Moving Image 1

An Introduction to Film Culture

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Cover image: The cinema aboard the SS Oriana, from a promotional brochure (1960)

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Introduction

Cinema is arguably the most important and influential cultural phenomenon of the last 120 years. It is not just entertainment but a reflection on the myriad diverse wonders of storytelling, social observation and comment in a world that has been transformed by a swathe of new technologies in the last century and beyond.

For anyone who is curious and passionate about cinema in all its forms, this course provides a route map to explore the endless range and influences that film has brought to bear as a truly global art form. In many ways we are all naturally students of film studies because we all have opinions about what is good and bad in film. We know what we like and don't like, and why, and we have at least some awareness of cinematic conventions as a result of film's constant and ubiquitous presence in our daily lives.

This course is an introduction to the analysis and understanding of film as a creative means of communication. Through your viewing and research, you'll engage with the primary conventions of film-making: montage, mise-en-scène, sound, framing, editing, the evolution of film language, narrative structure, cinematography, cinematic styles and ideology. You'll look at a wide variety of national cinemas and movements covering a century of film history and consider the principal aesthetic, cultural and institutional factors that spawned them. The course will help you both to understand why particular film movements have been seen as influential and to analyse film as a cultural phenomenon.

What is film culture?

Film culture is a part of the wider subject of film studies. By studying the course reader you'll gain an understanding of the main conventions within film studies; these include genre, the roles of the producer and the director, scripting, the process of filming itself including the language of film, and the roles of all the different departments such as camera, sound, design and special effects, post-production and distribution. This more 'technical' side of things will help to inform your thinking on film culture because film culture is both the subjective personal experience of our relationship with the moving image and a study of cinema as a reflection of social and cultural values and influences through time. And in order to be able to talk and write about these two strands of film culture, we need a basic grounding in film language and the conventions of film.

Film-making is a craft and its language has evolved differently in different countries but popular cinema as we know it began towards the end of the nineteenth century when the Lumière brothers in Paris built on the foundations of the moving image first developed by Eadweard Muybridge in 1878. Any student of film or media studies needs to have a firm grounding in film culture in order to better equip themselves as film-makers and cineastes in their own right. This course challenges you to immerse yourself in cinema in all its forms and to develop your own voice by understanding the influences of others.

Every student on this course will have different interests and we've tried to make it possible for you to pursue yours. The course includes elements that enable you to explore the cinema of your national and ethnic roots within the wider context of world cinema, for example. And you'll get the opportunity to study an aspect of film culture of your own choice in some detail in the final assignment.

Course aims and outcomes

Moving Image 1: An Introduction to Film Culture aims to:
- develop your awareness of a range of global cinematic genres and the social and political context of cinema
- encourage you to think critically about film auteurs and genres and articulate your own perspective on them
- develop research methodologies and distil good practice in the way you present and organise your research and resources
- introduce you to cinema trends and themes in relation to your own interests, and encourage you to write critically on film culture.

On successful completion of the course you'll be able to:
- describe a range of cinematic genres, from the start of cinema to the present day, and demonstrate knowledge of historical and political perspective, themes and issues in cinema movements globally
- demonstrate knowledge of current film culture trends and debates and of at least one film auteur or culture/genre that is new to you
- conduct directed and self-directed research and demonstrate clear organisation of your research and learning resources
- reflect on current trends and themes in relation to your own interests and present coherently written points of view on a range of subjects within film culture.

Your tutor will be looking for evidence that you're beginning to demonstrate these outcomes in your work. It's a good idea to apply these to your progress at the end of each part of the course and reflect in your learning log on whether or not you feel you're beginning to develop these skills.

Your tutor

Your tutor will be your main point of contact and support during this course. Before you start work make sure that you're clear about your tuition arrangements. The OCA tuition system is explained in some detail in your Student Handbook.

If you haven't already done so, please write a paragraph or two about your experience to date. Add background information about anything that you think may be relevant for your tutor to know about you (your profile) – for example, your current knowledge, your reasons for exploring this subject and what you expect to achieve from taking the course.

Email or post your profile to your tutor as soon as possible. This will help them understand how best to support you during the course. Your tutor's reply will include a suggested deadline for completion of your first assignment. These course materials are intended to be used flexibly so this deadline isn't set in stone – but please keep your tutor informed about your progress.

Your tutor will also make arrangements with you for dealing with queries and reviewing progress. This will usually be by email or phone. Please note that tutors can only deal with occasional emails between assignments.

Only work done during the course should be sent to your tutor for review or submitted for assessment.

Do note that you're encouraged to reflect carefully on all tutor feedback and, if appropriate, to go back to the assignment you submitted and make adjustments to it based on your tutor's comments. If you decide to submit your work for formal assessment, making such adjustments demonstrates responsiveness and learning and will help improve your mark. If you're unclear about anything your tutor has written, contact them for clarification.

Course support

Your tutor is supported by the course support advisors, who can answer questions relating to course documentation or OCA processes in between assignments or feedback points. You can email them here: coursesupport@oca.ac.uk.

Formal assessment

Read the section on assessment in your Student Handbook at an early stage in the course. See also the study guide on assessment and getting qualified for detailed information about assessment and accreditation. You'll find this on the OCA student website.

For assessment you'll need to submit all of the work you have done on the course:
- Assignments One to Five
- your tutor feedback forms
- Your learning log (submitted on your blog)

Assignment One is a diagnostic assignment and won't be formally assessed, but the assessors will want to see it to help them gauge your progress through the course.

Assessment criteria

The assessment criteria listed below are central to the assessment process for this course, so if you're going to have your work assessed to gain formal credits, please make sure you take note of these criteria and consider how each of the assignments you complete demonstrates evidence of each criterion. On completion of each assignment, and before you send your assignment to your tutor, test yourself against the criteria; in other words, do a self-assessment and see how you think you would do. Note down your findings for each assignment you've completed in your learning log, noting all your perceived strengths and weaknesses, taking into account the criteria every step of the way. This will be helpful for your tutor to see, as well as helping you prepare for assessment.

- **Demonstration of technical and visual skills** – materials, techniques, observational skills, visual awareness, design and compositional skill.
- **Quality of outcome** – content, application of knowledge, presentation of work in a coherent manner, discernment, conceptualisation of thoughts, communication of ideas.
- **Demonstration of creativity** – experimentation, invention, development of a personal voice.
- **Context** – reflection, research, critical thinking.

The criteria have different weights which are used to determine your overall assessment mark. Details of the current weightings can be found in the 'Resource' section of the student website:

Your learning log

Whether you call it a journal, logbook, workbook, notebook or something similar, they are essentially the same thing. The learning log is something you create to record and support your learning and is an integral element of study with the OCA.

Your learning log is where you record your experiences, thoughts, feelings, and reflections on your learning activities. These activities can include courses you went on, exhibitions visited, books read, discussions had, internet sites browsed, TV programmes watched etc. As well as documenting what you've been doing whilst studying this course unit, it's important to add your personal comments, to reflect critically on the work of others as well as your own. You can say what you think about the material you have encountered and how it has helped you with your studies.

Using an online blog

It is a requirement to use an online blog in addition to (or instead of) physical logbooks/notebooks/folders.

A blog is a great way to consolidate and present your course work, as well as providing your tutor and peers with a live view of your learning and reflections. Blogs can be sectioned off into various categories and can make your recorded learning more navigable to these external viewers.

Setting up a blog can be done for free through websites such as Blogger, Tumblr or Wordpress. If this is your first course unit with the OCA, see the study guide Keeping an Online Learning Log on the OCA student website, located in the 'Resources' section. There is also a OCA wordpress blog template in the same section of the OCA student website.

It's also strongly recommended that you keep a separate blog for each of the course units you study, just as you would your coursework, sketchbooks, notebooks and learning logs. However if you insist on keeping the same blog for each course unit, you must separate all entries/posts from one another in order to clearly distinguish what learning was undertaken for a given course unit, otherwise your work could be at risk of being viewed as self plagiarism.

Studying with OCA

If you haven't already done so, now is a good time to work through the free introductory course 'An Introduction to Studying in HE'. This is available on the OCA student website.

Don't be tempted to skip this introductory course as it contains valuable advice on study skills (e.g. reading, note-taking), research methods and academic conventions which will stand you in good stead throughout your studies.

The OCA website will be a key resource for you during your studies with OCA, so take some time to familiarise yourself with it. Log onto the OCA student website and find the video guide to using the website. Watch the video and take some notes.

Remember, there are other students following this course, so you are not on your own. Use the online forums to reflect on your findings and discuss issues with other students.

Course content

This Level 1 course represents 400 hours of learning time. Allow around 20% of this time for reflection and keeping your learning log/blog. The course should take about a year to complete if you spend around 8 hours each week on it. If this is your first course with OCA, you can learn more about studying with OCA by reading your Student Handbook. As with all OCA courses, these course materials are intended to be used flexibly but keep your tutor fully informed about your progress. You'll need to allow extra time if you decide to have your work formally assessed.

This course is as much about a personal journey into film culture as a self-guided tour. You'll be expected to research both the familiar and the unfamiliar. The course is in five parts, each built around a particular theme. Each part of the course requires around 80 hours of study and in each part you'll tackle a particular assignment through a series of exercises and projects. It is important that you complete all of the tasks set out in each part of the course as they build to give you important skills, experience and a knowledge base that will inform your assignment work.

The five parts cover most of the major film genres but it's simply not possible to explore each and every genre or sub-genre within the scope of this course. You'll get the opportunity to research an area not covered in the course in the final assignment.

Part one: Heroes and villains

The battle between good and evil is a bedrock of cinema. The exercises will ask you to look analytically at films and to reflect upon the four disciplines of director, cinematographer, editor and composer. Your first assignment will look at this theme within the context of cinematic convention and cultural differences in the portrayal of good and evil and the significance of the contributions of the four disciplines.

Part two: Love and lust

Arguably, the majority of films made are, to some extent at least, about love. A series of exercises in genres from the French New Wave to horror will form the basis of an assignment which explores the cultural sensibilities brought to bear on the telling of a love story, the culture of stardom and celebrity, and how it crosses borders and cinematic boundaries.

Part three: Fact or fiction? Truth or lies?

Seeking after a truth has been the goal of many great film-makers. In Part Three you'll analyse the development of propaganda as both documentary and fiction. You'll study the work of several key film-makers and your assignment will be to analyse the cinematic language of their work, with particular emphasis on cinematography and editing as a way to exploit and inform public opinion.

Part four: Rites of passage

This theme is used across many cinematic genres. The assignment will ask you to contrast and compare different cinematic outcomes – from science fiction to historical biopic – with reference to their cultural significance. You'll critique and analyse how technology is now enabling directors to tell stories in new ways, building on the skills of their predecessors.

Part five: The suspension of disbelief

Storytelling is the fundamental act of film-making. In this, your final assignment, you'll be required to review and expand upon cinematic convention through researching a film-maker, national cinematic movement or genre of your own choice. The assignment will ask you to critique and analyse how film language has changed and evolved with changing social mores and the globalisation of culture

These themes and the film genres associated with them are the building blocks to understanding many of the key principles of film culture. The written assignments address a broad range of themes:
* cultural perspective
* style and narrative form
* film language
* cinematic movements
* documentary
* women in cinema
* the idealisation of men and women
* representation of facts – re-writing history
* the voice of the auteur
* film as escapism.

You should start by skimming through the course as a whole to get an overview of what's covered, then read each part thoroughly before you start work, noting down the films and resources you'll need to access so that you have these to hand when you start work. For example, for your work on Part One, you'll need to access five films:

Seven Samurai (Akira Kurosawa, Japan, 1954)

Yojimbo (Akira Kurosawa, Japan, 1961)

The Magnificent Seven (John Sturges, US, 1960)

A Fistful of Dollars (Sergio Leone, Italy, 1964)

Last Man Standing (Walter Hill, US, 1996)

The Kurosawa films are provided as part of your course materials.

Most of the research sources referred to directly in the course guide are online but you should also explore a range of books and periodicals, starting with the titles listed at the end of this course guide.

We've also put several important articles for this course on the student website; go to the website when you see the reading icon above.

Throughout the course you'll have many opportunities for reflection and to review previous exercises with reference to each new assignment. Although each assignment is built around a theme, there is considerable cross-over between themes and genres generally. You'll be expected to refer to earlier exercises as part of your developing analysis and study.

Reading and viewing

You should start with the course reader included with the course, *Film Studies: The Basics* by Amy Villarejo. Read 'Chapter 1: Introduction to film studies' and 'Chapter 2: The language of film' before starting your first assignment. Jill Nelmes' ongoing An Introduction to Film Studies is also a highly recommended text that you should make regular and detailed use of. There are other introductions to Film Studies that cover similar ground and which are worth referring to. You'll find a list of suggested further reading, including useful journals and websites, throughout and at the end of this unit guide and on the OCA student website, but you should also independently seek out further research material from what is a vast and varied literary genre. Whatever research and reading you do, be aware that not all writing about film is necessarily useful, certainly not when it comes to helping you to develop your critical skills and ability to write rigorous, informed and thoughtful essays. The Researching and approaching film writing section that follows examines the various types of film writing that are in circulation and thinks about the notion of the 'film critic', and will give you more of an idea of what to look for when conducting independent research.

You'll be watching a lot of films. Apart from your local multiplex, independent cinemas are the main places to go to see foreign language and art house movies.

Mostly, however, you'll be watching films on DVD, Blu-ray or streamed from the internet. While a growing number of them are hidden behind paywalls, it's easier than ever to access a broad range of contemporary and historical films. Finding ways to do this will be as important as the academic research that you'll conduct as part of *An Introduction to Film Culture*.

Amazon is a good source for rare DVDs and Blu-rays. To rent classic and foreign language films, it's worth signing up to Cinema Paradiso at Link 1[1]. There are also a number of video streaming services worth exploring. Take a look at Curzon Home Cinema, BFI player, Amazon Instant Video, Netflix and MUBI. BBC's iPlayer often has many worthwhile films, and Sky Movies has a fairly large catalogue of 'mainstream' releases and 'classics'. The Apple iTunes store also has a growing collection of films.

The Library of Congress website Link 2 is an invaluable resource and can be viewed free online. It's a good place to look at early films and to analyse the development of film language, including camerawork, image size, framing, editing, special effects and performance. Also, the library gives insight into the use of film as entertainment and as record.

The National Film Board of Canada has supported the production of films for many years, making everything from feature films, documentaries and animated shorts to more experimental and politicised fare. The NFBC is at Link 3 and an app can be downloaded for iPhone and iPad.

Researching and approaching film writing

While the ever-expanding reach of the internet means that the volume of film-based writing in circulation seems to have skyrocketed in recent years, it's often said that film criticism is in a terminal state of decline. As the print industry continues to adapt to a digital climate where free content is the rule rather than the exception, the 'film critic', so some claim, becomes an ever-more endangered species. As Mattias Frey notes,

judging by the many journalistic articles, regular symposia and conferences, and the increasing scholarly output on the subject- which bemoan a 'crisis of criticism' or mourn the 'death of the critic'- it might seem safe to claim that the aims, status, and institution of arts and culture criticism in general, and film criticism in particular, are, indeed, facing possible extinction.

(p.2, Film Criticism in the Digital Age)

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1   (You'll find a list of links at the end of this course guide. They are listed separately like this for ease of updating. You can also find them on the student site: www.oca-student.com/resource-type/course-specific-resources/ph4ifccourse-links)

There's certainly a case to be argued that film criticism is not the cultural force that it once was. The influence that writers for Cahiers du Cinema wielded with their popularisation of les politique des Auteurs, or the 'auteur theory', for example, doesn't seem to have any obvious equivalent in modern film criticism. Indeed, rather than being motivated by political, ideological or more 'weighty' intellectual or artistic concerns, lots of contemporary film writing actually seems to exist largely to help readers decide whether or not a particular film is worthy of their attention.

Nevertheless, film writing makes up a vast and varied universe, and is certainly not a single, monolithic 'thing'. While those practicing within a particular branch of film writing will understandably lament its apparent decline, countless others have emerged in recent years and are positively flourishing. Regardless of how they might be categorised or 'valued', a seemingly endless range of film websites, resources and publications circulate, adding as much to film culture as the films that prompt them, with many passionately, perceptively and intelligently discussing the merits of films of an almost unimaginably wide variety. Is 'film criticism', however we might define it, really on the ropes? Or is it actually in rude health, reaching more people and having a greater influence than ever before? Has it perhaps just become… something else?

While it might appear to be a fairly self-evident issue, the question of what a film critic actually even is has been a source of much discussion. As Mattias Frey notes,

[f]or centuries the purpose of criticism has been a subject of debate. […] [S]uffice to say that these purposes have included education or refining the taste of the audience; personal or artistic expression on the side of the critic; creating a dialogue with an audience or enlivening a public sphere; describing, deciphering, demystifying, contextualizing, or categorizing the work or its relationship to society; or simply judging the aesthetic or entertainment value of the examined cultural product.

(p. 3, Film Criticism in the Digital Age, edited by Mattias Frey, and Cecilia Sayad, Rutgers University Press, 2015)

If you were to visit pretty much any current film culture-based website or flick through any contemporary film publication, you'd doubtless come across writing that did some of the above in one form or another, whatever level it might pitch itself at: entertainment, gossip, detailed scholarly analysis, theory; the high-minded and 'serious', or the 'populist'. As certain films are pitched to particular audiences, so particular publications, online or off, are pitched at certain readers. Nevertheless, Dana Polan definitely doesn't see all film writing as being equal:

Professional criticism may be elitist but the democratization that the internet supposedly offers can end up as little more than narcissistic parading of each and every person's opinion as worthy of attention.

('The Futures-Market for Film Criticism', 2016)

A little cynical perhaps, but it's certainly the case that there's a dense jungle of opinion out there, not all of it necessarily particularly useful in helping you develop the skills to critically assess film culture and produce observant, informed, plausible and engaging academic essays. So what will? As indicated earlier, Jill Nelmes' ongoing An Introduction to Film Studies is a really important and useful starting point. Alongside David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson's

landmark Film Art, which reached its tenth edition in 2012, it's a text that will give you a sense of some of the main theories and discussion points in Film Studies and provide you with key resources that will help the development of your analytical skills. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith's encyclopaedic The Oxford History of World Cinema (1997) is getting on a bit now, but still offers an invaluable critical overview of the development of cinema across the world. There are plenty more besides: Film Studies now has a fairly long history as an academic discipline and there are countless texts that will furnish you with the tools to pick apart and understand film culture in ways that will enhance your ability to produce consistently strong assignments. Academic texts, as challenging as they can be, come into being via rigorous 'gatekeeping' processes that place great stock in 'the development of knowledge' and should be at the centre of your independent research. Whenever you're reading a worthwhile book or journal article, note any mentions it makes to other sources, and always have a flick through its bibliography: you'll invariably come across lots of material that you'll find equally useful.

By contrast, popular journalism and review sites that are largely focused on 'judging the aesthetic or entertainment value of the examined cultural product', as Mattias Frey puts it, exist in a slightly different context and work as 'consumer guides' that help viewers decide which films are worth their time and money. While they frequently offer thoughtful, stimulating and observant analysis, it's important to be aware that they, very broadly speaking, also have a role in the marketing and promotion of the films that they discuss. They also construct and maintain systems of taste and perform an ideological function, stressing films' value as artworks and 'cultural products', minimising the sense that they're also 'commodities' produced on an industrial scale. Likewise, studio marketing materials, star autobiographies, fan blogs, and industry magazines will give you a certain set of perspectives on films and film culture, ones that are important to keep an eye on and refer to where appropriate. But they, by definition, are partisan in nature, and it's important that your 'consumption' of them is as critically engaged as your viewing of the films you're directed to as part of An Introduction to Film Culture.

'Professional criticism' of the sort that you can, at least for now, expect to see in the likes of Sight and Sound magazine and broadsheet newspapers offers something else, something that sits partway between the 'popular' and the scholarly. While such publications can offer excellent and 'serious' analysis, often with reference to film theory and academic ideas, they still also function as 'guides' that express their authors' sense of whether a film is worth a reader's interest. Again, it's essential that you take a critical, questioning approach to them and use them in tandem with more obviously 'scholarly' sources.

Ultimately, An Introduction to Film Culture requires you to develop your independent research skills and be able to assess the differences between the many types of film writing that are out there. Popular film reviews and the responses they prompt from audiences are important and useful because they reflect a simply vital part of film culture: whether the films they write about have any value as entertainment. 'Simple' pleasure is a huge reason why lots of audiences watch films in the first place, of course, and so has to be taken very seriously. Popular film review websites and publications are extremely valuable resources in this regard but need to be evaluated and used in an appropriately 'scholarly' manner. But ultimately your main focus should be on researching material that will help you to become more accomplished at, as Mattias Frey notes, 'deciphering, demystifying, contextualizing, or categorizing the work or its relationship to society' and being able to bring a scholarly, rigorous and critical mindset to film culture.

To get you started

As well as the examples mentioned above, there are a few things you can do and keep in mind to generate some momentum with your research:

- OCA students are now able to access the University of the Creative Arts' online library, meaning that you can now view a huge range of academic texts that are focused on film and film culture. Rather than using Google as your initial means of finding out more about a particular area of film culture, use the UCA library.
- The British Film Institute (BFI) library is an excellent resource for literature and films. This is a reference library only- you can't take material out. If you can, visit the library on the South Bank in London. You can select books for research prior to visiting at Link 4. Alternatively, use the resources of your local library to access books through the inter-library lending scheme.
- Consider registering with jstor (Link 5), part of the University of California Press, which will give you access to Film Quarterly, an august and serious academic journal with review, discourse and polemic.

Referencing your reading

Whenever you read or see something that you might want to refer to in your projects and assignments, get into the habit of taking down the full reference to the book, article, website, film or image straight away. You must fully reference any other work that you draw on if you plan to go for formal assessment. To do this you should use the Harvard system of referencing – there is a guide to using the Harvard system on the OCA student website. Getting down the full reference at the time will save you the frustration of having to hunt for the details of a half-remembered reference long after the event and ensure that you don't inadvertently plagiarise someone else's work.

You're now ready to start reading and preparing for Part One.

Part one
Heroes and villains 're-made'

Edward G Robinson (1893-1973) as Rico Bandello in the film *Little Caesar,* 1931

Use the grid below to keep track of your progress throughout Part One.

Exercise	Page	Complete
0.1	22	
1.1	24	
1.2	29	
1.3	31	
1.4	32	
1.5	34	
Research Point		
1	21	
2	28	

Introduction

At one level, cinema is a universal art form, transcending its locality. At another level, it depends for its success on being grounded in a specific culture and drawing on its resources. Hollywood westerns, samurai films of Japan, martial arts films of Hong Kong and the romantic musicals of India all illustrate this.

(Gokulsing and Dissanayake, 1998, p.91)

Cinema has many genres and you'll be examining a number of these in detail through the various exercises and assignments you'll be undertaking on this course. In Part One the overarching theme is one of the most important in cinema, 'heroes and villains'. The 're-made' in the title refers to a very common habit amongst film-makers from all over the world, which is to re-make, re-version and re-interpret the films of others. Imitation is said to be the sincerest form of flattery and artists have been finding their inspiration in the work of others for millennia. Renaissance painters paid tribute to classical Greek and Roman art, for example. And at the dawn of the age of photography in 1865 Édouard Manet caused a stir in Parisian cultural circles with his *Olympia,* inspired by Titian's *Venus of Urbino,* painted 350 years earlier. Log on to Bridgeman Education via the student website to see Manet's re-interpretation of Titian's Venus.

Titian, *Venus of Urbino,* 1538 (oil on canvas)

Throughout all fields of artistic endeavour – painting, sculpture, music and literature – the artist finds inspiration in the work of others. In a very few cases an artist's genius, their uniqueness and individuality, becomes a fundamental part of art history and culture. These great masters influence, shape and colour the work of their contemporaries and the generations of students who follow. An idea, a narrative, an image may be repeatedly re-interpreted by different artists and this has its own artistic value and merit. Not all art is imitative but we can see the influences and memory of others within much great art. It is a fundamental truth of creativity. And film-makers are no different.

Within the context of the study of film culture this idea is very interesting because it allows us to look at how the same story is treated:
• culturally – with regard to where and who was directing it
• stylistically – with regard to when it was made and the creative talent behind it
• critically – with regard to its aesthetic, theme and genre.

The battle between good and evil is a bedrock of cinema and is the focus of Projects 2 to 5. In these projects you'll look analytically at films that have been inspired and re-made by other directors from two works by the Japanese director Akira Kurosawa. You'll reflect upon the roles of the four key cinematic disciplines – the director, the cinematographer or director of photography (DoP), the editor and the composer – both in Kurosawa's films and in the 're-makes.' Your first assignment will bring together your thoughts and responses to watching these films and ask you to reflect upon the theme of 'heroes and villains' within the context of cinematic convention and cultural differences in the portrayal of good and evil. You'll also reflect upon the contributions of the four disciplines listed above.

Tip
As you work through each project ask yourself how one genre influences and informs another; how cinema from one part of the world has been embraced in another; and how the cultural and historical mores of one country's cinema are reflected and re-worked in another. You should read through the whole of Part One, including the first assignment brief, before beginning Project 1. When you reach the end of Part One, re-visit all the work you've done during this part of the course because all the exercises coalesce in the first assignment.

Research point 1

In this part of the course you'll watch a film of your choice and five films selected for you, which you may or may not be familiar with: *Seven Samurai, The Magnificent Seven, Yojimbo, A Fistful of Dollars, Last Man Standing*. The two films by Kurosawa (*Seven Samurai* and *Yojimbo*) are included in the DVD collection you've received as part of the course.

Once you've watched the films, read some contemporary criticisms. A good starting point and invaluable reference as well as source of inspiration is Mark Cousins' *The Story of Film* (see the reading list at the end of this course guide for full details). Here you can learn about the significance of the structure, tone, style and ambitions of the films in question.

In your learning log note down the full bibliographic details of any useful source material you find; remember you may need to reference these in a bibliography so it's advisable to note down all the relevant information (title, author, year and place of publication, publisher, page number(s)) immediately so that you don't have to go back and look for it later. Also note down any quotes that you find interesting and where you found them, even if it's from an online quote website.

Note the differences and similarities in your initial reactions to the films and those of scholars and critics. What do you think about the views expressed? Are you in agreement? Or do you have an opposing point of view?

Read about the directors, their cinematic influences and the work of the cinematographers, editors and composers of the films. Express an opinion about their work. Feel free to refer to any of their other films that you're familiar with. In this first part of the course, write in a subjective as well as an objective way about your responses to what you see and what the exercises are asking you to do.

Exercise 0.1

Throughout this course you'll read and use a number of terms that are a fundamental part of the lexicon of film language. As a short exercise before you start, write down what you understand by the following terms:

- auteur
- cinematographer/director of photography or DoP
- cutting room
- cross-cutting
- the inter-cut
- deep focus
- edit suite
- Foley
- mise-en-scène
- montage
- production designer
- pre-production,
- principal photography
- post-production.

Read Chapter 2: The language of film in your course reader, *Film Studies: The Basics* by Amy Villarejo, and see how well you've done.

As you read around the subject, you'll notice that people tend to use the terms cinematographer and director of photography (DoP) in slightly different ways. A common name for the DoP is lighting cameraman but a DoP may operate the camera as well as light the scene; some DoPs are known for this and are therefore called cinematographers. For some, though, the definition of a cinematographer means just the role of lighting cameraman. For the purposes of this course, we've used the term DoP to encompass both roles. In your reading, try to be aware of the way in which the author applies these terms.

You'll come back to the heroes and villains theme later. Your first project is simply to watch a movie and reflect upon it.

Project 1 The act of watching

PJ Crook, *Cinema,* 1995

The culture of film is, on the one hand, personal. It is part of our lives through the act of watching. But it is also detached from us: it is a reflection of time, place and experience. Film culture is intrinsic to the more familiar subject area of film studies. The history of film, a medium that has existed for 120 years or more, is the foundation for a study of film culture. So where is our starting point? It might seem obvious, to 'begin at the beginning.' The act of watching is many things: subjective, detached, serendipitous, calculated, informed and uninformed. What is important as a student of film culture is to engage in the act of being the audience. And so your starting point is simply to watch a film and respond to it.

Tip
You should make notes whilst watching the films on this course – you can always pause whilst viewing to write anything down. Store these notes in your learning log.

When pausing a film, make a note of the lapsed time and the scene so you can easily find it again later.

If you've been planning to see a particular film, or have one waiting on your hard drive or on a rental DVD sitting by the TV, then watch it. At this stage the film doesn't have to conform to the 'heroes and villains' theme. It can really be about anything. But if you have no particular film in mind, choose a film that has Part One's theme at its heart.

Typically the DoP is head of the camera department which includes the camera operator, the focus puller who is responsible for setting the focus on the lens, and the clapper-loader who is responsible for loading the camera's magazines with film and managing the film once it has been shot. The script supervisor or continuity person – traditionally a female role – is also considered a member of the camera department. You'll find a good description of the role of the script supervisor – and other roles – at Link 1. The clapper loader also operates the clapper board which is used to enable the editor to synchronise (sync) the sound with the film. However, as mentioned earlier, many DoPs are also camera operators and some directors operate the camera on their films. Today, even with films being shot in high definition (HD) using digital technology, the jobs of DoP, camera operator, focus-puller and clapper loader are still retained.

Reading Film

We mightn't necessarily be particularly conscious of it each time we shuffle towards our seat at the local multiplex or cue up an evening's viewing at home, but watching a film, even the most apparently 'undemanding' of fare, requires a certain amount of 'work' on the part of the viewer. Even if the viewing of a film is motivated purely by 'pleasure', as audiences we still have to engage in, as Allan Rowe puts it, 'an active process of making sense of what we are experiencing' (p.89, An Introduction to Film Studies, 1996, ed. Jill Nelmes). The word 'active' is an important one to keep in mind here. Film-viewing can often be stereotyped as a rather 'passive' cultural practice, but audiences are always rather more engaged than this, and interpreting- or 'reading'- what we're presented with is an essential precondition to getting any sort of pleasure from a film.

Audiences are perhaps also rather more savvy than can be assumed, and the long-standing and enormous popularity of film as a medium means that even somebody with just a passing interest in cinema will still be reasonably adept at reading the various codes, cues and conventions that unfold before them. When a film cuts between two characters talking on a phone, for instance, even a relatively inexperienced viewer of film will likely have few difficulties understanding that they're talking to one another at the same time but in different places. If the camera then slowly zooms in on one of them, we'll likely read this as a cue that something of dramatic or psychological importance is taking place. Likewise, if the action slowly fades to a black screen before dissolving into the next scene, viewers will typically take this as a cue that a period of time has passed between the events that we're watching. This is the language of film and, like all languages, we tend to be less conscious of it once we've attained a certain fluency. As Robert Edgar-Hunt et al note,

When we are watching a movie in the cinema or at home we seldom have any difficulty understanding this language. Even though most films are a mosaic of fractured images and fragmented narratives, we have little problem piecing them together into something complete, pleasing and meaningful (so much so that we seldom experience them as fractured or fragmented in the first place). We are capable of following the most labyrinthine plots, feeling genuine emotion for the most improbable characters, and believing that their worlds continue to exist even after the film has ended. We don't know how we do it (or that we are doing anything at all) but we are.

(p.9, The Language of Film, Edgar-Hunt, Marland, Rawle)

We should also bear in mind that audiences are always more diverse and complex than might be assumed, and there is no guarantee that they'll read the cues that filmmakers present them with in uniform ways. The cultural theorist John Tomlinson highlights an interesting example of this, recounting the tale of researcher Irene Penacchioni, who accidentally stumbled into an isolated region of Brazil and joined a group of villagers watching a Chaplin film. As Tomlinson quotes her,

And what do we see on the screen? Charlie Chaplin's bread dance from the Gold Rush. So all of us in the square are laughing at the same time about the same things.

(Irene Penacchioni in John Tomlinson, p52, Cultural Imperialism)

Penanchioni presents this as a heart-warming example of a moment of 'universal humanity' between a group of people with very different backgrounds and experiences of the world. Tomlinson, however, doesn't agree:

How does the European sociologist, with her stock of cultural referents (Chaplin- 'the little man'- pathos-as-comedy- the classic silent movie) know that she laughs 'about the same things' as the tall peasant from the tropical swampland? Isn't all she can confidently say that they both see the image and laugh?

(p52, Cultural Imperialism)

By extension, while filmmakers might intend us to read a film or a particular scene in a certain way, this is ultimately something that they can only have limited control over, and what a viewer brings to a film- their background, beliefs, accumulated experiences, etc- is ultimately as significant to their reading of it as what its makers have purposely included in it. Whatever Stanley Kubrick intended his 1980 film *The Shining* to mean, for example, it hasn't stopped hordes of film obsessives rushing to offer their readings of it, and the film has become almost as famous for the outlandish interpretations it has prompted. Rodney Ascher was so fascinated by The Shining's capacity to do this that he made *Room 237* (2012), a documentary that is solely focused on exploring the readings of various scholars and über fans. Bill Blakemore suggests that the film is about the slaughter of Native Americans, while Jay Weidner insists that *The Shining* is an elaborate confession by Kubrick for his involvement in the filming of the Apollo moon landings, which, so he claims, were far too technically complex to have actually been filmed on the lunar surface. While these readings perhaps might seem too outré and conspiratorial to be useful as meaningful ways to understand the film, we should in no way dismiss them as being 'incorrect'. Rather, they stand as examples of how the same film can be given over to all kinds of readings. Just because a filmmaker says that a film they made was or wasn't 'about' a particular thing doesn't immediately render other readings invalid, and the filmmaker's reading is just one interpretation among many. Although specifically talking about photography, Terry Barrett makes a point that applies equally to film, i.e., when a filmmaker

does offer particular interpretations of specific [films] or general interpretations that apply to his or her work, that interpretation becomes one among many possible or actual interpretations… We should take an artist's interpretation as an argument and evaluate it on the same grounds as we do other interpretations that are offered. We should not consider an interpretation more privileged because it comes from the artist.

(p.65, Criticizing Photographs)

Put slightly differently, a filmmaker can never 'own' what a film they've made means. Films, like all art, media and culture, are much too complex to ever be reduced to single interpretations, even when they come from someone as apparently authoritative as their maker.

Some films, such as Derek Jarman's Blue (1993), which consists of a single, unchanging blue screen, seem to resist any sort of obvious reading. Others, such as Walter Hill's 1981 Southern Comfort, which tells the story of a nightmarish trip into the American swamps by a group of National Guardsmen, have been read as allegories that invite audiences to make connections between what they are watching and events that have taken place off-screen in the 'real world'. The Hungarian film White God (Kornél Mundruczó, 2014), a technically dazzling story of a

canine uprising, appears to ask the viewer to see rather more than dogs escaping captivity. But what the viewer actually sees, of course, is very much contingent on what they bring to the film. Beyond individual films, lots of movies have been read collectively as expressions of wider social and cultural issues and anxieties. Joseph Sartelle's essay 'Dreams and Nightmares in the Hollywood Blockbuster', which can be found in *The Oxford History of World Cinema*, argues that a number of Hollywood action films in the late 1980s and early 1990s, such as *Die Hard* (John McTiernan, 1988) and *Falling Down* (Joel Schumacher, 1993), had a tendency to depict their white male protagonists as 'victims':

The white male paranoia movies expressed the white male's sense of resentment and anger in reaction to a perceived loss of privilege; they told us that the normative American white male felt like a victim even if the rest of society told him he was the oppressor.

(p. 523)

Other Hollywood blockbusters have also been subject to interesting readings. In a scene from Rory Kelly's *Sleep With Me* (1994), a cameoing Quentin Tarantino offers a comical dissection of the Tom Cruise vehicle *Top Gun* (Tony Scott, 1986), interpreting the film as an elaborate metaphor for repressed gay desire. In the early 2000s, a number of American horror films seemed to be preoccupied with the perceived dangers of going abroad: *Hostel* (Eli Roth, 2005) and John Stockwell's 2006 *Paradise Lost,* aka Turistas, both point to an America that seemed to be anxious about setting foot on foreign soil in the years following 9/11. While these films function as entertaining, money-making blockbusters, such readings underline how film culture is as much about what audiences 'do' with the films they watch as the films themselves.

Whatever the aforementioned films' makers might have intended them to mean is one thing- and what they might think of the various ways that they've been interpreted is another- but these are issues to consider as you work through *An Introduction to Film Culture*. The 'dominant' or 'preferred' meaning of a film, i.e., how the filmmakers intended the film to be read, is something to always keep in mind, but how else might a film you've watched be read and contextualised? Is there something to be said about the genre that it might fit into? Can the film be explored in relation to its director or star's other films? Might it be used as a springboard to discuss a particular aspect of culture or society? Are there alternative ways of reading and understanding it? And what might be said about the ideological position of a particular film? Might it reinforce or challenge the status quo? Both?

Ultimately, there are different ways of looking at and thinking about films, and it's important to keep this in mind whenever you're viewing anything that's highlighted in *An Introduction to Film Culture* or watching a film that that you've found independently. The key is to be as clear and persuasive as possible with your readings, to connect your ideas to wider literature and theory, and engage with the films you view in almost forensic detail. This certainly doesn't have to preclude you 'enjoying' the films you watch- far from it- as much as it requires you to adopt a slightly different way of looking at and experiencing them. It does mean, however, that it is important to watch each film more than once. This will soon become second nature, and you'll doubtless find yourself appreciating the films that you watch in new, richer ways.

Project 2 Same story, different director

Akira Kurosawa (1910–98) was one of Japan's most influential film directors. His nickname was Tenno – The Emperor – because it was felt that he'd changed the way the world looked at Japanese cinema forever. Kurosawa not only directed films but was a screenwriter, cameraman and editor.

Kurosawa is most famous for a string of powerful and exhilarating sword-fighting films known as 'chanbara', of which *Seven Samurai* is one of the most renowned. Made in 1954, it was the inspiration for one of Hollywood's most iconic 'westerns' – *The Magnificent Seven*, made in 1960 and directed by John Sturges, who also made the enduringly popular WWII film The Great Escape.

French poster for *Seven Samurai*, directed by Akira Kurosawa (Japan, 1954)

Research point 2
Research what Kurosawa thought about Sturges's re-make of his film and the Hollywood cinematic influences on *Seven Samurai*. Refer to your reader (p.79) where Villarejo discusses the 'spaghetti western'. Look up the term 'chanbara'. How does it differ from a traditional western?

Exercise 1.2

Watch *Seven Samurai* and *The Magnificent Seven.* Look for the similarities and differences in the plot and in the role and persona of the principal lead – Toshirô Mifune in *Seven Samurai* and Yul Brynner in *The Magnificent Seven*. In your learning log describe the characters of the heroes and how you see them being represented by the director within the cultural context of the film genre – the chanbara and the western, respectively. List examples from the films to suggest how faithful (or not) *The Magnificent Seven* is to *Seven Samurai.* Both films are considered to be seminal works within their respective genres. Can you understand why?

Do you think one film is better than the other, and if so, why? Does the story have more power in one version? Do you think Kurosawa is a better director than Sturges, and if so, why?

If you haven't already done so, read Chapter 2: The language of film in your course reader. You should refer to this chapter regularly in order to familiarise yourself with film terminology and language. In a few words, describe the meaning of mise-en-scène and its importance to the look and feel of a film. How much does the mise-en-scène, cinematography, editing and music in both films affect your enjoyment and appreciation?

Project 3 Lights, camera, action

Akira Kurosawa had a huge influence on cinema around the world and his work has inspired some of the greatest film-makers of all time. As you do your research, try to read about the impact of Kurosawa on George Lucas and Steven Spielberg, for example, and find out who else has been influenced by his work. In Project 2, you looked at how Kurosawa's work influenced the Hollywood western. In this, the first of three projects centred on the same three films, you'll first watch Kurosawa's classic thriller *Yojimbo*, which is included with this course. It was made in 1961 and again stars Toshirô Mifune. You'll then compare this film with two others: the 1964 spaghetti western *A Fistful of Dollars,* starring Clint Eastwood and directed by the Italian film-maker Sergio Leone, and the 1996 Hollywood film *Last Man Standing*, starring Bruce Willis and directed by Walter Hill. *A Fistful of Dollars* was highly controversial as a re-make of *Yojimbo* because it was made unofficially and resulted in a lawsuit with Kurosawa's distributor, Toho (which Toho won).
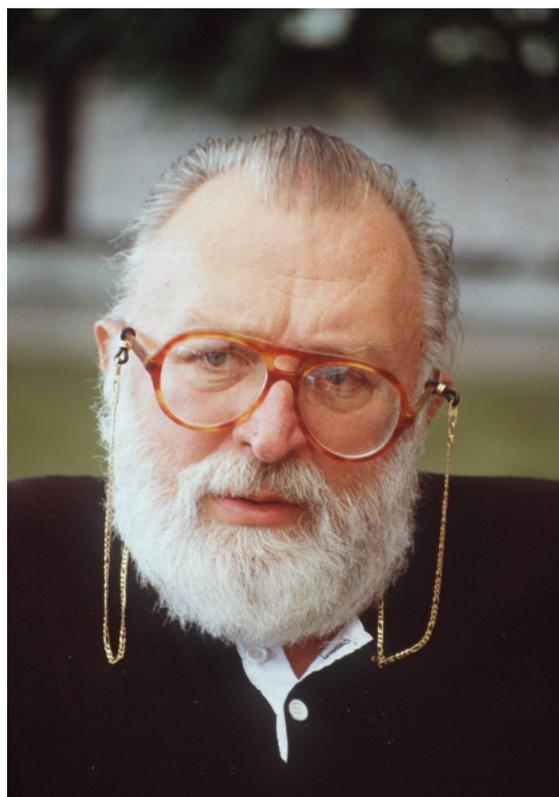
Sergio Leone (1929– 89), photographed in 1987

Tip

Film-makers have to write synopses or plot summaries, not only to get financiers to listen to their idea but also to get audiences to go and see the finished work. A synopsis can be just 100 words describing the plot of the film: the beginning, the middle and a pointer to the end. A plot summary may be as little as 30 words but is usually about 50 words. It is a good discipline to write both summaries and synopses of the films you watch because it can help you to distil the essence of a film and help you focus during your periods of reflection throughout the course.

Exercise 1.3

Watch these three films now. In your learning log describe each of the stories in a short paragraph of no more than three sentences. Save this work so that you can see the evolution of your thinking when you come to write at greater length in the first assignment. You should find the notes you make in your learning log very helpful in distilling your thought processes as you continue through the exercises and assignments.

How faithful to the original screenplay of *Yojimbo* are the other two films?

Write down your impressions of the way the three films have been shot. Look at the films with regard to camera movements and lighting. How stylistically different are they? How aware are you of the work of the cinematographer or DoP? What are the differences in the use of lighting? Does it feel natural or artificial?

You may want to read more about the work of the men who shot these films: Kazuo Miyagawa *(Yojimbo),* Massimo Dallamano and Federico G Larraya *(A Fistful of Dollars)* and Lloyd Ahern (*Last Man Standing*). Which is most skilful, in your opinion?

Thinking about film culture across borders, how do you imagine a Japanese audience in the 1960s would have seen the use of the pistol? Remember that a Japanese audience would be very familiar with the western genre as Hollywood movies were shown widely in Japan after WWII – and also with *Yojimbo*, which was a huge box-office hit at the time. Do you think there is any cultural difference between the representation of the pistol in westerns compared with the sword in chanbara?

Yojimbo had a limited release in the west. Do you think this means that it was perceived as an 'art-house' film by western audiences?

You might enjoy this clip: Link 2
In what way is it a comment on the cultural difference between American and Japanese values?

Project 4 Music maketh the movie?

A Fistful of Dollars is the first in a trilogy of westerns by Sergio Leone, the second being *For a Few Dollars More* (Italy, 1965) and the third *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (Italy, 1966). *A Fistful of Dollars* features one of cinema's most memorable soundtracks. The composer, Ennio Morricone (b.1928), is one of the world's most prolific and influential film composers. This was said of him by one of Italy's most famous contemporary directors:

He is someone with two identities. One is the composer of contemporary music, and the other is this composer of big epics, this popular music for movies. All his life he has been trying to nourish one identity with the other one, and it is as if the two voices were enriching each other. He has a great capacity of harmonizing in himself.

(Bernardo Bertolucci, director of *1900*, scored by Morricone)

Ry Cooder wrote the soundtrack for *Last Man Standing* (1996). It was originally scored by Elmer Bernstein, whose treatment could not be more different; Bernstein's version (and Cooder's) has been released as a CD film soundtrack so you can compare the two and ask, 'what if' Bernstein's music had been used instead. How appropriate is Cooder's score and how does it stand alongside Morricone's music and that of Masaru Satô who wrote the soundtrack for *Yojimbo*?

Exercise 1.4

Listen to the three scores in their entirety. Some parts of the score are repetitive; you can skip these if you're short of time, but by listening to an entire score you can see how the music in these films introduces different characters and situations. Does the music make you react in a particular way to what you're seeing on screen? Write down your thoughts and observations in your learning log. What can you find in the literature and online about how the music was conceived?

In your learning log make notes about the stylistic differences and similarities of the three soundtracks.
- Do you think Morricone has added to the diverse series of themes in *Yojimbo*?
- Has Ry Cooder lived up to the quality and breadth of musical innovation of *Yojimbo* and *A Fistful of Dollars?*

Watch this YouTube clip of *Yojimbo* over-dubbed with the music from *A Fistful of Dollars:*
Link 3

What does this clip tell you about the marriage of a musical style with the image? Does the over-dubbed version work?

Project 5 Where the magic happens

Sergei Eisenstein (1898–1948) editing the film *October* (1928)

A film does not exist until it has been edited. Before the editor cuts the scenes together all that exists is raw footage. The title of this project refers to a truth: namely, that something magical really does happen in a cutting room. It is in the edit suite – or in the case of films shot and edited on celluloid, the cutting room – that a film is born, formed, endlessly re-worked and honed until it is ready for public consumption.

Well-conceived and crafted editing, like the best cinematography, does not shout out to an audience. When shots are cut seamlessly together it is the narrative that holds your attention; usually it is only shoddy editing and camerawork that you notice. In film we often talk about 'the suspension of disbelief'. Great movies with powerful and compelling stories, well written and convincingly performed, draw us in so that we believe what we see, even though we know it's just a story, simply another film.

In this first part of the course you might like to look in detail at the construction of some scenes of the three films you're studying; the opening scene is the most obvious, but which others might be worth analysis?

Suggestions for further study

If you're interested in thinking more about how cinema takes ideas and re-works them across cultures then consider watching and reading about some re-makes and their 'originals' in a range of genres:

- **Horror** – Re-make of *Audition* (Takashi Miike, Japan, 1999) using the original novel, with Richard Gray (*Mine Games*) writing and directing (in production 2014).
- **Thriller** – *Infernal Affairs* (Andrew Lau, Alan Mak, Hong Kong, 2002).
- **Comedy** – *Eat Drink Man Woman* (Ang Lee, Taiwan, 1999) re-worked as *Tortilla Soup* (Maria Ripoll, US, 2001).
- **Romantic thriller** – *Pépé le Moko* (Julien Duvivier, France, 1937) re-worked as *Algiers* (John Cromwell, US, 1938) then as the musical *Casbah* (John Berry, US, 1948).
- **Science fiction** – 2001: *A Space Odyssey* (Stanley Kubrick, UK, 1968) v. *Solaris* (Andrei Tarkovsky, USSR, 1972). There has been much discussion about the influence of these films and whether *Solaris* was a reaction to *2001: A Space Odyssey.* Has a myth been created about the relationship of these two films to each other? And how does Steven Soderbergh's George Clooney-starring 2002 remake of Solaris compare to the Tarkovsky original, itself an adaptation of Stanislaw Lem's 1961 novel?

Assignment one

This is primarily a diagnostic assignment to enable your tutor to decide how best to help you. If you go for formal assessment, you'll have to submit this assignment but it won't count towards your final mark.

Within your learning log you should be exploring the following points about the films you watch:

- What are your thoughts about the work of the director? How effectively has he or she told the story?
- How important is the contribution of the cinematographer/DoP, the editor and the composer?
- How aware are you of the contribution of these three aspects of film-making to the overall quality – or otherwise – of the films?
- What are your thoughts about the overall body of work and the place of these films within their particular genres?
- Is one form more successful than another? How well do you think the directors have succeeded in creating a cinematic style that is unique to the genre?
- The role of the movie star as cinematic hero. Compare and contrast the styles and personas of the principal players.

For your first assignment you should reflect upon Seven Samurai and any TWO of the other four films you've watched so far and discuss in no more than 1,000 words how the specific styles of the directors compare. Try to keep simple descriptions of the films and their plots to a minimum and ensure that the majority of your essay is focused on **analysing and making sense** of your chosen films and directors.

Remember, we've looked at five genres: the chanbara or sword film (*Seven Samurai*), the western (*The Magnificent Seven*), the thriller (*Yojimbo*), the spaghetti western (*A Fistful of Dollars*) and the Hollywood thriller (*Last Man Standing*). The webpage Link 4 is an entertaining and informative comparator of the three films you studied in Projects 3 to 5 with lots of interesting background facts which you might find helpful in distilling some of your thoughts for the assignment.

In addition to your 1,000-word essay, send the relevant section of your learning log or your blog url to your tutor as part of your assignment submission.

Reflection

Before you send this assignment to your tutor, take a look at the assessment criteria for this course, which will be used to mark your other assignments when your work is formally assessed. The assessment criteria are listed in the introduction to this course guide. Review your work using the criteria and make notes in your learning log.

Your tutor may take a while to get back to you so continue with the course while you're waiting.

Reworking your assignment

Following feedback from your tutor, you may wish to rework some of your assignment, especially if you are ultimately submitting your work for formal assessment. If you do this, make sure you reflect on what you have done and why in your learning log.