

FILM DIRECTING

FILM 151, SUMMER SESSION 2

SUMMER 2014

Instructor: Alex Johnston Email: alwjohns@ucsc.edu

Office Hours: by appointment

Class: T/TH 1:00-5:00PM Communications 130

→ COURSE OVERVIEW

This is a “difficult” class. (Hopefully) Not difficult for you as a student, but difficult for me as an instructor. It is a light production class with limited access to production equipment, and a five-week sprint about a profoundly time-consuming and process-oriented topic (filmmaking). As such, in attempting to avoid the pitfall of simply offering a watered-down cliff's notes survey of the practices and methods of film directing, I've decided to make the response to limitations, constraints and difficulties (technical, logistical, financial and otherwise), which is to say, the work of the director, the mobilizing issue of this course.

We will tackle our subject matter through completion of a series of production projects meant to strengthen our filmmaking muscles in two domains whose mastery is essential to the practice of film directing: adaptation & collaboration. The first domain we will approach through a constant and relentless (but I mean it in a good way!) consideration of, and reflection on, the role of choice and decision-making in the practice of the film director. The second domain we will engage more organically, through weekly group production assignments. Moreover, the very structure of the class itself will compel further exercise in these two areas.

In that regard, our week will be nominally broken up into “thinking” days (Tuesdays) and “doing” days (Thursdays), classifications which I hope will become increasingly blurred as we progress through the course. On Tuesdays we will watch and discuss a film (and related readings), reflecting and speculating on the specific decisions made by the film's director, and the particular challenges that compelled some of those decisions. At the end of class, a tally will be made of the decisions and challenges identified, some of which may be applied as “obstructions” to the production assignments which will be the focus of our class time on Thursdays.

This is a course about process, deliberation and reflection. It will not provide you with the time, space, or resources to produce your own individual dream projects. Rather, my hope is that you leave the class with a greater understanding of the creative and collaborative processes of filmmaking, allowing you to make more interesting, intelligent and beautiful films that reflect your own unique voice(s) and point(s)-of-view.

→ REQUIRED OBJECT + TEXTS

Stuff you gotta buy/borrow/have:

- You are responsible for providing your own digital media storage (External Hard Drive).
- Sayles, John. *Thinking In Pictures: The Making of the Movie Matewan* (available used on Amazon for \$7-10, incl. shipping; there are also two copies on reserve at the library)

Stuff available online (linked from this syllabus, or located in the course google group):

- Bresson, Robert. *Notes on Cinematography* (PDF in google group)
- Assorted Readings

→ ASSIGNMENTS + GRADE BREAKDOWN

| | |
|--|-----|
| Participation in Discussions/Productions/Crits | 40% |
| Filmmaker Intros + Discussion Facilitation/"Notes" presentations | 10% |
| Personal "Notes On Cinematography" (Due Last Day of Class) | 25% |
| Final Project | 25% |

→ COURSE REQUIREMENTS

-Attendance is mandatory; punctuality is required. As this is a 5-week course, 2 unexcused absences or excessive lateness will result in a NO PASS.

-All assignments must be completed and turned in on time.

-Active and thoughtful participation in class discussion and critique is required.

-Careful and conscientious handling of equipment/facilities is expected.

A Note for Summer Session Students with Disabilities - If you qualify for classroom accommodations because of a disability, please submit your Accommodation Authorization Letter from the Disability Resource Center (DRC) to me as soon as possible, preferably within the first week of the Summer Session. Contact DRC by phone at 831-459-2089 or by email at drc@ucsc.edu for more information.

→ SCHEDULE

WEEK 1: Obstruction, Difficulty and Other Tools of Creative Emancipation

Tuesday July 29

© Introductions, Discussion of Goals & Expectations

© Screening:

The Five Obstructions (Jorgen Leth & Lars Von Trier, 2003, 90 min.)

Thursday July 31

© Reading (Ongoing): Bresson, Robert. *Notes on Cinematography* (PDF in google group)

© PROJECT #1 - Text → Image → Motion

WEEK 2 - The Art of Collaboration

Tuesday August 5

© Reading Due:

Leigh and Veltman, "I Have to Get Out Of Bed Every Day to Make Something Happen"

(URL: http://www.believmag.com/issues/200903/?read=interview_leigh)

Leigh and Raphael, Introduction excerpt from: *Leigh on Leigh*

(PDF located in google group)

© Screening:

Secrets and Lies (Mike Leigh, 1996, 136 min.)

Thursday August 7

© Reading (Ongoing): Bresson, Robert. *Notes on Cinematography* (PDF in google group)

© PROJECT #2 - So what's the scenario?

WEEK 3 - Dillinger's Wooden Gun (or, Making Do With What You Got)

Tuesday August 12

© Reading Due:

Sayles, John. *Thinking in Pictures: The Making of the Movie Matewan*

© Screening:

Matewan (John Sayles, 1987, 135 min.)

Thursday August 14

© Due in class: Sample (min. 3pgs.) from your personal *Notes on Cinematography*

© Reading (Ongoing): Bresson, Robert. *Notes on Cinematography* (PDF in google group)

© Screening/Critique of student work thus far...

© Screening:

Pickpocket (Robert Bresson, 1959, 75 min.)

WEEK 4 – Representing (Your, A) Real

Tuesday August 19

© Reading Due:

Rachleff, Peter, “*An Injury to One: A Film by Travis Wilkerson*” (PDF in google group)

Wilkerson, Travis, “*Incomplete Notes on the Character of New Cinema*”

(PDF in google group)

Dargis, Manohla, “*A Mardi Gras Story In Black and White*”

(URL: <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/25/movies/25orde.html>)

Brown and Dawson, “*Margaret Brown: The Order of Myths*”

(URL: <http://filmmakermagazine.com/1326-margaret-brown-the-order-of-myths/#.UvoX4BdXIU>)

© Screening:

The Order Of Myths (Margaret Brown, 2008, 78 min.)

An Injury to One (Travis Wilkerson, 2002, 53 min.)

Thursday August 21

© Reading (Ongoing): Bresson, Robert. *Notes on Cinematography* (PDF in google group)

© PROJECT #4 – (Self)Portrait

WEEK 5 – Directly

Tuesday August 26 – FINAL PROJECT - You Do You...

Thursday August 28 – FINAL SCREENINGS!