

FMST 90: Film and Media Studies Capstone

Course Syllabus

Instructors: Bob Rehak, Patricia White

Consulting instructor: Erica Cho

Office: K111

Office Hours: Rehak (brehak1) T 1-3; White (pwhite1) M 9-10 & Th 1-4; Cho (echo2) by appt.

REALLY REAL?

Course Description

The rhetoric surrounding digital media – its proliferation, accessibility, novelty, and technological sophistication – warrants the same close interrogation we give its forms, formats, and social relations. As part of our capstone inquiry in the discipline of film and media studies, we raise a series of questions about the status of the real in the digital era. We will address anxiety about the alleged disappearance of the index (that sign that points to something's unique existence in space and time) and the implications of this shift for aesthetics and politics.

In cinema, digital visual effects build spectacular bodies that astound with their high-tech artificiality, even as performance capture works to preserve the subtle authenticating marks of an actor's performance. From 3D IMAX films to first-person shooters and MMORPGs, unreal worlds are realized with the greatest possible perceptual realism – just as their 8-bit and cel-animated predecessors did within other historical “states of the art.” Then as now, technology chases the real as encodable resource, but can never fully contain or control it.

Other contemporary, devastating examples of changing views of the truth-value of the image include snapshots of torture indicating indifference to human suffering; the spectacularization of terrorism; and remote-controlled warfare. The possibilities of self-expression and surveillance seem endless as reality television formats proliferate globally. At the same time, we witness an increasing interest in documentary – both mainstream and independent – and its hybridization, as well as the emergence of what has been called a “neo-neo realist” aesthetic in world cinema.

In this context, knowledge and skills of media production become essential critical, political, and scholarly tools, offering us a different perspective on real and virtual, and preparing us to enter a “real world” in which those concepts – apparently opposed – actually depend on each other in intimate and unexpected ways.

Goals of the Course

Complete a substantive senior project in a supportive team-taught workshop environment; explore a major contemporary debate in the discipline; hone critical analysis and basic production skills.

Texts

Timothy Corrigan and Patricia White, with Meta Mazaj, eds. *Critical Visions in Film Theory: Classic and Contemporary Readings*. Bedford St. Martin's (2011). Available at the bookstore.

Links to and PDFs of additional readings on Moodle (<https://moodle.swarthmore.edu/my/>)
Please print and bring all texts to class.

Graded Course Components

20% Participation/Preparation/Collaboration

20% Response Papers

60% Final Project

(Includes satisfactory progress, meeting of deadlines, participation in colloquium/screening)

Participation/Preparation/Collaboration

Regular attendance and active participation are crucial components of the Capstone. Because it is structured as a workshop, students are expected to engage in dialogue about course concepts as well as each others' creative and scholarly work. Students are also expected to attend all screenings and come to class meetings with the day's assigned materials prepared.

Response Papers

Four 1-2 page papers, due at intervals throughout the semester, will respond critically to readings and/or screenings based on a prompt. Students will upload their papers to Moodle and read each other's work before class.

Final Project

Based on their decision to pursue either a visual media project or written senior essay, students will work throughout the term on their pre-approved individual project, meeting agreed-upon deadlines, and completing all aspects of the work (such as abstracts, director's statements, etc). While each student is responsible for producing an individual project, significant collaboration in the workshop is essential and will be factored into your assessment. Final projects will be presented at a special community event at the end of the semester (details TBA).

Other Information

Class Format

We will meet to discuss assigned readings and screenings during the first half of the semester in a seminar format. Although our focus will shift to individual projects during the second half of the term, we will have small group meetings, crits, peer writing sessions, etc. during the regularly scheduled meeting time, and Sunday nights will frequently be utilized for screenings and events.

Instructors

Profs. Rehak and White are primary instructors, and Professor Erica Cho is consulting on production projects. She will meet with production students at several points during the term.

Screenings

Unless otherwise announced, all screenings will take place on Sunday in LPAC Cinema. Please arrive early enough to get settled before the start time of 7 p.m. Food and drink are not permitted. Phones and other devices – anything with a screen – must be switched off for the duration of the

screening. Please clean up after yourself. These conditions are not meant to curtail your comfort, but to minimize distractions and enable you to focus exclusively on the content.

Written work

Please double-space all printed assignments, using 12-pt font and 1-inch margins all around, numbering your pages. MLA citation style is preferred, but any consistent style is adequate. See the guide to Plagiarism and Citation at the Dept. of English Literature website: <http://www.swarthmore.edu/x10027.xml>. Please include director and year of release in parenthesis after the first mention of a film title. Credits and release dates can be found at IMDB.com. You do not need to cite dialogue from a film.

Disability Accommodations

If you need accommodations for a disability, please contact Leslie Hempling in the Office of Student Disability Services to set up an appointment. Information is available at <http://www.swarthmore.edu/x7687.xml>.

Readings and topics are subject to change. We will sometimes add short readings to Moodle site without advance notice.

On the calendar, reading deadlines are marked with •, senior essay deadlines with *, and production deadlines with §.

Calendar

Week 1 (Jan 16): Approaching the Real

- Thomas Elsaesser, “Lumiere: The Cinema’s First Virtualist?”
 - Tom Gunning, “An Aesthetic of Astonishment”
- Screen Lumiere films in class, review video exercise
*§ Proposals and treatments

Week 2 (Jan 23): Special Effects and Digital Doubles

- Dan North, “The Synthespian” from *Performing Illusions*
- Vivian Sobchack, “Final Fantasy: Computer Graphic Animations of Humanity (or the [Dis]Illusion of Life)” from *Animated Worlds*
- D. N. Rodowick, “A New Landscape (Without Image)” from *The Virtual Life of Film*

Screening: *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within* (Hironobu Sakaguchi, 2001, 106 min.)

Week 3 (Jan 30) Realism and Film Theory

- Andre Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” and “The Evolution of the Language of Cinema” from *What Is Cinema?* (CV)
 - Siegfried Kracauer, “Basic Concepts” and “Inherent Affinities” from *Theory of Film* (CV)
- Recommended: Philip Rosen from *Change Mummified* and Miriam Hansen, introduction to *Theory of Film*
- A.O. Scott, “Neo-neorealism”
 - Michal Flanagan, “Towards an Aesthetic of Slow in Contemporary Cinema”
 - Dan Kios, “Eating Your Cultural Vegetables”
- * Thesis paragraph and outline
§ Author draft screenplay due

Screening: *24 City* (Jia Zhangke, 2008, 112 min.)

Week 4 (Feb 6): Reality Formats

- Laurie Ouellette, “ ‘Take Responsibility for Yourself!’ ” (CV)
 - Brenda Webb, from *Makeover TV*
 - Henry Jenkins, “Buying Into *American Idol*” from *Convergence Culture*
- § Shooting script & schedule; casting calls, production schedule

Screening: TV shows

** Attend Henry Jenkins lecture Thurs Feb 9 at 7 p.m. & student event Fri Feb 10 at 10 a.m., both in Scheuer

Week 5 (Feb 13): Virtual Witness

- Susan Sontag “Regarding the Torture of Others”
 - Sam Gregory and Patricia Zimmerman, “Speculation on the Virtual and the Viral Witness to Human Rights Crises”
 - Jennifer Terry, “Killer Entertainments”
 - Jonathan Rozenkrantz, “Colourful Claims: Towards a Theory of Animated Documentary”
 - Ohad Landesman and Roy Rendor, “Animated Recollection and Spectatorial Experience in *Waltz With Bashir*”
- * 10-page draft due
§ Visual research & strategy due: director’s lookbook, location photos, photography/cinematography tests

Screening: *Waltz with Bashir* (Ari Folman, 2008, Israel, 90 min.)

Online: Sam Gregory YouTube video; websites for Harun Farocki exhibitions

Week 6 (Feb 20)

No group meeting; individual meetings TBA

§ Pre-production paperwork due: refined schedule, marked shooting script, overhead diagrams, storyboard, shot list, scene breakdowns, call sheets, budget, contact sheet and cast & crew list

Week 7 (Feb 27): Gaming the Social

- Ken Hillis, from *Online A Lot of the Time*
 - Alexander Galloway, from *Gaming*
 - Introduction from *Race After the Internet*
- * 10 more pages due
§ Acting rehearsals

Screening: *Catfish* (Henry Joost and Ariel Schulman, 2010, 86 min.)

Spring Break

§ Shoot

Week 8 (Mar 12)

- * Rough draft due; workshop drafts
- § Shoot

Week 9 (Mar 19)

Full class meeting

- * Continue to workshop drafts

§ Start of post-production; begin editing

Screening: *Milestones* (Robert Kramer and John Douglas, 1975, US, 135 min.)

Week 10 (Mar 26)

Full class meeting

§ Edit

Screening: *Hugo* (Martin Scorsese, 2011, US, 112 min.)

Week 11 (Apr 2)

* Workshop revisions

§ Meet in media lab

Week 12 (Apr 9)

Meet as full group; class visit with alumnae filmmakers Kate Bernstein, Juliet Lashinsky-Revene, and Stella Kyriakopoulos

* 10 min. multimedia presentations

§ 10 min. presentation of film

Screening: Alumnae film panel

Week 13 (Apr 16)

Individual meetings; optional critique with editor Kate Amend

Week 14 (Apr 23)

Evaluations, review, class visit with Marshall Curry

*§ Finish

§ Create press kits, director's statements, etc.

Screening *If a Tree Falls: A Story of the Earth Liberation Front* (Marshall Curry, 2011)

April 27: Submission for Tri-Co Film Festival due

May 2: Tri-Co Film Festival

May 3: 4pm Presentation of Senior Essays in LPAC 101

5pm reception for Louis Massiah and FMST picnic in Kohlberg courtyard

7:30pm screening of capstone projects in LPAC 101