

**Loyola University COMM 324-001 (3811)
Spring 2024**

Film Genre: U.S. Independent Cinema

Tuesdays: 4:15pm-6:45pm

Location: Cudahy Library – Room 318

Tuesdays. Jan 16-April 30, 2024

Instructor: Anthony Kaufman

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Tracing the rise of independent filmmaking in the '70s and '80s through its explosion in the '90s and to today, this course will focus on the varying artistic, political, and industrial concerns that have affected filmmakers over the last 40 years, from the pioneering cinema of Maya Deren and John Cassavetes to seminal works by filmmakers as diverse as Charles Burnett, Todd Haynes, Spike Lee, Kelly Reichardt, and Barry Jenkins. The class will also pay close attention to the evolving business of independent film, from production to distribution to marketing as well as the changing roles of digital technologies and streaming platforms.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES/GOALS

The main objectives of this course are to provide an in-depth look at the way films are a mix of aesthetic goals and industrial practice, and to see how American independent filmmakers have used the tools at their disposal to create works of film art. Upon successful completion of the course, students should be able to:

- Think, write and speak knowledgeably about U.S. independent films and specific filmmakers.
- Discuss the ways in which economics and technology effect the entertainment business.
- Discuss the ways in which meaning is communicated through film form.
- Write analytically about cinema.

WORKLOAD/COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Class activities include mandatory film/video screenings; reading of lectures and viewing of clips; participation in class discussions; and completion of papers. Successful completion of this course requires regular and active participation in discussions, satisfactory performance of all writing and/or exam requirements. Repeated, unexcused absences will result in a reduced grade.

FINAL GRADE CALCULATION AND EXPECTATIONS

• PARTICIPATION/ATTENDANCE/DISCUSSION **20%**

• REACTION PAPERS (2) **20%**

• MID-TERM ASSIGNMENT **30%**

Students will 2 short essays, or write a short 4-5 page essay on single topic/group of films.

• FINAL RESEARCH PROJECT **30%**

Students will write 2 short assigned essays, or a final 8-10-page research essay on a subject of their choosing to be approved by the instructor.

Incompletes: A grade of “incomplete” may be assigned by an instructor at his/her discretion [or you may specify above that you have a ‘no incompletes’ policy]. If an instructor is inclined to offer an incomplete, then the student has a maximum of 4 weeks after the last day of class to complete and submit to the instructor the outstanding work and/or the work agreed upon by the instructor and student. An incomplete becomes an “Unofficial Withdrawal and Failure” (WF) if the work is not submitted in a timely fashion.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

With respect to grading, after missing 3 (three) onsite classes, a student's grade drops one full letter. Upon missing 4 (four) classes, the student fails the course. Lateness – Being late to class three times will be counted as one absence.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

A basic mission of a university is to search for and to communicate truth as it is honestly perceived. A genuine learning community cannot exist unless this demanding standard is a fundamental tenet of the intellectual life of the community. Students of Loyola University Chicago are expected to know, to respect, and to practice this standard of personal honesty. Academic dishonesty can take several forms, including, but not limited to cheating, plagiarism, copying another student's work, and submitting false documents. These examples of academic dishonesty apply to both individual and group assignments. Please read the university's entire statement on academic integrity [here](#).

Plagiarism is a serious violation of the standards of academic honesty. Plagiarism is the appropriation of ideas, language, work, or intellectual property of another, either by intent or by negligence, without sufficient public acknowledgement and appropriate citation that the material is not one's own. It is true that every thought probably has been influenced to some degree by the thoughts and actions of others. Such influences can be thought of as affecting the ways we see things and express all thoughts. A detailed description of plagiarism issues can be found [here](#).

Student Accommodations: Any student who needs special accommodation during exams or class periods should provide documentation from the Student Accessibility Center confidentially to the instructor. The instructor will accommodate that student's needs in the best way possible, given the constraints of course content and processes. It is the student's responsibility to plan in advance in order to meet their own needs and assignment due dates.

Privacy Statement: Assuring privacy among faculty and students engaged in online and face-to-face instructional activities helps promote open and robust conversations and mitigates concerns that comments made within the context of the class will be shared beyond the classroom. As such, recordings of instructional activities occurring in online or face-to-face classes may be used solely for internal class purposes by the faculty member and students registered for the course, and only during the period in which the course is offered. Instructors who wish to make subsequent use of recordings that include student activity may do so only with informed written consent of the students involved or if all student activity is removed from the recording.

Student Diversity, Equity and Inclusion: As Loyola's mission statement holds, "We are Chicago's Jesuit, Catholic University—a diverse community seeking God in all things." Together, as a community rich in diversity, we are called to "expand knowledge in the service of humanity through learning, justice and faith." Recognizing and appreciating the diverse collection of identities, experiences, perspectives, and abilities of the students, faculty, staff, and community partners with whom we collaborate, the School of Communication commits itself to enriching academic experiences through the advancement of diversity, equity, inclusion, anti-racist, and anti-oppressive practices.

Managing Life Crises and Finding Support: Should you encounter an unexpected crisis during the semester (e.g., securing food or housing, addressing mental health concerns, managing a financial crisis, and/or dealing with a family emergency, etc.), I strongly encourage you to contact the Office of the Dean of Students by submitting a CARE referral (LUC.edu/csaa) for yourself or a peer in need of support. To learn more about the Office of the Dean of Students, please find their websites here: LUC.edu/dos or LUC.edu/csaa; phone number 773-508-8840, email deanofstudents@luc.edu

REQUIRED READING

News and journal articles, indicated below.

REQUIRED MOVIES

All movies will be screened in class or are readily available for online streaming.

Week 1 (Jan. 16): Introduction: What Is Independent Film? Predecessors and Beginnings

Screening due: *Shadows* (John Cassavetes, 1959)
Clips: *Meshes of the Afternoon* (Maya Deren, 1943); *Little Fugitive* (Morris Engel, 1953)

Week 2 (ONLINE ASYNC WEEK): Underground Film and No Wave Cinema

Screening due: *Stranger than Paradise* (Jim Jarmusch, 1982)
Clips: *Pink Flamingos* (John Waters, 1972); *Smithereens* (Susan Seidelman, 1982)

Reading due: “The First Statement of the New American Cinema Group” (1961); “Cinema of Transgression Manifesto” (1985); “Paradise Regained” by J. Hoberman (2007)

Week 3 (Jan. 30): The L.A. Rebellion

Screening due: *Killer of Sleep* (Charles Burnett, 1979)
Clips: *Bush Mama* (Haile Gerima, 1979); *Your Children Come Back to You* (Alile Sharon Larkin, 1979); *Bless Their Little Hearts* (Billy Woodberry, 1983)

Reading due: *L.A. Rebellion: Creating a New Black Cinema*, “Introduction” pp 19-29, edited by Field, A., Horak, J., & Stewart, J. N. (2015).

Due: Reaction Paper #1

Week 4 (Feb. 6): Indie Feminist Cinema

Screening due: *Working Girls* (Lizzie Borden, 1986)
Clips: *Losing Ground* (Kathleen Collins, 1982); *Born in Flames* (Lizzie Border, 1983); *Just Another Girl on the I.R.T.* (Leslie Harris, 1992)

Reading Due: “Where the Girls Are,” by Carrie Rickey (*American Film*, 1984)

Week 5 (Feb. 13): Genre Takes/Regional Tales

Screening due: *Blood Simple* (Joel and Ethan Coen, 1984)
Clips: *Chan is Missing* (Wayne Wang, 1982), *A Flash of Green* (Victor Nuñez, 1984)

Reading due: “Bloodlines” by Hal Hinson (*Film Comment*, 1985); “Rural Crimewave: Reconfiguring Regional Spaces through Genre in US Indie Cinema” (pp 1-7), by John Berra (2017)

Midterm Assigned

Week 6 (Feb. 20): Indie Documentaries: From Advocacy to Subjectivity

Screening due: *Roger and Me* (Michael Moore, 1989)
Clips: *Harlan County U.S.A.* (Barbara Kopple, 1976), *Thin Blue Line* (Errol Morris, 1988)

Reading due: “Mirrors without Memories: Truth, History, and the New Documentary,” by Linda Williams (*Film Quarterly*, 1993)

Week 7 (Feb. 27): Black New Wave

Screening due: *She's Gotta Have It* (Spike Lee, 1986)
Clips: *Hollywood Shuffle* (Robert Townshend, 1987), *Do the Right Thing* (1989), *Boyz in the Hood* (John Singleton, 1991); *Livin' Large* (Michael Schultz, 1991)

Reading due: “Framing Blackness: The African-American Image in the Cinema of the Nineties,” by Ed Guerrero (*Cinéaste*, 1993)

Midterm Due: March 3

March 4-9: Spring Break: No classes

Week 8 (March 12): Sex, Lies, Sundance and Miramax

Screening due: *sex, lies, and videotape* (Steven Soderbergh, 1989)

Reading due: *Indie, Inc: Miramax and the Transformation of Hollywood in the 1990s*;

pp. 16-18; 31-40, by Alissa Perren (University of Texas Press, 2012)
“Some Kind of Skin Flick,” by Amy Taubin (Criterion, 2018)

Week 9 (ONLINE ASYNC WEEK): New Queer Cinema

Screening due: *Poison* (Todd Haynes, 1991)
Clips: *My Own Private Idaho* (Gus Van Sant, 1991); *Swoon* (Tom Kalin, 1992);
Go Fish (Rose Troche, 1994)

Reading due: “New Queer Cinema,” by B. Ruby Rich (*Sight & Sound*, 1992)

Week 10 (March 26): The “Specialized” Indie Industry

Clips: *Pulp Fiction* (Quentin Tarantino, 1994); *Scream* (Wes Craven, 1996); *The English Patient* (1996), *Flirting with Disaster* (1996)

Reading due: *Indie, Inc: Miramax and the Transformation of Hollywood in the 1990s*, pp. 144-160
by Alissa Perren (University of Texas Press, 2012)

Due: Reaction Paper #2

Week 11 (April 2): The Digital Revolution

Screening due: *The Blair Witch Project* (Edward Sanchez, Ed Myrick, 1999)
Clips: *Celebration* (Thomas Vinterberg, 1998), *Tape* (Richard Linklater, 2001);

Reading due: “New Digital Cinema” by Holly Willis, pp. 22-29 (Wallflower Press, 2005)

Week 12 (April 9): The Economic Crash, New Realism, and Mumblecore

Screening due: *Wendy and Lucy* (Kelly Reichardt, 2008)
Clips: *Man Push Cart* (Rahmin Bahrani, 2005); *Mutual Appreciation* (Andrew Bujalski, 2005); *Tiny Furniture* (Lena Dunham, 2010)

Reading due: “Neo Neo Realism” (*New York Times*); “A Generation Finds Its Mumble” (*New York Times*)

Final Assigned

Week 13 (April 16): A24 and Marketing an Indie Auteur Renaissance

Screening due: *Moonlight* (Barry Jenkins, 2016)
Clips: *Spring Breakers* (Harmony Korine, 2013); *Lady Bird* (Greta Gerwig, 2017)

Reading due: “The Distributor as Auteur,” by David Ehrlich (*Slate*, 2015); “How the indie studio behind ‘Moonlight,’ ‘Lady Bird’ and ‘Hereditary’ flourished while breaking Hollywood rules,” by Sonia Rao (*Washington Post*, 2019)

Week 14 (April 23): TV/Streaming: the New Indie Film?

Clips due: *Girls* (Lena Dunham, 2013); *The Knick* (Soderbergh, 2014); *Insecure* (Issa Rae, 2016)

Reading due: “Lena Dunham's 'Girls' has changed the game -- not just for TV, but for indie film” (*Entertainment Weekly*); “TV is Not the New Film” by Mike Ryan (*Filmmaker Magazine*, 2015) “Why TV Is the Perfect Place for Indie Filmmakers” by James Poniewozik (*Time*, 2015)

FINAL PAPER DUE: MONDAY, April 29