

Englit 1390
Spring 2007
Majumdar, N.

Instructor: Neepa Majumdar

Office: CL 450

Phone: 412-624-5578

Email: nmajumda@pitt.edu

Office Hours: Mondays, 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. or by appointment

ENGLIT 1390 - 20059

Contemporary Film

LECTURE and SCREENING: Wednesdays, 6:00 p.m. to 9:50 p.m. in LAWRN 207

This course will explore the contemporary moment in international cinema in terms of film styles, movements, production, distribution, and reception through the related (but different) concepts of globalization, transnationalism, and postmodernism. The films we will study include mainstream blockbusters, “independent” films, international co-productions, activist or subcultural films, diasporic and exile cinemas, digital and video production, and local productions. We will also look at specific institutional contexts in which contemporary world cinema circulates, such as film festivals, the Internet, academia, the museum, mail order distributors such as Netflix, and commercial theaters.

Required Texts

TNC Transnational Cinema: The Film Reader edited by Elizabeth Ezra and Terry Rowden (Routledge, 2006) – available at the bookstore.

BB: Readings available for download from Blackboard.

Blackboard

You can access the course website at <http://courseweb.pitt.edu> where you will be able to participate in the discussion board, read class-related announcements, and download the syllabus, course readings, and information about the assignments. Please note that lecture notes will not be available online. You can also use this website to email your classmates.

I will contact you occasionally via email to keep you updated about your attendance and performance in class and to make announcements. The course website will send out emails only to your Pitt email account. Therefore, if you do not use your Pitt email account, please use the following instructions to **have your Pitt email forwarded** to the account you use regularly:

- 1) Go to <http://accounts.pitt.edu/>
- 2) Log in with your username and password and click “connect”
- 3) On the Management menu, click on “Edit forwarding addresses”
- 4) Enter your forwarding address(es) (the email address you use regularly) in the box(es) and click “OK”

If you don't have your email forwarded, you may miss important announcements regarding exams and assignments.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Attendance Policy:

3 Late arrivals = 1 absence

2 partial presences = 1 absence (for example, if you leave before or after the film screening)

2 unexcused absences = course grade lowered by one full letter grade

3 to 5 absences = 1/3 letter grade lowered for every unexcused absence after the second one.

6 excused or unexcused absences = F

Excused absences: you must turn in a doctor's note or other valid explanation within a week of your absence.

I will keep track of attendance based on your signature in the sign-up sheet that will be circulated at the beginning of class. It is your responsibility to remember to sign in when the sheet is sent around. This will be your only valid proof that you were in class.

Assignments and Grade Breakdown:

READING

Each week you will read approximately 50 pages before you come to the class for which the readings are assigned.

1) Weekly Reading Journal (25%): This assignment will test your reading and preparation for class each week. You will bring to each class two copies of a one-page single-spaced typewritten response to the readings for that class (although you are welcome to write longer journals for weeks that have more than one reading).

In your journal:

- * Summarize the main ideas of each of the readings
- * Make connections between the ideas in the readings and other readings and/or films
- * Respond to the readings

I will not accept late assignments unless you have a formal medical or other legitimate excuse in writing. Since I will pick up your assignments in the first 10 minutes of class, I strongly urge you to come to class on time. There will be 12 journals in all and grades will be on a **10 point scale** with 10=A+; 9.5=A; 9=A-; etc. down to 5=F.

Important Note: If you do all 12 journals, I will include only the best 8 for your final grade. If you do 11 or fewer, I will average all journals for your grade. This means that if you do all of the reading journals, you will be taking the opportunity to figure out what is expected in this assignment and to improve your grade.

2) Class Discussion (10%):

Your journal will be the basis for your contribution to class discussion. If I don't hear your voice in class, I will call on you to speak up or to read from your journal.

ACTIVE FILM VIEWING

You cannot watch films in this class merely for entertainment. This means that I will expect you to take screening notes and be able to speak in class and write on the discussion board with detailed examples from your notes.

3) Discussion Board Film Posts (15%)

Participate in the course discussion board at least six times in the semester, excluding the week when your group will lead online discussion. You must have a gap of at least a week between comments. If you crowd all of your comments in the last weeks of the semester, your grade will be lowered. You must post substantive comments backed by detailed observation/analysis for which you can draw on your screening notes. In other words, you are required to share mini analyses of each week's film online. Or, you can choose to respond to someone else's post with a counter-analysis of your own. I will grade your posts on the same 10-point scale as your reading journals. One sentence posts will not be graded.

If you post more than six times, I will take your six best grades. I will let you know your grade within a week after you have posted it.

4) Film Presentation and online discussion (5%)

Your group will research one of the films on our syllabus. You will jointly make a brief presentation to the class before the screening and hand out a set of discussion questions to the class. You will then lead online discussion on the film during the week after the screening. Each member of your group will be graded individually.

RESEARCH AND WRITING

5) Group Presentation (15%)

Since contemporary film culture is always in process and all published scholarship is always slightly behind, you will contribute to the scholarship on this area in a class workshop in which you will all present your work to each other. With three other students you will prepare a 20-minute group presentation on an area of contemporary film culture from a list of topics that we will generate in class together. You will also make a handout for the class and turn in a detailed outline with of your presentation.

6) Midterm and Final exams (15% and 15%; 30% total)

For each take-home exam, you will answer assigned questions based on readings and films on the syllabus. I may also ask you to apply concepts learned in class to films of your choice.

Opportunities for Extra Credit

Please don't come to me at the end of the semester to tell me that you "need" a particular grade for this class. The responsibility for earning a grade is yours and all the information you need to do well in this class is in this syllabus. I will not make special arrangements for extra credit at the end of the semester.

Remember that all aspects of your course grade will depend on your careful and regular reading in advance of each week's meeting. You will not do well on the research and writing assignments

if you don't do the readings. Towards the end of the semester there will be no way for you to make up a poor grade in these areas.

Academic Integrity

Students in this course will be expected to comply with the University of Pittsburgh's policy on academic integrity. Cheating/plagiarism will not be tolerated. Everything you write in your exams and papers must be your own work, unless you quote someone else's work and provide full citations. This includes material you may have found online. Students suspected of violating the University of Pittsburgh Policy on Academic Integrity, noted below from the Senate Committee on Tenure and Academic Freedom reported to the Senate Council, will be required to participate in the outlined procedural process as initiated by the instructor. A minimum sanction of a zero score or F for the paper or exam will be imposed.

The integrity of the academic process requires fair and impartial evaluation on the part of faculty and honest academic conduct on the part of students. To this end, students are expected to conduct themselves at a high level of responsibility in the fulfillment of the course of their study. It is the corresponding responsibility of faculty to make clear to students those standards by which students will be evaluated, and the resources permissible for use by students during the course of their study and evaluation. The educational process is perceived as a joint faculty-student enterprise which will perforce involve professional judgment by faculty and may involve – without penalty- reasoned exception by students to the data or views offered by faculty. Senate Committee on Tenure and Academic Freedom, February 1974

Disability Accommodations

If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both your instructor and Disability Resources and Services, **216 William Pitt Union, 648-7890 or 383-7355 (TTY)** as early as possible in the term.

If you have any questions or concerns about the course or your performance, feel free to talk to me, e-mail me, or stop by during my office hours.

ENGLIT 1390 Class Schedule

For the first month of the semester, all readings will refer to the film you watched in class the *previous* week. We will end class with the film, and discuss it the following week. From February onwards, readings and films will be on the same day.

Class 1: January 3

Topic: Introduction

Screening: Spider-Man 2 (Sam Raimi, 2004, 127 mins.)

Discussion Board: Respond to class questionnaire by 12 noon on January 10. Your first journal is due in class on January 10.

Information on group presentation handed out in class.

Class 2: January 10

Topic: The Hollywood Blockbuster

Readings: Robert E. Davis, "Instantaneous Worldwide Release: Coming Soon to Everyone, Everywhere" (TNC Chapter 5, 73-80)

Geoff King, "Spectacle, Narrative, and the Spectacular Hollywood Blockbuster" (*Movie Blockbusters* 114-127). **BB**

Angela Ndaliansi, "Architecture of the Senses: Neo-Baroque Entertainment Spectacles" (*Rethinking Media Change* 355-373) **BB**

Screening: Bride and Prejudice (Gurinder Chadha, UK/USA, 2004, 107 mins.)

Class 3: January 17

Topic: National/Transnational Cinema

Readings: Andrew Higson, "The Limiting Imagination of National Cinema" (TNC Chapter 1, 115-125)

Christine Geraghty, "Jane Austen Meets Gurinder Chadha" *South Asian Popular Culture* 4.2 (2006): 163-168. **BB**

Jigna Desai, "Postcoloniality, Globalization, and Diaspora" (*Beyond Bollywood* 11-31) **BB**

Screening: Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon / Wo hu cang long (Ang Lee, Taiwan/Hong Kong/USA/China, 2000, 120 mins.)

Class 4: January 24

Topic: National Genre in Transnational Context

Readings: Sheldon H. Lu, "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon, Bouncing Angels" (220-233) **BB**
Ackbar Abbas, "Cinema, the City, and the Cinematic" (142-156) **BB**

Optional: David Desser, "Diaspora And National Identity: Exporting 'China' Through The Hong Kong Cinema" (TNC Chapter 10)

Screening: Abre los Ojos / Open Your Eyes (Alejandro Amenábar, Spain, 1997, 117 mins.)

Watch on your own: Vanilla Sky (Cameron Crowe, USA, 2001, 136 mins.)

Class 5: January 31

Topic: The Transnational Remake

Readings: Daniel Herbert, "The Sky's the Limit: Transnationality and Identity in Abre los Ojos and Vanilla Sky," *Film Quarterly* 60.1 (Sep 2006): 28-38. **BB**

Constantine Ververis, "Remaking Film" *Film Studies* 4 (Summer 2004): 87-103. **BB**

Angela McRobbie, "Post-Feminism and Popular Culture: *Bridget Jones* and the New Gender Regime" (*Media and Cultural Theory* 59-70) **BB**

Screening: *Bridget Jones's Diary* (Sharon Maguire, UK, 2001, 97 mins.)

Class 6: February 7

Topic: Contemporary Neo-Realism

Readings: Ann Marie Stock, "Migrancy and the Latin American Cinemascope: Towards a Post-National Critical Praxis" (TNC Chapter 11)

David Slocum, "Violence and American Cinema: Notes for an Investigation" (*Violence and American Cinema* 1-34) **BB**

Further Reading: Anne Friedberg, "Jameson and the Cinematic Postmodern" (*Window Shopping* 168-179) **BB**

Randal Johnson, "TV Globo, the MPA, and Contemporary Brazilian Cinema," (*Latin American Cinema: Essays on Modernity, Gender and National Identity*) **BB**

Screening: *Cidade de Deus / City of God* (Fernando Meirelles and Katia Lund, Brazil, 2002, 130 mins.)

Class 7: February 14

Topic: Contemporary Godard and Montage

Readings: Marcia Landy, "Just an Image: Godard, Cinema, and Philosophy" *Critical Quarterly* 43.3 (October 2001): 9-31. **BB**

Notre Musique website: Read the synopsis, interview, and pressbook. **BB**

Screenings: *Notre Musique / Our Music* (Jean-Luc Godard, France, 2004, 80 mins.)

Midterm exam handed out in class

Class 8: February 21

Topic: Surveillance Aesthetics

Readings: Robin Wood, "Hidden in Plain Sight," *Artforum International* 44.5 (Jan 2006): 35-37. **BB**

Maximilian le Cain, "Do the Right Thing: The Films of Michael Haneke" *Senses of Cinema* May 2003. **BB**

Screening: *Caché / The Hidden* (Michael Haneke, Italy, 1965, 117 mins.)

Midterm exam due in the first 10 minutes of class; no journal due

Class 9: February 28

Contemporary Film Culture Student Workshop

Details provided in class and on Blackboard

SPRING BREAK: March 5-9

Class 10: March 14

Topic: The International Co-Production and New Political Cinema

Readings: Amy Abugo Ongiri, "Lumumba," *American Historical Review* 107.2 (2002): 675. **BB**

J. Watson, "Raoul Peck's *Lumumba*: A Film for Our Times," *Research in African Literatures* 33.2 (Summer 2002): 230-235 **BB**

David Morley, "Globalization and Cultural Imperialism Reconsidered" (*Media and Cultural Theory* 30-43) **BB**

Screening: *Lumumba* (Raoul Peck, France/Belgium/Germany/Haiti, 2000, 115 mins.)

Class 11: March 21

Topic: Image Technologies and Terror

Readings: Homi K. Bhabha, "Terror and after ..." (TNC Chapter 14)

John S. Nelson, "Four Forms of Terrorism: Horror, Dystopia, Thriller, and Noir (TNC Chapter 13)

Robin Wood, "Hidden in Plain Sight," *Artforum International* 44.5 (January 2006): 35-37. **BB**

Screening: *Paradise Now* (Hany Abu-Assad, Palestine, 2005, 90 mins.)

Class 12: March 28

Topic: Contemporary American Independent Film

Readings: Chris Holmlund, "From the Margins to the Mainstream" (*Contemporary American Independent Film* 1-19) **BB**

Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, "Remediation," *Configurations* 4.3 (1993): 311-358 **BB**

Screening: *Donnie Darko* (Richard Kelly, USA, 2001, 113 mins.)

Class 13: April 4

Topic: The Digital Image

Readings: Constance Balides, "Immersion in the Virtual Ornament" (*Rethinking Media Change* 315-336) **BB**

Lev Manovich, "What is Digital Cinema?" **BB**

Nick Turse, "Bringing the War Home: The New Military-Industrial-Entertainment Complex at War and Play," *Common Dreams News Center* (May 13, 2006) **BB**

Screening: *Avalon* (Mamoru Oshii, Japan/Poland, 2001) or *eXistenZ* (David Cronenberg, Canada, 1999, 97 mins.)

Class 14: April 11

Topic: Participatory Film Culture: Short Films/Parodies/Fan Films

Readings: Barbara Klinger, "To Infinity and Beyond: The Web Short, Parody, and Remediation" (*Beyond the Multiplex* 191-238) **BB**

Matt Hills, "Star Wars in Fandom, Film Theory, and the Museum" (*Movie Blockbusters* 178-189) **BB**

Further Reading: Elana Shefrin, "Lord of the Rings, Star Wars, and Participatory Fandom: Mapping New Congruencies Between the Internet and Media Entertainment Culture" (TNC Chapter 6, 81-96)

Screening: Troops (Kevin Rubio, 1998, 10 mins.)

Grayson John (Fiorella, 2004, 6 mins.)

Batman: Dead End (Sandy Collora, 2003, 8 mins.)

World's Finest (Sandy Collora, 2004, 6 mins.)

Excerpt from Call of Cthulhu (Andrew Leman, 2005)

Student Films/Student choice

Class 15: April 18

Topic: The Moving Image Today

Readings: Chris Dercon, "Gleaning the Future from the Gallery Floor" (*Senses of Cinema* 2002) **BB**

Lev Manovich, "Towards an Archaeology of the Computer Screen" (*Cinema Futures: Cain, Abel, or Cable?* 27-43). **BB**

John McMurria, "The YouTube Community" **BB**

Screening: Selections from Soft Cinema (Lev Manovich and Andreas Kratky, 2004)

Baltimore and Paradise Ormeros (Issac Julien, 2005)

Take-home final exam handed out in class

Final Exam due on Wednesday, April 25 by 4 pm in my mailbox in CL 501. Please include a self-addressed stamped envelope if you would like your exam back in the mail.
