**Scott Eberhardt**

**Unit-Plan: 11th-12th grade Film-Studies Seminar**

**Title: New Mexican Cinema**

**Abstract:**

21st-century film has thus far been greatly influenced by a young generation of filmmakers from throughout Latin America. Foremost among these are a pioneering group of filmmakers from across Mexico (known by some as the “Mexican New Wave”). This film-studies unit is designed to introduce students to the films and personalities of this regional cinema and hopefully utilize some of its features/characteristics/”ethos” in their own short student films.

**Materials:**

**\* Films:** *Y Tu Mama Tambien* (Cuaron), *Amores Perros* (Innaritu), *Duck Season* & *Lake Tahoe* (Eimbcke), *The Violin* (Vargas), *Alamar* (Gonzales-Rubio), *Silent Light* & *Japon* (Reygadas), *La Misma Luna* (Riggen), *Sin Nombre* (Fukunaga), *La Mision* (Bratt)

**\* Texts:** *Film History: An Introduction* (Thompson & Bordwell); *World Cinema: Critical Approaches* (Hill, Gibson, Dyer, Kaplan); Interview with Francisco Vargas (http://twitchfilm.net/interviews/2007/12/the-violininterview-with-francisco-vargas.php), NY Times articles (on Mexican Cinema and *Amores Perros*, respectively: http://www.nytimes.com/2004/06/27/movies/film-a-different-mexican-revolution.html?pagewanted=2; <http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9B03E1DA1E3DF936A35753C1A9669C8B63>); The Mexican Film Resource Page: [http://terpconnect.umd.edu/~dwilt/mfb.html](https://owa.sfusd.edu/OWA/redir.aspx?C=9ab4a59df4844668b46afb6cd8549368&URL=http%3a%2f%2fterpconnect.umd.edu%2f%7edwilt%2fmfb.html" \t "_blank)

**Student objectives:**

***Students will be able to:***

\* Identify key traits/characteristics of New Mexican Cinema.

\* Understand background histories/narratives of both the filmmakers and their subjects and use this prior knowledge to analyze and assess their films.

\* Recognize key geographical areas/regions and socio-political underpinnings of Mexico and how they relate to directors’ work.

\* Think, speak, and write critically about the works shown, focusing especially on the 3 “lenses”/readings of critical discourse in ethnographic film/film writing: Formal Reading, Ideological Reading, Psychoanalytical Reading (if enough films from a single director are shown, we can begin to talk about Auteur Theory, etc.)

\* Utilize their newfound knowledge of New Mexican Cinema to shoot, direct, and produce works of their own which bespeak/reflect elements/attributes of this cinema (i.e. non-linear narrative form; time-lapse photography for dramatic effect/compression of time; directing non-professional actors; shooting on-location; interweaving multiple narratives; incorporating symbolic use of landscape and objects, etc; blurring documentary and narrative forms; incorporating social-justice issues into narrative film, etc.).

\* Engage in student-mentor relationships with working professionals throughout Mexico. This will involve I-Chats/Skyping with individuals working in Mexican film (of whom director Alfonso Cancino and members of Oaxacan film collective, El Ojo de Agua, have agreed to participate, and hopefully others will as well.)

**Questions for professor (me) or students to ask filmmakers (via live interview, on-line chats, etc):**

\* Name, age, location (where born, raised, live currently)

\* List past projects and their formats/specs

\* How would you characterize the state of Mexican cinema?

\* To what extent are film schools (in Mexico City and elsewhere) setting the tone for Mexico’s film culture?

\* (How) is Hollywood/American mainstream cinema influencing Mexican directors/the film culture? How about American independent cinema?

\* Discuss the importance if place/location/setting in your films (or your favorite Mexican films). Do you see a nature/culture, country/city dichotomy developing?

\* What are some of the challenges of working as an independent director in Mexico today?

\* Comment on the representation of marginalized people (indigenous, campesinos, women, LGBT people, etc.) in contemporary Mexican cinema. Is film giving these individuals voice? Explain.

\* What advice do you have for young filmmakers-in-training in America today?

**Unit Scope and Sequence:**

**\* Week One:** **What is New Mexican Cinema?** Introduce the concept, era, regions, political climate(s), and major directors (Cuaron, Innaritu, Vargas, Eimbcke, Reygadas, Gonzalez-Rubio, among others). Utilize YouTube interviews and DVD-extras as primary sources, and readings from World Cinema text (and others—to be researched on-line) to help articulate the movement.

Also, use clips of how Mexico is represented/perceived (from Telenovelas, Cheech and Chong, and other American movies “about” Mexico—like *Nacho Libre*) to examine what New Mexican cinema isn’t.

**\* Week Two: Mexican Urban Realism.** Use Innaritu’s *Amorres Perros* and/or Eimbcke’s *Temporada de Patos (Duck Season)* as examples of genre-defying/defining films made by directors from the Instituto and working in/around Mexico City. Emphasis on technique and realism/social-justice issues.

**\* Week Three: Mexican Regionalism and La Tierra.** Use Gonzalez-Rubio’s *Alamar* (from Playa del Carmen, Yucatan) and/or Vargas’ *The Violin* (from the Sierra Norte/Ixtapaluca, Mexico) and/or Reygadas’ *Silent Light* (from the Mennonite farming communities in Southern Chihuaua) to discuss the importance of the land/elements in shaping local communities and the struggles/issues they undergo.

**\* Week Four: The Portrayal of Youth in Mexican Cinema.** Use Eimbcke’s *Duck Season/Lake Tahoe* and/or Cuaron’s *Y Tu Mama Tambien* to articulate a vision of youth/youth culture in Mexico (esp. in and around Mexico City). Discuss universal topics (coming of age, rites of passage) and more specific/regional issues (class distinctions, gender relations, generational gaps, etc.).

**\* Week Five: Indigenism and Women Filmmakers.** (This section is least worked-out thus far, but will rely heavily on week 4 of our NEH workshop—especially the ways by which Indigenous cultures are/have been utilizing new media to give voice to its communities. Or at least will use *La Misma Luna* as example of women in Mexican narrative cinema.

**\* Week Six: California and Mexican-American Cinema.** Use Fukunaga’s *Sin Nombre* and/or the Bratt brothers’ *La Mission* to frame an understanding of Mexican-American identity--and specifically to discuss Mexican-American topics such as immigration, assimilation, and biculturalism.

**Individual Lesson Plans: (Subject to change, and will eventually be aligned with California State Visual Arts and Media and Technology Content Standards):**

**Week One:**

\* Begin by situating Mexico on world map. Then pull in more detailed topographical country map and describe various states/regions.

\* Brainstorming activity: What comes to mind when students think about “Mexico”? How many of these quick associations are positive/negative? Fact/fiction? Use this opportunity to talk about cultural bias/discrimination/stereotypes, etc.

\* Show clip reel of scenes “from Mexico”/popular views of Mexico (from various Telenovelas, Cheech & Chong films, *Repo Man*, *Nacho Libre*, among others). Have students discuss representation of Mexico/Mexicans they’ve witnessed in the clip reel.

\* Read handout on National Cinemas and discuss. Annotate handout for next session.

\* No production assignment this week.

**Week Two:**

\***Day 1:** Provide context for *Amores Perros*. Screen film. Extra time should be used for questions, discussion.

\***Day 2:** Debrief from film. Read and discuss articles. Assign production work (choose one or more of the following): Shoot downtown; experiment with non-linear narrative or editing; create effective montage.

**Week Three:**

**\*Day 1:** Provide context for *Silent Light* and *Alamar*. Screen clip and film. Extra time should be used for discussions, questions.

**\*Day 2:** Debrief from films. Read and discuss articles (or in this case, DVD commentaries from Reygadas). Assign production work (choose one or more of the following): on-location shooting in nature or during magic hour; cast and direct non-professional actors; practice time-lapse photography and long takes.

**Week Four:**

\***Day 1:** Provide context for *Duck Season* and clips from *Y Tu Mama Tambien*. Screen clips and film. Extra time should be used for questions, discussion.

\***Day 2:** Debrief from films. Read and discuss articles (NY Times, etc.). Assign production work (choose one or more of the following): shoot and edit a process montage; short film as character study (of youth “types”); write short Coming-of-Age screenplay.

**Week Five:**

\***Day 1:** Provide context for *La Misma Luna* (and perhaps Gaby`s film about Women and Media). Screen clips and films. Extra time should be used for questions, discussion.

\***Day 2:** Debrief from films. Read excerpts from Gaby`s article on cinema law and article on representations of indigenous, and then discuss. Assign production work: students should explore the idea of “marginalization and identity”. Set up interviews and collect footage for upcoming long-term documentary project.

**Week Six:**

\***Day 1:** Provide context for either *Sin Nombre* or *La Mision*. Screen clips or film. Listen to KQED Forum podcast with Bratt brothers regarding their film. Extra time should be used for questions, discussion.

\***Day 2:** Debrief from film(s). Set aside time to discuss biculturalism in SF (especially Chicano issues in the Mission). Assign production work: Create a place film in or about the Mission District (focus on identity issues, food, murals, political voice, etc.).

**Final Written Assignment** (topic to be determined—will most likely be about the idea of “National Cinema” and the problems in defining as such).