

Individually Negotiated Honors Option

Fall 2007

AVF157: Cinema and Transcendence

Student: Amanda Elliott

Professor: Kristi McKim

In the regular course (as the syllabus indicates), each week includes texts and a film that mutually reinforce each other's clarity and complexity. For example, the regular course commences with Paul Schrader's *Transcendental Style in Cinema* as a textual basis for our screenings of films by Ozu, Dreyer, and Bresson. Through framing the course with these readings that overtly locate patterns of transcendental style within specific films, I hope that students will then be able to apply this learning (which they've 'practiced,' so to speak, through Schrader's analyses) to films not overtly included within Schrader's study. We will work closely with films that might both fit within and also stretch the limits of what Schrader terms "transcendental style": films that often, for example, incite reviewers to use praiseful words such as "transcendent!"; we will think about the implications of these assessments and the varying narrative/stylistic patterns that incur these descriptions.

This course thus relies upon a firm theoretical framework within which to crystallize students' perceptual and expressive capabilities; likewise, the films help to concretize arguments that, by their theoretical incarnation, might otherwise remain abstract.

This INHO intends to supplement the course requirements by integrating additional screenings and readings, which will be discussed during student/professor meetings, into the regular schedule. Every two weeks, Amanda will either read an additional essay or will screen an additional film, for which she will then a) write a response paper, and b) discuss with me during our meetings.

This process allows her to understand the ways that one film can have multiple meanings in relation to various theoretical frameworks (e.g. as part of the regular course, she will study Bresson's *Le Journal d'un cure de campagne*; as her INHO, she will also study this film through Andre Bazin's phenomenological celebration of Bresson's transcendental stylistics—an essay that non-INHO students will not read) and also how one framework can relate to additional films (e.g. the regular course doesn't include Fellini's *Notti di Cabiria*, but this film more than suggests the transcendental style we're studying within the regular course). This process allows her to gain significant familiarity, comfort, and confidence with the attributes and limits of one particular way of approaching film.

Amanda's enrichment will thus involve both depth (immersion within theories and films of transcendental style, through additional readings) and breadth (considering more than one approach to a single film; and considering more than one film in relation to a single approach).

A s s i g n m e n t s

Reading and Screening Schedule:

Meeting One:

Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self Reliance"

Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter...and Spring (Kim Ki-duk, 2003; South Korea, 102 min.)

Meeting Two:

Andre Bazin, "Le Journal d'un cure de campagne and the Stylistics of Robert Bresson"

Meeting Three:

Nights of Cabiria (Federico Fellini, 1957; 110 min.)

Andre Bazin, "Cabiria: The Voyage to the End of Neorealism"

Meeting Four:

The Double Life of Veronique (Krzysztof Kieslowski, 1991; France/Poland, 96 min.)

Meeting Five:

Wings of Desire (Wim Wenders, 1987; Germany, 130 min.)

Meeting Six:

Breaking the Waves (Lars von Trier, 1999; Denmark, 152 min.)

Writing:

For each meeting, Amanda will write a two-page response to the assigned text/film, which indicates her contextualization of the film within the course framework.

Meeting:

Amanda and I will meet six times during the semester to discuss her understanding of the texts and films, integration of theory and film, and written response to text and film.

Grading for INHO

- o Attendance 10%
- o Participation 10%
- o Midterm Exam 20% (regular course 25%)
- o Short Papers 20% (regular course 30%)
- o ~~Final Exam 20% (regular course 25%)~~
- o INHO Summaries 20%

CINEMA AND TRANSCENDENCE

AVF157 | Spring 2007 | Hofstra University

Dr. Kristi McKim
Dempster 200
avfkim@hofstra.edu

Class: MW 9-11 a.m., Dempster 202
Office Hours: TBD

Course Description

"The use of literature is to afford us a platform whence we may command a view of our present life, a purchase by which we may move it...The field cannot be well seen from within the field."

—Emerson, "Circles"(1841)

"Crossing a bare common, in snow puddles, at twilight, under a clouded sky, without having in my thoughts any occurrence of special good fortune, I have enjoyed a perfect exhilaration. I am glad to the brink of fear."

—Emerson, "Nature"(1836)

"[I]n times of political extremity or urgency it is necessary to reconnect with transcendent, metaphysical dimensions – to remember what lies behind or beyond the impermanent, immediate realities...this is something cinema can do – make links between layers of existence and evoke the visible world"

—Sally Potter, *Cineaste* interview about *Yes*

Arguably the central figure of American transcendental traditions, Ralph Waldo Emerson champions the striving toward an unmediated relation of the self with nature, such that the world can perpetually reveal itself to the individual receptive to this continual knowledge. He advocates literature's ability to "afford a platform" from which we might see ourselves more clearly, and validates the spirituality inherent in "brief moments" that might afford a "perfect exhilaration" of "glad[ness] to the brink of fear." In other words, Emerson calls for a new understanding of faith, world, and selfhood based upon the knowledge and spirituality that emerge within the ephemera of experience itself.

Privileging a momentary immersion and continual revelation, Emerson appreciates the immediacy of an individual's experience as well as art's ability to offer a clearer perspective upon this experience. Within this framework, we discover the underpinnings of cinematic experience: film as an art that changes our experience of time through the duration and ellipses afforded by editing; film as an art that grants us, through cinematic scale, an experience of distance and intimacy; film as an art that can create *moments* of stylistic immersion for the spectator or can portray *moments* of climactic significance within the film narrative. What might we learn about the intersection of film, the world, and our spectatorship by studying transcendental style in cinema? In this course, we will hardly offer a singular answer to this broad question; rather, we will base our inquiry within this intriguing dynamic of film experience and spectatorial exhilaration.

Moments of built cinematic transcendence appear quite frequently within Hollywood conventions of climactic grandeur: for example, at the end of *E.T.* (Steven Spielberg, 1982), when Elliott (Henry Thomas) magically pedals the sheet-cloaked extra-terrestrial into the sky, the famous John Williams score emphasizes this narrative climax through a momentous major chord at the peak of the musical crescendo. This score—which exists somewhere outside of the world of these humans and E.T.—

simply are not doing the work you ought to be doing. As your professor, I will do my best to elicit conversation, flag key concepts, and guide our inquiry; but as students, you must also do your best to contribute to the course, to raise questions and offer reflections as you see fit. As with any subject, some area, however small or large, will pique your interest. May you find at least one such area during this semester; I hope that our class discussions, readings, screenings, and writing might enrich your learning if not further refine your questions.

So that this semester will be a rewarding experience for both of us, please realize that your presence in this class demands a rigorous investment in and commitment to the subject matter. This course will not take the form of a passive, entertaining, movie-going experience; rather, you are expected to be active learners, taking a vested interest in transforming your reception of films into a refined, critical attention. Please take your role in this classroom as seriously as I do my own. Together we can increasingly inform, steepen, and enrich our love of cinema.

Blackboard: You must regularly check your Hofstra email account, as you will be enrolled in our class Blackboard site. You are responsible for all announcements and assignments placed there; if your account isn't working, then you are responsible for fixing this problem. If you prefer an account other than Hofstra's student account, then you must make necessary modifications to your Blackboard profile. Weekly screening/reading handouts—with guidelines, questions, plot summaries, and cast/production crew—will be posted to Blackboard. You are responsible for downloading and printing this information *before you come to class*, as you should use these handouts both as a screening and discussion guide. You must have these handouts in front of you for our class discussion. I will not bring extra handouts for students who neglect their pre-class responsibilities. Notify me in reasonable advance of class discussion (at least 24 hours) if you're having difficulty downloading the materials.

C o u r s e R e q u i r e m e n t s

For all written assignments, please follow guidelines made explicit in "Writing about Film: Style and Mechanics," attached to the syllabus.

Attendance (10%): Your presence (attendance and informed participation) in this class will be rigorously required. To be present, you must not only be in attendance and awake, but you must also be prepared, text in hand, actively engaging with and responding to the course material. Any **absence beyond two will be negatively factored into your grade.** Choose wisely how you spend these absences—if you take two days off at the semester's beginning but don't feel well at the semester's end, these latter absences will count against your grade. If you're sick, you need a *doctor's excuse* and not simply a *receipt*. Many concepts will be introduced and explained with visual and aural examples during class, and your success in this class is contingent on your ability to take careful notes and synthesize that information. You are responsible for any material that you miss; arrange to borrow notes from a classmate for days that you are absent. While it is helpful to know where you are, realize that your telling me does not excuse your absence. **Five or more absences (unexcused and/or excused) will result in failure of the course.**

This attendance policy will be strictly enforced, since your presence and participation are vital to this class. Sleeping during class constitutes an absence, as does doing things (reading newspapers, doing other homework, text messaging, etc.) that aren't immediately related to our class: in other words, you can't be "present" if you're otherwise engaged. **Two late arrivals equal one absence.** Learn to allow appropriate time for traffic/finding a parking place, printing your paper, etc.; these are not valid excuses. If you are not present at the beginning of class when I take attendance, you are responsible for emailing me after class, or your arrival will not

C (73-76.75)
C- (70-72.75)
D+ (67-69.75)

D (63-66.75)
D- (60-62.75)
F (less than 59.75)

Class Policies

If at any point throughout the semester you have questions or concerns about this course, please make an appointment during my office hours. I am more than willing to work with you to improve your learning experience.

Missed Screenings: If you miss a screening, *you are responsible for locating and studying the film on your own time, with your own resources.* Hofstra's library doesn't hold all of these titles, and they will not all be readily available at your local film rental store. Do yourself a favor: make a valiant effort to view the film during the scheduled class time: not only is your attendance required, but also will you be accountable for these films in discussion and on exams (and you can save yourself the difficulty of locating the film on your own).

Late Assignments/Excuses: All assignments must be completed and submitted in accordance with the deadlines indicated below. Very simply, I respect students who respect this policy. Have enough self-respect and responsibility to submit your papers on time, and—should you not manage to do so—accept the fact that your neglect merits a lowered grade. Negotiating late assignments with students is a disappointing waste of time and energy, for both professor and student. Be forewarned: I quickly grow frustrated and impatient with students' disregard for class deadlines. Your grade drops one entire letter grade for each day late (including weekends and weekdays); if you forget to bring the paper to class and place it in my mailbox shortly thereafter, this delay still counts as one day late (highest grade possible will be a "B"). *Do not email me late assignments. Do not beg my mercy and patience by offering excuses or explanations. Printer/traffic/internet issues can be resolved by planning ahead.* Late is late. Should your situation be extreme and dire, Hofstra has resources in place to communicate with faculty regarding student performance: take advantage. As with absences from class, I accept only a doctor's excuse and not simply a receipt.

Honor Code: Your compliance with Hofstra University's Honor Code (attached to this syllabus) is expected and enforced; violations will be reported without hesitation. You are responsible for understanding the terms of this policy. Should you be guilty of academic dishonesty, a plea of ignorance will not suffice. Students who plagiarize will fail the class—no exceptions.

Student Disabilities: Attached to this syllabus are paragraphs regarding the documentation of student disabilities. Please read this information closely and follow appropriate procedure, so that I can accommodate your needs.

Course Texts

The following **required** texts are available for purchase in Hofstra's campus bookstore:

- o Paul Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer*
- o Hannah Patterson, ed., *The Cinema of Terrence Malick: Poetic Visions of America*
- o Robert Bresson, *Notes on the Cinematographer*

The following on-line reserve readings are also **required**:

- o Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Transcendentalist"
- o Andrei Tarkovsky, "Art—A Yearning for an Ideal," *Sculpting in Time*
- o Andrei Tarkovsky, "On Cinema, 1966"

Screening: *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (Carl Theodor Dreyer, 1928; 82 min.)

M 1 October

Paul Schrader, "Dreyer"

Film excerpts:

- o *Ordet* (Carl Theodor Dreyer, 1955; 125 min.)

R o b e r t B r e s s o n

W 3 October

Screening: *Journal d'un cure de campagne* (Robert Bresson, 1951; 115 min.)

M 8 October

Paul Schrader, "Bresson"

W 10 October

Screening: *Un condamné à mort s'est échappé* (Robert Bresson, 1956; 99 min.)

M 15 October

Robert Bresson, *Notes on the Cinematographer*

Film excerpts:

- o *Pickpocket* (Robert Bresson, 1959; 75 min.)
- o *Mouchette* (Robert Bresson, 1967; 81 min.)

S a l l y P o t t e r

W 17 October

Screening: *Orlando* (Sally Potter, 1992; 93 min.)

M 22 October

- o Pat Dowell, "Demystifying Traditional Notions of Gender: An Interview with Sally Potter," *Cineaste*

- o Kristi McKim, "'A state of loving detachment': Sally Potter's Impassioned and Intellectual Cinema," *Senses of Cinema* <http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/directors/06/potter.html>

W 24 October

Screening: *Yes* (Sally Potter, 2004; 100 min.)

M 29 October

Cynthia Lucia, "Saying 'Yes' to Taking Risks: An Interview with Sally Potter," *Cineaste*

A n d r e i T a r k o v s k y

W 31 October

Screening: *The Mirror* (Andrei Tarkovsky, 1974; 106 min.)

M 5 November

- o Andrei Tarkovsky, "Art—A Yearning for an Ideal," *Sculpting in Time*
- o Andrei Tarkovsky, "On Cinema, 1966"
- o Film Excerpts:

Last day of class—Screening TBD

Writing Guidelines

A clear, coherent writing style bolsters your ideas, while unintelligible writing detracts from the cogency of your argument and, consequently, your grade. Consult the MLA Style Guide for help. Also, be sure to take advantage of the wonderful resource of Hofstra's Writing Center (208 Calkins Hall). Your ability to compose grammatically-sound sentences and to construct well-supported, original arguments determines your grade. Even the most intriguing idea cannot be appreciated or understood if written awkwardly and unclearly.

HOW TO CITE...

Film Title/Director/Year

The first time that we mention a film in our writing, it should be followed by the director's name and the year of release in parentheses. Film titles should be either underlined or italicized (whatever you prefer), but never should they be enclosed in quotation marks (some periodicals or emails use quotation marks; but only because neither italics nor underline formatting is available). If you include some of the information in your sentence, then appropriately omit that information from the parentheses.

Examples:

- ❖ *Rear Window* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1954) presents several motifs that contribute to and comprise the narrative.
- ❖ Alfred Hitchcock explores the underside of neighborly relations in *Rear Window* (1954).

Character/Actor

When writing about the narrative of a film, we talk about *characters*, not actors. It is not Julia Roberts who was married to George Clooney in *Ocean's 11*; rather it is Tess (Julia Roberts) who was married to Danny Ocean (George Clooney). The first time that we mention a character's name, the actor's name follows in parentheses. Every mention of the character thereafter should not be followed by the parenthetical actor's name—just the first appearance of the character in the prose.

Example:

- ❖ L.B. Jeffries (Jimmy Stewart) suspects that Thorwald (Raymond Burr) has killed his wife (Irene Winston).

Points to Remember

1. Assignments should be typed in something comparable to Times New Roman 12 pt. font (use your judgment). Please don't insult my intelligence with enormous fonts that surprisingly fill up a page with only a paragraph written. Neither strive to crunch ten pages worth of analysis into five with only a trick of font reduction. I trust you to be honest and reasonable; please be.
2. Written assignments should be double-spaced; margins should be 1", and pages should be numbered. Put your name, date, and course number at the top of your assignment. You work too hard to risk anonymity.
3. Spell check! but not at the expense of your own better judgment. For example, Charlie Kane's last name begins with a "K" and not a "C." Do not let spell check convince you otherwise. For each screening, I will distribute a handout on which all primary characters/actors are listed. Consult this resource.

13. Avoid passive voice.

CORRECT: "He threw the ball."

INCORRECT: "A ball was thrown by him."

14. Use literary present tense. Even though our very watching of the film means that it was made in the past, we still are experiencing this specific narrative as present to and unfolding before us. Although Hitchcock made *Rear Window* in 1954, we write about this film in 2007 in the present tense because it is immediate to us.

CORRECT: The camera pans with the character.

INCORRECT: The camera panned with the character.

15. Remember, you are composing a film analysis and not a film review. We all love movies, and indeed, the films we will be screening are in many ways worth your infinite admiration. Realize that you will offer more praise to the film by appreciating some element of its composition than you would by simply offering the word "masterpiece." Admittedly, minimizing our gushing can often be challenging, but we can work together to esteem the films through our careful, well-supported arguments.

16. Try to avoid ending sentences with prepositions. Restructure the sentence or add an object of the preposition.

17. Be careful with pronouns, number, and gender. If you refer to one person, use singular pronouns; if you refer to more than one person, use plural pronouns. "Who" refers to a person, while "that" refers to a place or thing.

18. Use precise diction and syntax! If you do not know what these words mean, find their definitions in the dictionary—your first exercise in utilizing resources toward your increased linguistic accuracy.

19. Reduce use of "it is," "there is," "this is" style of writing, which empties sentences of their concentrated intensity. Make the predicate your subject, and proceed accordingly. This pattern of tightening your sentences will also, beneficially, tighten your thinking and argumentative expression. "This" should only be used as an adjective (*This close-up; This directorial signature, etc.*) instead of a subject ("This is the point."—notice the vague use of "this." What's the point? We don't know, since the writer didn't specify the antecedent of "this.")

Not desirable:

There is a motif of tracking shots. These tracking shots move along with the characters. These tracking shots show how they're connected.

Desirable:

The tracking shots frequently follow characters to establish their relationality.

20. Advice for writing conclusions: Use your final paragraph(s) to **further** the conclusions you have discovered and articulated by attempting to understand the stakes of those conclusions. Do not simply summarize your introduction. Briefly bring together the arguments that your paper has established, and offer an impressive conclusion that cohesively and conclusively considers what's at stake in this argument. An exemplary paper will eloquently and succinctly integrate a cinematic interpretation with exploration of the implications of its style. A good test of a good paper and conclusion: ask yourself "so what?" for every assertion you make, and write your paper in response to this question of what matters and why.

an environment conducive to learning. The Rights and Responsibilities for all students will guarantee this environment:

1. You are entitled to an environment conducive to learning and the promotion of tolerance and diversity.
2. You are entitled to committed and accessible faculty, administrators, and staff.
3. You are entitled to a clear presentation of the policies and requirements for every course.
4. You are entitled to be treated respectfully by all members of the Hofstra community.

The above entitlements are contingent upon the following student responsibilities:

1. You agree to make a commitment to the process of learning in a liberal arts environment.
2. You agree to become familiar with and adhere to the policies as stated in course syllabi.
3. You agree to accept assessment of your academic performance as an integral part of the learning experience.
4. You agree to act civilly and to demonstrate respect for all members of the Hofstra community: faculty, staff, administration and fellow students.

Academic Honesty and the School of Communication

Violations of academic honesty can take several different forms in different disciplines. The University policy itself indicates that "it is important for students to avoid even the *appearance* of dishonesty" (III). The policy offers the following non-exhaustive "partial list of such violations" each of which can be considered as a major infraction where the penalty may be an F for the course.

- ❖ Quotation or paraphrase of sources without acknowledgment,
- ❖ Submission of work produced wholly by someone else, or with unauthorized assistance of someone else,
- ❖ The use of paid 'research services',
- ❖ Copying from another's exam, term paper, computer disk,
- ❖ Bringing unauthorized materials into an exam,
- ❖ Gaining unauthorized knowledge of exam materials,
- ❖ Having another person take an exam in one's place,
- ❖ Unauthorized or unacknowledged use of computer programs or data,
- ❖ Falsifying experimental data (111-112)

Because violations can take many forms, your individual instructor will discuss other kinds of dishonesty ~~pertaining to particular coursework in your class. Because even the faculty take academic honesty so~~ seriously, however, we remind you that an action, even though an instructor may not have anticipated and specifically prohibited it, may still be dishonest. In general—whether working on a video, film, audio project, journalistic piece, public relations campaign, critical analysis, research paper, speech, performance or *any other assignment*—work you submit for academic credit should be your own and acknowledge pertinent direct quotations and paraphrased passages from the work of others. If you are uncertain about *how* to acknowledge a direct quotation or paraphrase, see the *Hofstra Writer's Guide*, or the style manual (APA, MLA, Chicago, Hacker, etc.) your instructor has assigned.

Work submitted for credit should also conform, ethically, to all aspects of assignments. For example, staging a "person on the street" interview, performing an unpublished poem by oneself or a friend when an assignment calls for performing published work by an established poet, or having a friend do technical work (such as editing) you should do yourself, all constitute academic dishonesty.

As a faculty, we take this opportunity to remind you about the importance of academic honesty because we value your future. We do not intend this statement to suggest a general mistrust of students. On the contrary, we recognize that academic honesty is a concern of all dedicated students at the University, and in the School of Communication. Please do not hesitate to see your instructors with any questions about this policy.