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. Purchase of media (DVDs or access to Digital Video files) may be required.

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, 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
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. Late developments and responses will not be accepted.

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 may be used during class time. This includes all portable computers, tablets, phones, blackberries, mp3 players, etc. When emailing your esteemed instructor(s), please reference PHL 130 in the topic heading, address the email (Steven, Dr. Brence, etc.), use complete sentences, proper punctuation and spelling, and sign your message. Please do email me if I can be of assistance, but do not contribute to the further deterioration of our capacity for language, or to basic standards of politeness and civility, in the process.

Classroom Guidelines:

Class attendance is required. You are expected to arrive before class begins, be respectful and polite to me and your classmates, 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

Schedule

M (6/24): Introduction, Film Form
T (6/25): Film Form
W (6/26): screening: Kiss Me Deadly (Robert Aldrich, 1955)
    Reading: excerpt from Jack Shadoian, Dreams and Dead Ends: The American Gangster Film
R (6/27): discussion
    Group 1 Initial filmtank developments posted before class.
    Groups 2-7 filmtank responses posted before midnight.
F (6/28): discussion

M (7/1): screening Office Space (Mike Judge, 1999)
   Reading: excerpt from Karl Marx, Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844

T (7/2): discussion
   Group 2 Initial filmtank developments posted before class.
   Groups 1, 3-7 filmtank responses posted before midnight.

W (7/3): screening Psycho (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960)
   Reading: excerpt from Robin Wood, Hitchcock's Films Revisited

R (7/4): no class

F (7/5): discussion
   Group 3 Initial filmtank developments posted before class.
   Groups 1, 2, 4-7 filmtank responses posted before midnight.

M (7/8): screening Shaun of the Dead (Edgar Wright, 2004)
   Reading: Lynn Pifer, "Slacker Bites Back: Shaun of the Dead Finds New Life for Deadbeats"
   **Film Development Essay #1 due**

T (7/9): discussion
   Group 4 Initial filmtank developments posted before class.
   Groups 1-3, 5-7 filmtank responses posted before midnight.

W (7/10): screening Casablanca (Michael Curtiz, 1942)
   Reading: excerpt from Milan Kundera, The Unbearable Lightness of Being

R (7/11): discussion
   Group 5 Initial filmtank developments posted before class.
   Groups 1-4, 6, 7 filmtank responses posted before midnight.

F (7/12): discussion

M (7/15): screening Blow-Up (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1966)
   Reading: George Slover, "Isolation and Make-Believe in Blow-Up"

T (6/16): discussion
   Group 6 Initial filmtank developments posted before class.
   Groups 1-5, 7 filmtank responses posted before midnight.

W (7/17): screening Moon (Duncan Jones, 2009)
   Reading: excerpts from Jürgen Habermas, "The Debate on the Ethical Self-Understanding of the Species"

R (7/18): discussion
   Group 7 Initial filmtank developments posted before class.
   Groups 1-6 filmtank responses posted before midnight.

F (7/19): discussion

M: (7/22), Noon: **Film Development Essay #2 due**
   Bring your completed essays by the Philosophy Dept. office (2nd Floor, Susan Campbell Hall) before Noon.
Using filmtank.org

Registration:

1) Go to http://filmtank.org/forum/
2) Click on the "Register" button at the bottom left of the main banner.
3) Check the box to agree to the forum rules, and click the "Register" button.
4) Enter a username consisting of your first initial and last name (e.g. S.Brence) and a password of your own choosing (be sure to write this password down).
5) Enter your university email address.
6) Enter "word" in the anti-spam question box, and click the "Complete Registration" button.
6) Return the confirmation email sent to you by the site.

Film Development Prompts:

Both Pre-viewing and Post-viewing Prompts are contained in the second block of forums on the main forum page (http://filmtank.org/forum/), or directly through this link: http://filmtank.org/forum/forumdisplay.php?f=7

Consult the pre-viewing prompts before the screening of each film, and then the post-viewing prompts after the screening. You may need to go to the second page to find relevant threads for a film; those for "Office Space", for example, are on page two. You may also use the search feature (the box at the top-center of the page), of course.

Creating Thread for a New Film Development:

1) Compose the text of your development off-line so you may spell-check and otherwise proofread it. For a general treatment of the process of "film development", see the following guide: http://filmtank.org/forum/showthread.php?t=9

2) Make sure you are properly logged in after following the registration steps outline above.

3) From the main forum page (http://filmtank.org/forum/) the Film Development forums are the first block of forums at the top of the page. We will be using the "Films" forum at the top of the block, accessible directly via this link: http://filmtank.org/forum/forumdisplay.php?f=3

4) Click the "New Thread" button at the top left of the forum.
5) Title your thread according to the following format: Film Title (Director name, Date) - your own unique title—e.g. The Maltese Falcon (John Huston, 1941) - The Temptation of Sam Spade

6) Paste the text of your post composed offline. Enter a blank space between each paragraph.

7) Add the film title and director name in the "Tags' box at the bottom, separating each by a comma.

8) Double-check that your title is as it should be and click the "Submit New Thread" button.

Adding a Reply in an Existing Thread:

1) From the main forum page (http://filmtank.org/forum/) the Film Development forums are the first block of forums at the top of the page. We will be using the "Films" forum at the top of the block, accessible directly via this link: http://filmtank.org/forum/forumdisplay.php?f=3

2) In the empty box at the top-center of the page, enter the title of the film (e.g. Office Space) and switch the pull-down menu to the right to "Search Titles Only". Click the "Search" button.

3) Find a threads of recent date. Read them all and then choose one to which you would wish to add a reply.

4) Compose your reply offline so you may spell-check and otherwise proofread your post.

5) Make sure you are properly logged in after following the registration steps outline above.

6) At the top of the thread to which you are adding a reply, click the "Post Reply" button at the top-left of the thread. Paste the text of your reply, adding a space between paragraphs.

7) There is no need for a new title to your reply, but you may add one if you wish.

8) Click the "Submit Reply" button.

For Creating New Threads and Posting Replies in Existing Threads, you may also review the following two documents (Both "stickied" at the top of the "Films" forum):

"Posting Guidelines for 'Films' sub-forum": http://filmtank.org/forum/showthread.php?t=33
"About Film Development": http://filmtank.org/forum/showthread.php?t=9

If you have any questions or concerns, please email me and I will try to help as quickly as I can.

Steven Brence -- brences@uoregon.edu