PHIL 332 – Philosophy of Film
University of Oregon
Spring, 2016
12-13:20 MW, 221 MCK
7-10 U, 129 MCK

Instructor: Steven Brence
Email: brences@uoregon.edu
Office: 250 Susan Campbell Hall Hours: 1:00-3:00 Tuesdays, or by appointment
GTFs: Martina Ferrari, mferrar2@uoregon.edu
Claire Pickard, cpickard@uoregon.edu

Course Description:

Arguably now the predominant medium for the origination and communication of culture, film (along with associated media such as video and television) has nevertheless largely been ignored by philosophers. This course, however, will approach film as a manifestation of thought more than adequately rich, subtle, and meaningful enough to inform and guide genuine philosophical reflection and inquiry. In it, particular films will be allowed to raise problems of wide human import, and to advance claims about, and perhaps propose solutions to, those issues. Those problems, claims, and proposed solutions will then be carefully examined, measured and evaluated.

We will begin with an exploration of the particular medium that is film, rendering more accessible its unique ways of advancing meaning through the combined and controlled use of color, texture, sound, perspective, transitions, and time, as well as narrative content. As the course proceeds to the development of particular films, significant use will be made of an Internet-based discussion forum (filmtank.org, a kind of think-tank, created for this course and open to the wider public, that seeks to promote the cooperative development of genuine insight in and through films). Sunday evening screenings will begin in week two. Student work will consist of weekly contributions to discussion at filmtank.org, short readings, and two essays written on films that students will develop independently.

Required Texts:

- All required readings will be available for download on the course’s Canvas page. Acquisition of two films, one for each essay, will be required.

Course Requirements and Grades:

- Two Essays, 5-6 pages each (40%)
- Weekly Film “Development” Assignments, ~1.5-2 pages/week (40%)
  (Note that completion of this portion of the course requires registration at filmtank.org, a non commercial, publicly accessible website that has been developed, and offered to the world, out of this course at the University of Oregon.)
- Attendance and Participation (this includes lectures, discussion sections, and film screenings, and any activities therein). (20%)
Learning Outcomes:

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

- View films with an increased attentiveness to, an understanding of, how their non-narrative aspects—what might be termed “film form” or “film thinking” (color, sound, perspective, transitions, etc.)—contribute to their meaning.
- Make use of films for the process of significant and substantial philosophical inquiry.
- Engage in philosophical inquiry that examines a broad range of topics such as human nature, meaning, the self and the community, political authority, morality, dignity, justice, recognition and identity.
- Demonstrate critical thinking, reading, and writing skills through academic format essays and the use of films and other primary sources in philosophical literature.

Assignment Guidelines:

All written work, unless otherwise specified, should be written independently. You are encouraged to discuss all aspects of this course with your fellow students, but the work you turn in must be entirely your own. Any academic dishonesty will result, at minimum, in course failure. University of Oregon Academic Misconduct Code:

http://uodos.uoregon.edu/StudentConductandCommunityStandards/AcademicMisconduct/tabid/248/Default.aspx

Late essays will be marked down according to degree of lateness. Late filmtank.org assignments, because they are meant to contribute to an ongoing discussion with other students, must be posted to the forum before the deadline to receive credit. If they are submitted for the purposes of grading late, they will be graded down according to the degree of lateness.

Philosophy Department Grading Rubric:

A = excellent. No mistakes, well-written, and distinctive in some way or other.
B = good. No significant mistakes, well-written, but not distinctive in any way.
C = OK. Some errors, but a basic grasp of the material.
D = poor. Several errors. A tenuous grasp of the material.
F = failing. Problematic on all fronts indicating either no real grasp of the material or a complete lack of effort.

Technology Guidelines:

No electronic devices (including laptops, tablets, and mobile phones) are to be used during class time. Email communication with your instructors is sincerely encouraged but proper language (spelling, punctuation, etc.) should be used. Your messages should also be addressed, signed, and have a subject heading which makes reference to the course (PHIL 332).
Classroom Guidelines:

Class attendance is required. You are expected to arrive before class begins, be respectful and polite to everyone in the room, and to stay until it ends. If you should need to leave before the end of class, please let me know before class begins.

Accessibility:

The University of Oregon is working to create inclusive learning environments. Please notify me if aspects of the instruction or course design result in barriers to your participation. You are also encouraged to contact the Office of Accessible Education in 164 Oregon Hall at 346-1155 or uoaec@uoregon.edu

Sexual Harassment and Assault:

The University of Oregon is committed to providing an environment free of all forms of discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, domestic and dating violence and gender-based stalking. If you (or someone you know) has experienced or experiences gender-based violence (intimate partner violence, attempted or completed sexual assault, harassment, coercion, stalking, etc.), know that you are not alone. UO has staff members trained to support survivors in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, helping with legal protective orders, and more.

Please be aware that all UO employees are required reporters. This means that if you tell me about a situation, I may have to report the information to my supervisor or the Office of Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity. Although I have to report the situation, you will still have options about how your case will be handled, including whether or not you wish to pursue a formal complaint. Our goal is to make sure you are aware of the range of options available to you and have access to the resources you need.

If you wish to speak to someone confidentially, you can call 541-346-SAFE, UO’s 24-hour hotline, to be connected to a confidential counselor to discuss your options. You can also visit the SAFE website at http://safe.uoregon.edu/
Schedule

All film screenings (in bold) are **Sundays** at **7 p.m** in **129 McKenzie Hall**. The group responsible for initial developments each week is noted in bold after each film (**G1, G2, etc.**). The same pattern for developments, responses, rejoinders, and follow-ups established and detailed for Week 2 will be repeated for Weeks 3-9.

**Week 1**

M (3/28):  *Introduction and Film Thinking*
W (3/30):  *Film Thinking continued*
F (4/01):  Discussion sections
    [Groups established and Films for Film Development Essay #1 Assigned]

**Week 2**

Sun (4/03):  *Office Space* (Mike Judge, 1999) **G1**
Mon (4/04):  Film Discussion - *Office Space*
Tues (4/05):  [Noon - **G1** initial developments due on filmtank.org]
Wed (4/06):  Reading: excerpt from *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* by Karl Marx [Noon - **G2-G8** two responses due]
Thur (4/07):  [Noon – **G1** rejoinders due]
Fri (4/08):  Discussion sections [ Noon - **G2-G8** follow-ups due]

**Week 3**

Sun (4/10):  *The Big Lebowski* (Joel and Ethan Coen, 1998) **G2**
Mon (4/11):  Film Discussion – *The Big Lebowski*
Wed (4/13):  Reading: excerpt from “The Port Huron Statement of the Students for a Democratic Society” (presumably the “compromised second draft”) by Tom Hayden
Fri (4/15):  Discussion sections
    **[filmtank.org Assignments 1 & 2 Due]**

**Week 4**

Mon (4/18):  Film Discussion – *Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai*
Wed (4/20):  Reading: excerpt from *Beyond Good and Evil* by Friedrich Nietzsche
Fri (4/22):  Discussion sections

**Week 5**

Sun (4/24):  *Up in the Air* (Jason Reitman, 2009) **G4**
Mon (4/25):  Film Discussion – *Up in the Air*
Wed (4/27):  Reading:
Fri (5/29):  Discussion sections
    **[filmtank.org Assignments 3 & 4 Due]**
Week 6

Sun (5/01): *Into the Wild* (Sean Penn, 2007) **G5**

Mon (5/02): Film Discussion – *Into the Wild*

**[Film Development Essay #1 Due]**

Wed (5/04): Reading: excerpt from *On the Origin of Inequality* by Jean-Jacques Rousseau

Fri (5/06): Discussion sections

[Films for Film Development Essay #2 Assigned in section]

Week 7

Sun (5/08): *Vagabond* (Agnès Varda, 1985) **G6**

M (5/09): Film Discussion - *Vagabond*

W (5/11): Reading:

F (5/13): Discussion sections

**[filmtank.org Assignments 5 & 6 Due]**

Week 8

Sun (5/15): *Ghost World* (Terry Zwigoff, 2001) **G7**

Mon (5/16): Film Discussion - *Ghost World*

Wed (5/18): Reading: excerpt from *Adolescence* by G. Stanley Hall

Fri (5/20): Discussion sections

Week 9

Sun (5/22): *her* (Spike Jonze, 2013) **G8**

Mon (5/23): Film Discussion - *her*

Wed (5/25): Reading:

Fri (5/27): Discussion sections

**[filmtank.org Assignments 7 & 8 Due]**

Week 10


Mon (5/30): Memorial Day

Tue (5/31): *The Cruise* [additional screening]

Wed (6/01): Film Discussion – *The Cruise*

Fri (6/03): Discussion sections

**[filmtank.org E.C. Assignment Due]**

Finals Week

Tuesday (6/09) **[Film Development Essay #2 Due]**