

MCOM 320 Advanced Studies in Criticism: Philosophy of Film
Biola University, Fall 2005
Thursdays 7-9:45pm

Instructor: John McAteer
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Texts: [M] Stephen Mulhall, *On Film*
[PS] Carl Plantinga & Greg M. Smith, *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition, and Emotion*
[WC] Tomas E. Wartenberg & Angela Curran, *Philosophy of Film: Introductory Text and Readings*

Journal: For 1/2 of their course grade, students will write a weekly journal. In this journal, students must write 1-2 pages critically evaluating each assigned reading. Note that there are usually two or three assigned readings for each week. For each assigned reading the student should first summarize the reading and then say what the student thinks is right and wrong about the reading. Evaluations should include references to specific films that the student thinks support or undermine the argument of the reading. **Journals will be turned in each week in class.** *No late work will be accepted without a doctor's excuse.*

Term Paper: For 1/2 of their course grade, students will write an 8-10 page term paper on one of the following four topics. **Due December 15, 2005.** *No late work will be accepted without a doctor's excuse.*

Topic 1: Read Stanley Cavell's *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*; then discuss the book in relation to the assigned readings on the nature of film and the possibility of philosophical film.

Topic 2: Watch one of the following films; then ethically and artistically evaluate in detail the film's use of emotion (the sublime, horror, sentiment, empathy, identification, etc.), making reference to the relevant assigned readings: *Birth of a Nation* (Griffith, 1915), *Triumph of the Will* (Riefenstahl, 1935), *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (Spielberg, 1977), *Pulp Fiction* (Tarantino, 1994), *Fahrenheit 9/11* (Moore, 2004), or *The Passion Of The Christ* (Gibson, 2004).

Topic 3: In the same way that Mulhall discusses the *Alien* sequels as responses to the original film, watch two films, discuss the way one of the films is responding philosophically to the other. Some possible films include: *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (Kramer, 1967) and *Jungle Fever* (Lee, 1991); *Cape Fear* (Thompson, 1962) and *Cape Fear* (Scorsese, 1991); *The Exorcist* (Friedkin, 1973) and *Exorcist: The Beginning* (Harlin, 2004); etc. and etc.

Schedule:

8/25 Introduction to Course
Reading: WC Intro
In class viewing: *Waking Life* (Linklater, 2001)

Part I: Analytic Philosophy of Film

9/1 The Possibility (and Necessity) of Film Theory
Reading: WC 1-3
In class: *Persona* (Bergman 1966)

9/8 The Nature of Film, part 1
Reading: WC 4-5
In class: *Sherlock, Jr.* (Keaton, 1924)

9/15 The Nature of Film, part 2
Reading: WC 6-7
In class: *Blow Up* (Antonioni, 1966)

9/22 The Possibility of Non-Fiction Film
Reading: WC 8 & two articles on library reserve:
Noel Carroll, "Nonfiction Film and Postmodernist Skepticism"
Carl Plantinga, "Moving Pictures and the Rhetoric of Nonfiction Film"
In class: *The Thin Blue Line* (Morris, 1988)

9/29 Film Narration
Reading: WC 18-20
In class: *Rear Window* (Hitchcock, 1954)

10/6 Film Authorship
Reading: WC 9-10 & 12
In class: part of *Psycho* (Hitchcock, 1960) and *Psycho* (Van Sant, 1998)

Part II: Film and Emotion

10/13 Introduction & The Sublime
Reading: PS 1 & 3
In class: *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (Dreyer, 1928)

10/20 *Torrey Conference*
Reading: *None*
In class: *No Class*

10/27 Horror
Reading: WC 17 & 25
In class: *The Exorcist* (Friedkin, 1973)

- 11/3 Sentiment & Empathy
 Reading: PS 2 & 12
 In class: *City Lights* (Chaplin, 1931)
- 11/10 Identification
 Reading: PS 10-11
 In class: *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* (Spielberg, 1982)
- 11/17 Emotion and Ethics
 Recommended viewing: *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (Hitchcock, 1956) and
Casablanca (Curtiz, 1942)
 Reading: WC 14-16
 In class: *Unforgiven* (Eastwood, 1992)
- 11/24 *Thanksgiving*
 Reading: None
 In class: *No class*

Part III: Film as Philosophy

- 12/1 The Possibility of Philosophical Film
 Recommended viewing: *The Matrix* (The Wachowski Brothers, 1999)
 Reading: WC 26 and Wartenberg in *Philosophy Now* (July/Aug 2003)
<http://www.philosophynow.org/issue42/42wartenberg.htm>
 In class: *The Matrix Reloaded* (The Wachowski Brothers, 2003)
- 12/8 Stephen Mulhall on the *Alien* series, part 1
 Recommended at home viewing: *Aliens* (Cameron, 1986)
 Reading: M (entire book)
 In class: *Alien* (Scott, 1979)
- 12/15 Stephen Mulhall on the *Alien* series, part 2
 Recommended at home viewing: *Alien: Resurrection* (Jeunet, 1997)
 Reading: Anderson, Baggini, and Mulhall in *Film-Philosophy* (Aug 03)
<http://www.film-philosophy.com/vol7-2003/n23anderson>
<http://www.film-philosophy.com/vol7-2003/n24baggini>
<http://www.film-philosophy.com/vol7-2003/n25mulhall>
 In class: *Alien³* (Fincher, 1992)
Turn in Term Paper