

PHL 243-301: PHILOSOPHY & FILM

DePaul University: Lincoln Park Campus
Spring Quarter 2017
Meets: M/W 11:20-12:50pm
SAC: Room 254

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Hours: W 2:00-4:00pm (or by appt)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The title of the course immediately opens several questions: what do we mean to do when we bring philosophy and film together with a conjunction? How does this differ from the sub-genre of aesthetics that goes by the name of 'philosophy of film'? What are we meant to understand or gain by the unification of academic discipline and art form(s)? Which of the two terms takes precedence: philosophy or film? Does one serve to inform us about or deepen our engagement with the other and/or vice versa?

These are questions that are posed internal to philosophy, aesthetics, and film or cinema studies, questions that riddle something as yet unresolved. As a result, there are many conflicting arguments on the subject. Some scholars—usually philosophers—believe film can only be used as a *didactic* tool, i.e. one that helps philosophers teach the unenlightened about how philosophy can be embodied by or embedded in an art form. Others—usually film scholars and art critics—believe that film is a unique medium, an art form in the truest sense in that it is creative of its own dynamic of communication whose layers can, to be sure, be interpreted by reference to philosophy, but whose significance most certainly does not require philosophy in order to be appreciated.

Our work in this course will trace a dialogue between the mediums of philosophy and film in order to open the possibility of approaching film as itself capable of philosophizing. Dialogue does not collapse the difference between its participants, but acknowledges each as coming to the table with its own contributions and limitations, strengths and weaknesses. Thus, in an effort to understand the language, coherence, and temporality of a given film, we shall find ourselves learning to think (with) it, tracing the dialogical contribution of the film and practicing philosophy simultaneously.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

In order to trace this dialogue, we will need to achieve a certain fluency in the language of: 1) film interpretation (that is based largely on an informed understanding of how the filmic art functions and signifies); and 2) philosophy (in terms of its history, objects of concern, and critical practice). Generally speaking, the aim is to introduce students to the ways in which the tools specific to philosophical practice can be deployed to deepen our reflections on the problems specific to time and narrativity that emerge from the study of and engagement with films that philosophize. The chosen focus on problems of time and narrativity should enable us to both: explore a specific and thereby limited territory of philosophical inquiry that will allow us to go

deeper rather than broader in scope; and to facilitate a critical practice driven by engagement with an art form, reflection that makes significant use of philosophically investigative tools, respectful collective discourse, and the goal of improving both oral and written expression of idea complexes.

To meet these objectives, students will be encouraged to develop a critical reading practice, i.e. they will be required to read a number of primary texts, paying careful attention to the language used and the arguments made, and notating the texts for thesis statement, central claims, important or problematic passages, and key or confusing terms. In order to ensure fidelity to the text, the readings will never exceed twenty pages, but will be dense and complex, and will demand that the student not only read but also **reread** for further depth of understanding. While lectures and in-class discussions serve to situate, explicate, and clarify the readings, raising questions and provoking discussion, they cannot be substituted for the critical reading practice students are expected to cultivate in this course. In addition, students will be expected to take notes during any and all in-class screenings that will be submitted along with the Midterm and Final Examinations for review. Therefore passive spectatorship will not suffice to achieve success in this course.

Note.1: Several of the required films will challenge everyone in the class. To be challenged is part and parcel of opening difficult questions and critically engaging art forms. Many of the films contain images that are of a graphic nature. This includes, but is not limited to, depictions of violence, sex, and sexual violence. It should be understood that the challenging content of the film(s) will also be reflected in our readings and discussions. Therefore, while visitors are welcome to come to film screenings, the host is responsible for informing the visitor of the course content; no minors will be permitted to attend. If you are unable to devote the time required to watch the supplemental films [see **Course Schedule** below], or if the disturbing content of these films and the discussions to follow will prevent you from viewing, discussing, and writing about the issues reflected in the films and course content, please consider taking another course in lieu of this one.

COURSE TEXTS

The following texts will be made available to you on Desire2Learn. You are expected to print each text and bring it to class on the date for which it is assigned (see **Course Schedule**, below:

- Berger, John. "Chapter One". *Ways of Seeing*. New York: Penguin Books, 1972.
- Cavell, Stanley. *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*. Enlarged Edition. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979, 25-41.
- Faulkner, Joanne. "Does Philosophy Meet Film in Plato's Cave? Or at the Pharmacy? Reflections on *Memento*". 2003. [retrieved online]
- Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema". *Film Theory and Criticism, Introductory Readings*, eds. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen. New York: Oxford UP, 1999: 833-844.
- Kristeva, Julia. "Excerpts". *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia UP, 1989.

- Nietzsche, Friedrich. "Excerpts". *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Random House, 1974.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. "Excerpts". *Untimely Meditations: On the Uses and Abuses of History for Life*, ed. Daniel Breazeale, trans. RJ Hollingdale. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997.
- Kurtz, Katherine. "Chance is Curbed: Time-Image in *Birdman*". Paper Presented at the annual meeting of The Society for Phenomenology & Existentialism, 2016.
- Pope, Alexander. "Eloisa to Abelard". Accessed March 27, 2017.
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/44892>

Note.2: Please see me if you have any issues acquiring these texts. You are otherwise expected to have the text in class for reference on the day(s) it is assigned. Furthermore, I do not allow laptops or any other electronic devices in the classroom. Feel free to come speak with me about this if it is a problem.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

I. Attendance, Attentiveness, & Participation (Worth 20% of Final Grade)

A. Attendance: Attendance is determined based on the following criteria: whether you are here, on time, *with* the assigned reading. A sign-in sheet will be circulated at the start of class. If you arrive late to class you will be offered the opportunity to sign in at its conclusion. In addition, I will occasionally take reading attendance. If you do not have your text in class, you will be marked late. Be aware that two instances of tardiness, whether from arriving late, leaving early, or failing to bring your copy of the assigned text to class, will count as one absence. Two absences are permitted, excused or unexcused, for whatever reason. Absences in excess of two without a documented, legitimate excuse (emergency, medical, family, athletic, etc.) will negatively affect your overall grade. Absences in excess of four insure that the best you can do is pass the course. Please do not test me on this policy.

B. Attentiveness: While attendance is crucial to your success in the course, attentiveness is equally so. It is not enough to show up and shut down. This means arriving well rested, ready to contribute to the discussion, and in the proper mindset to absorb and respectfully respond to the contributions of your fellow classmates. Following along in the text, actively listening to what others are saying, and taking notes during film screenings are visible aspects of attentiveness that I will record to determine this component of your grade.

C. Participation: Having arrived on time, with your text, attentive and ready to contribute, you are now in a position to participate. You should plan to participate in every class session. Note that participation is not the same thing as vocalization. I expect the classroom to be an atmosphere where the free and vital exchange of ideas is encouraged through active contribution. Active contribution means:

1) Thoughtful and respectful vocalization, examples of which include but are not limited to: asking earnest, critical questions; genuinely responding to a classmate; identifying, clarifying, or requesting clarification of difficult terms and passages; recalling previous class sessions to bring

insight to a current class session; providing examples that shed light on a concept we are discussing; and explaining the real life relevance of a concept we are discussing.

2) Making space for others to speak by taking a step back. While we often assume that everyone shares the same ability to vocalize, each of us comes to the table with different levels of comfort, readiness, and even urgency. Take a moment to assess yourself and consider where you stand in this respect.

II. Mini-Test (Worth 5% of Final Grade)

In order to achieve basic fluency in the language of film interpretation, one mini-test (on applying the terminology of film theory) will be administered in the second week of the course. This mini-test cannot be made up.

III. Supplemental Film Worksheets (Worth 15% of Final Grade)

At the end of Week Three, we will begin working on a series of films that explore time and narrativity in a variety of ways. Each of the films in the series will be screened in class. However, in order to supplement these screenings and to: 1) deepen our appreciation of the work of each director and 2) explore the extent to which the directorial signature may or may not imply a continuity in philosophical expression, students are required to watch four films outside of class. Each of these four films will be made available to you via Course Reserves in the DePaul Library (Lincoln Park Campus), but you are free to obtain them by whatever means you are comfortable provided you adhere to copyright law. For each of the four supplemental films you will be assigned a worksheet to complete during (and perhaps partially after) your viewing of the film. Worksheets will be due at the start of the class for which they have been assigned. They will be assessed on a \checkmark , $\checkmark+$, and $\checkmark-$ basis:

a \checkmark is satisfactory (4pts), a $\checkmark+$ exceeds expectations (5pts), and a $\checkmark-$ (3pts) fails to meet expectations but evinces at least a minimal effort. You will not receive a grade if the work is not sufficient to pass.

Your best 3 of 4 worksheets will count toward your final grade.

IV. Midterm Examination (Worth 25% of Final Grade)

Halfway through the quarter a take-home midterm will be assigned (I will pass out hard copies in class, but if you prefer to type the exam a digital copy will be made available on D2L). It will be comprised of two sections: 1) [worth 40 points] a combination of multiple choice, true-false, short answer, matching, and fill in the blank questions designed to test your retention of any and all material covered in class to date; and 2) [worth 60 points] a short essay segment in which you will be asked to respond to a scene in a film and to critically interpret it through the lens of an assigned philosophical text. Note that while the constraints of the exam are such that typical formal paper requirements need not be met, you will be expected to present a polished, proofread, and cohesive short essay. Closer to the date of the exam I will distribute the rubric I utilize to evaluate the short essay segment so you have a clear idea of my expectations. Finally:

you must attach your in-class screening notes to the exam (with a staple, paperclip, or binder clip). I will look them over and give you up to five extra credit points based on their quality.

V. Final Examination (Worth 35% of Final Grade)

The final examination will have the same format as the Midterm Examination, but will cover the **entire quarter**. It is therefore a cumulative exam designed to assess our overall progress in the course. It will be due Monday, June 7th at the usual start time of our class. A hard copy—whether handwritten or typed— must be submitted to my mailbox at the Department of Philosophy (LPC, Clifton, Suite 150). I will pick up the submitted exams 20 minutes after they are due, so do not be late! The same expectations, thus the same rubric for essay evaluation, will apply to the final. You are also expected to attach your in-class screening notes (only from the second half of the quarter) and can receive up to five extra credit points based on their quality.

FINAL GRADE SUMMARY

1. Attendance/Attentiveness/Participation:	20%
2. Mini Test:	5%
3. (3 of 4) Supplemental Film Worksheets:	20%
4. Midterm Examination:	25%
5. Final Examination:	30%

CLOSING NOTES

- Technology has become a second skin in the 21st century; whether to our benefit or to our detriment is a whole other question for a whole other course. Critical thinking above all requires dedicated focus, so dialing down distractions is a must. Please turn off and stow away all cell phones at the start of class. If you are visibly on your cell phone while class is in session, you will be marked absent for the day. No excuses; no exceptions.
- If you have any questions or concerns about a grade received, feel free to bring it up. If you think the assignment requires re-evaluation, I will ask that you type up a brief explanation and re-submit the assignment for reassessment. You will never be penalized in this process. Keep in mind that you have up to one week after the assignment has been returned to appeal, and that it is ultimately your responsibility to take the initiative in this regard.
- No prior experience with philosophy is expected or required for this course. I do, however, assume that you have taken or are taking a college level composition course, know how to write an essay in English, and can read comfortably at the college level in English. If this is not the case, please see me.
- If you need English language assistance, help with writing, handling college, or dealing with personal or family issues, feel free to ask for help and/or consult the following resources:

DePaul Writing Center:

<http://condor.depaul.edu/writing/what/Writing%20Center/wc.html>

Office of Students with Disabilities:

<http://studentaffairs.depaul.edu/studentswithdisabilities/highcontrast/>

PLuS (provides services for students diagnosed with learning disabilities or attention deficit disorders): <http://studentaffairs.depaul.edu/csd/>

University Counseling Services (UCS, offers affordable individual, group, and couples counseling to enrolled students): <http://studentaffairs.depaul.edu/ucs/>

- If you plan to communicate with me via email, please do so professionally, i.e. in complete sentences, with a proper salutation and conclusion. Include a comprehensible subject heading, identify what class you are in (as instructors often teach more than one class at a time), and explain clearly what it is you are inquiring about. If you fail to comply with these guidelines, I will not respond.
- Please do make use of my office hours to approach me with any questions, concerns, or just to drop in and talk shop. Naturally your feedback is welcome, and your questions and thoughts serve to deepen our exchange and advance the learning process. Let me reiterate that if you need clarification of or help with any of the texts or assignments, do not hesitate to ask. Please do not wait until the end of the quarter to worry about your performance in the course. I expect that everyone in the class will talk with me during office hours or by appointment at least once this quarter.

COURSE SCHEDULE: **Subject to Revision At Any Time**

I. Critically Engaging the Filmic Medium

Week One: Mar 27/29

(M) Mar 29: Syllabus and Introduction

(W): Film Glossary & Slide Presentation

Week Two: Apr 3/5

(M): In-Class Mini Test; Video on Conventions of Cinema History

(W): Berger, *Ways of Seeing* [available on D2L]

Week Three: Apr 10/12

(M): Cavell, Chapters 2-4 from *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* [available on D2L]

II. Narrative Cinema: How Story is Pleasure (and Pain)

(W): Partial Screening: *Vertigo* (Alfred Hitchcock); [Supplemental Film: *Rear Window* (Hitchcock); Worksheet 1 Assigned]

Week Four: Apr 17/19

(M): Complete Screening: *Vertigo*; Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" [available on D2L]; Worksheet 1 Due

(W): Mulvey Concluded; Partial Screening, *Caché* (Haneke)

Week Five: Apr 24/26

(M): Complete Screening: *Caché*; Discussion, In-Class Activity; **Take Home Midterm Examination Assigned**

III. Disrupting Narrativity: Films that Philosophize?

(W): Partial Screening: *Memento*; [Supplemental Film: *Following* (Nolan); Worksheet 2 Assigned]

Week Six: May 1/3

(M): Complete Screening: *Memento*; Faulkner, "Does Philosophy Meet Film in Plato's Cave? Or at the Pharmacy? Reflections on *Memento*"; Worksheet 2 Due

IV. Film & The Philosophy of Non-Linear Time

(W): Partial Screening: *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (Gondry); **Take Home Midterm Examination Due (With In-Class Screening Notes Attached)**

Week Seven: May 8/10

(M): Complete Screening: *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (Gondry); Pope, "Eloisa to Abelard" [available on D2L]; Nietzsche, excerpts from the 2nd Untimely Meditation [available on D2L]; [Supplemental Film: *The Science of Sleep* (Gondry); Worksheet 3 Assigned]

(W): Nietzsche, excerpts from *The Gay Science* & *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* [available on D2L]

Week Eight: May 15/17

(M): Partial Screening: *Birdman* (Iñárritu); Worksheet 3 Due

(W): Complete Screening: *Birdman*; Kurtz, "Chance is Curbed: Time-Image in *Birdman*" & Borges, "The Garden of Forking Paths" [available on D2L]; [Supplemental Film: *Babel* (Iñárritu); Worksheet 4 Assigned]

Week Nine: May 22/24

(M): Take Home Final Examination Assigned; Worksheet 4 Due; Partial Screening: *Melancholia* (Lars von Trier)

(W): Complete Screening: *Melancholia*; Kristeva, excerpts from *Black Sun* [available on D2L]

Week Ten: May 29/31

(M): Memorial Day; University Closed

(W): Last Day of Class; Discuss *Melancholia* and Kristeva; Quarter in Review

-----**(M) June 7: Take Home Final Examination Due** -----
(With In-Class Screening Notes Attached)

HONOR CODE PLEDGE¹

Academic and intellectual integrity are paramount virtues of higher education. They assure our ability to research, think, write, and speak freely in a world of widely diverse viewpoints, and they protect the products of our scholarly work from misappropriation. In the contemporary “digital age,” the widespread availability of information has been a tremendous democratizing force, opening up the world of scholarly productions to many who previously did not possess the means or privilege to access them. However, the digitization of information has also made it easier to reproduce the words and/or ideas of others without proper attribution.

Students in this class should think of themselves as members of a community of scholars committed to upholding and protecting the virtues of academic and intellectual integrity. The values of that community are only as strong as its community members’ promise to honor them. Consequently, students should sign the following “pledge” as their promise to their instructor, their classmates, and the larger academic community to act honorably.

As a member of this class, I pledge that I will not lie, cheat, or indulge intellectual laziness. I will afford to my fellow classmates the most generous interpretation of their arguments and positions. When there are disagreements and I become convinced that my own view is in error, I will concede as much. When I am able to demonstrate that my classmates’ positions are erroneous or wanting, I will endeavor to always allow them a graceful exit from their argument.

I furthermore pledge to do my part to create and maintain an environment in which diversity of both PERSONS and IDEAS is valued and protected. I understand that disagreement alone does not constitute disrespect, but I also pledge that I will not engage in, nor will I enable or excuse, discrimination or harassment based on (real or perceived) race, gender, age, color, sexual orientation, ability, national or ethnic origin, religious belief or socioeconomic class.

*Finally, I pledge to **actively** encourage personal, intellectual, and academic integrity in my peers and, as I am able, I pledge to intervene when it becomes evident to me that the principles of this class are being violated.*

Print Name

Signature

¹ I owe both the inspiration for and the template of this pledge to my colleague, Dr. Leigh M. Johnson.