

UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI
Department of Philosophy

PHI 353 – Philosophy of Film

Syllabus – May Intersession 2017

- *Dates and times:* May 15-18 (M-Th) and May 22-24 (M-W); from 5:00 to 10:30 PM.
- *Classroom:* TBD

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Course description: Films raise a number of philosophical issues, ranging from specifying their nature to making sense of their allure. This course develops a framework to examine these issues. In the first part, we will analyze central components of the understanding of films. In particular, we will examine whether film is an art form, discuss what is cinema, analyze the moving image (the shot, cinematic sequencing and narration, as well as the production of affect and emotions), and examine how to evaluate films. In the second part, we will try to understand the power of films. In particular, we will discuss the interaction of vision and the screen, examine the metaphysics of the moving image, and explore the connections between dreams and film. Finally, we will provide an application of the resulting framework by examining the interactions between films and literary imagination.

Required texts:

- Carroll, N., *The Philosophy of Motion Pictures*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2008.
- McGinn, C., *The Power of Movies: How Screen and Mind Interact*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2005.
- Auster, P., *The Book of Illusions*. New York: Henry Holt, 2002.

Requirements:

1. Quizzes. Before each class, you will be expected to have read the assigned reading, and we will discuss it together in class. Throughout the semester, we will have regular quizzes to check your reading and understanding of the material.

2. Individual paper. An important part of the learning process is the ability to apply the concepts and techniques studied in this course to a particular film (or a group of films). The individual paper is meant to provide exactly this opportunity. You will be expected to write a 3,500-word paper (2,000 words if you don't need writing credit) applying the concepts and techniques examined in the first part of the course to understand central aspects of a film (or a group of films). In writing your paper, you should: (i) present the main features of the film(s) you selected; (ii) discuss a philosophical issue about film that that particular film (or that group of films) can be taken to raise (e.g. how can the film be objectively evaluated?); (iii) use one (or more) theories of film that we will have discussed to address the philosophical issue you identified (e.g. in the film evaluation, identify the roles played by shots, cinematic sequencing, narrative structure, and treatment of emotions); and (iv) develop your own approach to the issue, giving arguments to support your view. Write a focused paper and go straight to the point. A 500-word outline of the paper (250 words if you don't need writing credit) needs to be submitted by *Wednesday, May 17*. In the outline, you will highlight the central claim you will defend in your paper and provide a summary of the central arguments you will develop. Before you start working on the outline and the paper, please speak to me about the topic and overall strategy of your paper. I am happy to discuss the paper with you. The individual paper is due on *Monday, May 22*.

3. Presentation/Final project. One in-class presentation will be required. The presentation/final project is a group undertaking. We will divide the class into four groups. Each group will select a film that is an adaptation of a literary work. The goal is to assess how successful it was as an adaptation. Which new insights were generated by the adaptation? Which specific features of the moving images were explored (successfully or not) in the adaptation? How does the experience of the viewer can change in light of the film in comparison with his or her experience of reading the literary work? The group should choose in advance the literary work and the film, and discuss the central ideas of the presentation with me. In the presentation, your group should (a) discuss the key points of the film and the corresponding literary work, (b) analyze the main aspects of the adaptation, and (c) assess the overall cogency of the adaptation *using the tools and concepts developed*

throughout the course. As part of the presentation, your group is supposed to analyze relevant parts of the film, and use PowerPoint to deliver the presentation, which should last about 40 minutes. Please, turn in a written-up version of your presentation—one report per group—one day after your presentation. The report should have 6-8 pages, and should have the same structure as the presentation (see items (a)-(c) above). The presentations will be on *Tuesday, May 23* (groups 1 and 2) and *Wednesday, May 24* (groups 3 and 4).

Writing credit: This is a writing course, and in order to earn writing credit, students need to write 4,000 words and revise their work in light of the instructor's feedback. In particular, students will need to (a) submit an outline of their individual paper (500 words), and in light of instructor's feedback, (b) expand that outline into a full individual paper (3,500 words). (c) After receiving feedback from the instructor on the full paper, students will submit a revised version of that paper that takes into account the comments received by the instructor. To earn writing credit, students need to complete all of the three steps above, (a)-(c). Please submit a word count for each of these writing assignments.

If a student *doesn't* need writing credit, the outline for the paper should have 250 words and the individual paper 2,000 words. (Please submit a word count for each of these writing assignments.)

Evaluation: Credit for all the assignments will be assigned as indicated below:

1. Quizzes: 30% of the grade
2. Individual paper: 40%
3. Presentation/final project: 30%

Grades: Letter grades are assigned on a scale: 100-98% = A+; 97-93% = A; 92-90% = A-; 89-88% = B+; 87-83% = B; 82-80% = B-; 79-78% = C+; 77-73% = C; 72-70% = C-; 69-68% = D+; 67-63% = D; 62-60% = D-; 59% or below = F. In the event of borderline score, attendance, useful class participation, and improvement will be taken into account in determining the course grade.

Criteria for grading:

Quizzes will be evaluated for evidence that you have prepared as well as for the accuracy of your claims about the texts and films we will have discussed and analyzed.

Presentations will be evaluated for the accuracy, clarity, and originality of your group's examination of the selected film. You will also be expected to assess critically the adaptation of the film using the tools developed in the course.

Papers will be evaluated for the *quality* and *originality* of the arguments you present for your position. In particular, (i) you must show that you can think clearly and critically about the philosophical issues under consideration (so the clarity of organization of your paper is crucial); (ii) you must show that you can critically evaluate an argument (i.e., identify correctly its strengths and weaknesses), and (iii) you must show that you can state, propose, and philosophically defend a position on an issue (i.e., give reasons for the position that *anyone* could understand as reasons, even if not everyone accepts them as *strong* reasons).

Tentative course schedule:

Page references are to the books listed in the required texts above.

Date		Topic	Reading	Assignment
May 15	M	<i>Introduction: What is Philosophy of Film?</i>		
May 16	T	PART I: Understanding Films 1. <i>Is film an art form?</i> 2. <i>Exploring what is specific about the medium</i> 3. <i>What is cinema? Understanding films in terms of moving images</i>	Carroll, pp. 1-79.	Write two questions about the reading and sketch your answers to them.
May 17	W	4. <i>Analyzing moving images: the shot</i> 5. <i>Analyzing moving images: cinematic sequencing and narration</i>	Carroll, pp. 80-146.	Idem. Outline of individual paper due.
May 18	Th	6. <i>Analyzing moving images: affect and emotions</i> 7. <i>Evaluating films</i>	Carroll, pp. 147-226.	Idem.
May 22	M	PART II: Understanding the Allure of Films	McGinn	Write two questions about the reading and sketch your answers

		8. <i>The power of films</i> 9. <i>The interaction of vision and the screen</i> 10. <i>The metaphysics of the moving image</i> 11. <i>Dreams and film</i>		to them. Short paper due.
May 23	T	PART III: Applications 14. <i>An application: films and literary imagination</i> <i>Students' presentations</i>	Auster	Idem. Student's presentations: Groups 1 and 2
May 24	W	<i>Students' presentations</i>		Students' presentations: Groups 3 and 4

Class policies and general information

Getting help: If you would like to discuss any aspect of the course, please see me after class, during office hours, or make an appointment to meet me at another time. I am eager to help you learn and do well in the course. If you have any kind of problem that is preventing you from working on this course, please speak to me. We will talk it over and work out a solution if we can.

Course attendance: I reserve the right to adjust the final grade in light of attendance and participation. As for attendance, students are allowed at most 1 absence, whether excused or unexcused. Students will lose a percentage of their final grade for every absence thereafter. Your presence and participation in class are crucial to your success in the course. Most of the readings we will study are conceptually difficult, and the best way of understanding them is by discussing together the issues they raise. But this presupposes that all of us are at the seminars, working together.

Late assignment: Make every attempt to complete your work by the due date. If you see that you cannot complete an assignment on time, please notify me *prior to the deadline* in class, by phone or by e-mail with an explanation. The only accepted excuses are: (i) illness for which you have a doctor's note, (ii) a university sponsored activity taking place at the time an assignment is due, or (iii) death or family crisis, with proper documentation provided.

Plagiarism and cheating: Plagiarism and cheating of any sort will not be tolerated. Academic disciplinary procedures will be instituted against anyone caught cheating in this course.

Doing really well in this course: Why not? It is a good idea to plan, now, to do really well. Set your expectations high: to have an enjoyable experience, meet interesting classmates, meet some challenges and do lots of thinking.

Note: Everything in this syllabus is *subject to revision* as the course moves along. Stay current with any changes!