PHIL 332 – Philosophy of Film  
University of Oregon  
Spring, 2015  
12-12:50 MWF, 240C MCK  
7-10 U, 182 LIL

Instructor: Steven Brence  
Email: brences@uoregon.edu  
Office: 250 Susan Campbell Hall  
Hours: 1:00-3:00 Tuesdays, or by appointment  
GTF: Anna Cook, acook@uoregon.edu

Course Description:

In its relatively brief history (scarce more than a century), film has arguably become the most significant art form and medium for the origination and transmission of culture. Perhaps because of the brevity of its existence, or perhaps due to its dismissal as merely “popular” culture (a form of cultural production often deemed unworthy of serious reflection) it has received relatively little attention from philosophers. When, however, philosophers have attended to film, they have commonly sought only to adapt accepted “philosophical” problems to their study of the subject (traditional metaphysical and epistemological problems concerned with the relationship between experience and reality, for example, take the form of the examination of the relationship of film to reality), or worse still, they have regarded film as capable only of shallow, but perhaps more accessible, illustration of already charted philosophical ground (e.g. “The Truman Show” as crudely illustrative of Plato’s cave allegory).

This course, premised upon the view that philosophy is a disciplined practice of inquiry and evaluation that does not have its own particular subject matter (other than its own practice), will, instead, endeavor to develop films philosophically. That is to say, the films themselves will be regarded as subject matter for philosophical examination. They will be allowed to raise their own problems, advance their own claims, and propose their own solutions, all to be carefully examined, interrogated and evaluated.

Required Texts:

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

Course Requirements and Grades:

- Two Essays, 5-7 pages in length (40%)
- Briefer film “Developments” and Responses. Analyses (1-1½ pp.) must be posted to http://filmtank.org/forum/ by no later than Tuesday at Noon. Responses (½-1 pg.) must be posted no later than Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday at Noon, respectively. (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, all of which are required). (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](http://uodos.uoregon.edu/StudentConductandCommunityStandards/AcademicMisconduct/tabid/248/Default.aspx)

All work is to be submitted in class, unless otherwise directed. No work may be submitted via email without prior arrangement. Late essays will be marked down according to degree of lateness. Smaller written assignments will not be accepted late.

**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 182 Lillis. 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 3-10, with only the responsibilities changing according to who is responsible for initial development that week.

Week 1
M (3/30): Introduction
W (4/01): Film Thinking – Guest Lecture by Anna Cook, GTF for the course
F (4/03): Film Thinking – Guest Lecture by Jeff Stolle (Ph.D., Philosophy), Sr. Instructor, Lillis College of Business, UO

[Groups established and Films for Film Development Essay #1 Assigned in section]

Week 2
Sun (10/02): “Casablanca” (Michael Curtiz, 1942) G1
Mon (4/06): Film Discussion - “Casablanca”
Tues (4/07): [Noon - G1 initial developments due on filmtank.org]
Wed (4/08): Reading: excerpt from The Unbearable Lightness of Being by Milan Kundera [Noon - G2–G8 responses due]
Thur (4/09): [Noon – G1 rejoinders due]
Fri (4/10): Film Discussion - “Casablanca” – [Noon - G2–G8 follow-ups due]

Week 3
Sun (10/09): “The Battle of Algiers” (Gillo Pontecorvo, 1966) G2
Mon (4/13): Film Discussion - “The Battle of Algiers”
Wed (4/15): Reading: excerpt from The Wretched of the Earth by Frantz Fanon and introduction to the text by Jean-Paul Sartre
Fri (4/17): Film Discussion – “The Battle of Algiers”

**[filmtank.org developments and responses 1 & 2 Due in class]**

Week 4
Sun (10/16): “Harold and Maude” (Hal Ashby, 1971) G3
Mon (4/20): Film Discussion - “Harold and Maude”
Wed (4/22): Reading: excerpt from Beyond Good and Evil by Friedrich Nietzsche
Fri (4/24): Film Discussion - “Harold and Maude”

Week 5
Sun (10/23): “Ghost World” (Terry Zwigoff, 2001) G4
Mon (4/27): Film Discussion - “Ghost World”
Wed (4/29): Reading: excerpts from Adolescence by G. Stanley Hall
Fri (5/01): Film Discussion - “Ghost World”

**[filmtank.org developments and responses 3 & 4 Due in class]**
Week 6
Sun (10/30): “Office Space” (Mike Judge, 1999) G5
Mon (5/04): Film Discussion - “Office Space”
**[Film Development Essay #1 Due in class]**
Wed (5/06): Reading: excerpt from Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 by Karl Marx
Fri (5/08): Film Discussion - “Office Space”
[Films for Film Development Essay #2 Assigned in section]

Week 7
Sun (11/06): “Moon” (Duncan Jones, 2009) G6
M (5/11): Film Discussion - "Moon"
W (5/13): Reading: excerpt from "The Debate on the Ethical Self-Understanding of the Species" by Jürgen Habermas
F (5/15): Film Discussion - “Moon”
**[filmtank.org developments and responses 5 & 6 Due in class]**

Week 8
Sun (11/13): “Into the Wild” (Sean Penn, 2007) G7
Mon (5/18): Film Discussion - “Into the Wild”
Wed (5/20): Reading: excerpt from On the Origin of Inequality by Jean-Jacques Rousseau
Fri (5/22): Film Discussion - “Into the Wild”

Week 9
Mon (5/25): Memorial Day
Tue (5/26): “The Cruise” (Bennett Miller, 1998) 8 p.m.
Wed (5/27): Film Discussion - “The Cruise”
Fri (5/29): Film Discussion - “The Cruise”

Week 10
Sun (11/27): "The Big Lebowski" (Joel and Ethan Coen, 2006) G8
Mon (6/01): Film Discussion - “The Big Lebowski”
Wed (6/03): Reading: “The Port Huron Papers” by Tom Hayden et. al. (presumably the “compromised” final draft)
Fri (6/05): Film Discussion - “The Big Lebowski”
**[filmtank.org developments and responses 7 & 8 Due in class]**

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

Bring completed essays to Philosophy Department office (211 Susan Campbell Hall) by noon.