror Films” (627-648)

## **WEEK 12: Film Spectatorship & Audience I**

*Read:*

- Jean-Luc Comolli and Jean Barboni, “Cinema/Ideology/Criticism” (686-693)
- Christian Metz, “Identification, Mirror,” “The Passion for Perceiving,” and “Disavowal, Fetishism” (694-710)
- Tom Gunning, “An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)Credulous Spectator” (736-750)

## **WEEK 13: Film Spectatorship & Audience II**

*Read:*

- Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (711-722)
- Mantha Diawara, “Black Spectatorship: Problems of Identification” (767-776)
- Alexander Doty, “There’s Something Queer Here” (Sakai)

## **WEEK 14: Film & Digital Culture**

*Read:*

- Lev Manovich, “Synthetic Realism and Its Discontents,” “The Synthetic Image and Its Subject,” and “Digital Cinema and the History of the Moving Image” (785-801)
- J.P. Telotte, “*The Blair Witch Project*: Films and the Internet” (Sakai)
- Henry Jenkins, “Searching for the Origami Unicorn: *The Matrix* and Transmedia Storytelling” (Sakai)

## **WEEK 15: Global Cinema**

*Read:*

- Dudley Andrew, “Time Zones and Jetlag: The Flows and Phases of World Cinema” (Sakai)
- Rey Chow, “Film and Cultural Identity” (Sakai)
- Ramon Lobato, “Content, Catalogs, and Cultural Imperialism” (Sakai)