| English 345 | Studies in Film: American Independent Film | Spring 2011 |

Instructor: Kimberlee Gillis-Bridges
Class: M, 2:30-5:20 p.m.; TTH, 2:30-4:20 p.m.
Location: Mary Gates 251 (M); Mary Gates 271 (TTH)
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Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday, 12:30-1:30, and by appointment
Class Web Page: http://faculty.washington.edu/kgb/independent

Description

What constitutes "independent film" in an era where both filmmakers who distribute their work online and boutique divisions within Hollywood studios lay claim to the term? English 345 addresses this question by examining the narrative, stylistic, industrial and cultural aspects of contemporary U.S. independent film. We will begin by examining the early work of John Cassavetes, the "father" of American independent film before turning to the burgeoning of independent cinema that began in the mid 1980s. In addition to viewing films in class, students will attend selected screenings at the Seattle International Film Festival.

Course Goals and Methodology

Students in the course work toward several goals: learning how to read film formally, contextually and ideologically and developing as critical thinkers and writers. By the end of the course, students should be able to:

- o   To identify narrative and formal techniques that define U.S. independent film.
- o   To analyze how filmmakers use artistic strategies to achieve a range of effects.
- o   To compose written arguments focused on the artistic, industrial, or ideological significance of selected films and support those arguments with sufficient and appropriate evidence.
- o   To engage the work of film scholars, critically responding to their ideas in discussion and writing.

Course activities promote active learning, with most class sessions including a mix of mini-lectures, discussion, and group work. My role is to provide the tools and resources; you will need to advance your own thinking and writing. I will pose questions, design activities to help you think through these questions, and respond to your ideas. Your role is to do the hard work—the critical reading, discussion, and writing. You will analyze films, generate ideas in electronic and face-to-face discussions, verbally analyze film clips, and construct written arguments.

Requirements
Class Participation

Class discussion constitutes one key method of developing your analytical skills. Thus, I expect prompt, regular attendance and active participation in discussions of films and readings. You should come prepared for each class session with assigned reading completed. You should also plan to ask questions, make comments, summarize critical arguments, analyze clips, paraphrase your electronic postings, or contribute to small-group discussions. Like all skills, speaking in class becomes easier with practice. I do not expect fully polished analyses in class discussion; rather, your contributions represent ideas for further development.

Electronic Film Responses

Students will use the class posting board to post responses to films and readings. Each week, I will pose questions on course texts. In a 250- to 300-word response, you may address one of my questions or introduce another point. Feel free to engage your classmates' ideas as you write. The electronic postings allow us to extend class conversations, raise issues for in-class discussions, and develop ideas for presentations, the clip annotation and essays. Your postings receive points on a credit/no credit basis, with full points granted to on-time postings that meet the length requirement

and demonstrate serious engagement with the questions provided. Please note that you are excused from submitting a response on your presentation film, although you may do so for extra credit.

To access the electronic discussion board, go to the course web site, click on "Discuss," and follow the instructions. I have divided the class into two groups to keep the discussion manageable:

- o   Group One: Students with last names A through L
- o   Group Two: Students with last names M through Z

Clip Annotation
During the fourth week of the term, you will create an online text and/or video analysis of how elements of editing, cinematography, mise-en-scene and sound function in a clip from *Easy Rider*, *Faces*, *Pulp Fiction*, *sex, lies and videotape*, or *Shadows*.

Presentation
Students will work together in groups of two or three to create a 20- to 25-minute collaborative analysis of a selected course film. The presentation should focus on the formal, thematic, or ideological significance of the film and should apply concepts from the reading due on the presentation date. Presenters must use visual aids (PowerPoint, film clips, screen shots, transparencies, handouts) to structure their remarks and underscore key points. Groups should conclude their presentations with two or three questions for class discussion. Because our course texts are quite challenging, groups should meet with me to discuss their ideas before the presentation date.

Essays
You will compose two five- to six-page essays on assigned topics; your second essay requires you to incorporate material from course readings. I will be available to discuss ideas-in-progress and drafts. You can also seek feedback from consultants at the CLUE Writing Center in the Mary Gates Commons; or the Odegaard Writing and Research Center in Odegaard Undergraduate Library.

Please title, paginate, and double-space your essays, and set margins at one inch. In the upper left hand corner of the first page, include your name, the course number, the assignment, and the due date; this information should be single-spaced. Please use a 10- or 12-point Arial, Bookman, Century Schoolbook, or Times New Roman font for your papers. When citing sources, use MLA format. You will submit the essays via the course Collect It tool.

Policies
Lateness Policy
I will not accept late electronic postings or presentations. Late clip annotations and essays will receive a 10-point deduction per day late, including weekends and holidays. I will make exceptions to the lateness policy only in cases of documented illness or family emergency.

Technology glitches do not constitute valid excuses for lateness. To avoid computer problems, you should save frequently while working, and you should back up work saved to a hard drive on a flash drive or your Dante account. If the posting board or Collect It breaks down, email your work directly to me.

Plagiarism Policy
In your electronic film responses, clip annotation, essays, and presentation, you may draw upon the ideas and words of other writers. However, you must make clear to your audience that you are incorporating another's work by placing quotation marks around exact words and citing the author's name whenever you quote, summarize or paraphrase. Failure to credit sources may result in a failing grade for the assignment, a failing grade for the course, or expulsion from the university. The course links page contains information on when and how to cite sources.

Email and Access to Course Web Site

You must have a UW Net ID, a working email account and a way to access the course web site. I frequently upload schedule changes, film clips, assignment guidelines, and grading criteria to the web site. The site also contains links and sample student work not distributed in class.

Texts
Films

All course films are on reserve at the Odegaard Media Library. While you may not check out reserve films, you may view them at the Media Library.

- *Dead Man* (Jim Jarmusch, 1995, 121 min.)
- *Do the Right Thing* (Spike Lee, 1989, 120 min.)
- *Easy Rider* (Dennis Hopper, 1969, 95 min.)
- *Faces* (John Cassavetes, 1968, 130 min.)
- *Far From Heaven* (Todd Haynes, 2002, 107 min.)
- *Humpday* (Lynn Shelton, 2009, 94 min.)
- *Inland Empire* (David Lynch, 2006, 180 min.)
- *My Own Private Idaho* (Gus van Sant, 1991, 104 min.)
- *Pulp Fiction* (Quentin Tarantino, 1994, 154 min.)
- *Poison* (Todd Haynes, 1991, 119 min.)
- *The Puffy Chair* (Jay and Mark Duplass, 2005, 85 min.)
- *sex, lies, and videotape* (Steven Soderbergh, 1989, 100 min.)
- *Shadows* (John Cassavetes, 1959, 81 min.)
- *Winter's Bone* (Debra Granik, 2010, 100 min.)

Textbooks

- Nichols, Bill. *Engaging Cinema: An Introduction to Film Studies*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010. Print.
- *Reading Packet for English 345, Volume 1*. Available at Professional Copy 'N Print, 4200 University Way.
- *Online Reading Packet for English 345*. Available at https://catalyst.uw.edu/workspace/kgb/21630/131898

Grading

Grades in English 345 will be computed by points, with 400 points equaling a 4.0, 300 points a 3.0, and so on. If your total falls between grades, I will round up if you score one to five points below the higher grade and round down if you score one to four points above the lower grade. For example, 274 points equals a 2.7 and 275 points a 2.8. Students who score less than 65 points total will receive a 0 for the course, as the UW grading system does not scale grades lower than .7.

Apart from postings, which are graded on a credit/no credit basis, points for each assignment will be awarded based on quality of work submitted. I will distribute grading criteria with all assignments. Each component of the course is worth the following number of points:

- Essays: 160 points
- Class Participation: 60 points
- Presentation: 40 points
- Electronic Film Responses: 80 points
- Clip Annotation: 60 points

Schedule

This schedule may be altered at any point in the term at the instructor's discretion. Students must complete required readings and film screenings by the time class meets on the dates indicated. "CP" indicates a reading from the course packet, "CP Online" a reading from the online course packet.

Date	Activity	Reading	Due
3/28	Course introduction		
3/29	Screening: *Shadows* (Cassavetes, 1959, 81 min.)	Nichols, Chapter 1, "Film as a Language" (29-69)	Complete online student survey by noon
3/31	Discuss *Shadows* and history of U.S. independent film Presentation assignment introduced	Carney, "Selves in the Making: *Shadows*" (CP 1-24)	Response to *Shadows* due by noon via GoPost
4/1-4/3			Screen *Easy Rider* (Hopper, 1969, 95 min.) on own
4/4	Screening: *Faces* (Cassavetes, 1968, 130 min.)	Nichols, Chapter 4, "Storytelling and Narrative Fiction Film" (136-172)	
4/5	Discuss *Faces* and 1960s and 1970s independent film	Carney, "Noncontemplative Art: *Faces*" (CP 25-44)	
4/7	Discuss *Easy Rider* and the New Hollywood Student presentation	Berra, "Ancestry of Independence" (CP 45-72)	Response to *Easy Rider* due by noon via GoPost
4/8-4/10			Screen *Pulp Fiction* (Tarantino, 1994, 154 min.) on own
4/11	Screening: *sex. lies, and videotape* (Soderbergh, 1989, 100 min.) Clip annotation assignment introduced	Nichols, Chapter 6, "Institutional and National Contexts" (209-247); Levy, "The New American Independent Cinema" (CP 73-92)	
4/12	Discuss *sex. lies, and videotape* and independent film of the 1980s and 1990s Student presentation	Perren, "Sex, Lies and Marketing" (CP 93-102); Andelman and Paternostro, "Toward a Universal Cinema" (CP 103-111)	
4/14	Discuss *Pulp Fiction* Student presentation	Nichols, Chapter 5, "Three Fundamental Styles: Realism, Modernism and Postmodernism" (175-208)	Response to *Pulp Fiction* due by noon via GoPost

Date	Activity	Reading	Due
4/18	Screening: *Dead Man* (Jarmusch, 1995, 121 min.)		
4/19	Discuss *Dead Man* and genre Student presentation	Nichols, Chapter 7, "Genre Films" (248-286)	Response to *Dead Man* due by noon via GoPost
4/21	Discuss ideology and American independent film	Nichols, Chapter 8, "Ideology and the Cinema" (287-324)	
4/22			Clip annotation due by noon via Viddler
4/25	Screening: Screen *Do the Right Thing*, Lee, 1989, 120 min.) Essay 1 assignment introduced		
4/26	Class canceled		Response to *Do the Right Thing* due by noon via GoPost
4/28	Discuss *Do the Right Thing* Student presentation	Nichols, Chapter 9, "Race and Ethnicity in Film" (325-358)' Johnson, "Polyphony and Cultural Expression" (CP Online)	
4/29-5/1			Screen *Far From Heaven* (Haynes, 2002, 107 min.) on own
5/2	Screening: *Poison*, (Haynes, 1991, 85 min.)		
5/3	Discuss *Poison* and New Queer Cinema Student presentation	MacDonald, "From Underground to Multiplex" (CP, 112-122); Aaron, "New Queer Cinema: An Introduction" (CP Online)	
5/5	Discuss *Far From Heaven* Student presentation	Nichols, Chapter 10, "Gender and Masculinity" (359-394); Higgins, "Orange and Blue, Desire and Loss" (CP Online)	Response to *Far From Heaven* due by noon via GoPost
5/9	Screening: *My Own Private Idaho* (van Sant, 1991, 104 min.)		
5/10	Discuss *My Own Private Idaho* Student presentation	Bergbusch, "Additional Dialogue" (CP Online)	Response to *My Own Private Idaho* due by noon via GoPost
5/12	Class canceled for individual essay conferences		

Date	Activity	Reading	Due
5/16	Screening: *Winter's Bone* (Granik, 2010, 100 min.)		
5/17	Discuss *Winter's Bone* Student presentation	Nichols, Chapter 11, "Feminism and Film" (395-431)	Response to *Winter's Bone* due by noon via GoPost
5/19	Optional Essay 1 draft workshop Note: SIFF begins		Two hard copies of Essay 1 draft (optional for those participating in the workshop)
5/20			Essay 1 due by noon via Collect It
5/23	Screening: *The Puffy Chair* (Duplass Brothers, 2005, 85 min.) and *Humpday* (Shelton, 2009, 94 min.)		
5/24	Discuss *The Puffy Chair* and *Humpday* Student presentations	Lim, "A Generation Finds Its Mumble," Taubin, "All Talk?" and Shelton interview, "That's What Friends Are For" (CP Online)	Response to *The Puffy Chair* or *Humpday* due by noon via GoPost
5/26	Discuss *The Puffy Chair* and *Humpday*		
5/27-5/30			Screen *Inland Empire* (Lynch, 2006, 180 min.) on own
5/30	Memorial Day		
5/31	Discuss *Inland Empire* and DVD/web distribution of independent films	Clarke, "Daydream Believer" (CP Online)	
6/2	Discuss SIFF films		Response to selected SIFF film due by noon via GoPost
6/7			Essay 2 due by noon via Collect It