## CINE 590 ARTH593 COML599 ENGL593 GSWS594 Fall 2013

Professor Patricia White pwhite1@swarthmore.edu M 2-4, FBH 406 office hours M 11-1 FBH 202

**Independent Women’s Cinema: Aesthetics, Politics, Institutions**

The concept of women’s cinema, with its ambiguities—by women, or for women? populist or feminist?—has been debated within feminist film scholarship for three decades. Does it still have salience within a postfeminist popular culture? How can feminist theories of authorship, film language, genre, and gendered spectatorship illuminate the production strategies, aesthetic modes, and viewing practices associated with contemporary U.S. independent feature filmmaking by women? This course assesses both the field of feminist film studies and the sector of independent production today, while bringing feminist and queer theories of intersectionality, diaspora, temporality, sexuality, and embodiment to bear on the films themselves.

Independent cinema also covers a wide semantic field: pioneers in the silent era, the postwar avant-garde, the political cinema of the 1960s, exploitation film after the break-up of the studio monopolies, documentary and other non-theatrical production, and finally “Indiewood” —a symbiotic formation with media conglomerates. “Independence” may signify financial, aesthetic or ideological autonomy.

How do the two histories and discourses come together? The narratives of independent cinema have often been about maverick male directors and entrepreneurs, and their focus on the market overlooks the infrastructure of nonprofit media arts organizations in which women have long labored. This course reviews and restores the importance of gender representation (in the sense of both images and equity) to the history of US independent cinema. It looks at authorship and aesthetics; concepts of cultural politics and production; the structure of festivals and nonprofits; and the ambivalent relation between US independent cinema and Hollywood on the one hand, and between indies and “foreign films” on the other. Student projects will focus on recent independent filmmaking by women in the US in transnational context, including research into production and reception contexts as well as textual analysis and theoretical inquiry.

**Required Texts**

Available at Penn Book Center:

Butler, Alison. *Women’s Cinema: The Contested Screen*. London: Wallflower, 2002.

Newman, Michael. *Indie: An American Film Culture*. NY: Columbia UP, 2012.

Rich, B. Ruby. *New Queer Cinema: The Director’s Cut*. Durham: Duke UP, 1013.

E-book:

Silverstein, Melissa. *In Her Own Voice: Women Directors Talk Directing.*

All other required readings as well as many supplemental ones are available on the course Blackboard site. Please bring your readings to class.

**The syllabus is subject to change. Consult Blackboard and contact me with any questions.**

Accommodations can be arranged for a documented disability. Please consult the instructor.

**Course Meetings and Screenings**

At most class meetings, one or two students will facilitate a portion of our discussion, focusing on the week’s primary film and linking it with one or more assigned readings. The facilitator should prepare a few substantive questions and select a clip to show in class. **Two weeks later, facilitators will post a 4-5 page paper on the week’s topic, following one of two formats: a close reading or argument about one or more assigned texts (which may include films) or an overview synthesizing themes from the assigned texts and class discussion.** Everyone else will be responsible for preparing one article or supplementary film for *each* seminar meeting and may be called upon by me or the facilitator to set up that text for discussion.

Please turn off all electronic devices unless you are using them exclusively for note-taking.

If we can coordinate schedules, I will arrange a weekly group screening. If this is not possible, please see primary films (listed with the weekly readings) at the Cinema Studies office or Van Pelt library. You may check them out, but be mindful of your classmates (try to watch the films together when possible). Please return DVDs early Monday the day they are being used in class.

Films listed each week as “related,” including those in theaters, may be used for discussion forum posts or other writing assignments; clips will frequently be shown in class.

As our work for this class will revolve around the independent film “scene,” we will see several films in theaters. I have also tried to include release dates for upcoming independent films for recommended screenings. Please note theatrical screenings may change and will be confirmed in class. You can follow independent film news online at Indiewire, among other sites.

**Requirements**

**Regular attendance and active, respectful participation**. 10%

**Discussion forum posts.** Please post your substantive comments and questions on readings and films to the weekly course forum (click under “Discussion Board”) as frequently as you wish and at least five times during the semester (preferably paced throughout; please number your comments). This can be a part of your preparation of an article or supplementary film for seminar, and a response to another post is acceptable. 20%

**Facilitation** In-class discussion of 20-30 minutes, 4-5 page follow up paper. 20%

**Short writing assignments.** Occasional informal assignments on indie films and institutions.

**Seminar paper.** 12-15 pages. Topic and preliminary bibliography due Nov. 4. Presentation in class weeks 13 and 14. Papers due December 15. 50%

**Writing guidelines:** Please make sure your paper is in twelve-point type, double-spaced and proofread, with 1-inch margins and numbered pages, and stapled. MLA citation style preferred.

Fall 2013 Prof. Patricia White

**Independent Women’s Cinema**

**9/9 Week 1: Introduction and Organization**

Patricia White, “Feminism and Film”

Carrie Rickey, “Female Directors Gain Ground, Slowly”

Manohla Dargis, “How Oscar Found Ms. Right”

Sundance/NYWIFT/Annenberg Study, “Exploring the Barriers,” Exec. Summary

Toronto International Film Festival coverage (check Indiewire)

Watch in class: *Illusions* (Julie Dash, 1982, 34 min.)

At the Ritz: *In a World…* (Lake Bell, 2013, 93 min.)

**9/16** **Week 2: Gaze and Voice: Mapping Feminist Film Studies**

Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”

Claire Johnston, “Women’s Cinema as Counter Cinema”

bell hooks, “The Oppositional Gaze”

Alison Butler, introduction

Michele Schreiber, “Their Own Personal Velocity: Women Directors and Contemporary Independent Cinema” (esp. section on Mary Harron)

Christine Vachon, excerpt from *Shoot to Kill*

Pick one: Judith Mayne, “Lesbian Looks”

Mary Ann Doane, “Femininity and the Masquerade”

Teresa de Lauretis, “Desire in Narrative”

KajaSilverman, “The Female Authorial Voice”

Film: *The Notorious Bettie Page* (Mary Harron, 2007, 91 min.)

At the Ritz: *Afternoon Delight* (Jill Soloway, 2013, 99 min.)

Related films: *Morocco* (Josef von Sternberg, 1930, 92 min.)

*Vertigo*  (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958, 128 min.)

*Gilda* (Charles Vidor, 1946, 110 min.)

*Dance, Girl, Dance* (Dorothy Arzner, 1940, 90 min.)

9/23 Week 3: Feminist Aesthetics and the New York Avant-garde

Alison Butler, ch. 2, 77-85

Lauren Rabinovitz, from *Points of Resistance*

Maya Deren, “Cinematography: The Creative Use of Reality”

Theresa Geller, “Maya Deren’s Film Aesthetics as Feminist Praxis”

Melissa Ragona, “Swing and Sway: Marie Menken’s Filmic Events”

Teresa de Lauretis, “Rethinking Women’s Cinema”

Pick one: B. Ruby Rich, “In the Name of Feminist Film Criticism”

Cristina Lane, *Feminist Hollywood*, chapter on Borden

Teresa de Lauretis, “Strategies of Coherence”

Films: *Meshes of the Afternoon* (Maya Deren, 1943, 14 min.)

*Go, Go, Go!* (Marie Menken, 1962-4, 11 min.)

*Born in Flames* (Lizzie Borden, 1983, 80 min.)

Related films: *News from Home* (Chantal Akerman, 1977, 85 min.)

*The Man Who Envied Women* (Yvonne Rainer, 1985, 125 min.)

At the Ritz: *Enough Said* (Nicole Holofcener, 2013, 91 min.)

**9/30 Week 4: African American Women’s Independent Film Networks**

Jacqueline Bobo, “Black Women’s Films: Genesis of a Tradition”

Toni Cade Bambara, “Reading the Signs, Empowering the Eye”

Clip from *Sisters in Cinema* (Yvonne Welbon, 2003)

Christina Lane, “Just Another Girl Outside the Neo-indie”

Interviews with and blog posts about Ava DuVernay

Film: *Middle of Nowhere* (Ava DuVernay, 2012, 97 min.)

Related films: *Daughters of the Dust* (Julie Dash, 1991, 112 min.)

*Just Another Girl on the IRT* (Leslie Harris, 1992, 92 min.)

*The* *Watermelon Woman* (Cheryl Dunye, 1996, 90 min.)

*Night Catches Us* (Tanya Hamilton, 2013, 90 min.)

**10/7 Week 5: Documentary/Politics**

Read: Bill Nichols, “The Voice of Documentary”

Patricia Zimmerman, “Flaherty’s Midwives”

Rosalinda Fregoso, from *MeXicana Encounters* and “*Maquilapolis*: An Interview with Vicky Funari and Sergio de la Torre”

Hamid Naficy, from “Situating Accented Cinema”

Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, “Esthetics of Resistance”

Films: *History and Memory* (Rea Tajiri, 1991, 32 min., video)

*Maquilapolis* (Vicky Funari and Sergio de la Torre, 2006, 70 min.)

Related films: *Healthcaring* (Jane Warrenbrand & Denise Bostrom, 1976, 32 min.)

*Harlan County* (Barbara Kopple, 1976, 103 min.)

*The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter* (Connie Field, 1980, 65 min.)

*El General* (Natalia Almeda, 2009, 83 min.)

At the Ritz: *After Tiller* (Martha Shane and Lana Wilson, 2013, 85 min.)

**10/14**  **Week 6: New Queer Cinema and Beyond**

B. Ruby Rich, from *New Queer Cinema: The Director’s Cut*

J. Halberstam, “The Transgender Gaze”

Lisa Henderson from *Love and Money*

Christine Vachon from *A Killer Life*

Film: *Boys Don’t Cry* (Kimberly Peirce, 2005, 118 min.)

Related films: *Portrait of Jason* (Shirley Clarke, 1967, 105 min.)

*Go Fish* (Rose Troche, 1994, 83 min.)

*Saving Face* (Alice Wu, 2004, 91 min.)

*Circumstance* (Maryam Keshavarz, 2011, 107 min.)

*Pariah* (Dee Rees, 2011, 86 min.)

**10/21 Week 7: Female Authorship and Popular Genres**

Alison Butler, *Women’s Cinema,* chapter 1

Angela McRobbie from *The Aftermath of Feminism*

Yvonne Tasker, “Bodies and Genres in Transition”

Michele Aaron, “The New Queer Cable?”

Francesca Coppa, “A Fannish Taxonomy of Hotness”

Watch in class: Selected vids, *Girl Trash* (Angela Robinson)

See in cinema: *Paradise* (Diablo Cody, 2013) or *Carrie* (Kimberly Pierce, 2013)

Related films: *Girlfight* (Karen Kusama, 2000, 110 min.)

*D.E.B.S.* (Angela Robinson, 2005, 91 min.)

*Julie and Julia* (Nora Ephron, 2009, 123 min.)

*Jennifer’s Body* (Karen Kusama, 2009, 102 min.)

**10/28 Week 8:** **Sundance: The Women**

Michael Newman, *Indie*, esp. parts 1&2

Sherry B. Ortner, “Introduction” and “Film Feminism” from *Not Hollywood*

Melissa Silverstein, *In Her Voice* (selections)

Sundance/NYWIFT/Annenberg study, “Exploring the Barriers”

Film: *Winter’s Bone* (Deborah Granik, 2010, 100 min.)

Related films: *Gas, Food, Lodging* (Allison Anders, 1992, 101 min.)

*The Savages* (Tamara Jenkins,

*Frozen River* (Courtney Hunt, 2008, 97 min.)

*The Kids Are All Right* (Lisa Cholodenko, 2010, US, 106 min.)

*Your Sister’s Sister* (Lynn Shelton, 2011, 100 min.)

**11/4** **Week 9: No Class**

Post abstracts and bibliographies to Blackboard

Film: *The Bling Ring* (Sofia Coppola, 2013, 90 min.)

**11/11** **Week 10: The New Director Study**

Catherine Grant, “Feminist Theories of Women’s Film Authorship”

Claire Perkins, “Beyond Indiewood: The Everyday Ethics of Nicole Holofcener”

Belinda Smaill, “Sofia Coppola: Reading the Director”

Miranda Banks, “Gender Below the Line: Defining Feminist Production Studies”

Film: *Lovely and Amazing* (Nicole Holofcener, 2001, 91 min.)

Related films: *Blue Steel* (Kathryn Bigelow, 1989, 102 min.)

*Marie Antoinette* (Sofia Coppola, 2006, 123 min.)

*Tiny Furniture* (Lena Dunham, 2010, 98 min.)

**11/18 Week 11: American Indies in the World**

Butler, chapter 3 (skim) and Afterword

Lucia Nagib, “Towards a Positive Definition of World Cinema”

Ella Shohat, “Post Third-Worldist Culture”

Fredric Jameson, from *Geo-Political Aesthetics*

A. O. Scott, “Neo-neorealism”

Dan Kios, “Eating Your Cultural Vegetables”

Patricia White, “Watching Women’s Films”

Patricia White, Introduction to *Women’s Cinema/World Cinema*

Film: *Meek’s Cutoff* (Kelly Reichardt, 2010, 104 min.)

Related films: *Wendy and Lucy* (Kelly Reichart, 2008, 80 min.)

*Treeless Mountain* (So Yong Kim, 2008, 89 min.)

*Amreeka* (Cherien Dabis, 2009, 96 min.)

*Mosquita y Mari* (Aurora Guerrero, 2012, 85 min.)

**11/25** **Week 12: Haptic Cinema**

Alison Butler, ch. 2, 57-77

Laura Marks, “Video Haptics and Erotics”

Julia Bryson-Wilson, “Some Kind of Grace: An Interview with Miranda July

Lauren Berlant from *Cruel Optimism*

Films: *It Wasn’t Love* (Sadie Benning, 1992, 20 min., video)

*Fuses* (Carolee Schneeman, 1967, 22 min.)

*Dyketactics* (Barbara Hammer, 1979, 4 min.)

*You and Me and Everyone We Know* (Miranda July, 2005, 90 min.)

**12/02** **Week 13: Blurred Lines**

Tim Corrigan, from *The Essay Film*

Julia Lesage, “Women’s Fragmented Consciousness in Feminist Experimental Autobiographical Video”

Patricia Zimmerman, “Reinventing Amateurism”

Film: *Stories We Tell* (Sarah Polley, Canada, 2012, 108 min.)

Related film: *Daughter Rite* (Michelle Citron, 1980, 53 min.)

Presentations

**12/09 Week 14: Conclusion**

Presentations