

Film: Movies About Movies ~ The Magic of Cinema

Faculty: Elliot Shapiro, Knight Foundation Director of the Writing in the Majors

Week Two: July 12 – 18, 2026

Schedule: Monday - Friday, 9-12 and 1:30-3:30, except Wednesday afternoon.

Location: Lincoln Hall, room 124

Dear CAU Students,

Welcome to “Movies about Movies: The Magic of Cinema.” I’m glad you chose to enroll in this class during the coming summer. Come July, I look forward to learning together and sharing our love of movies.

My academic home at Cornell is in the Knight Institute for Writing in the Disciplines. During the academic year, I teach classes about writing, teaching, film, and Jewish Studies. (My Jewish Studies classes are all film studies classes).

The class itself will be conducted, in large part, as a seminar. As instructor, I provide the content and context for the films we discuss. Much of class time will be spent in discussion, with the instructor as facilitator and guide.

The movies we will view and discuss will be at the center of our class. To prepare for the class, you should view the five feature films listed below (and on the block schedule). I’ve chosen these films both because they’re great movies, and because they all foreground, in different ways, the experience of viewing and/or making movies.

All five films should be available through streaming services or other means. The ones you might have the most difficulty finding are *Sherlock Junior*, a comedy from the silent era; and *Watermelon Woman*, a low-budget independent film from 1996. If you do have trouble accessing any of the films assigned for advance viewing, please contact me. If access is an issue for members of the class, I may need to make adjustments to my course plan.

Films to view in advance

Sherlock Junior (dir. Buster Keaton 1924)

Singin’ in the Rain (dir. Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen 1952)

Postcards from the Edge (dir. Mike Nichols 1990)

Watermelon Woman (dir. Cheryl Dunye 1996)

Hugo (dir. Martin Scorsese 2012)

In addition to the films students assigned as advance viewing, we will screen several documentary films (in whole or in part) during class time. These documentaries may be harder to find, which is part of why we will view them in class.

The documentaries will help us understand cinema as art; as commerce; as industry; and as material object. We will get a sense of how cinema has changed over time, and the fragility of film stock itself.

Viewing films and sections of films together will also remind us that, for most of its history, cinema has been a communal experience. Movies are meant to be watched together. Of course, viewing habits have changed with the times. We will talk about what has been gained, and lost,

as our experience of cinema has shifted from being something we do together in a crowd, in a public space, to becoming something we do at home: alone, or with a few friends or family members.

Documentaries viewed in class (in whole or part)

An Extraordinary Voyage (Serge Bromberg and Eric Lange 2011)

Visions of Light (Stuart Samuels 1992) (excerpts in class)

Arabic Movie (Eyal Saig Biz'avi and Sara Tsifroni 2015)

I look forward to meeting you in July. Happy viewing.

Elliot