

Englit 1485
Spring 2003
Majumdar, N. LIT 1485

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Office Hours: Thursdays 10:00–12:00 p.m. or Tuesdays by appointment

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

ENGLIT 1485/30590

Film and Politics

How do films construct the past? By what visual and cinematic means is the process of memory conveyed? How does the time frame in which a film is viewed affect the way its representation of the past is understood? "Film and Politics" is a writing-intensive course whose topic this semester is the relation between film and history. While the course will be structured around films that narrate historical events or otherwise engage the past, our interest will not be to evaluate the accuracy of a film's historical representation. Rather, we will consider the uses to which history, both "real" and "invented," has been put in various mainstream and alternative cinematic traditions around the world. Issues to be considered will include: memory and national identity, "truth" and representation, "documentary" and "fiction," personal and collective pasts, and censorship.

Required Texts

There is no assigned textbook for this course.

- All readings (books and articles) have been placed on reserve at the Hillman Library. You can check out these articles and make your own copies. Please see the **instructions on the attached yellow sheet** for instructions on how you can check out articles on reserve at the Hillman library.
- In some cases, the reading is available online and you will be able to download it yourself.
- On week 7, there is no assigned reading other than a one-page handout. Instead, your assignment will be another film.

Note: Because of the length of many historical films, on some weeks, you will be asked to **watch some films on your own**. All such films will be available in the Hillman library's Media Resource Center. On those weeks, class will be shorter than usual because we won't be watching the film in class.

* Every film you will watch in advance on your own is marked with an asterisk. For films you watch on your own, I will require a **one-page typed response** as part of your journal for that week.

Course Requirements

To do well in this class, you must do all the readings by the date shown on the syllabus, take notes, and participate actively in the class. This is a writing course and you should plan on spending approximately 3 hours a week on reading and writing in preparation for class. 45% of your final course grade will be based on this ongoing, regular work.

Attendance

Regular attendance is essential to your doing well in this class. Film classes are highly visual and the film clips we will watch and analyze during class meetings will be vital to your understanding of major concepts. Since lecture and discussion will add substantially to the readings, any absences will significantly affect the quality of your final term paper.

I will keep track of attendance based on your signature in the sign-up sheet that will be circulated in 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.

Attendance Policy

If you have more than **two** unexcused absences, your grade will be lowered. I will remind you of your attendance record, and then will begin lowering your final course grade by **1/3 of a letter grade** for every additional class you miss. For instance, after your second unexcused absence, a final grade of B will be lowered to B-, after your second absence, to C+, and so on. Of course, if you have religious holidays, are ill, or have some other crisis, you should talk to me. If you have a legitimate reason for being absent, you must inform me about it in writing for it to be excused. I will not accept any excuses that are presented to me **more than a week** after the absence.

Course Website

This course will have its own website at <http://courseweb.pitt.edu> where you will be able to read class-related announcements and download the syllabus, handouts, and paper topics. Lecture notes will **not** be available online. This is where we will have the discussion board for our class (see course assignments below). You can also use this website to email your classmates.

Communication

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 account you use regularly) in the box(es) and click "OK"

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

Course Assignments and Grade Breakdown

Please make sure that you **keep a hard copy** of each assignment for your own protection.

Weekly Reading Journal (45%)

This assignment will test your reading and preparation for class each week. You will submit a **single-spaced type-written** response to the reading questions that will be assigned online each Thursday night. You must turn in your reading journal at the beginning of class each week. 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 the **10 best will count** towards your grade. Occasionally, I will ask you to read out passages from your journal in class.

Online discussion group (10%)

Our course website will have a threaded online discussion group so that we can continue to think about the films and readings outside the classroom. Your task will be to post online **at least 4 times** in the semester according to the following “rules”:

- You must post at least **two** questions and at least **two** responses (not to your own questions) in the entire semester.
- There must be a **gap of at least a week** between each of your entries.

In other words, you cannot make up for an entire semester of non-participation by posting all your questions and answers in one or two weeks. Needless to say, I strongly encourage you to post more than the minimum number of postings I have specified here.

5-page paper (15 %)

This paper will be a detailed exploration of an issue pertaining to cinema, history, and memory. I will hand out a list of possible topics early in the semester. As part of this paper, you will review and respond to at least two of the theoretical readings on cinema and history assigned for this class.

Final term paper (25%)

You will substantially revise your 5-page paper and use it in your final term paper as the theoretical framework for your analysis of two films, one seen in class and the other from a list of films I will hand out. If you decide to choose another film to write on, you must run it by me. Your term paper will be 12 to 15 pages in length and is due on Wednesday, April 23 by 5 p.m. in my mailbox in CL 501. This is an **absolute deadline** and I will accept no late papers except in the event of a genuine emergency.

Class participation (5%)

Your active participation in class discussion will count for 5% of your grade. This means that you cannot get an A or A+ as your course grade if you don't contribute to discussions, ask questions, come to office hours, or in some other way demonstrate your active and on-going engagement with the material.

Academic Integrity

Students in this course will be expected to comply with the University of Pittsburgh's policy on academic integrity. Everything you write in your papers and reading journals must be your own work, unless you quote someone else's work and provide full citations. Any student suspected of violating this obligation for any reason during the semester will be required to participate in the procedural process, initiated at the instructor level, as **outlined in the University's *Guidelines on Academic Integrity***.

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, feel free to talk to me, e-mail me, or stop by during my office hours.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Please note that sometimes films and/or readings listed on the schedule may be changed (due to unavailability or lack of time) or replaced by other materials. In the event of any changes, I will inform you well in advance and you will be responsible for updating your syllabus.

Class 1: January 8

Topic: Course Overview

Readings: ► Robert A. Rosenstone, "What you Think About When You Think About Writing a Book on History and Film" (handout)

Screening: *The Patriot* (Roland Emmerich, U.S.A., 2000, 164 mins.)

Class 2: January 15

Topic: The Past in the Present

Readings: ► Robert A. Rosenstone, "Introduction" (from *Visions of the Past*)

► Sumiko Higashi, "Walker and Mississippi Burning: Postmodernism versus Illusionist Narrative" (*The Historical Film: History and Memory in Media* ed. Marcia Landy)

Screening: *Walker* (Alex Cox, U.S.A., 1987, 95 mins.)

Class 3: January 22

Topic: Personal and Collective Pasts

Readings: ► Leger Grindon, "Analyzing the Historical Fiction Film" (from *Shadows on the Past*)

► Lucy Fischer, "Documentary Film and the Discourse of Hysterical/Historical Narrative: Ross McElwee's *Sherman's March*" (*Documenting the Documentary* eds. Barry Keith Grant and Jeannette Sloniowski): handout

Screening: * *Sherman's March* (Ross McElwee, U.S.A., 1986, 157 mins.)

* watch on your own in the Hillman library Media Resource Center

Class 4: January 29

Topic: Revisioning Genre and History

Readings: ► Marcia Landy, "Introduction" (pp. 1-25): xerox from book, *Cinematic Uses of the Past* by Marcia Landy on reserve at Hillman library reserve desk: PN1995.9 H5L36 1996

► Tania Modleski, "Our Heroes Have Sometimes Been Cowgirls: An Interview with Maggie Greenwald" (*Film Quarterly* 49.2: 2-11)

Screening: *The Ballad of Little Jo* (Maggie Greenwald, U.S.A., 1993, 121 mins.)

Class 5: February 5

Topic: History and Memory: The Holocaust I

- Readings:** ► Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, "Documenting the Ineffable: Terror and Memory in Alain Resnais's *Night and Fog*" (*Documenting the Documentary* eds. Barry Keith Grant and Jeannette Sloniowski)
- Michael S. Roth, "*Hiroshima Mon Amour*: You Must Remember This" (*Revisioning History* ed. Robert A. Rosenstone)

- Screenings:** *Nuit et Brouillard / Night and Fog* (Alain Resnais, France, 1955, 32 mins.)
- Hiroshima Mon Amour* (Alain Resnais, France, 1959, 90 mins.)

Class 6: February 12

Topic: History and Memory: The Holocaust II

- Readings:** ► Andreas Huyssen, "Monument and Memory in a Postmodern Age" (*The Yale Journal of Criticism* 6.2: 249-261)
- Hilene Flanzbaum, "'But Wasn't it Terrific?': A Defense of Liking *Life is Beautiful*"
- download from:
- http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/yale_journal_of_criticism/v014/14.1flanzbaum.html
- Recommended:** ► Ruth Ben-Ghiat, "The Secret Histories of Roberto Benigni's *Life is Beautiful*"
- download from:
- http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/yale_journal_of_criticism/v014/14.1ben-ghiat.html
- Screening:** *La Vita è bella / Life is Beautiful* (Roberto Benigni, Italy, 1997, 122 mins.)

Class 7: February February 19

Topic: Rewriting National Trauma: India's Partition

- Readings:** ► handout
- watch *Gandhi* (Richard Attenborough, 1982): D-517 (laserdisc) or V-1397 (video)
- Screenings:** * *Hey Ram!* (Kamala Haasan, India, 2000, 186 mins.)
- * watch on your own in the Hillman library Media Resource Center

Class 8: February 24

Paper 1 due at beginning of class

Topic: Rewriting National Trauma: The U.S.A.'s Vietnam War

- Readings:** ► Gregory Waller, "*Rambo*: Getting to Win this Time" (*From Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film* eds. Linda Dittmar and Gene Michaud): 11 pages
- Screening:** *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (George P. Cosmatos, U.S.A., 1985, 94 mins.)

March 5: **SPRING BREAK**

Class 9: March 12

Topic: Feminist Experimental Films: Personal and National History

- Readings:** ► Linda Peckham, "*Surname Viet Given Name Nam*: Spreading Rumors & Ex/Changing Histories" (*Screening Asian Americans* ed. Peter X. Feng)
- Lisa French, "An Analysis of *Nice Coloured Girls*"
- download from <http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/00/5/nice.html>
- Screening:** *Nice Coloured Girls* (Tracy Moffatt, Australia, 1987, 16 mins.)
- Surname Viet Given Name Cong* (Trinh T. Minh-ha, U.S.A., 1989, 108 mins.)

Class 10: March 19

Topic: National Identity and History: Soviet Georgia

Readings: ► Denise Youngblood, "Repentance: Stalinist Terror and the Realism of Surrealism"
(*Post - War Cinema and Modernity* eds. John Orr and Olga Taxidou)

Screening: *Monanieba / Repentance* (Tengiz Abuladze, U.S.S.R. (Georgia), 1987, 153 mins.)

Class 11: March 26

Topic: National Identity and History: Senegal

Readings: ► Marcia Landy, "Folklore, Memory, and Postcoloniality in Ousmane Sembene's Films" (xerox from book, *Cinematic Uses of the Past* by Marcia Landy on reserve at Hillman library: PN1995.9 H5L36 1996)

Screening: *Camp de Thiaroye* (Ousmane Sembene, Senegal, 1987, 147 mins.)

Class 12: April 2

Term Paper draft due at beginning of class

Topic: Borderless History I: Texas

Readings: ► "Sayles Talk (Interview with John Sayles) and review of *Lone Star* (*Sight and Sound*)

Screening: *Lone Star* (John Sayles, U.S.A., 1996, 135 mins.)

Class 13: April 9

Term Paper draft returned at end of class

Topic: Borderless History II: Slavery in the Americas

Readings: ► Pamela Woolford, "Filming Slavery: A Conversation with Haile Gerima"
(*Transition* 64: 91-104)

► Sylvie Kande, "Look Homeward, Angel: Maroons and Mulattos in Haile Gerima's *Sankofa*" (*Research in African Literatures* 29.2 (1998 summer): 128-146)

Screening: *Sankofa* (Haile Gerima, U.S.A., 1993, 125 mins.)

Class 14: April 16

Topic: Transnational Reception of History and Film

Readings: ► Wendy Larson, "The Concubine and the Figure of History: Cheg Kaige's *Farewell My Concubine*" (*Transnational Chinese Cinemas* ed. Sheldon Hsiao-peng Liu)

Screening: * *Ba wang bie ji / Farewell My Concubine* (Chen Kaige, 1993, 171 mins.)

* watch on your own in the Hillman library Media Resource Center

Term Paper due on Wednesday, April 25 by 5 p.m. in my mailbox in CL 501