

PHI 4884: PHILOSOPHY OF FILM
Spring 2021

Instructor: Dr. Elizabeth Scarbrough

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Course Description:

This class is an introduction to the philosophy of film. The course is designed to provide you with a broad overview of **some** of the topics in the philosophy of film. This is not a film theory course, nor is it a film history or film studies course. Topics discussed include:

- What is film (ontological questions)?
- What is documentary film?
- Do films have narrators?
- Who is the author of a film?
- How can we respond emotionally to things in film we know are fake? (paradox of fiction)
- Why do we take pleasure in disgusting images?
- How should we judge a film made by a moral monster? A film that glorifies Nazis?
- How can we love evil characters?
- Can films make arguments?
- Can a film be philosophy?

You will be required to read (approximately) one article and watch one movie per week. **Although there are no prerequisites for this course, previous coursework in philosophy will be extremely beneficial.** The articles assigned are not designed for introductory students.

Learning Objectives:

It is the objective of this course to acquaint the student with aesthetic theory both as a way of enriching the student's exchange with art as well as the broader culture. Your skills will be developed and tested in three ways:

(1) **Reading Comprehension:** involves carefully, closely reading all the assigned texts;

(2) **Philosophical Writing:** involves completing a variety of written assignments designed to teach you how good philosophical writing differs from other familiar types of writing;

(3) **Class Discussion:** involves actively, respectfully engaging with your peers and instructor about philosophically complex, abstract theories that have implications for how we engage with motion pictures.

Success in this course requires you to prepare yourself for class discussion by reading critically, to defend your own views with reasons and arguments, and to give a good faith effort to develop your philosophical skills, both verbally and in writing.

Required Texts:

Carroll, Noel and Choi, Jinhee, ed. *Philosophy of Film and Motion Pictures: An Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008).¹ All other written text will be placed on CANVAS (PDF) or can be retrieved electronically through our library.

You are also required to watch one movie a week. The vast majority of these movies are free through the FIU library. There might be 1-2 we've lost permissions for – so budget \$3-6 for movie rentals when necessary. I expect you to watch the movie even if you have seen it before. Good movies, like good books, reward multiple viewings.

Evaluation Criteria:

Attendance and Participation 10% (10 points): You are required to attend class sessions. Attendance includes being awake, alert, and prepared. If you miss more than 1 unexcused classes your participation grade will be lowered by 3 points (3%) per excessive absence (remember class is only once a week). Participation is vital to your success in this class. You are being graded on the quality of your contribution to the class. To this end you will be asked to keep a participation journal. Detailed instructions will be given in class.

Memos 6% (6 points): During class I will ask you to demonstrate that you made a good faith effort to read the assigned text and watch the assigned movie. These “memos” might take the form of discussion posts, multiple choice quiz, or brief writing reflections. The point of the memos is twofold: (1) to practice writing and (2) to encourage reading/watching before class. The memos are graded pass/fail.

Weekly Journal Questions and Reflections 35% (35 points): Attendance includes being prepared with questions. You will be required to write in your on-line journal (on CANVAS). You must hand in 7 journals over the course of our semester. Each journal must have:

- (1) Brief explanation of the argument in the text (3 points)
- (2) A brief reflection on how the movie assigned does or does not relate to the author's argument (1 points)
- (3) 2 questions about the text (1 point)

Journal entries are turned in on CANVAS by the start of class and **can be handed in late with a 50% penalty**. These are designed to encourage class participation and are designed to help you write your papers. You only have to complete 7 journal entries to receive full credit. There is no journal in our first week. You may complete one extra for 5 points extra credit.

Leadership Project 7% (7points): Each leadership project should have three parts:

- (1) A 2-minute (brief) explanation of a key concept from the text (3 points)
- (2) Two discussion questions for the class (3 points)
- (3) A class activity (3 points)

One point will be allocated for you to come to see me **BEFORE** presenting your project in class so I can give you feedback on it. Be creative! One way to satisfy all three parts of this assignment is to have a Kahoot (part 3) and make sure you discuss the key concepts in-between concepts (part 1), and supplement the Kahoot with a PowerPoint with two discussion questions. A sign up sheet for presentations will be passed around WEEK 1.

¹ This book is required, and you must have access to it during class.

Group Projects (10%): You will be placed in 'groups' during this online course. You'll have a group for the first half and have the option to switch groups for the second half. Two times during the semester you will be given an assignment you will have to do outside of class with your group. You will be graded based both on the final result and on the quality of your particular contribution.

Two short papers 30% (15% each) (30 points): You must complete two short papers. The papers should have an introduction (with thesis statement), exegesis, argument, and conclusion. If you are having trouble coming up with a thesis statement, please come see me in office hours. You must complete one paper by MARCH 9th of our course (between weeks 8 and 9) This paper should be 5-7 pages in length (approx. 2500 words). Your second paper will be due the Monday of finals week. You have two options for the final paper: you may choose a new topic and write a new 2500 word paper OR you can turn your original paper into a longer term paper (15 pages). In order to choose the longer paper, you must meet with me via appointment by the 11th week of class and get approval. These papers will be turned in via Turn-It-In, a link to which can be found on your CANVAS page. With special permission from me, I would also allow a video essay for either / both of these papers. Plagiarized papers (or parts of paper) will receive a 0 for that assignment.

Final paper presentation 2% (2 points): For our final class during finals week, you must send me 1 slide powerpoint the night before our scheduled exam time. You will have 1-2 minutes to present your final paper project to the class.

Grading Scale: A = 93-100%, A- = 90-92%, B+ = 87-89%, B = 83-86%, B- = 80-82%, C+ = 77-79%, C = 73-76%, C- = 70-72%, D+ = 67-69%, D = 63-66%, D- = 60-62%, E = 59% and below

Late policy: Your leadership project and final paper may not be handed in late. Your first paper may be handed in late for a penalty of -.5 per day (or part of the day) late. Your journals may be handed in late at a 50% penalty (so any late journal can get a maximum of 2.5 points).

Class Etiquette: Please treat our Zoom session as if you were in class. Try to minimize outside distractions (video games, texting, talking with friends). Remote learning requires **more concentration** (not less) and it is (partially) up to you to set up the conditions for your success. Do not attend class while driving. If I suspect you are in your car while in class, I will remove you from the class session. It is not safe to take class and drive. Additionally, I expect you to treat other students (and their opinions) with respect. ***This includes not taking photos (screen shots) or videos of me or your fellow students without permission. I will always let you know before recording our class sessions.***

Academic Misconduct: *Academic dishonesty disadvantages honest students, and is clearly unfair to hardworking students. Instructors have a duty, therefore, to protect honest students, and to insure that they are not disadvantaged by dishonest students.* For more information, see FIU's Academic Misconduct policy (Section 2.44). There are serious consequences for academic misconduct, including suspension and expulsion from the university. **All students suspected of plagiarism will be reported to the Office of Academic Misconduct and receive a "0" on their assignment.**

Safe Zone Statement: I am part of the Safe Zone Ally community here at FIU. This means I am part of a network of trained FIU faculty/staff/students who are available to listen and support you in a safe and confidential manner. As a Safe Zone Ally, I can help connect you with resources on campus to address problems you may face that interfere with your academic and social success on campus as it relates to issues surrounding sexual orientation/gender identity. My goal is to help you be successful and to maintain a safe and equitable campus.

Commitment to

Disability Access:

It is my moral and legal obligation to provide students with disabilities accommodations to help them succeed in my classroom. I take this responsibility seriously. You need not disclose to me your disability, but I can work with you to provide accommodations to help you succeed. You may also choose to work with the Disability Resource Center. The Disability Resource Center collaborates with faculty to provide inclusive learning environments. More information may be found at the DRC's website: drc.fiu.edu.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

*All readings must be completed by the date they are listed in the syllabus.

**I reserve the right to change/adjust this schedule. Changes will be announced in class.

***Locations for the movies can be found on our CANVAS site.

WEEK 1: Introduction

Discussion on how to watch a movie.

Film:

We will watch a movie together

WEEK 2: What is Film?

Readings:²

-Introduction Section II (text)

-Carroll "Defining the Moving Image" (text)

Film:

The Story of Film: *Birth of the Cinema* (Cousins, 2011)

Required You-tube:

Wayang Kulit: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pfydro4X2t0>

WEEK 3: Documentary⁸

Readings:⁴

-Introduction Section III (text)

-Carroll, "Fiction, Non-Fiction, and the Film of Presumptive Assertion: A Conceptual Analysis" (text)

Film:

The Act of Killing (Oppenheimer, 2012)

You-tube:

Lumiere Bro.: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1dgLEDdFddk>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4nj0vEO4Q6s>

Recommended:

I am Not Your Negro (Peck, 2016)

Paris is Burning (Livingston, 1990)

The Thin Blue Line (Morris, 1998)

Cave of Forgotten Dreams (Herzog, 2010)

The Up Series (Apted, 1964-2012)

WEEK 4: Film Narrative / Narration

Readings:⁵

-Introduction Section IV (text)

² Supplemental reading: Langer (in your text)

³ Easter Egg: If you email me (escarbro@fiu.edu) (a) the name of your favorite documentary (b) a brief 50-150 word description of why it is your favorite and (c) permission to place this on my blog (with your name or anonymously) I will give you +.5 extra credit. This must be done by class on Wednesday.

⁴ Supplemental reading: Remes, "Motion(less) Pictures: The Cinema of Stasis" BJA July 2012 Vol 52 Issue 3 (look up in library)

⁵ Supplemental reading: Wilson (in your text)

-Currie, "Unreliability Refigured: Narrative in Literature and Film" (text)

Film:
Rashomon (Kurosawa, 1950)

WEEK 5: Cinematic Authorship

Readings:
Livingston, "Cinematic Authorship" (text)

Film:
8 ½ (Fellini, 1963)

WEEK 6: Emotions and Film: Playing make-believe

Readings:⁶ Introduction, Section V (text)
Walton, "Fearing Fictions" (text)

Film:
Dogtooth (Lanthimos, 2011) -

In class: WORLD OF TOMORROW (Hertzfeldt, 2015)

Recommended:

A Letter to Momo (Okiura, 2011)
Delicatessen (Jeunet, Caro 1991)
Akira, (Otomo, 1988)
Timecrimes (Vigalondo, 2007)
World on a Wire (Fassbinder, 1973)
Fantastic Planet (Laloux, 1973)

WEEK 7: Emotions and Film: Empathy

Reading:⁷
Neill, "Empathy and Film Fiction" (text)

Film:
Au Hasard Balthazar (Bresson, 1966)

WEEK 8: Emotions and Film: Identification⁸

Reading:⁹
Gaut, "Identification and Emotion in Narrative Film" (text)

Film:
Do the Right Thing (Spike Lee, 1989)

Recommended:

Moonlight (Jenkins, 2016)

WEEK 9: Horror I

Readings:¹⁰
(1) Carroll, "Why Horror?" (PDF)

⁶ Supplemental reading: Carroll "Film, Emotion and Genre" (in your text)

⁷ Supplemental reading: Knight "In Fictional Shoes" (in your text)

⁸ Easter Egg: If you email me (escarb@fiu.edu) (a) the name of the movie that made you the most emotional (b) a brief 50-150 word description of why it made you so emotional (and what emotion: pity, anger, envy, empathy) (c) permission to place this on my blog (with your name or anonymously) I will give you +.5 extra credit. This must be done by class on Wednesday.

⁹ Supplemental reading: Johnson and Dyck, "Appreciating Bad Art" The Journal of Value Inquiry 51 (find in our library)

¹⁰ Several supplemental readings are available on CANVAS

Movie:
The Host / Gwoemul (Joon-ho Bong, 2006)

WEEK 10: Horror II

Reading: Freeland “Art Dread” (PDF)

Movie:
A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night (Amirpour, 2014)

WEEK 11: Horror III¹¹

*If you'd like to work on PAPER 1 to turn it into a 15 page paper, you must come talk to me during WEEK 11. Schedule an appointment here: escarbro.appointy.com

Reading:
Strohl “Horror and Hedonic Ambivalence”
Journal of Aesthetics & Art Criticism
Spring 2012, Vol. 70, Issue 2
(find this through our library)

Movie: Gremlins (Dante, 1984)

WEEK 12: Film and Ethics

Please see my attached “Potentially Offensive Material” warning attached to the end of this syllabus. If explicit (though academic) discussions of sex, or unfamiliar and disturbing sexual practices, inhibit your learning, then you should reconsider whether this is a good course for you.

Reading:
Article: Devereaux, “Beauty and Evil: The Case of Leni Riefenstahl’s *Triumph of the Will*” (text)

Movie:
Triumph of the Will (Riefenstahl, 1935) - Online:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HVCUsKkXq3Y>
(Only watch the first 20 minutes)

Triumph of the Will and the Cinematic Language of Propaganda (Dan Olsen, 2017):
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j11Qm1Z_D7w (20 minutes)

Recommended:
Au Revoir Les Enfants (Malle, 1987)

WEEK 13: Film and Ethics: The Ethicism Debate

Please see my attached “Potentially Offensive Material” warning attached to the end of this syllabus. If explicit (though academic) discussions of sex, or unfamiliar and disturbing sexual practices, inhibit your learning, then you should reconsider whether this is a good course for you.

Reading:
Anne Eaton “Robust Immoralism” (PDF)

Required Movie:
TBD

¹¹ Easter Egg: If you email me (escarbro@fiu.edu) (a) the name of your favorite horror movie (b) a brief description related to our theories of horror about why you found it so compelling and (c) permission to place your entry on my blog (anonymously), I will give you +.5 extra credit. This must be done by class on Wednesday.

Suggested Movies (from most explicit to least explicit):

In The Realm of the Senses (Oshima, 1976) - Kanopy

Nymphomaniac (Von Trier, 2013 *5 hours long) - course reserves

WEEK 14: Film and Philosophy

Article: Intro to Part VIII (text)

Article: Hanson, "Minerva in the Movies: Relations Between Philosophy and Film" (text)

Film: *The Seventh Seal* (Bergman, 1957)

WEEK 15: FINAL EXAM PERIOD

You will be required to present your final paper to your classmates. You must send me 1 powerpoint slide the night before our final exam. See assignment instructions.

***Your final paper is due MIDNIGHT THE DAY OUR FINAL EXAM IS SCHEDULED.** I will give you a rubric score and brief comments UNLESS you write "FULL COMMENTS" on your paper and then I will include full comments.