

Instructor: Kimberlee Gillis-Bridges

Class: M, 2:30-5:20 p.m.; TTH, 2:30-4:20 p.m.

Location: Electrical Engineering Building 045 (M) and Johnson 175 (TTH)

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Office Hours: M, 12:30-2:20 p.m., and by appointment

Course Web Site: <https://canvas.uw.edu/courses/1131307>

Description



Screenshot from *The Piano* (Campion 1993)

"As a woman you are trusted to tell an emotional story, because 'you like people', while men get the latest *Spider-Man*. I should be able to make a film about whatever I want." Alice Lowe in *The Independent* 18 January 2017

"Being the first African American woman director ever nominated [for an Academy Award] in a [Best Documentary] feature category is really abhorrent. . . . The fact that we're in 2017 and that's the case reflects poorly on our industry, an industry that prides itself on forward thinking and being a leader in creativity around the world. We are not when it comes to being inclusive." Ava DuVernay to *Elle.com* at the 2017 Women in Film pre-Oscar party

Although films by Jane Campion, Julie Dash, Lucrecia Martel, Agnes Varda, and other female directors have appeared on critics' best-of-year lists and garnered award nominations and wins, women filmmakers represent a minority in their industry. In the United States, only eleven percent of the 250 top-grossing films of 2017 were directed by women, and only one percent of these films employed ten or more women in prominent positions behind the scenes. Of 109 feature-length films released between September 2014 and August 2015, only two were made by women of color. Such statistics confirm the inequality DuVernay and Lowe have encountered. But what effects does the paucity of women behind the camera have and what might their presence bring? How does the filmmaker's identity matter? To investigate these questions, we will examine the work of female directors from around the globe, beginning with silent-era director Alice Guy Blaché and concluding with films from the 2018 Seattle International Film Festival. The first seven weeks of the course will take place on campus; the final three weeks will blend online and face-to-face instruction to accommodate SIFF screening times.

A study of women directors' work not only allows us to analyze cinematic narrative and style, but also provides a unique perspective on film history. Furthermore, course films raise questions about the relationship between an individual filmmaker's work and concurrent cinematic movements, film scholarship, and cultural contexts. Throughout the term, we will focus on the following questions:

- ❖ What distinguishes the work of women directors?
- ❖ How does an investigation of women directors change our conception of film history, genre, national cinemas or film movements?
- ❖ How does feminist film criticism help us to interpret films made by women? What challenge do particular directors pose to critics?
- ❖ How do historical, cultural, and industrial factors shape the work of women directors?
- ❖ How do films made by women engage local ideologies of gender, race, class, and sexuality?

Course films highlight how female directors work within and against genre conventions; examine cinematic gaze and the female body; explore intersectional identities; and critically interrogate motherhood, marriage,

and romance. Please note that selected course films depict painful subjects, including rape, sexual coercion, domestic violence, racism, homophobia, and death. Students need not ask permission to briefly leave class if necessary.

English 368 fulfills the University's VLPA requirement and counts toward the English and Cinema Studies major elective requirements.

Course Goals and Methodology

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

1. Identify films' narrative, visual, and sound techniques, using vocabulary specific to cinema studies.
2. Analyze how women filmmakers use artistic strategies to achieve a range of effects.
3. Evaluate how films made by women respond to and shape existing cultural contexts and cinematic conventions.
4. Develop complex written arguments and support those arguments with sufficient and appropriate evidence.
5. Engage the work of film scholars, critically responding to their ideas in discussion and writing.



Still from *Christopher Strong* (Arzner 1933)

Course activities promote active learning, with most class sessions including a mix of mini-lectures, discussion, and individual or group work. My role is to provide the tools and resources you 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, analyze film clips, and construct written arguments.

Requirements



Screenshot from *Daughters of the Dust* (Dash 1991)

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 prepare for each class session—whether in-person or online—by completing assigned readings and taking notes during screenings. You should also plan to ask questions, respond to peer comments, summarize scholars' arguments, analyze clips, paraphrase your electronic postings/SIFF blog entries, or contribute to small-group exchanges.

Like all skills, participating in class becomes easier with practice. I do not expect fully polished analysis in class discussion; rather, your contributions

represent ideas for further development. Students should expect me to call on them during in-person discussions, as I want everyone to earn full points for class participation.

Because students will have multiple, sometimes conflicting, interpretations of course films, we will establish norms for maintaining a respectful classroom environment early in the quarter.

Our wired classroom allows both instructor and students to access online film clips and other electronic materials. Therefore, I ask that you bring a laptop to class if possible on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Because laptops and wireless internet access present the temptation of email, messaging, and the web, students must follow basic ground rules:

- ❖ Students should switch off and stow their cell phones before class begins.
- ❖ Students may use laptops to take notes, access materials during small-group exercises and research questions posed in class discussion; however, they should not check email, electronically chat, update their social networking status or surf the web during class unless asked to do so.

Lack of engagement in class activities, inadequate preparation, and failure to adhere to classroom rules will substantially lower your participation grade for the course.



Screenshot from *Advantageous* (Phang 2015)

Electronic Responses and SIFF Blog

Students will use the class discussion board to share responses to films and readings. During the first seven weeks of the course, 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. You may also engage your classmates' ideas as you write. During the final three weeks of the course, you will author 250- to 300-word blog entries on the SIFF films you attend. The online film responses and SIFF blog postings allow us to raise issues for further discussion, expand on previous in-class or online conversations, and develop ideas for presentations, the clip annotation and essays. Your

postings and blog entries 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.

Clip Annotation

Early in the quarter, you will create an online analysis of how elements of narrative form, cinematography, or mise-en-scene function in a clip from *The Blot*, *Christopher Strong*, or *The Piano*.

Presentation

Students will work together in groups of three or four to create a 15- to 20-minute collaborative presentation that analyzes a selected film scene or overarching stylistic or narrative pattern via the lens of the *Film Art* textbook or a critical article. Presenters will use visual aids (PowerPoint, Prezi, film clip, screen shots, handouts) to structure their remarks and underscore key points. They will also lead an activity designed to generate class discussion of concepts and arguments they've presented.

Essays

Students will compose two 1400- to 1600-word essays with screenshots on assigned topics. I will be available to discuss ideas-in-progress and drafts, and students will peer review the first essay. You can also seek feedback from consultants at the Odegaard Writing and Research Center in Odegaard Undergraduate Library, the CLUE Writing Center in the Mary Gates Commons, or the Interdisciplinary Writing Studio in Smith Hall.

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. When citing sources, use MLA 8th edition format.

Extra Credit

Students may receive extra credit for attending screenings and other events related to class topics, texts and filmmakers. To earn points, students must first discuss the event with me. Within one week of attending the event, students should write a 300- to 350-word analysis that briefly describes the event, explaining how the ideas and materials encountered complement, supplement or challenge our class conversation. Students attending screenings may also draw on the *Film Art* textbook or a critical article read for class to analyze the film. Each extra-credit piece is worth eight points; students may do a **maximum of two** extra-credit activities.

Policies



Screenshot from *Lady Bird* (Gerwig 2017)

Lateness Policy

Since electronic responses and SIFF blog postings contribute directly to class discussion, I will not accept these assignments late, nor will I allow students to reschedule presentations. Students must also submit extra-credit write-ups on time. 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 on a hard drive to Dropbox, iCloud, UW Google Drive, or your personal file space on Canvas. When submitting essays via

Canvas, make sure that you upload the correct file. If Canvas breaks down, email your work directly to me.

Plagiarism Policy

English 345 adheres to the University of Washington's policies on academic honesty, which prohibit unacknowledged use of others' words or ideas. When you draw upon sources in your electronic postings, presentation, clip annotation and essays, make clear to your audience that you are incorporating others' work by placing quotation marks around exact words and noting 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 other disciplinary action by the university's Committee on Academic Conduct. The course links page contains information on when and how to cite sources. We will use MLA format, which requires in-text parenthetical citations and a list of works cited.

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 Canvas site. Rather than distributing print materials in class, I will upload all assignments, grading criteria, handouts, schedule changes and sample student work to Canvas. Our Canvas site also contains clips from course films.

Texts

Films

With the exception of *Outside In* and *Lady Bird*, all course films are on reserve in the Libraries Media Center (3rd Floor, Suzzallo Library). Please **use the listed call numbers** to request these titles.

- ❖ *Advantageous* (Jennifer Phang, USA, 2015, 90 min.). DVD USMISC 681
- ❖ *The Babadook* (Jennifer Kent, Australia/Canada, 2014, 93 min.). DVD SHFA 022
- ❖ *The Blot* (Lois Weber, USA, 1921, 80 min.). DVD IEF 284
- ❖ *Christopher Strong* (Dorothy Arzner, USA, 1933, 77 min.). DVD WHV 591
- ❖ *Daughters of the Dust* (Julie Dash, USA, 1991, 112 min.). Available via UW Libraries Alexander Street Black Studies in Video streaming media database.
- ❖ *La Niña Santa/The Holy Girl* (Lucrecia Martel, Argentina/Italy/Netherlands/Spain, 2004, 106 min.). DVD HBO 021



Screenshot from *Ratcatcher* (Ramsay 1999)

- ❖ *A House Divided* (Alice Guy Blaché, USA, 1913, 13 min.). VHS LIBCONG 011 (part of collection titled *America's First Women Filmmakers: Alice Guy-Blaché and Lois Weber*)
- ❖ *Lady Bird* (Greta Gerwig, USA, 2017, 94 min.)
- ❖ *Matrimony's Speed Limit* (Alice Guy Blaché, USA, 1913, 14 min.). VHS LIBCONG 011 (part of collection titled *America's First Women Filmmakers: Alice Guy-Blaché and Lois Weber*)
- ❖ *Outside In* (Lynn Shelton, USA, 2018, 109 min.)
- ❖ *Ratcatcher* (Lynne Ramsay, 1999, UK/France, 94 min.). DVD CRIT 327
- ❖ *The Piano* (Jane Campion, Australia/New Zealand/France, 1993, 121 min.). DVD ARHE 015
- ❖ *Sans Toi Ni Moi/Vagabond* (Agnes Varda, France/UK, 1985, 105 min.). DVD CRIT 103
- ❖ Selected SIFF films

Textbooks

An earlier edition of *Film Art* is available on reserve at the Odegaard Undergraduate Library. The course "Schedule" page links to all critical articles.

- ❖ Bordwell, David, Kristin Thompson and Jeff Smith. *Film Art: An Introduction*. 11th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2016. ISBN: 1259534952. Call Number: PN 1995.B617 2008
- ❖ Critical articles available via course Canvas site.

Additional Expenses

- ❖ Tickets for three SIFF films (approximately \$30-\$35 total)
- ❖ DVD rental or online streaming of *Lady Bird* (under \$4)
- ❖ Tickets to screen Lynn Shelton's *Outside In* at SIFF Cinema Uptown between 4/6 and 4/11 (\$9 SIFF member/\$14 non-member; 6:30 showing on 4/6 includes Q&A with Shelton)



Still from *The Blot* (Weber 1921)

Grading



Screenshot from *Vagabond* (Varda 1985)

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:

- ❖ Class Participation: 60 points
- ❖ Clip Annotation: 60 points
- ❖ Electronic Postings: 80 points
- ❖ Essays: 160 points
- ❖ Presentation: 40 points