Realaty, Illusion, and the Moving Image

FLMM 355-TH .01
Dr. David Sterritt – djsterritt@gmail.com
Brown 320
Spring 2015 / Tuesdays 1 - 3:45 p.m.
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Important note: To reach David always use the gmail address given above. Otherwise your message will probably never be seen. Thanks.

Course description:

Through extensive screenings, readings, and discussions, this course explores the continually shifting and elusive boundary between reality and illusion in film, video, and animation; identifies different ways in which the moving image constructs fantasy or reveals its self-reflexive nature, using as a theoretical framework key texts and concepts from the fields of aesthetics, semiotics, psychology, and ethics. Areas to be explored include ways in which cinema constructs illusory spaces of “fantasy” and “reality” and techniques used by film, video, and animation artists to question conventional boundaries between “objective” and “subjective” experiential realms. The range of inquiry will be expansive, ranging from Hollywood classics and indie films to documentary and experimental cinema.

Course objectives:

• Students will sharpen their critical skills through intensive historical and theoretical study of cinematic texts that employ narrative and audiovisual devices to evoke auras of the fantastic, the liminal, and the uncanny in fiction and to blur lines between objective fact and subjective viewpoint in documentary. Students will thereby increase their understanding of the social, psychological, and political roles played by media in contemporary Western culture.
• Students will cultivate skills for discerning important themes, tropes, and stylistic traits of classical, independent, and avant-garde cinema through the analysis of works by international filmmakers who have explored unorthodox means of expressing modes of thought and feeling that are conventionally deemed elusive, intangible, obscure, or otherwise inexpressible.
• Students will learn to integrate different modes of understanding related to
modern artistic phenomena – historical, sociological, psychological – and will acquire proficiency in bringing these to bear on the works of leading moving-image artists working within various cultural contexts.

- Students will further their ability to communicate ideas and opinions cogently and effectively in both written and spoken form.

**Required book:**


(The required book is available at the MICA bookstore and is readily obtainable elsewhere. All other reading assignments will be posted on moodle.)

**Course schedule:**

*Please note: Additional reading may be assigned during the semester.*

**Part 1 – Fiction: Illusions disguised as realities**

Class 1 – January 20
Lecture and discussion: The real, and fantastic, and the movies
Viewing: *The Mummy* – Karl Freund, USA, 1932
Reading: Pomerance, *The Eyes Have It*, pp. 36-52

Class 2 – January 27
Lecture and discussion: Twin cinema
Viewing: *A Stolen Life* – Curtis Bernhardt, USA, 1946
Reading: Pomerance, *The Eyes Have It*, pp. 105-123

Class 3 – February 3
Lecture and discussion: Mythical geography
Viewing: *Brigadoon* – Vincente Minnelli, USA, 1954
Reading: Pomerance, *The Eyes Have It*, pp. 179-222

Class 4 – February 10
Lecture and discussion: Performance and paranoia
Viewing: *The Manchurian Candidate* – John Frankenheimer, USA, 1962
Reading: Pomerance, *The Eyes Have It*, pp. 129-136
Class 5 – February 17
Lecture and discussion: Genius and insanity
Reading: Roberto Gil, “Beautiful Minds.” In Vivo vol. 1 no. 3 (11 February 2002) http://www.cumc.columbia.edu/publications/in-vivo/Vol1_Iss3_feb11_02/pov.html

Class 6 – February 24
Lecture and discussion: Toward the supernatural
Viewing: Birth – Jonathan Glazer, USA/UK/Germany, 2004
Reading: Pomerance, The Eyes Have It, pp. 152-157

Part 2 – Documentary: Realities mingled with illusions

Class 7 – March 3 – Midterm journal entries due
Lecture and discussion: Cinéma-verite and the myth of objectivity
Viewing: Gimme Shelter – David Maysles, Albert Maysles, Charlotte Zwerin; USA, 1970

Class 8 – March 10
Lecture and discussion: Debating history
Viewing: Fahrenheit 9/11 – Michael Moore, USA, 2004

March 17 – Spring Break – No Class

Class 9 – March 24
Lecture and discussion: Subjectivity and the gaze of the interrotron
Viewing: Mr. Death: The Rise and Fall of Fred A. Leuchter, Jr. – Errol Morris, UK/USA, 1999
Class 10 – March 31
Lecture and discussion: Cinema and photography
Dave Gilson, “Interrogating Errol Morris.” *Mother Jones* (May/June 2008) [http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2008/05/interrogating-errol-morris](http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2008/05/interrogating-errol-morris)

Class 11 – April 7
Lecture and discussion: Documentary, docudrama, animation
Viewing: *Howl* – Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman, USA, 2010
Reading: David Sterritt, “*Howl* by Rob Epstein; Jeffrey Friedman; Eli zabeth Redleaf.” *The Journal of American History* vol. 98 no. 1 (June 2011), pp. 298-301.

**Part 3 – Postmodernism, or, Anything goes!**

Class 12 – April 14
Lecture and discussion: Film within film
Viewing: *Grizzly Man* – Werner Herzog, USA, 2005

Class 13 – April 21
Lecture and discussion: History, memory, reality
Viewing: *Werner Herzog Eats His Shoe* – Les Blank, USA, 1980
*Little Dieter Needs to Fly* – Werner Herzog, Germany/UK/France, 1997
Darragh O’Donoghue, “*Little Dieter Needs to Fly.*” *Senses of Cinema* 67
Class 14 – April 28
Lecture and discussion: History, memory, illusion
Viewing: Rescue Dawn – Werner Herzog, USA/Luxembourg, 2006

Class 15 – May 5 – Final journal entries due
Lecture and discussion: Summing up and drawing conclusions
Viewing: Bad Lieutenant: Port of Call New Orleans – Werner Herzog, USA, 2009
Reading: Sacha Orenstein, “Bad Lieutenant: Beyond Expectations.” Offscreen vol. 16 no. 11-12 (December 2012) http://offscreen.com/view/bad_lieutenant1

Course requirements:
Students must attend all class sessions, complete all reading assignments in a timely way, and participate actively in class discussions.

In addition, each student must keep a journal during the course, comprising one to two pages per week. This is the equivalent of a short paper each week, in which you respond to that week’s course material: the reading, the film, the lecture, and the class discussion. Journals must be printed by computer, not written by hand. Additional rules and guidelines for the journal are given below.

Grading schedule: Journals are due in two installments. Entries for the first seven weeks must be submitted on March 3. Entries for the remaining weeks are due in class on May 5. No journal entry is required for our last class on May 5, since journals are due on that day.

Attendance and Participation:
Attendance will be taken. It is your responsibility to get to class on time. Unexcused absences or excessive lateness will result in a lower final grade. If you know you will be absent on a future date, let me know in advance. Absences will be excused only if you provide verification (documentation of a legitimate reason: illness, family emergency, etc.) as to why the class was missed. You must catch up with work missed due to absences, excused or otherwise. This includes all films that have been screened in class; if you miss something, you must watch it on your own. (All film material for this course
is on reserve in the Media Resources Collection for re-viewing or catching up.) You should participate fully in class discussions, since part of your final grade will reflect class participation.

Journals must be submitted on the dates given above unless a later date is arranged because of special circumstances. Handing in a journal late because of unforeseen circumstances requires verification (documentation of a legitimate reason: illness, family emergency, etc.) as to why the due date was missed.

Journal rules and guidelines:
The journal must contain one to two pages on each week’s subject matter, demonstrating knowledge of the pertinent film material, topics considered in class discussions, and subjects covered in the reading assignments. You are encouraged to view additional relevant films outside class and include references to them in your journal entries. This is not a diary – it is an academic journal, meant to record what you are learning and thinking with regard to the course on a weekly basis. You are welcome to include material suggested by reading and film viewing outside class, but such material must be relevant to this course.

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Additional information

Academic integrity:
Academic integrity -- the pursuit of scholarly activity free from fraud and deception -- is an educational objective of this institution. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication of information or citations, facilitating acts of academic dishonesty by others, submitting work of another person or submitting work previously used without informing the instructor, and tampering with the academic work of other students.

A student charged with academic dishonesty will be given oral or written notice of the charge by the instructor. If students believe they have been falsely accused, they should seek redress through informal discussions with the instructor, department head, dean, or campus executive officer. If the instructor believes the infraction is sufficiently serious to warrant the referral of the case to the Office of Conduct Standards, or if the instructor decides to give a final grade of F in the course because of the infraction, the student and faculty will be afforded formal due-process procedures.
Plagiarism

Plagiarism is using someone else’s words or ideas without acknowledgment. Submitting work containing plagiarism is grounds for failure of an assignment or failure of the course. Repeat offenses will be brought to the attention of the department chair. To be responsible when summarizing, paraphrasing, or quoting, include a citation like:

*** I read in yesterday’s New York Times that…
*** As Simone de Beauvoir famously asserts: “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (p. 34).
*** My roommate Pete noticed that…
*** If it’s common knowledge and your own idea, you do not need quotations. The yellow of the Lance Armstrong bracelet suggests bravery.

Document your citations in a bibliography or “works cited” page at the end of your paper and follow standard guidelines such as MLA or Chicago manual style. Familiarize yourself with these guidelines in Diana Hacker’s A Pocket Style Manual, and always check with your instructor before turning in questionable work. You may also check on these and other language-related issues with one of the helpful tutors in the Writing Center, (410) 225-2418. The Writing Center has copies of the Hacker manual as well.

ADA Compliance Statement

Classroom: Health and Safety Guidelines

Health and Safety
It is the responsibility of faculty and students to practice health and safety guidelines relevant to their individual activities, processes, and to review MICA’s Emergency Action Plan and attend EHS training. It is each faculty member’s responsibility to coordinate with the EHS Office to ensure that all risks associated with their class activities are identified and to assure that their respective classroom procedures mirror the EHS and Academic Department guidelines. Each of these policies and procedures must be followed by all students and faculty. Most importantly, faculty are to act in accordance with all safety compliance, state and federal, as employees of this college and are expected to act as examples of how to create art in a way to minimize risk, and reduce harm to themselves and the environment. Faculty
must identify, within each art making process, and require personal protection equipment use, by each student for each class, when applicable. Students are required to purchase personal protection equipment appropriate to their major. Those students who do not have the proper personal protection equipment will not be permitted to attend class until safe measures and personal protection is in place.

**Classroom: ADA Compliance**

**Learning Resource Center ADA Compliance Statement**
Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the instructor privately to discuss specific needs. Please contact the Learning Resource Center at 410-225-2416, in Bunting 458, to establish eligibility and coordinate reasonable accommodations. For additional information please refer to: http://www.mica.edu/LRC