

## SYLLABUS

### **Phil 445A Philosophy of Art Topic: Philosophy of Film**

Winter 2006, University of Washington

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Texts: **The Philosophy of Film**, eds. T. Wartenberg and A. Curran  
**Reel Arguments: Film, Philosophy, & Social Criticism**, A. Light  
**Articles on Reserve (OR)**

### **Summary of Class and Requirements**

Since the beginning of the development of film, a body of film criticism has arisen along side it. Interestingly, many of the first film theorists were also philosophers. But in today's academic world film studies has become an independent scholarly endeavor closer to literary criticism than philosophy. Slowly, things are beginning to change. Encouraged by the example of Harvard philosopher Stanley Cavell, several distinguished philosophers, especially Noël Carroll, have produced substantial bodies of work on philosophy and film. But even while developments in philosophy and film proceed, it is still unclear how film and philosophy go together. Are there particular philosophical issues peculiar to film as an art form or is film simply a repository for examples of philosophical questions? This class will provide an overview of work in the philosophy of film covering such topics as the nature of film, whether films have "authors," like other texts, how films engage our emotions, and whether films can make "arguments" on important moral and social questions in a way similar to philosophical arguments on such topics.

As this is an advanced undergraduate/graduate seminar, the course will be mainly discussion based. Undergraduates will write two ten-fifteen page papers, one on an assigned topic during midterms (the topic will be provided one week prior to the due date of the paper), and one on a topic of their choice due on the last day of the last week of classes. Graduate students will write one research paper, no longer than twenty pages, due on the last day of the last week of classes. The topic of the second paper for undergraduates and the final paper for graduate students must be given prior approval by the instructor. No exceptions will be made to this rule. A paper turned in that has not been granted written approval will be given a mark of 0. Each participant should provide the instructor with a written summary of the topics of these papers no later than the sixth week of class. Participants may also provide rough drafts of these final papers to the instructor for comments up to one week prior to the final due date of the paper. For undergraduates, the initial grade for the class will be determined equally as an average of the two paper grades. For graduate

students the initial grade for the class is the grade on the paper.

In addition to completing these papers, each participant will be required to (1) make at least one oral presentation on the assigned readings and (2) prepare a short written analysis of the film screened for that week which will periodically be taken up during class without prior notice. These short pieces should attempt to raise a philosophical issue at work in the film watched that week or offer a brief critique or reading of the film from a philosophical perspective (these reflections can either be related to the readings for that week or be separate from them). The presentations should seek not only to outline the arguments made in the readings, but should also provide examples which help to illuminate the philosophical problems under consideration in the readings (for example, it would be very helpful to bring in film clips relevant to the readings if possible). Presentations should include questions on the readings for class discussion.

Finally, all film screenings will take place during a separate lab time on Mondays from 1:30-3:30 (Phil. 445AA) in Denny 205. All students are required to attend these screenings. Additional home screenings are suggested each week for those seeking to view other films related to a particular week's readings. Note that the weeks of February 6<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> there are required home screenings.

Appeals of any grades must be made in writing, providing a detailed argument for why a grade should be increased. Any work found to be plagiarized will be given a mark of 0 and disciplinary action will be taken. Late work will not be accepted.

### **Reading and Screening Schedule (Subject to Change)**

#### **Do We Need Film Theory?**

J03: Introduction to class.

J05: Carroll and Turvey in Wartenberg and Curran (W&C), 11-32.

#### **What is the Nature of Film 1? The Photoplay and the Fiction Film**

J09: Screen, *The Birth of a Nation* (D. W. Griffith, 1915).

Suggested Home Screening, *Citizen Kane* (Orson Wells, 1941).

J10: Musterberg and Arnheim in W&C, 43-58.

J12: Simmon, "Mr. Griffith's Civil War," OR.

#### **What is the Nature of Film 2? The Documentary**

J16: Screen, *The Thin Blue Line* (Errol Morris, 1988).

Suggested Home Screening, *Triumph of the Will* (Leni Riefenstahl, 1935).

J17: Ponech in W&C, 77-90.

J19: Carroll, "Fiction, Nonfiction, and the Film of Presumptive Assertion," OR.  
Light, "Objectivity and the Film of Presumptive Assertion," OR.

#### **Do Films Have Authors?**

J23: Screen, *The Seventh Seal* (Ingmar Bergman, 1957).

Suggested Home Screening, *Jules and Jim* (Francois Truffaut, 1962).

- J24: Sarris and Kael in W&C, 99-117.  
 J26: **No Class. Midterm Assignment Distributed.**

### Film Narration

- J30: Screen, *Rear Window* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1954).  
 Suggested Home Screening, *Memento* (Christopher Nolan, 2000).  
 J31: Bordwell and Chatman in W&C, 183-197.  
 F02: Wilson in W&C, 198-207. **Midterm Assignment Due.**

### Emotion in Film

- F06: Screen, *Casablanca* (Michael Curtiz, 1942).  
 Required Home Screening, *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (Hitchcock, 1956).  
 F07: Currie and Plantiga in W&C, 139-159.  
 F09: Smith in W&C, 160-169.

### Emotion in Film: The Example of Horror

- F13: Screen, *The Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, 1991)  
 Suggested Home Screening, *Frankenstein* (James Whale, 1931).  
 F14: **No Class.**  
 F16: Schneider, "The Paradox of Fiction," OR; Carroll in W&C, 170-177.

### Film and Social Criticism: Moral Conflict

- F20: Screen, *The Life of David Gale* (Alan Parker, 2003).  
 Suggested Home Screening, *Dead Man Walking* (Tim Robbins, 1995).  
 F21: Light, Chapter 1 (pp. 1-12).  
 F23: Light, Chapter 2. **Last Day to Turn in Final Papers for Comments.**

### Film and Social Criticism: The Example of Race

- F27: Screen, *Falling Down* (Joel Schumacher, 1993).  
 Required Home Screening, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*  
 (Stanley Kramer, 1957).  
 Suggested Home Screening, *Brother From Another Planet*  
 (John Sayles, 1985).  
 F28: Light, Chapter 4 and Chapter 6 (pp. 136-152).  
 M02: Wartenberg in W&C, 225-234.

### Film as Philosophy

- M06: Screen, *It Happened One Night* (Frank Capra, 1939)  
 Suggested Home Screening, *The Matrix* (Wachowski Brothers, 1999).  
 M07: Cavell in W&C, 253-259.  
 M09: Wartenberg in W&C, 270-283. **Final Papers Due.**