

PHILOSOPHY AND FILM

PHI 4150 – 001

CRN: 22358

FALL 2009

PROFESSOR: GABRIEL ROCKHILL

Time: MW 3-4:15

Location: Driscoll 240

Office Hours: M 4:15-5:15, W 2-3 or by appointment in SAC 171

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OVERVIEW

This course will explore the relationship between film and philosophy. We will begin by examining the philosophic debates about the historic emergence of film and its links to various conceptions of the nature of human thought. This will lead us to the question of the relationship between film and the unconscious as well as to the problem of the connections between the appearance of film (c. 1895) and the development of psychoanalysis (c. 1900). Against the backdrop of this first major section of the course, we will then examine the links between film and temporality since the “seventh art” is often considered to be the art of time *par excellence*. In particular, we will concentrate on the nature of time, memory, and history as well as on the temporal models used to think the history of film. In the final section of the course, we will situate film in a larger context in order to inquire into the relationship between film and the other arts, film and politics, and film and the new media of the televisual and digital age. Through the course of our investigation, we will have the opportunity to discuss the role of technology in the arts, competing descriptions of human thought, theories of memory, psychoanalysis and its description of the human psyche, modes of representation and revelation proper to film, rival conceptions of temporality, competing historiographical paradigms, narrative structure within and outside of film, theories of ideology, the politics of film, the emergence of new digital technology, and many other topics proper to the study of philosophy and film.

In addition to being presented with some of the major philosophic issues in film and media studies, students are expected to come away from the course with a solid grasp of some of the major movements in film history (including the first “films,” early avant-garde cinema, Surrealism, classic Hollywood cinema, Italian Neo-Realism, the French New Wave, New German Cinema, the Hong Kong “School,” and contemporary independent film). They will also be made familiar with some of the most important film and media theorists of the 20th and early 21st centuries (Baudrillard, Bazin, Bellour, Musser, Williams). Finally, they will be exposed to the ideas of important philosophers whose work can be related, directly or indirectly, to issues in film (Benjamin, Bergson, Deleuze, Freud, Plato, Sartre).

REQUIRED MATERIAL

1. Sigmund Freud. *The Ego and the Id*. New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989.
2. Essays and articles will be made available to you electronically and placed on reserve in the library. **It is required that you print or photocopy them so that you can bring them to every class.**

3. All of the films are available in Falvey library.
4. Optional book: Lewis Vaughn. *Writing Philosophy: A Student's Guide to Writing Philosophy Essays*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

REQUIREMENTS

1. **Attendance and Participation – 15%**. The class will be conducted as a seminar so it will be very important for you to come to class having engaged with the required material. This means taking notes on the films and readings, preparing informed questions and comments, and re-reading/re-viewing difficult sections after class discussion. A cursory, passive overview of the material will prove insufficient. In addition, you should make sure that you organize your time wisely since some sessions will require more out-of-class work than others.
2. **Weekly Response Papers – 20%**. You will be required to write a **single one-page paper per week** (1 or 1 ½ spaced) that responds to and critically engages with the material. A list of the questions can be found in the program below. Unlike the “graded response papers” (see below), your grade for the weekly response papers will be calculated based on the number of papers you complete and turn in **on time**. This means that you will not receive individual grades on each of the papers. Instead, you will receive a proportional grade based on the number of papers you successfully complete (10 out of 10 = 100% (A), 9/10 = 90% (A-/B+), 8/10 = 80% (B-/C+), etc.). However, since you will not know in advance which assignments will be graded, it is highly recommended that you prepare each response paper as if you were handing it in for a grade. It is **highly recommended** that you make use of the Villanova Writing Center for your response papers, particularly at the beginning of the semester (please turn in your Writing Center form with your paper). You can use their pamphlet *How to Write a College Paper* as a useful starting point.
3. **Graded Response Papers – 35%**. **Two** of your weekly response papers will be collected and graded (see above). Since I will not tell you in advance which papers will be graded, it is highly recommended that you prepare every response paper as if it were going to be turned in for a grade.
4. **Final Exam – 30%**. A **comprehensive** final exam will be scheduled on December 15th. The exam will contain short answer questions, and you will be required to write an essay. I will provide you with guidelines and study hints in advance of the exam. The best way to ensure a solid performance on your final exam is to take detailed course notes, spend ample time on your response papers, and take notes on the films and readings. With the exception of students with disabilities that require alternative test-taking arrangements or other university approved exceptions, all tests must be taken in class at the day and time listed on the syllabus. No other make-up tests will be administered.

POLICY ON PLAGIARISM AND RESEARCH RESOURCES

Any form of plagiarism is unacceptable. This includes, but is not limited to, referencing or paraphrasing someone else's ideas without proper citation as well as handing in someone else's work as your own. This also includes using any part of an Internet resource without proper citation. Any assignment that is at all plagiarized will automatically receive an F and, depending on the circumstances, may constitute grounds for failing the course. Moreover, every incident will be reported to the university and could constitute grounds for expulsion. For a good list of resources on what counts as plagiarism and how to avoid plagiarizing see <http://directory.google.com/Top/Reference/Education/Educators/Plagiarism/Prevention/>

You should be aware of the fact that not all of the information on the Internet is equally accurate. This is why I strongly encourage library research over Internet research and require that you do most of your work in the library. Of course, you should also be wary of the quality of published sources and try to get a feel for what is reliable (based on the author's name, the publisher, journals' reputations, etc.). If you have any questions regarding the quality of Internet or published resources, please contact me.

POLICY ON E-MAILS

1. I will try to respond to all e-mails in a reasonable time-frame. As a general rule of thumb, this means that you will get a response within 24 to 48 hours. If you send an e-mail over the weekend or late at night, do not expect to receive a response back immediately, even if you deem it to be an emergency.
2. I will not grant extensions via e-mail.
3. In general, I will not provide my lecture notes or other material that you could have obtained in class. If you miss class, it is your responsibility to obtain this material.
4. **No computers** will be allowed in the classroom unless you obtain explicit consent.

POLICY ON GRADE CHANGES, LATE WORK AND ABSENCES

1. I will not change grades based on oral negotiation. If you feel that I have overlooked something in my grading policy, please submit a detailed written explanation of what has been overlooked along with the graded copy of your work.
2. **No late work will be accepted.** Rather than looking behind in class, you should plan on looking ahead and catching up on future assignments any points you may have lost on past assignments. You will only be able to make up for late work in the most extreme cases, and preferably when you have let me know ahead of time that you have a serious extra-curricular problem. Since a "lost paper" does not constitute a valid excuse in the computer age, **always back up your work.**
3. If you absolutely have to miss class for an excusable reason, please let me know ahead of time.

PROGRAM (subject to change)

SECTION 1: THE BIRTH OF FILM

- Aug. 24** Introduction and the "Birth" of Film.
- Aug. 26** Walter Benjamin. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction."
Question 1: *Discuss your background, interests, and expectations for this course. Outline Benjamin's basic historical argument, and give me a sense for how you found the first reading.*
- Aug. 31** André Bazin. "Ontology of the Photographic Image" in *What Is Cinema?*
Charles Musser. "Introduction" in *The Emergence of Cinema.*
Optional Reading: Jacques Rancière. "Mechanical Arts and the Promotion of the Anonymous" in *The Politics of Aesthetics.*
Question 2: *Discuss how you think each of these authors fits within the opposition between the technological and the ideational accounts of the birth of film.*

SECTION 2: FILM AND THOUGHT

- Sept. 2 Henri Bergson. "The Cinematographical Mechanism of Thought" in *Creative Evolution*.
Marcel Proust. *Remembrance of Things Past* (selection).
- Sept. 7 *Labor Day – No Class*
- Sept. 9 Alain Resnais. *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959).
Question 3: Explain why *Hiroshima mon amour* can be seen as either a Bergsonian or a Proustian film (or both).
- Sept. 14 Wong Kar-Wai. *In the Mood for Love* (2000).
Optional Film: Wong Kar-Wai. *2046* (2004).

SECTION 3: FILM AND THE UNCONSCIOUS

- Sept. 16 Sigmund Freud. *The Ego and the Id* (first three chapters).
Question 4: Explain in detail the relationship between the ego, the id and the super-ego according to Freud.
- Sept. 21 Sigmund Freud. *Civilization and its Discontents* (chapters I, V and VIII).
Luis Buñuel. *Un chien andalou* (1928).
- Sept. 23 Luis Buñuel. *L'âge d'or* (1930).
- Sept. 28 P.T. Anderson. *Magnolia* (1999).
Question 5: Does it make sense to classify *Magnolia* as a Surrealist film? Why or why not?
- Sept. 30 *Class meeting cancelled and replaced by the meeting on Oct. 1.*
- Oct. 1 Outside Film and Discussion in the Connelly Center: *Invisible Children*

SECTION 4: FILM AND TIME

- Oct. 5 Alfred Hitchcock. *Vertigo* (1958).
- Oct. 7 Chris Marker. *La jetée* (1962).
Raymond Bellour. "The Book, Back and Forth."
Optional Film: Christopher Nolan. *Memento* (2000)
Question 6: Explain the notion of "temporal vertigo" as it relates to both *La jetée* and *Vertigo*.
- Oct. 10-18 *Semester Recess*
- Oct. 19 Terry Gilliam. *12 Monkeys* (1995).

SECTION 5: FILM AND HISTORY

- Oct. 21 Jean-Luc Godard. *Breathless* (1960).
Gabriel Rockhill, "Modernism as a Misnomer: Godard's Archeology of the Image."
Optional Film: Hal Hartley. *Amateur* (1994).
Question 7: Write an anonymous assessment of the class to date. Discuss both the strong points and the weak points. Highlight any difficulties or concerns you may have.
- Oct. 26 Jean-Luc Godard. *Contempt* (1963).
Gabriel Rockhill, "Modernism as a Misnomer: Godard's Archeology of the Image."
- Oct. 28 Jean Baudrillard. "The Precession of Simulacra" in *Simulacra and Simulation*.
Question 8: How does Baudrillard's conception of simulacra relate to Godard's conception of the iconic image?

SECTION 6: CINEMATIC MODERNITY

- Nov. 2 Orson Welles. *Citizen Kane* (1941).

Nov. 4 Optional Film: Sergei Eisenstein. *The Battleship Potemkin* (1925).
André Bazin. "Evolution of Cinematographic Language" in *What Is Cinema?*

Question 9: Provide a detailed map of Bazin's understanding of film history. Make sure that you touch on the role of Bergsonian duration (*la durée*) and its relationship to cinematic modernity.

Nov. 9 Gilles Deleuze. *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (chapter 1).
Optional Film: Vittorio De Sica. *Umberto D* (1952).

SECTION 7: GREEK AND CHRISTIAN SOURCES IN HOLLYWOOD

Nov. 11 Joseph Campbell. "Prologue: The Monomyth" in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*.

George Lucas. *Star Wars Episode IV – A New Hope* (1977).

Please bring the handouts I gave you so that we can discuss the "monomyth."

Question 10: Using the chart I provide for you, map out the story of Luke Skywalker in accordance with Campbell's "Monomyth." Comment on whether or not you think Lucas' film is a contemporary manifestation of "The Hero with a Thousand Faces."

Nov. 16 The Wachowski Brothers. *The Matrix* (1999).

Plato. *The Republic* (selection from Book VII).

The Bible: "The Gospel According to Matthew" (selection).

Optional Reading: *The Bible*: "The Gospel According to Mark" (selection).

SECTION 8: FILM AND THE OTHER ARTS

Nov. 18 Outside Film and Discussion: *The Yes Men Fix the World*

Jean-Paul Sartre. *What Is Literature?* (selection).

Nov. 23 Ovid. *Metamorphoses* (selection).

R.W. Fassbinder. *The Bitter Tears of Petra Von Kant* (1972).

Question 11: How can *The Bitter Tears* be understood as a modern version of the story of Midas?

Nov. 25-29 Thanksgiving Recess

SECTION 9: POLITICIZING FILM

Nov. 30 Gus Van Sant. *Elephant* (2003).

Michael Moore. *Bowling for Columbine* (2002).

Gabriel Rockhill. "The Politics of Aesthetics: Political History and the Hermeneutics of Art" (selection).

Question 12: Explain how *Bowling for Columbine* and *Elephant* relate to the distinction between "content-based commitment" and "formal commitment." Which film do you find to be a more effective statement on gun violence in America?

Dec. 2 Terry Gilliam. *Brazil* (1985).

SECTION 10: NEW MEDIA: TELEVISION, VIDEO, INTERNET

Dec. 7 Matthias Müller. *Home Stories* (video).

Raymond Williams. "Effects of the Technology and Its Uses" in *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*.

Question 13: Outline Williams' argument concerning cause and effect in communications systems. Do you find that it applies to contemporary television, video and Internet? Why or why not?

Dec. 9 *Outlawed* (available at www.witness.org).

John Pilger. *Breaking The Silence - Truth and Lies in the War on Terror*
(available at www.video.google.co.uk).

Dec. 15 **FINAL EXAM**
Final Exam: 10:45 a.m.-1:15 p.m.