Fall 2002. First-Year Seminar. Contemporary American Film

Steven Dillon
Pettiegrew 307
Office Hours: T 8:30-10 W 9:30-10 TH 2:30-3:30 and by appointment

Required Text: David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, Film Art: An Introduction

Schedule of Assignments:

W September 4    Introduction

11    Steven Spielberg, Jurassic Park, Saving Private Ryan
      Bordwell, Film Art, Chapter One, pp. 2-37  HW1

18    Spielberg, Schindler’s List, A.I.
      Bordwell, Film Art, Chapter Two, pp. 39-58  HW2

25    Kathryn Bigelow, Strange Days; Wachowski Bros., The Matrix
      Bordwell, Chapter Three, pp. 59-92  HW3

October 2       Darren Aronofsky, B. Requiem for a Dream
      Bordwell, Chapter Four, pp. 94-109  HW4

9       Marc Levin, Slam; Karyn Kusama, Girlfight
      Bordwell, Chapter Five, pp. 110-154  HW5

Fall Recess

23    Todd Solondz, Welcome to the Dollhouse; Happiness
      Bordwell, Chapter Six, pp. 156-192  HW6

30    Spike Lee, Do the Right Thing; Get on the Bus
      Bordwell, Chapter Seven, pp. 193-248  HW7

November 6     Jim Jarmusch, Dead Man; Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai
      Bordwell, Chapter Eight, pp. 249-290  HW8

13    John Singleton, Boyz N the Hood; Baby Boy
      Bordwell, Chapter Nine, pp. 291-326  HW9

20    David Lynch, Lost Highway; Mulholland Drive
      Bordwell, Chapter Ten, pp. 327-350  HW10

Thanksgiving Recess
December 4  Spike Jonz, Being John Malkevich
        HW11

December 9  10-page final paper (analytical interpretation + research) due by 5 p.m.

**Grading:** 11 Homeworks 75%. Final paper 25%. There is no midterm or final exam. Useful contributions to class discussion will certainly be taken into account in the final summing up. I want very much to see you in class each time and I’d like to see all the homeworks handed in. To miss a class, in this case, is to miss a whole week’s worth of classes. Unexcused absences will detract from your overall grade; no late homework will be accepted without a Dean’s excuse.

**Course Description:** This course provides an introduction to film studies, by using contemporary American film as our focus. Our study also takes place in the context of a first-year seminar, so there will be frequent short writing assignments. In terms of content, the course begins with some of the more popular films of the 90s, exemplified here especially by Steven Spielberg. Shortly thereafter we will move into films taken to be more critically interesting, produced by “independent” film-makers not so obviously aligned with Hollywood. As we discuss each film, we will come to learn various methods and approaches to talking about film (structure, set design, editing, soundtrack, acting). It is hoped that by the end of the course you will want to continue your investigation of film-beyond-the-mall. You will be able to make the most of this course by working carefully with the films assigned, and if you have a chance, to watch other films as well. The more movies you watch, the more you’ll come to understand film language. I will often mention other film titles in class, and you’ll come across dozens of key films in the Bordwell textbook. Every once and a while, have a look at one of these other movies—a silent film, a movie from classic Hollywood, a foreign art movie, or another work of contemporary American independent film.

**Logistics:** You need to watch the movies, at your convenience, in the week between Wednesday classes. All of the movies will be on reserve in the audio/video department in Ladd library. Don’t wait until the last minute!—because otherwise someone else might have the video. We need to share the videos, of course, so when you are done, please return the video to the desk where you checked it out. Each week we’ll officially watch 2 movies, write a page (or so) response to each movie, and read a chunk of Bordwell textbook. I may not ask you officially to respond to Bordwell, but you’ll be a lot smarter about what to do with movies if you keep up in your reading.