

Intro to Philosophy of Film

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Office: Bowden 112
Hours: W 2:30-4:00

Phil 133 - 000
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MW 4 – 5:15
Bowden 116

Description

This course will explore some of the many philosophical issues surrounding film — What is the nature of film? How does a film communicate? Do films have authors? Narrators? What role does the viewer play when watching a film? How do films engage our emotions, background knowledge, and cognitive capacities? How do artistic and technical filmmaking decisions influence the meaning of a film and our experience as viewers? How can film engage in social commentary and self-reflexive activity?

There will be mandatory film screenings in addition to class sessions. Screenings will include the following films: *Adaptation*, *Birdman*, *The Conversation*, *Dawn of the Dead*, *Persona*, and *Rear Window*. Students will keep a film journal and write informal reflections and formal analyses of the films we screen in class. Required readings will be available in a course packet which students must purchase at the beginning of the semester (likely included will be selections from David Bordwell, Noël Carroll, Walter Benjamin, Stanley Cavell, and Siegfried Kracauer). Students will create a short movie for their final project that interrogates a scene, film, or genre using the concepts we have covered in class. No technical knowledge or equipment is required in advance and instruction will be provided. This class will be discussion-based and is appropriate for beginners in both philosophy and film.

Required Texts

Course packet will be available for purchase during the first week of term.

Assignments

1. Attendance and Participation

Because this class will be primarily structured as a seminar, I expect participation from each student. This means you come to class having read assigned texts **and having marked up** the reading, and are prepared to discuss it in class. I expect each student to engage in dialogue throughout the semester, as well as sharing from your film journal, and will approach you if I think you are not speaking up enough. Please do not hesitate to come talk to me if this is a particular challenge for you, and we can identify strategies for making this aspect of class more manageable.

2. Film Journal

You will keep a physical paper “journal” over the course of the semester where you will take notes on the films we screen in class. It will also house any in-class free-writing exercises we do and your informal journal entries. It will have 3 graded components:

Notes/Free-writes: I do require you to take notes during our films, though these notes may be minimal. Please make an effort to keep your journal legible and neat!

Informal Entries: You will need to complete informal journal entries for all our screened films. These entries should be written in the film journal itself, and can remark upon any element of the film that was particularly striking to you—cinematography, lighting, acting, pacing, plot, narrative structure, thematic elements, visual style, philosophical questions raised by the film, etc. These should be no shorter than a page, probably somewhere between 1-3 pages depending on the size of your notebook and the size of your handwriting.

Formal Entries: You will write 3 formal entries over the course of the semester. These should be typed, not included in your film journal. Formal entries should be about 3-4 pages (no shorter than 3 full pages), double-spaced, with 12 pt. Times New Roman font and one-inch margins. They may be expansions of an informal entry for a class film, though if you choose this option the new writing should be considerably more detailed and should ideally contain some new scope or focus. Formal entries can also be based on a film that we have **not** screened in class. This way, it is a chance to apply our discussions and theories learned together to other films you are interested in viewing or are seeing during the course of your everyday activities.

3. Movie Project

The movie project will be an opportunity to creatively respond to the ideas discussed in class using a sustained example of your choosing. You will focus on a genre, director, specific film, or combinations of all three to examine in-depth in both a research paper and short iMovie project. I will provide a list of possible topics, but you will have considerable freedom in the choice of topic(s) and directions you choose to go in.

This project will have 5 components:

Mid-Term Research Paper: The research paper is meant to be a place to focus in on one particular element of your wider topic. More details to come. Paper should be 8-10 pages, double-spaced, with 12 pt. Times New Roman font and one-inch margins

Movie Script: Due one week after your research paper. Script should include dialogue, narration, on-screen text, as well as descriptions of settings, visuals, images, etc. in brackets.

Peer Critique: A rough draft of your movie will be due about two weeks before the final version is due. There will be a peer critique session in which you will show your rough draft to a small group of your classmates and will provide feedback in written and verbal form to each of your group members. I will provide a feedback form for guidance. You need to show up for this critique with your film in a close-to-finished state, be attentive to your peers, and provide constructive and helpful feedback.

Final Movie: The final movie will most likely communicate information and insights about your topic in a broader way than in your research paper. I encourage you to get creative here. The movie should not simply repeat what you have said in your research paper – they are meant to be *complementary* but not *redundant* vehicles to explore various facets of your topic and communicate them in unique linguistic and visual fashions. Have fun with it!

Filmmaker's Note: This short (1/2 page) note on the experience of making the movie will be due at the same time as your final movie. I expect you to address how you incorporated your peers' critique in editing your rough draft into a final cut, or well thought-out reasons why you chose not to incorporate their feedback. Other guidance will be provided.

4. Online Critical Thinking Component

This is a four-credit class. The class readings, screenings, other assignments, and participation in the classroom will comprise three credits. Students earn their fourth credit by completing a department-required online component that covers basic critical thinking skills. All students in introductory philosophy courses are required to complete this online course module. It is a self-guided course, located on Blackboard, focusing in informal logic and will help familiarize students with basic argument structures. It has **13 short online tests which must be passed by Thanksgiving**. While the critical thinking module is not graded, it is required to complete the module and pass all the exams. **Failure to complete this module will result in the student not passing the course.**

Grading

Grading Breakdown:

Attendance and Participation	15 %
Film Journal (Notes & 10 Informal Entries)	25 %
Film Journal (3 Formal Entries)	30 %
Mid-Term Research Paper	15 %
Final Movie	15 %
Extra Credit Opportunities	up to 5%
Critical Thinking Component	mandatory, not graded

Grading Scale:

A	93-100	C+	77-79
A-	90-92	C	73-76
B+	87-89	C-	70-72
B	83-86	D+	67-69
B-	80-82	D	60-66

1. Attendance and Participation

You are allowed to miss **three classes** throughout the semester without penalty. After the third absence, each unexcused absence will count as 2.5% off your final grade. Excused absences may be obtained by ADSR or by contacting the Office of Undergraduate Education in White Hall Room 300. Please arrive on time to class. If I notice a pattern of tardiness, I will approach you about the problem. If tardiness persists, I will mark each late arrival as an absence from then on. If this problem is widespread, I will adopt this policy for the entire class. Attending the film screenings is mandatory, but the absence policy will be more lax. I know you all have busy schedules. **If you miss a film screening**, you are responsible for watching the film on your own before the next class session at which we will discuss the film. Films have been placed on Course Reserve in the Media Library. You may check out the film for a limited time and view it in the library.

2. Film Journal

Notes/free-writes and informal entries will be graded on the basis of participation/completion. Formal entries will be graded on the A-D scale, a grading rubric will be provided.

3. Movie Project

I will provide assignment guidelines and/or grading rubrics for each component of the project during the semester. The research paper and final movie will each be 15% of your final grade. The movie script, peer critique, and filmmaker's note will not be graded, but failure to complete any of these will result in the loss of 1/3 of a letter grade from your movie project per component missed (i.e., an A will become an A-, an A- will become a B+).

4. Extra Credit Opportunities

There will be multiple opportunities to attend screenings outside of our class screenings that are sponsored by the Emory film department. If you attend (and there are corresponding "notes" and "informal entry" sections in your film journal), then you will receive **2.5% extra credit per event**, for up to 2 events attended. Think about using the films you see at these events as the subject of a formal journal entry as well—not only will you already have seen the movie, you will also be in the company of instructors and students who are knowledgeable about the films and can potentially answer any questions you may have after the screening is over. Strike up a conversation before you leave and talk about your ideas!

Late Policy:

No late work will be accepted. The only exception will be for excused absences for illness, or if cleared in advance with me given specific extenuating circumstances. If you know you will be absent on a day a formal entry is due, you must email me your entry in advance of the class session at which it is due.

Other Policies

Accommodations:

If you need any disability accommodations, please let me know early in the semester. You will want to contact the Office of Disability Services, Administration Building, Suite 110, phone: (404) 727-9877. They can help you acquire the accommodations you need.

Honor Code:

All students are expected to abide by Emory's official Honor Code policy. Emory's honor code can be found here: http://catalog.college.emory.edu/academic/policy/honor_code.html.

Weekly Schedule

W 8/24 **NO CLASS** (Read syllabus, fill out Doodle poll)

WHAT IS FILM? & MEDIUM SPECIFICITY

M 8/29 Introduction to Philosophy of Film ideas, course overview

W 8/31 Discussion: Basic Film/Film Theory History
Readings: Carrol, Choi, "What is Film?" (3 pgs)
Kracauer, "The Two Main Tendencies" (7 pgs)

M 9/5 **NO CLASS** (Labor Day)

T 9/6 **Screening #1: Fight Club**, 5:15 pm, Bowden 118
(Recommended Viewing: The Social Network)

W 9/7 Discussion: Fight Club
Readings: Schreiber, "Tiny Life" (15 pgs)

M 9/12 Discussion: Benjamin
Reading: Benjamin, "Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (26pgs)

W 9/14 Discussion: Benjamin and Carrol
Reading: Carrol, "Forget the Medium!" (9 pgs)

GENRE

M 9/19 Discussion: Genre
Reading: Grant, "The Classic Studio System," "Genre and Society" (8 pgs)
Chandler, "An Introduction to Genre Theory" (4 pgs)

Due: Topics chosen (4 weeks until research paper/script due)

M 9/19 **Screening #2: Birdman**, 5:15 pm, Anthropology Building 105

W 9/21 Discussion: Birdman
Readings: Gaine, "Genre and Super-Heroism" (8 pgs)

AUTEUR THEORY

M 9/26 Discussion: Authorship
Readings: Meskin, "Authorship" (15 pgs)

M 9/26 **Screening #3: Adaptation**, 5:15 pm, White Hall 207

W 9/28 Discussion: Adaptation, Auteur Theory
Readings: Sarris, "Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962" (4 pgs)
Pauline Kael, "The Idea of Film Criticism," (11 pgs)
Brody, "Andrew Sarris and the 'A' Word" (4 pgs)

M 10/3 Discussion: Auteur Theory, Barthes
Readings: Barthes, "Death of the Author" (7 pgs)

Due: Formal Entry #1

M 10/3 **Screening #4: Persona**, 5:15 pm, White Hall 207

W 10/5 Discussion: Persona, Sontag
Readings: Sontag, "Ingmar Bergman's Persona" (20 pgs)

M 10/10 **NO CLASS** (Fall Break)

W 10/12 iMovie Workshop in the MediaLab (3rd floor of Woodruff Library)

NARRATION

M 10/17 Discussion: Bordwell, Narration
Reading: Bordwell, Narration in the Fiction Film 29-40 (11 pgs)

Due: Research Paper (4 weeks until movie due)

M 10/17 Screening #5: Rear Window, 7 pm, White Hall 207

W 10/19 Discussion: Rear Window, Bordwell
Bordwell, Narration in the Fiction Film 40-47 (7 pgs)

M 10/24 Discussion: Bordwell
Reading: Bordwell, Narration in the Fiction Film 48-53 (6 pgs)

Due: Script

M 10/24 Screening #5: Rashomon, 5:15 pm, White Hall 207

W 10/26 Discussion: Rashomon, Bordwell
Reading: Bordwell, Narration in the Fiction Film 54-62 (9 pgs)

SOUND & SHOT

M 10/31 Discussion: Composition and Cinematography

Due: Formal Entry #2

W 11/2 Discussion: Music and Sound

Reading: Kalinak, "Film Music: A Very Short Introduction" (30 pgs)

W 11/2 Screening #7: The Conversation, 5:15 pm, White Hall 207

EMOTIONS & SOCIETY

M 11/7 Discussion: The Conversation

M 11/7 Screening #8: Cleo From 5 to 7, 5:15 pm, White Hall 207

W 11/9 Discussion: Cleo From 5 to 7, Emotions
Reading: Gaut, "Identification and Emotion in Narrative Film" (10 pgs)

M 11/14 Peer Critique Session
Due: Draft of Movie (2 weeks until final draft due)

M 11/14 Screening #9: Winter's Bone, 5:15 pm, White Hall 207

W 11/16 Discussion: Winter's Bone, Emotions
Readings: Interview with Rebecca Hohffer (~5 pgs)
John Morreall, "Enjoying Negative Emotions in Fictions" (8 pgs)

M 11/21 **Screening #10: Dawn of the Dead**, 2:00 pm, Group Viewing Room in Woodruff
Library, 4th floor across from Music & Media service desk

M 11/21 Discussion: Dawn of the Dead
Reading: Harper, "Zombies, Malls, and the Consumerism Debate" (7 pgs)

Due: Formal Entry #3, Critical Thinking Component completed

W 11/23 **NO CLASS** (Thanksgiving)

M 11/28 Student Film Fest

W 11/30 Student Film Fest

M 12/5 Student Film Fest