

UST 250 – THE CITY IN FILM

Instructor: Lauren P. Steiner  
Meeting times: Tuesdays & Thursdays 4:00 - 5:50 PM  
Meeting Room: UR112  
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Office Hours: By appointment

Text:

- Understanding Movies, Ninth Edition, Louis Giannetti.

Course Description:

This course will focus on the analysis of the relationship between film and culture, with through critical assessment of the medium. We are especially interested in issues surrounding the idea of "the representation of the city" and in how the approaches to this issue developed by filmmakers may or may not have been shaped by the culture at the time the film was made. Our quest to become better critics will be organized around the "cinematic city." By looking at films that examine different dimensions of the urban experience, we shall address the conjunction of geography and subjectivity that is operative in the ways in which each of us tells our own story.

Week 1                      Read Chapter 1 pp. 1-42  
                                    Photography: How does the way the  
                                    cinematographer captures the image of the city  
                                    shape the way the city is depicted?

Tuesday                      Introductions, syllabus, policies, expectations  
August 31                      Discussion of Photography and Mise en Sc?ne

Thursday                      *Johns* (1996)  
September 2

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Week 2                      Read Chapter 2 pp. 43-92  
                                    Mise en Sc?ne: The visual element as a whole. Why are  
                                    urban landscapes such interesting backdrops for  
                                    filmmakers?

Tuesday  
September 7                      *City Lights* (1931)

Thursday  
September 9                      *Manhattan\** (1979)

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Week 3                      Read Chapter 3 pp. 93-132  
Movement: How do cities "move" more than other settings? What does the movement mean?  
  
Discuss/assign group project

Tuesday  
September 14                      *'Animated Shorts'*  
*Sundae in New York* (1983)  
*Kakania* (1989)  
*The Candid Candidate* (1937)  
*A Close Shave* (1995)

Thursday  
September 16                      No film to watch

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Week 4                      Read Chapter 4 pp. 133-206  
Editing: Is the editor the real storyteller?

Tuesday  
September 21                      Discussion of Movement, Editing & Sound

Thursday  
September 23                      *Metropolis\** (1927)

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Week 5                      Read Chapter 5 pp. 207-244  
Sound: Why is sound so often overlooked as an element of film, and what important role does it play in the overall production? How important is ambient sound as opposed to action sound?

Tuesday  
September 28                      *Do the Right Thing* (1989)  
(Film will start at 4:00 pm and run full two hours)

Thursday  
September 30                      *The Crow\** (1994)

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Week 6 Read Chapter 6 pp. 245-293  
Acting: What makes good acting good? How dependent is it on the style of the film?

Tuesday  
October 5 *Lawn Dogs* (1997)

**TUESDAY: First Set of Screening Diaries Due: *Johns, City Lights, Manhattan, 'Animated Shorts', Metropolis, Do the Right Thing***

Thursday  
October 7 No Film to watch

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Week 7 Read Chapter 7 pp. 295-332  
Drama: What are the elements that make up the drama of a film? How does setting influence that?

Tuesday  
October 12 *A Christmas Story* (1983)

Thursday  
October 14 *Taxi Driver\** (1976)

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Week 8 Read Chapter 8 pp. 333-372  
Story: How does the city or setting help tell the story?

Tuesday  
October 19 Discussion of Acting, Drama, and Story

Thursday  
October 21 *Chinatown\** (1974)

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Week 9 Read interview with Michael Moore at <http://www.dogeatdogfilms.com/interviews.html>  
Documentary Films: Are they a truthful depiction of their subjects? Why or why not?

Tuesday  
October 26 *Dark Days* (2000)

Thursday  
*Roger & Me\** (1989)

October 28

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Week 10            Read Chapter 9 pp. 373-410  
Writing: How does setting effect things like language and dialogue?

Tuesday  
November 2            In-class presentations, Groups 1-4

Thursday  
November 4            No Film to watch

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Week 11            Read Chapter 10 pp. 411-454  
Ideology: What is the movie *really* saying about the city?

Tuesday  
November 9            In-class presentations, Groups 5-8

Thursday  
November 11            *Mi Vida Loca* \* (1993)

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Week 12            Read Chapter 11 pp. 455-492  
Theory: What is the essential nature of cinema?

Tuesday  
November 17            Discussion of Writing, Ideology, and Theory

**TUESDAY:**            **Second Set of Screening Diaries Due: The Crow, Lawn Dogs, Taxi Driver, A Christmas Story, Chinatown, Dark Days, Roger & Me**

Thursday  
November 19            *Just Another Girl on the I.R.T.*\*(1993)

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Week 13            Read Chapter 12 pp. 493-529  
Synthesis: Analysis of this

Tuesday  
November 23            *Citizen Kane* (1941)  
(Film will start at 4:00 pm and run full two hours)

Thursday  
November 25            No Class – Happy Thanksgiving

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Week 14            Re-read Chapter 12

Tuesday            Discussion of Citizen Kane and Synthesis  
November 30

Thursday            No Film to watch  
December 2

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Week 15            Review your text for final exam review

Tuesday            Final exam review  
December 7

**TUESDAY:            Third Set of Screening Diaries Due: Mi Vida  
Loca, Just Another Girl on the IRT, Citizen Kane**

Thursday            Study for your final!  
December 9

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Tuesday, December 14th, 2003, 4:00 PM – exam.

\* Films that need to be watched on your own can be viewed at the CSU Library, on the third floor, borrowed from your local library, or rented from a video store.

### **Assignments:**

20 Points

Screening Diaries: Screening diaries must be turned in for every film we watch. Information that **MUST** be in every screening diary is as follows:

- Title of Film
- Director
- Year released
- One sentence description of plot - Must be a complete sentence
- Historical setting – When and where did this story take place?
- Urban issues addressed
- What did you think of this film?

**IMPORTANT ! In addition to the above items, you must access and answer additional film specific questions on electronic course**

reserve, on the web at "Course Reserves" section of <http://scholar.csuohio.edu/>

These diaries are comprehensive, and as you read further in your text, *Understanding Movies*, you should use your new vocabulary to discuss films critically.

A Screening Diaries should be **typed** and should include:

- Thoughtful, full sentences.
- Key topics addressed in *Understanding Movies*
- Detail from the films to back up your statements

30 Points

Quizzes:

A quiz on any materials covered in your *Understanding Movies* text, class discussion, in class presentations, and/ or films watched will be given on 3 Tuesdays. You will be notified one week in advance of all quizzes. There will be no make-up quizzes for unexcused absences.

50 Points

Group Presentations:

The class will be divided into eight groups, each which will prepare and present a 15-20 minute presentation about their subject matter. The groups will address the following topics through presentation of background information on the issue, film clips, and critical assessment of the depiction of these issues in film. You may focus on one film's treatment of your issue, or various films. You may include films that have been shown in class, but be prepared to discuss them in detail. The issues are:

1. Transportation
2. Urban Design and Architecture
3. Industrialization and/or Class Struggle
4. Immigration
5. Suburbanization
6. Racial Issues
7. Recreation and/ or Lifestyles in the City
8. Crime

100 Points

Final Exam (December 14<sup>th</sup> at 4:00 PM):

Part one: Multiple choice and short answer. You must answer questions on materials covered in your *Understanding Movies* text, class discussion, in class presentations, and/ or films watched.

Part two: Synthesis. You must answer several synthesis questions in essay form.

10 BONUS Points available for Class participation.

Max Points:

A= 200-180 Points

B= 179-160 Points

C=159-130 Points

D=129-109 Points

F= Below 109 Points

### How to Pass the course

- Attend and participate in class discussions
  - Even if you have seen the films before, watch them again and write thoughtfully and carefully (no grammatical errors) in your screening diaries about your reactions .
  - Complete and hand in your screening diaries, complete and present your group projects and your final projects ON TIME. Late papers will be downgraded and late presentations will not be accepted.
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The instructor reserves the right to make adjustments to this syllabus at any time during the semester and an announcement will be made in class if there are any changes.

### University Policies

Refer to the undergraduate CSU Bulletin for procedures on course add/drop and withdrawal, grading, and incomplete procedures. Plagiarism is against University policy and will result in an "F" for the semester: NO EXCEPTIONS.

Special Needs: Anyone anticipating special accommodations to complete assignments must identify themselves to the instructor by the second week of classes. These include accommodations for physical handicaps, learning disabilities, and English as a second language.