



## MODERNISM AND CINEMA

### GENRE GROUP ASSIGNMENT

The Genre Group Assignment will take place in four parts:

The Proposal (due Monday, February 10 by midnight, e-mail to [kwalsh36@fordham.edu](mailto:kwalsh36@fordham.edu))

The Project (due in class on Feb 26)

The Presentation (10-15 min, in class on Feb 26)

The Reflection (due Friday, Feb 28 by midnight, e-mail to [kwalsh36@fordham.edu](mailto:kwalsh36@fordham.edu))

Here are details and guidelines for each stage.

**STAGE ONE: THE PROPOSAL** (4-8 pages, due by e-mail to [kwalsh36@fordham.edu](mailto:kwalsh36@fordham.edu) on Monday, February 10 at midnight).

Tell me what your group is going to do. The proposal (just one, written collaboratively and submitted as a group from the e-mail account of one of you, but with all group members cc'd) needs to cover the following topics:

- a. **A Description of the Project.** What are you going to do? What object will you create (ie. a formal paper, a website, a blog, a short film, a set of interviews?) What technology and skills will be required and who possesses them?
- b. **Plan of Work:** Please explain to me how this project is substantively collaborative. Why is it something that makes sense to do in a group? Who will do what? Which parts of the project will be done alone, which will be done together, and which will be done somewhere in between (ie. with Google docs, Skype, on the phone, or in twos).
- c. **The Research Background:** This is the most challenging and important part of the proposal stage. It should not be designated to one member of the group, but should be a shared discussion between all of you. Why are you going to do this project? How does it advance our critical understanding of debates about your genre? The goal is to undertake your project with a specific research goal in mind. So, for instance, if you are going to visit places in New York where noir films have been shot on location and then try to recreate those shots, why are you doing this? A project like that might be undertaken for any number of reasons. For instance:
- To gain greater understanding of the techniques of noir cinematography, for instance its use of camera angles and lighting.
  - To see what kinds of urban locations noir films are particularly drawn to shooting in, and to try to figure out why, or perhaps to focus on a particular location in its relation to the genre (seaports, parking garages, Chinatowns, etc).
  - To intervene in an element of the cultural politics of noir—for instance, to see what happens if you re-stage an iconic scene with different casting (what does it look like if you approach the gender roles of noir from a feminist perspective?)
  - To try to figure out whether there are differences between the locations/techniques used in a classic noir film (like *The Lady From Shanghai*) or a later neo-noir film (like *Taxi Driver* or *Sin City*).
  - To try to show distinctions between the ways in which different parts of the city are presented (ie. you might choose a noir film set in a particular city, and then show how the characters inhabit it. In the case of New York, for instance, is the film set largely uptown or downtown? On the East side or the West side? What cultural landmarks are used and why?)

As these examples reveal, there are many reasons to undertake any particular project, and your challenge is to use the critical readings from our class (or from your own research) to explain how your project is a critical engagement with the genre.

Here's an example of how you might use a critical source from our class: if you are pursuing a project on the use of music in your genre, you might take this quote from Michael J. Blouin's article "Auditory Ambivalence" as your starting point:

"Auditory ambivalence results from a fissure between the image onscreen (which has one set of associations for viewers) and the sound that accompanies it (which already has or is in the process of creating a different set of associations); these unsettled moments evoke a response by the audience, a response of ambivalence within their own senses echoing the duplicitous nature of American identity" (1175).

Even though Blouin is writing about the Western, you might use his quote as a starting point for thinking about whether there is 'Auditory Ambivalence' in the genre that you're working on. For instance, you might ask, "does music work the way that Blouin describes in film noir? What kind of ambivalences might be captured by disjunctions between the musical and the visual in noir?"

In this section you must mention at least two critical sources that will provide a background for your inquiry, and you must quote from them directly, showing how you are engaging with the idea presented (ie. it's not enough just to have a Works Cited—you must climb into the ideas of your sources and get to work at exploring them here in the proposal, showing how your project might explain, question, or experiment with these critical ideas).

Perhaps the readings from the course so far, on assimilation, secularization, music, etc., will provide you with the appropriate critical background for your topic. But if you are interested in exploring a different critical area—for instance, the use of horses in westerns in relation to the history of animal rights, or the relationship between Film noir and Cold War politics—then you will have to turn to your own research sources on JSTOR, Muse, or in Walsh library. Remember: for these purposes, an appropriate source is one that appears in a peer-reviewed, academic book or article, not simply on Wikipedia or a similar online source. Check with me if you have concerns about the status of your critical source.

## **STAGE TWO: THE PROJECT ITSELF (due February 26 in class)**

This is what you will present to the class on February 26. It must be a tangible object of some kind—an essay co-written by all of you, a website or blog, a short film, a live performance (including a script to be handed in), an exhibition of photographs, a set of transcripts of interviews, reviews of a set of recent films in your genre, a group of costumes you've designed, etc. Whatever it is, it should have some lasting physical form (if it is a live performance, a script or recording can be used as the lasting physical form). This can be anything you want it to be, as long as it based on critical engagement with scholarship (as described in the proposal) and substantial collaboration.

### **STAGE THREE: THE PRESENTATION (February 26 in class)**

You will have 10-15 minutes to present your project to the class on Wednesday, Feb 26 and then hand in to me. This presentation can take any form (a screening, a lecture, a game, a quiz, a handout, a discussion) but I encourage you to think as public speakers/teachers. How can you do more than simply “show and tell”? How can you engage the class intellectually in your work, and show it off to the best advantage possible in 10-15 minutes? The goal is to show us your object, but also to engage us in the critical debates and teach us about the critical intervention you made. So, for instance, to go back to our example of a project based on noir photography around New York City—if your goal for critical engagement had been to see what happens if you reversed the gender casting of noir, and created images of men in the roles of the “femme fatale” and women as “fall guys,” perhaps you could begin by showing the class one of the quotes from your Critical Engagement section about the gender politics of noir, and then discuss the quote, and then show your photographs to help the class understand why you did what you did. Then perhaps you could ask the class to vote for the photograph by your group that provides the most illuminating critique of the gender politics of noir, and then discuss why.

That is just one example—you may use your 15 minutes however you think best for creating an enriching learning experience for the class.

**TIP:** It is very important that you practice your presentation together before giving it to the class. You should have worked out how you will present the material together and how each member of the group can be an active part of the presentation (ie. you can’t just designate one person to be the presenter).

### **STAGE FOUR: THE REFLECTION** (due by e-mail to [kwalsh36@fordham.edu](mailto:kwalsh36@fordham.edu) on Friday, February 28 at midnight)

The reflection has two phases:

- a. **Working Separately.** In this final phase, each person in the group submits to me a Final Reflection of about 2 pages reflecting on the following questions. You write this by yourself and send it to me by e-mail individually:
  1. What was your contribution to the group? Did your group manage to achieve a good working relationship and a fair distribution of labor?
  2. What were the challenges of working on a substantively collaborative project and an unconventional (ie. non-essay based) project?
  3. What were the high points or strengths of working on a substantively collaborative and unconventional project?

4. What did you learn about your genre from the experience of working on this project? What did you gain from doing it?

- b. **Working Together.** Brainstorm one way that you can put your project ‘out there’ into the world, and then do it. For instance, if you made a film, you might share it on Youtube, our class website, or some other online venue. If you wrote reviews of recent films, you might submit some of them to the Fordham Ram or another review venue. If you took photographs, you might each agree to display these on someone’s dorm room door (or divide and display separately). Sharing your research beyond our class could take many forms, from publishing it online to showing it to your roommates, family or friends, discussing it with one of your professors in another course, or simply asking me to publish it on the class website. Choose your desired form of sharing, and then designate one person in your group to e-mail me and let me know how you have decided to put your work “out there” into the world.

### **EVALUATION:**

First, just to put this assignment in the context of the course as a whole, I should remind you that this will be your only group project and it represents 20% of the final course grade. For all other assignments and evaluations in the course (the review of *The Lady from Shanghai*, the midterm exam, the final exam, and the final paper) you will be graded in a conventional manner for your own individual work.

For this assignment, your grade will be assigned to the group as a whole as follows:

Proposal: 20%

Project: 50%

Presentation: 20%

Reflection: 10%

The group nature of the assignment places the emphasis on the need to collaborate and compromise to find the best, most creative, and most intellectually generative ways of working together. By incorporating the Reflection phase into the assignment, I have built in a place for you to let me know if any issues arose in your group relative to the distribution of labor that I should be aware of. It also allows you to give what you think is an honest assessment of your own contribution to the group. You may also get in touch with me during the process of working with your group if you need help with managing the dynamics of your meetings or even just a sounding board for figuring out good ways to divide the work and get the project done on time. Bear in mind that the best way to ensure equal distribution of labor is through good and frequent

communication. Take time to meet face-to-face as often as you can—as you may have learned in the past, this radically improves the enjoyment of a group working experience! It's much more fun (and often more efficient) to sit down with people in real time, face-to-face, rather than trying to figure things out through e-mails. Take time to find a project that everyone in your group can be excited about and that requires the expertise of everyone involved: this too will help to bring about a happy team experience. Also, I'd ask each and every one of you to ask yourself: what can I do to make this the best possible experience? Working together with a group on a creative project you're interested in can be a wonderful, memorable learning experience. My advice is to approach this with a strong work ethic, a willingness to go above and beyond the normal idea of what constitutes academic work, and a desire to be open to learning from your group and making some new friends who share an interest in film. Good luck!