

# PHIL 383: Philosophy and Film

## Spring 2008

Discussion: MW 4:00-4:50 PM, Tehama 106  
Activity: T 7:00-9:50 PM, Holt 170  
Registration #: 4632

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Office Phone: 898-6183  
Office Hours: MW 3:00-4:00 PM

“Not merely philosophy but also the fine arts work at bottom towards the solution of the problem of existence. For in every mind that once gives itself up to the purely objective contemplation of nature a desire has been excited, however concealed and unconscious it may be, to comprehend the true nature of things, of life and existence.... ‘What is life?’ Every genuine and successful work of art answers this question in its own way with perfect correctness. But all the arts speak only the naive and childish language of perception, not the abstract and serious language of *reflection*; their answer is therefore a fleeting image: not permanent and general knowledge.... [T]he ... arts hold up to the questioner a perceptible image, and say, ‘Look here, this is life.’ Their answer, however correct it may be, will yet always afford merely a temporary, not a complete and final, satisfaction. For they give merely a fragment, an example instead of the rule, not the whole.... [T]o give an answer which ... shall be permanent and suffice for always, is the task of philosophy. However, we see here upon what the relationship of philosophy to the fine arts rests, and can conclude from that to what extent the capacity of both, although in its direction and in secondary matters very – different, is yet in its root the same.”

– Arthur Schopenhauer, *The Will To Live* (Ungar, 1967) pp. 245f.

“The biggest toy train set any boy ever had.”

– Orson Welles on making movies in Hollywood.

“Is the unconscious ever used up?”

– Federico Fellini, on how he found subject-matter for his films.

‘It’s only ketchup.’

– Sam Peckinpah, on the amount of blood in several of his films.

“That’s not blood! It’s the color red!”

– Jean-Luc Godard, regarding the depiction of violence in one of his films.

### Course Description

An examination of philosophical themes in the cinema, with special emphasis on aesthetics. This is an approved General Education course, Area C3. Enrollment in this course entails the payment of a \$20.00 activity fee.

## Course Goals and Objectives

1. Development of a facility for description of cinema, to include an understanding of cinematic style.
2. Experience in the task of interpretation of cinema as a means of comprehending the ideas, message, and philosophical content imparted by a work of cinema.
3. Exploration of cinema as art.
4. Understanding significant representations of philosophical writings on cinema and art.
5. Exercise and promotion of general reading and writing skills, as well as skill in insight, observation, analytical thought, critical thinking, and creative thought.

## Required Textbook

*PHIL 383 Course Packet for Spring 2008*, available at the Associated Students Book Store.  
**Required.**

## Course Requirements

1. Four short papers (2-3 pp. each).
2. Six in-class quizzes.
3. Final exam.
4. Class attendance and participation.
5. Brief responses for four approved public events outside class.

The **preliminary calculation of the course grade** will be the average of the letter grades assigned to the four short papers, the final exam, and the letter grade assigned to the cumulative performance on the six in-class quizzes. The four individual short papers and the grade for the quizzes have equal weight in this average, whereas the final exam is counted twice. Thus each individual paper counts for one seventh (14%) of the final grade, the cumulative grade for the six in-class quizzes counts for one seventh (14%), and the final exam counts for two sevenths (29%). All members of the class need to submit four individual papers in order to receive credit for the course.

**Six quizzes** will be held during the course, according to a schedule and listing of topics below. These quizzes will be multiple-choice in format and will serve to direct attention to the topics they cover. Each quiz score will be translated into a letter grade according to a curve devised specifically for that quiz, and the cumulative grade for the six quizzes will be determined as the strict average of the five best quiz letter grades. The worst quiz grade is dropped automatically.

**The final exam** will be held 6:00-7:50 PM, Monday, May 19, 2008 in Tehama 106. The final exam will focus on readings in film theory and the philosophy of film that will have been

assigned and discussed during the semester. The *PHIL 383 Course Packet for Spring 2008* contains these readings. The final exam will have two parts, the first of which will be multiple choice in format and the second part will ask for a written essay. The essay part of the final exam will be an opportunity to discuss the theoretical concepts found in these readings as applied to the films studied during the course of the semester.

**Discussion Groups** will be created at the outset of the semester. Discussion Groups will be assigned a heuristic question to consider for each of the fourteen film showings. These questions will be discussed during the Wednesday session following each film showing on Tuesday evening. Time will be set aside during these Wednesday sessions for the Discussion Groups to meet and jot down a few sentences or outline of ideas regarding their assigned questions. Each group will submit this brief written response, signed by all members present. The written responses will be graded as “terrific” (“√+”), “fine” (“√”) or “bizarre” (“?”), which will contribute 2, 1 or 0 points respectively to individual students’ tabulation of **class participation**.

There will be an opportunity on selected Monday afternoon sessions for brief in-class writing exercises, which will be evaluated in the same way as the notes for group discussions on Wednesdays: “terrific” (“√+”), “fine” (“√”) or “bizarre” (“?”), which will contribute 2, 1 or 0 points respectively to individual students’ tabulation of **class participation**. These in-class writing exercises will occur on those Mondays when discussion is scheduled for specific reading assignments from essays in film theory and philosophy collected in the *Course Packet for PHIL 383*. Class participants should read the assigned article in advance and complete a brief quiz on-line via the Vista site for the course by 3:00 PM on the day designated for discussion of the assigned reading in class. Performance on the on-line quiz will also contribute to the tabulation of points for **class participation**: one point for completing the quiz with good performance, two points in case of especially long quizzes.

At least four **brief responses on approved films shown outside class** are required. These assignments will ask for a brief (one paragraph) written response for specified film showing on campus or in Chico commercial theaters. Approved film showings will be announced periodically in class and posted on the class Vista site. Typically, a published movie review for each of these films will be made available on the Vista site. The prompt for each public event assignment will quote one or several observational claims or interpretative hypotheses from this published review of the film. The task of the submitted response will be to discuss the claim or hypothesis, and specifically how the claim can be corroborated or amplified. Submission of a brief film report will contribute to the tabulation of points for **class participation**. Submitted responses will earn up to five points. Failure to complete four of these brief responses will result in demotion of the final grade by one step in the grading scale, e.g., from B to B-.

A high score for **class participation** will increase the final grade for the class by one step in the grading scale, e.g., from a B+ to an A-. A low score for class participation will decrease the final grade for the class by one or more steps in the grading scale.

A special accounting of **attendance** will apply to the **Tuesday evening sessions**. Students need to sign an attendance sheet at the beginning of the session, and again at the end. The two signings complete registered attendance for the showing. Missing more than four evening sessions will result in the demotion of the final grade by one full letter, e.g., from an A- to a B-.

**Any case of cheating or plagiarism will result in a grade of “F” for the course. In any such case, your instructor will report the incident to Student Judicial Affairs.**

# Schedule of Film Showings

(All showings will be in Holt 170.)

## I. Prelude

1/29: Akira Kurosawa, *Dreams (Yume)*, Japan, 1990; DVD; subtitled).

2/5: Short films on film techniques and style:

*Basic Film Terms: A Visual Dictionary* (16 mm)

*A Nickel for the Movies* (16 mm)

*Film: the Dynamic Illusion* (VHS)

## II. Jane Austen

2/12: Ang Lee, *Sense and Sensibility* (USA/UK, 1995; DVD),  
with Emma Thompson, Kate Winslet, Hugh Grant, Alan Rickman, Greg Wise.

2/19: Roger Michell, *Persuasion* (UK/France/USA, 1995; DVD),  
with Amanda Root, Ciarán Hinds, Susan Fleetwood, Corin Redgrave.

2/26: Patricia Rozema, *Mansfield Park* (UK, 1999; DVD),  
with Francis O'Connor, Johnny Lee Miller, James Purefoy, Victoria Hamilton.

3/4: Joe Wright, *Pride & Prejudice* (France/UK, 2005; DVD),  
with Keira Knightly, Matthew Macfadyen, Rosamund Pike, Donald Sutherland, Brenda Blethyn.

## III. Men Bunching

3/11: Martin Scorsese, *Mean Streets* (USA, 1973; 16 mm),  
with Robert De Niro, Harvey Keitel, David Proval, Amy Robinson.

3/25: Barry Levinson, *Diner* (USA, 1982; 16 mm),  
with Steve Guttenberg, Daniel Stern, Mickey Rourke, Kevin Bacon, Timothy Daly, Ellen Barkin, Paul Reiser, Michael Tucker.

4/1: Quentin Tarantino, *Reservoir Dogs* (USA, 1992; DVD),  
with Harvey Keitel, Tim Roth, Michael Madsen, Chris Penn, Steve Buscemi, Lawrence Tierney, Edward Bunker, Quentin Tarantino.

4/8: Doug Liman, *Swingers* (USA, 1996; DVD),  
with Jon Favreau, Vince Vaughn, Ron Livingston, Patrick Van Horn, Heather Graham.

## IV. Women Grouping

4/15: François Ozon, *8 Women* (France/Italy, 2002),  
with Danielle Darrieux, Catherine Deneuve, Isabelle Huppert, Emmanuelle Béart, Fanny Ardant, Ludivine Sagnier.

4/22: John Sayles, *Casa de los Babys* (USA/Mexico, 2003),  
with Daryl Hannah, Marcia Gay Harden, Mary Steenburgen, Rita Moreno, Lili Taylor, Maggie Gyllenhaal, Susan Lynch.

- 4/29: Rodrigo Garcia, *Nine Lives* (USA, 2005),  
with Aomawa Baker, Kathy Baker, Glenn Close, Dakota Fanning, Holly Hunter, Sissy Spacek, Robin Penn Wright.
- 5/6: Pedro Almodóvar, *Volver* (Spain, 2006),  
with Penelope Cruz, Carmen Maura, Lola Dueñas, Bianca Portillo, Yohana Cobo, Chus Lanpreave.

## **V. Coda**

- 5/13: Julie Taymor, *Across the Universe* (USA, 2007; DVD),  
with Evan Rachel Wood, Jim Sturgess, Joe Anderson, Dana Fuchs, Martin Luther McCoy, T.V. Carpio, Spencer Liff.

## **General Advice on Writing Papers for PHIL 383**

General Requirements. Roughly, a minimum of two pages of type-written prose (at 250 words per page) is necessary for even the simplest exposition of ideas concerning any of the topics at hand. It would entail an unusual degree of succinctness of expression to expect that a very good, or excellent effort could be restrained to less than this lower limit of three pages. At the other limit, efforts that exceed three pages are not discouraged. The limiting case here will be the paper that, so far as its content would warrant, *could* have been much shorter but wasn't. Nearly all of the papers that your instructor has received for these assignments that have exceeded the limit have been well worth the effort of reading them – not just because they were longer, but because their content warranted that length. For the sake of succinctness in a short writing assignment, it won't be useful to begin with an incidental information about the films discussed: who were the directors, who starred in them, etc. This information will be common knowledge to the members of the class and hence superfluous.

General Objectives of the Paper Assignments. The assigned papers are primarily exercises in interpretation. To an equal degree, they will also rely upon your developed powers of observation and description. Issues of aesthetics, such as you might be willing to invoke and discuss, will be welcome and may contribute to the worth of a paper, but such is not necessary for a good or excellent effort. Criticism, i.e., judgment and evaluation, is not the issue here. For that matter, your instructor is not interested in whether you liked the films or not, and he summarily ignores any such testimony, either positive or negative. What is important for the task of interpretation is what you have to say about a film that reveals your comprehension of it. This presumes first of all – and as prerequisite to any significant discussion – that you have understood the film, and are able to grasp the *film-maker's* meanings and intentions. The effort to acquire this understanding should be paramount in your viewing of the film, as well as in your thinking about it for the sake of class discussion and also in preparation of your written work for the class. The exercise of writing about film can be counted as educational just insofar as individuals need to strive hard to come to terms with a film in order to understand it, and in order to have some perspective upon what the film-maker has to say. It also entails the transformation of the rich visual experience of viewing a film into a linguistic discourse about that visual experience. This is real work, and, for the sake of education, the harder the better. The confession that "I couldn't really get into this movie" will be taken by your instructor as a request for a failing grade.

What Counts as Quality in the Grading of the Papers. There are no specific or simplistic

right or wrong answers to any of the questions offered as parts of the paper topics; yet it is not at all difficult to distinguish between a good essay and a meek one. Central to the issue of interpretation – and the paper assignments are intended as exercises in interpretation – is the ability to fathom and relate the structures of meaning and significance that the film-maker has imbued into the film. The lack of attentiveness to what the film-maker means to say amounts to *misrepresentation* of the film – sometimes willfully so – and this will suffice to render an interpretation very clearly misbegotten. The films selected for our schedule all are sufficiently rich and complex in meaning that simply pursuing this one goal – i.e., what does the film-maker (usually the person credited as the “director”) have to say? – will easily suffice, if pursued earnestly, to discover and explicate much that is insightful and revealing, even though much, much more might remain unrevealed and unmentioned.

**Grading Standards.** Generally, your instructor expects *excellent* work to be marked heavily by genuine and original insight, observation and/or analysis. *Good* work will have at least some of this same content. *Satisfactory* work exhibits minimal original effort or content. Thus, merely regurgitating your instructor’s ideas counts as having absorbed aspects of *one* developed interpretation but having added nothing to that by way of one’s own contribution. This may show that you have listened carefully and absorbed what your instructor has said, but merely repeating this constitutes no better than satisfactory work. If you can use your instructor’s ideas as a springboard for the development of your own ideas and analysis, then that warrants a better grade, to what degree dependent upon the amount and quality of this addition on your part. Blatant disregard of the purposes of the exercise will warrant an evaluation of *poor* or *failing* work. **Any case of cheating or plagiarism will result in a grade of “F” for the course. In any such case, your instructor will report the incident to Student Judicial Affairs.**

**Paper Delivery.** All papers will be due 5:00 PM, usually on a Friday. Papers will be deliverable via the course Vista site. It is advised that papers should be prepared as a word-processor file and then uploaded onto the Vista site.

**Policy on Late Papers.** Late papers will be demoted. When in a quandary as to whether to submit a poor paper on time or a better paper late, please attempt to consult with your instructor for proper advice. Generally speaking, your instructor prefers better papers to poorly conceived papers, but in fairness to those who submit papers on time, late submission will have its cost. All members of the class need to submit four individual papers in order to receive credit for the course. If you miss the due date for a paper, or simply want to improve your grade for one of the three assignments, you may write a paper on the single film (Julie Taymor’s *Across the Universe*), which will be shown during the last week of the semester before finals week. This film is chosen for this purpose as sufficiently challenging to warrant singular treatment. Papers submitted on this film will need to meet that greater challenge accordingly.

# Daily Routines

## Monday In-Class Quiz Routine

(February 4, February 11, February 18, March 10, April 14, May 12)

### 1. Quiz procedure:

- Your friendly instructor will display the quiz on the front screen.
- Put your name at the top of a blank sheet of paper.
- Mark your answers next to the corresponding question numbers on your paper.
- On a separate sheet of paper, maintain a copy of your answers to consult afterwards.
- When you have completed the quiz, place your sheet on the table at the front of the room.

### 2. Quiz post mortem:

- As soon as everyone is finished with the quiz, your friendly instructor will display the quiz again and go over each question, explaining what is the right answer in each case.
- Compare your answers.

## Monday Film Theory Discussion Routine

(February 25, March 3, March 24, April 7, April 21, April 28, May 5)

### 1. In advance:

- Read the assigned essay. (All essays assigned for reading and discussion are included in the *PHIL 383 Course Packet for Spring 2008*.)
- Visit the Vista site for PHIL 383 and complete the brief quiz on the reading by 3:00 PM on the day that discussion of the essay is scheduled for class.

### 2. Beginning of class:

- Your friendly instructor will offer some further commentary on the structure and important points of the essay.

### 3. Further discussion:

- A brief in-class writing exercise based upon one or another idea or theory from the reading will complete the class session.

## Tuesday Night Film Showing Routine

### At the beginning of class:

- Sign the attendance sheet, first column (“7:00 PM”).
- Check announcements displayed on the screen.
- Review the heuristic question assigned to your group (except February 5).

### At the end of the movie showing:

- Sign the attendance sheet, second column (“9:50 PM”).

### Wednesday Film Discussion Routine

(Beginning January 30, 2007, but with the exception of February 6, 2008)

- Gather into discussion groups; **commence discussion** of the heuristic question assigned to your discussion group for the previous night's film showing.
- One member of the group needs to serve as **secretary**, to compose a brief discussion summary, consisting of a few of the ideas that the group comes up with.
- Everyone present in the discussion group should **sign the discussion summary**.
- One member of the group needs to serve as **spokesperson** for the group, to report orally to the rest of the class regarding your group's heuristic question.
- After approximately 20 minutes of discussion, the instructor will ask spokespersons from the various groups to report to the class for a broader discussion.
- At the end of class, the discussion group secretary should **give the discussion summary to your friendly instructor**.

### **In-Class Quiz Schedule and Topics**

In-Class Quiz #1:	4:00 PM, Monday, February 4:	the Syllabus; Tips on Writing about Film.
In-Class Quiz #2:	4:00 PM, Monday, February 11:	Common Technical Terms in the Cinema, Parts 1 & 2.
In-Class Quiz #3:	4:00 PM, Monday, February 18:	Common Technical Terms in the Cinema, Parts 3 & 4.
In-Class Quiz #4:	4:00 PM, Monday, March 10:	<i>Sense and Sensibility, Persuasion, Mansfield Park, Pride &amp; Prejudice</i>
In-Class Quiz #5:	4:00 PM, Monday, April 14:	<i>Mean Streets, Diner, Reservoir Dogs, Swingers</i>
In-Class Quiz #6:	4:00 PM, Monday, May 12:	<i>8 Women, Casa do los Babys, Nine Lives, Volver</i>

### **On-Line WebCT Quiz Schedule and Topics**

On-Line Quiz #1:	3:00 PM, Monday, February 25:	André Bazin
On-Line Quiz #2:	3:00 PM, Monday, March 3:	Stanley Cavell
On-Line Quiz #3:	3:00 PM, Monday, March 24:	Peter Wollen
On-Line Quiz #4:	3:00 PM, Monday, April 7:	Noël Carroll
On-Line Quiz #5:	3:00 PM, Monday, April 21:	Ian Jarvie
On-Line Quiz #6:	3:00 PM, Monday, April 28:	Ted Cohen
On-Line Quiz #7:	3:00 PM, Monday, May 5:	Arthur Schopenhauer

## Film Theory Discussions Schedule and Topics

- Film Theory Discussion #1: 4:00 PM, Monday, February 25: André Bazin, “The Evolution of the Language of Cinema,” and “The Virtues and Limitations of Montage”
- Film Theory Discussion #2: 4:00 PM, Monday, March 3: Stanley Cavell, “Exhibition and Self-Reference,” “The Camera’s Implication,” and “Assertions in Techniques”
- Film Theory Discussion #3: 4:00 PM, Monday, March 24: Peter Wollen, “The *auteur* Theory”
- Film Theory Discussion #4: 4:00 PM, Monday, April 7: Noël Carroll, “Towards an Ontology of the Moving Image”
- Film Theory Discussion #5: 4:00 PM, Monday, April 21: Ian Jarvie, “Plato and the Cave”
- Film Theory Discussion #6: 4:00 PM, Monday, April 28: Ted Cohen, “High and Low Thinking about High and Low Art,” and “High and Low Art, and High and Low Audiences”
- Film Theory Discussion #7: 4:00 PM, Monday, May 5: Arthur Schopenhauer, “On the Inner Nature of Art”

## ***PHIL 383 Course Packet for Spring 2008***

### **Table of Contents**

André Bazin, “The Evolution of the Language of Cinema,” and “The Virtues and Limitations of Montage,”

From: Andre Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, ed. and trans. by Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967; 2 vols.), vol. 1, pp. 23-52.

Stanley Cavell, “Exhibition and Self-Reference,” “The Camera’s Implication,” and “Assertions in Techniques.”

From: Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed*, Enlarged Edition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), pp. 118-146.

Peter Wollen, “The *auteur* Theory,”

From: Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972; 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.), pp. 72-115.

Ian Jarvie, “Plato and the Cave,”

From: Ian Jarvie, *Philosophy of the Film: Epistemology, Ontology, Aesthetics* (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987), pp. 44-55.

Noël Carroll, “Towards an Ontology of the Moving Image,”

From: Cynthia A. Freeland and Thomas E. Wartenberg, eds., *Philosophy and Film* (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 68-85.

Ted Cohen, “High and Low Thinking about High and Low Art,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, v. 51, n. 2, Spring, 1993, pp. 151-156; and “High and Low Art, and High and Low Audiences,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, v. 57, no. 2, Spring, 1999, pp. 137-143.

Arthur Schopenhauer, “On the Inner Nature of Art,”

From: Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. By E.F.J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1958; 2 vols.), vol. 2, pp. 406-410.

## Summary: Schedule of Due Dates, Quiz and Exam Dates.

	<u>When</u>	<u>Where</u>	<u>What</u>
1.	4:00 PM, Monday, February 4	Tehama 106	<b>In-Class Quiz #1</b>
2.	5:00 PM, Tuesday, February 5	Vista	<b>Paper #1 due</b>
3.	4:00 PM, Monday, February 11	Tehama 106	<b>In-Class Quiz #2</b>
4.	4:00 PM, Monday, February 18	Tehama 106	<b>In-Class Quiz #3</b>
5.	3:00 PM, Monday, February 25	Vista	<b>On-Line Quiz #1</b>
6.	3:00 PM, Monday, March 3	Vista	<b>On-Line Quiz #2</b>
7.	4:00 PM, Monday, March 10	Tehama 106	<b>In-Class Quiz #4</b>
8.	5:00 PM, Friday, March 14	Vista	<b>Paper #2 due</b>
9.	3:00 PM, Monday, March 24	Vista	<b>On-Line Quiz #3</b>
10.	3:00 PM, Monday, April 7	Vista	<b>On-Line Quiz #4</b>
11.	4:00 PM, Monday, April 14	Tehama 106	<b>In-Class Quiz #5</b>
12.	5:00 PM, Friday, April 18	Vista	<b>Paper #3 due</b>
13.	3:00 PM, Monday, April 21	Vista	<b>On-Line Quiz #5</b>
14.	3:00 PM, Monday, April 28	Vista	<b>On-Line Quiz #6</b>
15.	3:00 PM, Monday, May 5	Vista	<b>On-Line Quiz #7</b>
16.	4:00 PM, Monday, May 12	Tehama 106	<b>In-Class Quiz #6</b>
17.	5:00 PM, Friday, May 16	Vista	<b>Paper #4 due</b>
18.	6:00-7:50 PM, Monday, May 19	Tehama 106	<b>Final Exam</b>
19.	5:00 PM, Friday, May 23	Vista	<b>Coda Paper due</b>