



Contemporary Spanish Cinema

Instructor: José Carlos Vela, PhD

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Course dates: fall/ spring semester

Course time & location: Tuesdays 17:30-20:30, Instituto Internacional (Madrid)

Class meets for 3 hours a week, 14 weeks **(4 credits)**

Prerequisites: Completion of Fifth Semester Spanish or equivalent

Office Hours: Tuesdays 16:30 - 17:30

Office: Room 402 Instituto Internacional (4th floor)

Course Bulletin

An overview of Spanish contemporary cinema and the variety of genres that have emerged in the last decades. Using different resources from films and literature, students will be able to better understand the diversity of Spanish society, which they will experience for themselves on the streets of Madrid. This course also explores how the technical elements of film (camera shots, angles, etc.) can express emotions as well as cultural and social values.

Course Description

Spanish cinema of the democratic period, and primarily from the 90s on, is characterized by a great diversity of film genres and visions of the world that reflect the multiplicity of Spanish society. The main objective of this course is to map out the variety of styles of filmmaking in relation to the relatively recent diversification of Spain that emerged after the death of the dictator, Francisco Franco, in 1975. Spanish cinema gives students the ability to reflect critically on Spain's past and present, as well as expose them to its profoundly diverse society.

In the analysis of the films, major importance will be given to the technical aspects that make cinematographic art an autonomous form of expression (planning, angulation, lighting, etc.); In addition, these purely formal components will be further explored by being juxtaposed with other horizons of interpretation such as history, myth, symbols, plastic arts and literature. The course is

multidisciplinary in nature, and rightfully so, given the wide variety of disciplines that have converged in this art form.

While interpreting the cinematic texts, special attention will be given to the theoretical and philosophical points of view. A major component of this course is the comparison of contemporary Spanish literature and its corresponding interpretation as shown through film. Students will analyze the formal aspects of both literature and film while exploring the complexity of these cinematic adaptations. We will read authors such as Manuel Rivas, Adelaida García Morales, and Sigmund Freud, with the intention of broadening the students' analytical skills. Students must express their thoughts on these connections between literature and cinema in the Spanish language using specific cinematographic vocabulary.

Boston University HUB Learning Outcomes

Aesthetic Exploration: Students will investigate the expressive potential of the formal/ technical aspects of cinema (lighting, camera angle, etc.), which will allow for a more sophisticated study into how meanings, reflections, and emotions are transmitted through film. The course also compels students to examine the relationship between cinema and literature, which will provide a better understanding of the reasoning behind the use of these technical elements. By mastering cinematographic language, students will be able to interpret films while also taking into consideration the cultural context in which they were created. Through both the research paper and the final essay, students will be evaluated on their ability to analyze and comment on the reflection of the diversity of Spanish society through the various genres of Spanish cinema.

Global Citizenship and Intercultural Literacy: Contemporary Spanish cinema will allow students to better comprehend the diversity of Spanish society and to analyze what they experience in their daily lives during their stay in Madrid. Students will be able to use the cultural contexts depicted in various genres of film to facilitate their coexistence within a society previously unfamiliar to them. An advantage of using contemporary films in class is that students are exposed to Spanish colloquialisms and modern expressions that they may not encounter in a traditional grammar or literature class setting.

During the course, students will be informed about the latest releases of Spanish cinema and, as a group, will see such premieres. When analyzing Spanish films, comparisons are constantly made to the cinematographic styles of other countries in order to situate Spanish cinema in a globalized context.

Research and information Literacy: An important part of the course is the research work in which students compare a literary text to a film. In this paper, they must demonstrate their ability to distinguish between the formal aspects of both literature and film, their skills to formally analyze texts, and the capacity to conduct research using primary sources and scholarly articles. The paper is only the final product of a number of drafts and exercises that will allow the students to acquire the necessary vocabulary, research tools, and key concepts.

All of these preliminary drafts will receive constructive feedback (from the instructor) so that the students will be able to reflect on their own progress.

The writing process, concluding with the final paper, consists of the following steps (professor's feedback provided throughout):

Part I- In order to understand the importance of the distinction and interrelation between literary and cinematographic languages, a talk about narratology will be given in class, using mainly (not only) the theories of Seymour Chatman. This will provide context, strategies and techniques for the students to use as reference as they begin to prepare their topic. There will be time set aside for Q&As to ensure that students have thoroughly understood all the concepts.

Part II- Outline and proposed bibliography submitted. Feedback provided by the professor to ensure that students are using proper sources and that the topic/argument is appropriate.

Part III- First draft of paper submitted. Constructive comments and revisions discussed with professor.

Part IV- Final draft of research paper submitted. Students must communicate their findings in a clearly organized and coherently structured way, as shown through this final draft. Not only will the assignments' content be evaluated, but also the students' ability to express their ideas and arguments in the Spanish language while demonstrating proficiency of Spanish cinematographic-specific vocabulary.

The students must also complete a film review which, while written in a more casual, opinionated style, will help students become accustomed to writing about Spanish cinema in preparation for the final paper. Students will exercise their writing skills while using the language of film and the specific (Spanish) terminology learned in class.

Course- Specific Objectives

By completion of the course, students will:

- Recognize popular trends and filming techniques in contemporary Spanish films.
- Become familiar with colloquial Spanish (expressions, idioms, slang) that will allow them to grasp social commentary conveyed through film more completely.
- Be able to interpret films taking Spain's social and historical context into consideration.
- Apply a critical interpretation of cinematic texts and understand how diverse traditions manifest in them.
- Be able to identify and discuss important theories such as F. Jameson's theory of *pastiche*, M. Bakhtine's theory of the grotesque, and S. Freud's theory of the uncanny.
- Improve foreign-language writing skills by having to articulate highly-developed arguments and analyses, in Spanish, while using technical cinematographic language.

Instructional Format, Course Pedagogy and Approach to Learning

This course meets once a week (for a 3-hour class) during the 14 weeks of the semester. All films must be viewed before class unless otherwise noted. Additional time per week will be dedicated to the students' own independent work outside of class (viewing assigned films, readings and research for class assignments). The class will also take a field trip to attend a premiere in one of Madrid's movie theatres. Since we will analyze this film later in class, students' attendance to this field trip is mandatory.

In this class, the students' participation plays an integral role. Questions are frequently asked during the analyses of the films to ensure that students are engaged and actively participating in each class. The students are also given questionnaires that are to be completed individually in order to promote critical thinking and allow students to organize their thoughts in preparation for discussion with their peers.

Students will analyze films using the theoretical frameworks discussed in class as well as multiple primary and secondary sources. The purpose of these written analyses is not to summarize cinematic theories in a general sense, but rather discuss exactly how elements of each theory are represented in the films (citing specific examples). Students will also critique a Spanish film of their choice and the best written review will be submitted for publication.

MANDATORY READINGS

These readings will be distributed to students by the professor in the form of electronic copies.

Allinson, Mark. (2001). *A Spanish Labyrinth. The Films of Pedro Almodóvar*. London-New York: Tauris, pp. 7-22. <https://es.scribd.com/doc/248913646/Spanish-Labyrinth-A-The-Films-of-Pedro-Almodovar>

Bakhtine, Mijail. (1984). *Rabelais and His World*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp. 1-58.

Buñuel, Luis. (1985). *My Last Breath*. Translated by Abigail Israel. Glasgow: Fontana.

Calleja, Pedro. (2005) "Estreno: Menores de edad, pero adultos" in *El Mundo*. <http://www.elmundo.es/metropoli/2005/10/13/cine/1129198539.html>

Díaz Martín, Marcos. (2012). "El Sur: convergencias y divergencias entre novela y adaptación cinematográfica" in *Fotocinema 4*, 140-162.

Fajardo, C. (2012). "Lo sublime en la cultura del mercado," *Sinapsis 4.4*. pp. 178-195.

Freud, Sigmund. (1996). "Lo siniestro" in *Obras Completas*. Tomo VII. Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, pp. 2483-2505.

García Morales, Adelaida. (1985). *El Sur (seguido de Bene)*. Barcelona.

Gubern, Román. (2000). "La ventana indiscreta" in *Máscaras de Ficción*. Barcelona, pp. 198-205.

____. (1993). "En el umbral de la caverna" in *Espejo de fantasmas*. Madrid, pp. 9-17.

Jameson, Fredrick. (1970). "On Raymond Chandler" *Southern Review*, pp. 624-650.

____. (1985). "Postmodernismo y sociedad de consumo" en *La postmodernidad* -ed. Hal Foster. Barcelona, pp. 165-175.

Molina, Mar. "Entrevista con Alicia Luna". El inconformista digital.

<http://www.elinconformistadigital.com/modules.php?op=modload&name=News&file=article&sid=662>

Murcia Serrano, Inmaculada. (2009). "Lo sublime de Edmund Burke y la estetización postmoderna de la tecnología," *Fedro. Revista de estética y teoría de las artes* 8, pp. 17-38.

Poyato, Pedro. "Circuito enunciativo de agresión y mundo originario en *Los olvidados* de Buñuel," *Pandora, Rupture(s)* 6, pp. 171-190.

____. (1997) "Referencias intertextuales de *Carne trémula*". *ZER* 17. 32, pp. 121-139.

Rivas, Manuel. (1995). "Carmiña", "Un saxo en la niebla" and "La lengua de las mariposas" in *¿Qué me quieres amor?* Madrid, pp. 23-39, pp. 43-61 and pp. 11-16.

VV. AA. "Dossier sobre te doy mis ojos" *Mucho más que cine*.

http://www.muchoymasquecine.com/documentos/material/3_Tedoymisojos.pdf (23 pages)

VV.AA. *El Bola*. <http://www.aprendiendoconelcine.com/fichas/017.pdf>

Vela Bueno, José Carlos. (2016). "Sobre Isla Mínima de Alberto Rodríguez." *Puente atlántico del siglo XXI. El boletín multidisciplinar de la asociación de licenciados y doctores españoles en Estados Unidos*. 26, pp. 69-72.

ADDITIONAL READINGS (OPTIONAL)

Arocena, Carmen. (1996) *Víctor Erice*. Madrid.

Bajtín, Mijaíl. (1995). *La cultura popular en la Edad Media y en el Renacimiento. El contexto de Francois Rabelais* . Madrid.

Baudrillard, Jean. (1988). *El otro por sí mismo*. Barcelona.

Burch, Noël. (1985). *Praxis del cine*. Madrid.

Camino, Jaime. (1999). *El oficio de director de cine*. Madrid.

- Caparrós Lera, Ángel. (1992). *El cine español de la democracia*. Barcelona.
- Carmona, Ramón. (1993). *Cómo se comenta un texto fílmico*. Madrid.
- Chatman, Seymour. (1990). *Coming to Terms. The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film*. New York.
- D' Lugo, Marvin. (1991). *The films of Carlos Saura*. Princeton.
- Fajardo, C. (2012). "Lo sublime en la cultura del mercado." *Sinapsis*, 4, pp. 178-195.
- Helen Graham y Jo Lavanyi (editors, 1995). *Spanish Cultural Studies*. Oxford.
- Gubern, Román. (1996). *Del bisonte a la realidad virtual. La escena y el laberinto*. Barcelona.
- _____. (1982). *Historia del cine*. Barcelona.
- _____ et al. (1995). *Historia del cine español*. Barcelona.
- _____. (1987). *La mirada opulenta. Exploración de la ionosfera contemporánea*. Barcelona.
- _____. (2000). *Máscaras de Ficción*. Barcelona.
- Jaime, Antoine. (2000) *Literatura y cine en España (1975-1995)*. Madrid.
- Jameson, Frederick. (1991). *Postmodernism; or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. London.
- Most, Jacob. (1997). *Así se crea cine*. Barcelona.

Grading Policy

Participation-----	10%
Midterm Exam (in class)-----	20%
Research project -----	40% (7 pages)
Film review -----	10% (2 pages)
Final essay -----	20% (3 pages)

Research Project: This paper mainly deals with the differences between film and literature and the complexity of cinematic adaptations. Besides showing their capability of interpreting literary and filmic texts, students will have to show their ability to conduct thorough research by quoting academic texts related to the material. Both the film and the literary text will be selected by the professor and students will have to complete this work individually. During the review and correction of the research paper, the professor will evaluate the clarity of expression, the coherence of the argument, the students' capacity to research effectively, and their proficiency in analyzing the given texts in Spanish. The paper should be no fewer than 7 pages long and include a bibliography with at least 6 references.

Film Review: The students themselves will choose a Spanish movie that, for whatever reason, has especially captured their attention. The movie must be from Spain but can be from any time period. With this assignment, the students will have more freedom in their analysis than they previously had with the research paper, thus enthusiasm will be especially appreciated. It's imperative that the students express their ideas thoroughly and clearly. The best film reviews will be selected to be submitted to an electronic academic publication shared with other American university programs in Madrid.

Final Essay: In lieu of a final exam, students will have to complete a final paper related to the content of the second half of the syllabus (options below). In this essay, the students will have to relate some of the concepts from the articles from the second half of the course, and compare and apply these ideas to two films that were previously analyzed in the classroom.

Students will choose between two options for their research paper:

1. Compare three stories by Manuel Rivas with the film *The Tongue of the Butterflies*. In this case they should reflect on how the scriptwriter has fused three stories to make a coherent scenario. These texts are also interesting to analyze the importance of historical memory in Spanish culture.
2. Comparison between the short novel *El Sur* by Adelaida García Morales and the homonymous film version of Victor Erice. In this case, they will have the opportunity to analyze how Victor Erice has carried out personal variations on the original text (a different view of the Civil War and Francoism) and others that are specifically determined by the filmic language.

As previously mentioned in the HUB learning outcomes, a talk about narratology will be given in class in order to understand the importance of the interrelation between literary and cinematographic languages (with special emphasis on the theories of Seymour Chatman). At the same time, the similarities and differences between the aforementioned literary texts and their film versions will be analyzed in detail in the classroom during the eighth and ninth week of class.

The students should submit an outline (with bibliography) after discussing the subject of the paper with the professor. After taking the professor's comments and feedback into consideration and making the appropriate corrections to their first draft, the students will then deliver a final copy of the paper during the eleventh week of class.

Cell phones and/or laptop computers are not permitted in class, except in the case of academic use. Unauthorized use of electronics will have a negative effect on the participation grade. The participation grade consists of, in addition to class attendance, a receptive, positive attitude towards both the professor's and student's comments during class discussion.

The participation grade will also be affected by any unexcused absences (absences without an accompanying doctor's note). Late submission of work will result in a 5-point deduction.

COURSE POLICIES

Students are encouraged to study together; however, all written work that is turned in must be each student's own, individual work. Students are responsible for adhering to the CAS Academic Conduct Code.

It is every student's responsibility to read the Boston University statement on plagiarism, which is available in the Academic Conduct Code. Students are advised that the penalty against students on a Boston University program for cheating on examinations or for plagiarism may be "...expulsion from the program or the University or such other penalty as may be recommended by the Committee on Student Academic Conduct, subject to approval by the Dean." <https://www.bu.edu/academics/policies/academic-conduct-code/>

Attendance: Class attendance is mandatory. Unexcused absences will directly affect the final grade. Absences will be considered excused if the instructor is presented with a doctor's note or in exceptional situations previously discussed with the instructor such as religious observance. Students are expected to attend and contribute to all lectures. In the event of an illness, students are expected to notify the professor and the BU in Madrid office before the beginning of the class. Travel is not an excused absence. ([Policy on Religious Observance](#))

Accommodations for Students with Documented Disabilities: If you are a student with a disability or believe you might have a disability that requires accommodations, please contact the Office for Disability Services (ODS) at [\(617\) 353-3658](tel:617-353-3658) to coordinate any reasonable accommodation requests.

COURSE CALENDAR

Class 1 – Introduction to the course

Pedro Almodóvar. The grotesque of Pedro Almodóvar.

Reading: Bakhtine, pp. 1-58.

Class 2 – Almodóvar and different genres of cinematography. Pastiche theory.

Film: *Mujeres al Borde de un Ataque Nervios*. Almodóvar (1988).
Reading: Jameson, pp. 1-12. Allinson, pp. 1-23.

Class 3 – Almodóvar and the parody of the power of patriarchy.

Film: *Carne Trémula*. Pedro Almodóvar (1996).
Reading: Allinson, pp. 23-93.

Class 4 – Reconsideration of Almodóvar’s films. Almodóvar in the context of a diverse society.

Film: *Volver*. Pedro Almodóvar (2006).
Reading: Allinson, pp. 109-208.

Class 5 – Cinema and literature.

Film: *La Lengua de las Mariposas*. José Luis Cuerda (1999).
Reading: “La Lengua de las Mariposas,” pp. 23-39. “Saxo en la Niebla,” pp. 43- 61. “Carmiña,” pp. 101-106.

Class 6– Film and historical memory in relation to *La Lengua de las Mariposas*.

MIDTERM EXAM

Class 7 – *El Sur*, from literature to cinema

Film: *El Sur*. Víctor Erice (1983).
Reading: *El Sur*, pp. 5-66.

Class 8 –

- Erice’s films and their relation to visual arts
- Social cinema and the representation of children and adolescents. Can we use the expression “social cinema?”

Film: *El Bola*. Acheró Mañas (2000).
Reading: Díaz, pp. 140-162.
El Bola en Aprendiendo con el cine, pp. 1-13.

Class 9 - *Los Olvidados* (Buñuel) in the context of cinema about children and adolescents.

Film: *Los Olvidados*. Buñuel (1950).
Reading: Poyato, pp. 171-190. Buñuel, pp. 197-217.

Class 10 – Cinema and visual arts in the works of Iciar Bollaín. The response to domestic violence in Spanish cinema.

Film: *Te Doy mis Ojos*. Iciar Bollaín (2003).
Reading: VV. AA. “Dossier sobre te doy mis ojos,” *Mucho más que cine*, pp. 1-23.

Molina, Mar. "Entrevista con Alicia Luna," *El inconformista digita*.

Class 11 – Madrid and the urban sublime through various directors.

Research paper due.

Reading: Fajardo, pp. 178-195.

Class 12 – The policial genre (detective fiction) and the critical views of Spanish society- the critical questioning of the transition in *Isla Mínima*.

Film: *Isla Mínima*. Alberto Rodríguez (2014).

Reading: Vela, pp. 69-72.

Murcia, pp. 17-38.

Class 13 – Amenábar and suspense.

Film: *Tesis*. Amenábar (1996).

Reading: Gubern (2000), pp. 198-205. Gubern (1993), (pp. 9- 63).

Class 14 – The uncanny in the genres of suspense and terror. Spanish directors who film in the English language.

FILM REVIEW DUE.

Film: *Los Otros*. Amanábar (2000).

Reading: Freud, pp. 2483-2505.

Final exam week ----- Final essay due