

PHIL 3225: Philosophy and Film

Fall Semester – 2026

Monday/Wednesday/Friday 2:20 - 3:40 PM

Hickory Hall 252

Professor

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Office: EESAT 225D

Office Hours: M/W 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM or by appointment

Course Description:

A philosophical investigation into the nature and importance of film. Examines how films raise philosophical issues and illustrate thought experiments; how films are art; how they make arguments, provide knowledge and moral insight; what it means to say a film is realistic; and what is at stake in the way we interpret or read films.

Textbooks and Bibliography:

All required readings are provided here in Canvas in .pdf format.

Films:

Unfortunately, we have neither the time to show each week's full film in class, nor an extra "lab" session each week to view them together as a class. Therefore, you will be required to acquire and view each film on your own. I highly recommend forming "viewing groups" with your classmates—not only does it make watching the movies more fun, but it also will make it easier to track down each movie in time. I have placed all of the movies on reserve in the media library; you are able to go in and watch them any time the library is open. Furthermore, between streaming services, personal collections, etc., you should also be able to find every movie on the list to watch outside of the library—especially if you work with a viewing group. Finally, if you are having trouble locating any of the movies this semester, come and talk to me!

Course Projects and Requirements (Evaluation):

1. **Response Papers** [40%] on the readings and films. Response papers will be submitted before class on each due date (course schedule is below). See the assignment description in the Response Paper module for more details.
2. **Midterm Exam** [20%], consisting of short essays. The midterm exam will be given in class on October 8.
3. **Final Essay** [20%]. You will engage philosophically with a film of your choosing; see the full assignment description on the Home page for more details.

4. **Class Participation** [20%] is very important. This includes not only attendance, but also active involvement in class discussion. Draw upon your own discussion questions, and also engage with your fellow students about their questions!

Relevant Policies:

- **You must be present to take the midterm exam.** If you are not going to be here on October 8, then you should arrange with me ahead of time to take the exam during my office hours.
- **The use of AI to generate content for assignments is strictly prohibited.** In this course, I want you to develop your own critical thinking and writing skills. For this reason, the use of Generative AI (GenAI) tools like ChatGPT is not permitted. While these tools can be helpful in some contexts, they do not align with our goal of fostering the development of your independent thinking. Using GenAI to complete any part of an assignment, exam, or coursework will be considered a violation of academic integrity, as it prevents the development of your own skills, and will be addressed according to the Student Academic Integrity policy (<https://policy.unt.edu/policy/06-003>).
- **Silence all cell phones before entering the classroom,** out of respect to fellow students and the discussion. Any student interrupting class with a cell phone or other noisy electronic device may be asked to leave the class for the day.
- **Numerical grading scale breakdown:** At the end of this semester, I will assign you a letter grade based upon the percentage of the total points available for the semester that you have earned. My grading scale is as follows. **A:** 100%-90; **B:** 89.9-80; **C:** 79.9-70; **D:** 69.9-60; **F:** 59.9 or below.

Academic Integrity Standards and Consequences:

According to UNT Policy 06.003, “Student Academic Integrity,” academic dishonesty occurs when students engage in behaviors including, but not limited to cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, forgery, plagiarism, and sabotage. A finding of academic dishonesty may result in a range of academic penalties or sanctions ranging from admonition to expulsion from the University.

ADA Accommodation Statement:

UNT makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide a student with an accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding one’s specific course needs. Students may request accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. For additional information see the ODA website at disability.unt.edu.

Emergency Notification & Procedures:

UNT uses a system called Eagle Alert to quickly notify students with critical information in the event of an emergency (i.e., severe weather, campus closing, and health and public safety emergencies like chemical spills, fires, or violence). In the event of a university closure, please refer to the UNT Learning Management System (LMS) for contingency plans for covering course materials.

Course Outline/Sequence of Subjects:

August 17	First Day of Class Syllabus; outline of course; introductions. <i>What is a film?</i>
August 19	Reading: Robert B Pippin, "Cinematic Reflection" Supplementary Reading: Stephen Mulhall, "Film as Philosophy" Robert Sinnerbrink, "Scenes From a Marriage: On the Idea of Film as Philosophy" <i>And: In, Of, As...</i>
August 24	Film: <i>Fight Club</i> (Fincher, 1999) Reading: Nancy Bauer, "Cogito, Ergo Film: Plato, Descartes, and Fight Club" Plato, Republic, book X (excerpt) Reflection Paper #1 Due
August 26	<i>Fight Club</i> continued
August 31	Film: <i>Bicycle Thieves</i> (De Sica, 1948) Reading: André Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" and "De Sica: Metteur-en-Scène" Siegfried Kracauer, "Basic Concepts" and "The Establishment of Physical Existence" Reflection Paper #2 Due
September 2	<i>Bicycle Thieves</i> continued
September 7	Labor Day: No Class
September 9	Film: <i>The Thin Red Line</i> (Malick, 1998) Reading: Rudolph Arnheim, Film as Art Erwin Panofsky, "Style and Medium in Motion Pictures" Reflection Paper #3 Due
September 14	<i>The Thin Red Line</i> continued
September 16	<i>The Thin Red Line</i> continued Reading: Simon Critchley: "Calm—On Terrence Malick's <i>The Thin Red Line</i> " Supplementary Reading: Robert B Pippin, "Vernacular Metaphysics: On Terrence Malick's <i>The Thin Red Line</i> "

September 21	Film: <i>Synecdoche, NY</i> (Kaufman, 2008) Reading: Stanley Cavell, <i>The World Viewed</i> Reflection Paper #4 Due
September 23	<i>Synecdoche, NY</i> continued
September 28	Film: <i>Be Kind, Rewind</i> (Gondry, 2008) Reading: Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" Reflection Paper #5 Due
September 30	<i>Be Kind, Rewind</i> continued
October 5	Film: <i>Ready Player One</i> (Spielberg, 2018) Reading: Godfrey Cheshire, "The Death of Film/The Decay of Cinema" Lev Manovich, "Cinema and Digital Media" Stephen Price, "True Lies: Perceptual Realism, Digital Images, and Film Theory" Reflection Paper #6 Due
October 7	<i>Ready Player One</i> continued
October 12	Midterm Review
October 14	Midterm Exam
October 19	Film: <i>The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance</i> (Ford, 1962) Reading: Thomas Schatz, "Film Genre and the Genre Film" Robin Wood, "Ideology, Genre, Auteur" Robert Warshow, "The Westerner" Supplementary Reading: Robert B Pippin, "What Is a Western? Politics and Self-Knowledge in John Ford's <i>The Searchers</i> " Thomas Schatz, "The Western" Reflection Paper #7 Due
October 21	<i>The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance</i> continued
October 26	Film: <i>Alien</i> (Scott, 1979) Reading: Tania Modleski, "The Terror of Pleasure" Linda Williams, "Gender, Genre and Excess" Stephen Mulhall, "Kane's Son, Caine's Daughter" Reflection Paper #8 Due
October 28	<i>Alien</i> continued

November 2	Film: <i>The Philadelphia Story</i> (Cukor, 1940) Reading: Stanley Cavell, "The Importance of Importance" Supplementary Reading: Stanley Cavell, "Words for a Conversation" Reflection Paper #9 Due
November 4	<i>The Philadelphia Story</i> continued
November 9	Film: <i>Letter From an Unknown Woman</i> (Ophüls, 1948) Reading: Stanley Cavell, Introduction to <i>Contesting Tears</i> Supplementary Reading: Stanley Cavell, "Psychoanalysis and Cinema" George M. Wilson, "Max Ophuls' <i>Letter from an Unknown Woman</i>" Reflection Paper #10 Due
November 11	<i>Letter From an Unknown Woman</i> continued
November 16	Film: <i>Vertigo</i> (Hitchcock, 1958) Reading: Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" William Rothman, "<i>Vertigo</i>: The Unknown Woman in Hitchcock" Supplementary Reading: Jacques Lacan, "Of the Gaze" Ben McCann, "Half a Century of the 'Male Gaze': Why Laura Mulvey's Pioneering Theory Still Resonates Today" Reflection Paper #11 Due
November 18	<i>Vertigo</i> continued
Week of November 23	Thanksgiving Break: No Class
November 30	Film: <i>The Night Is Short, Walk On Girl</i> (Yuasa, 2017) Reading: Stanley Cavell, "More of <i>The World Viewed</i>" Thomas Lamarre, "Introduction: between cinema and <i>anime</i>" Edward S. Small and Eugene Levinson, "Toward a Theory of Animation" Supplementary Reading: Thomas Lamarre, <i>The Anime Machine</i> Reflection Paper #12 Due
December 2	<i>The Night Is Short, Walk On Girl</i> continued
Week of December 8	Final Exams Week: Final Essay Due