PHIL 332 – Philosophy of Film
University of Oregon
Summer, 2012
10-11:50 MTWRF, 301 GER

Instructor: Steven Brence
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Office: 332 PLC
Hours: 1:00-3:00, Wednesdays, or by Appt.

Course Description:

In its relatively brief history (scarcely 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.

Course Requirements and Grades:

- Two Film Development Essays, ~5 pages in length: (40%)
- Briefer film “Developments” and Responses: (40%)
  (Note that completion of this portion of the course requires registration at www.filmtank.org, a non-commercial, publicly accessible website/forum that has been developed, and offered to the world, out of this course at the University of Oregon.)
- Attendance and Participation: (20%)

Assignment Guidelines:

All written work, unless otherwise specified, must be submitted both in hard copy and electronically to SafeAssignment, a Blackboard based electronic screener for incidents of plagiarism. All materials quoted or referenced in producing your written work must be properly cited. Violation of these policies will result, at minimum, in a failing grade for the course. Late essays will be marked down according to degree of lateness. Late developments and responses will not be accepted.

No electronic devices may be used during class.
Schedule

M (6/25): Introduction, Film Form
T (6/26): Film Form
W (6/27): screening: Office Space (Mike Judge, 1999)
R (6/28): discussion
  Group 1 Initial filmtank developments posted before class.
  Groups 2-7 filmtank responses posted before midnight.
F (6/29): discussion

M (7/2): screening Ghost World (Terry Zwigoff, 2001)
T (7/3): discussion
  Group 2 Initial filmtank developments posted before class.
  Groups 1, 3-7 filmtank responses posted before midnight.
W (7/4): no class
R (7/5): screening Harold & Maude (Hal Ashby, 1971)
F (7/6): discussion
  Group 3 Initial filmtank developments posted before class.
  Groups 1, 2, 4-7 filmtank responses posted before midnight.

S (7/8), 2 p.m.: **Film Development Essay #1 due**

M (7/9): screening Casablanca (Michael Curtiz, 1942)
T (7/10): discussion
  Group 4 Initial filmtank developments posted before class.
  Groups 1-3, 5-7 filmtank responses posted before midnight.
W (7/11): screening Notorious (Alfred Hitchcock, 1946)
R (7/12): discussion
  Group 5 Initial filmtank developments posted before class.
  Groups 1-4, 6, 7 filmtank responses posted before midnight.
F (7/13): discussion

M (7/16): screening: Island of Lost Souls (Erle C. Kenton, 1932)
T (6/17): discussion
  Group 6 Initial filmtank developments posted before class.
  Groups 1-5, 7 filmtank responses posted before midnight.
W (7/18): screening: Moon (Duncan Jones, 2009)
R (7/19): discussion
  Group 7 Initial filmtank developments posted before class.
  Groups 1-6 filmtank responses posted before midnight.
F (7/20): discussion

S: (7/21), 2 p.m.: **Film Development Essay #2 due**