

## **CULS 2294(01): “Film Genres”**

Winter 2011, Mount Saint Vincent University

Instructor: **Dr. Max Haiven**,  
Email: **Max.Haiven@msvu.ca**

Class meetings: **Mondays and Wednesdays, 3:05-4:20pm**,  
Location: **SAC 305**

Open screenings: **Wednesdays, 4:30pm**,  
Location: **SAC 304**

Office: **Evaristus rm.448**  
Office hours: **Mondays and Wednesdays, 1:45-2:45pm, and by appointment**

*To ensure timely delivery, please **forward all assignments** and other correspondence to Marisa in the SOCIOLOGY/ANTHROPOLOGY OFFICE (Evaristus rm. 438), **not** the cultural studies office in Seton.*

### **PREAMBLE:**

This course examines the social power of popular film as it operates through generic conventions. We come to know, love and embrace films not only because they entertain us, but because they resonate with and confirm *what we think we know* about how the world works. This course asks us to critically examine how films affirm, trouble, solidify and subvert cultural meanings. In particular, this course is framed around the question of genre: how films come to be categorized, and how this categorization affects both how films get made and how we receive films as viewers. Focusing largely on popular, Hollywood texts across (and between) a wide range of genres (romantic comedy, crime/detective, science fiction, etc.) we will uncover the ways films speak to (or distract us from) key social issues including consumerism, individualism, racism, sexism, homophobia, imperialism, colonialism and ecological devastation. Each week, students will be responsible for watching one or two films and reading complementary critical texts. Three response papers throughout the term will help students build a critical capacity to “read” and write about film and prepare them for the final paper and the exam.

**COURSE READINGS, SCREENINGS AND SCHEDULE:**

- **Textbook:** Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin, *America on Film: Representing Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality at the Movies*, Second Edition, Wiley/Blackwell Press, 2009. *This book will arrive at the MSVU bookstore in late January. Until then, you can find it on reserve at the library.*
- All **other readings** are available on 2h reserve at the MSVU library and many of them will be available on Moodle. PLEASE NOTE: Films, readings and assignments may change through the term. For the latest information, be sure to check Moodle.
- **Students are responsible for obtaining and watching all films.** Many films will be available on 3h reserve loan at the MSVU library. Some will be available for rent at Video Difference (6086 Quinpool Rd.) on a shelf specific to this class.
- **Screenings:** I have arranged for SAC 304 to be available from 4:30pm on Wednesdays (immediately following our meeting) to screen the *following* week’s films. Attendance at these screenings is optional.

**SCHEDULE**

- # = from Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin, *America on Film: Representing Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality at the Movies*, Second Edition, Wiley/Blackwell Press, 2009.
- \$ = from Barry Keith Grant, *Film Genre: From Iconography to Ideology*, Wallflower Press, 2007.
- @ = from Matthew Alford, *Reel Power: Hollywood Cinema and American Supremacy*, Pluto Press, 2010.

DATE AND THEME	FILMS	READINGS	DUE
1. Jan 5 <b>INTRODUC-TION</b>	N/A	N/A	
2. Jan 10, 12 <b>WARS OF THE WORLD: GENRES OF SOCIAL DREAMING</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The War of the Worlds</b> (1954)</li> <li>• <b>The War of the Worlds</b> (2005)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Edward Jay Epstein <i>The Big Picture</i>, p. 14-23.</li> <li>• \$ - <i>Film Genre</i>, Chapter 1 “Approaching Film Genre”</li> <li>• Kirsten Moana Thompson, “War of the Worlds: Uncanny Dread” chapter 7 of <i>Apocalyptic Dread: American Film at the turn of the millennium</i>, 145-154.</li> </ul>	
3. Jan 17, 19 <b>THE MOUSE THAT ROARED: FILM AS SOCIALIZATION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The Lion King</b> (1994)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• # - <i>America on Film</i>, Chapter 1 “Introduction to the Study of Film Form and Representation”</li> <li>• Henry Giroux and Grace Pollock, <i>The Mouse that Roared</i>, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; (selection - TBA)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>January 17, 3:05pm. Critical Response 1</b></li> </ul>

4. Jan 24 (26 – Charitas day, no class) <b>WELCOME TO THE MACHINE: THE FILM INDUSTRY</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>For Your Consideration</b> (2006)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• # - <i>America on Film</i>, Chapter 2 “<b>The Structure and History of Hollywood Filmmaking</b>”</li> <li>• Edward Jay Epstein <i>The Big Picture</i> (Random House, 2005), Pt. 2: “<b>The Art of Deception, the Deception of Art</b>” – p.126-174.</li> </ul>	
5. Jan 31, (Feb 2 – Tuition Day of Action) <b>GENRE AND CLASS STRUGGLE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Dirty Dancing</b> (1987)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• # - <i>America on film</i>, chapter 9 “<b>Cinematic Class Struggle After the Depression</b>”</li> <li>• Stanley Aronowitz and Henry Giroux “<b>Working class displacements and postmodern representations</b>” in <i>Postmodern Education: Politics, Culture and Social Criticism</i> (University of Minnesota Press, 1991)</li> </ul>	
6. Feb 7, 9 <b>GENRE AND GENDER</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The Company Men</b> (2011) (in theatres)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• \$ - <i>Film Genre</i>, chapter two “<b>Genre and Society</b>”</li> <li>• # - <i>America on film</i>, chapter thirteen “<b>Gender in American Film Since the 1960s</b>”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>February 7, 3:05pm - Critical Response 2</b></li> </ul>
7. Feb 14, 16 <b>PORNOGRAPHY : THE MOST POPULAR GENRE EVER</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The Price of Pleasure: Pornography, Sexuality and Relationships</b> (2008)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• # - <i>America on film</i>, chapter fifteen “<b>Sexualities on Film Since the Sexual Revolution</b>”</li> <li>• Drucilla Cornell “<b>Introduction</b>” to <i>Feminism and Pornography</i> (Oxford University Press, 2000)</li> </ul>	
(Feb 21-27) <b>BREAK</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Racism: A History (parts 1, 2 and 3) (2007)</b></li> </ul>	This film can be viewed online at: <a href="http://topdocumentaryfilms.com/racism-history/">http://topdocumentaryfilms.com/racism-history/</a>	
8. Feb 28, March 2 <b>THE COMEDY AND TRAGEDY OF RACE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner?</b> (1967)</li> <li>• <b>Guess Who?</b> (2005)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• # - <i>America on film</i>, Chapter four “<b>African Americans and American Film</b>”</li> <li>• Hernán Vera and Andrew Gordon “<b>Racism as a project: <i>Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner</i></b>” in <i>Screen Savors: Hollywood Fictions of Whiteness</i>, ch 6., p.84-99</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>February 28, 3:05pm - Mid-term quiz</b></li> </ul>
9. March 7, 9 <b>DISPOSABILITY AND WHITENESS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The Bad Lieutenant, Port of Call: New Orleans</b> (2009)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• # - <i>America on Film</i>, chapter three “<b>The Concept of Whiteness and American Film</b>”</li> <li>• Henry Giroux, “<b>Chapter one: Katrina and the Biopolitics of Disposability</b>” in <i>Stormy Weather</i> (Paradigm, 2006)</li> </ul>	

<p>10. March 14, 16</p> <p><b>MAKE WAR AT HOME FOR FUN AND PROFIT</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Black Hawk Down</b> (2001)</li> <li>• <b>Empire: Hollywood and the War Machine</b> (2010)</li> <li>• <b>Myths for Profits: Canada's Role in Industries of War and Peace</b> (2009)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• @ - <i>Reel Power</i>, p. 44-50</li> <li>• Sherene H. Razack "Introduction" <i>Dark Threats and White Knights</i> (University of Toronto Press, 2004)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>March 14, 3:05pm - Critical Response 3</b></li> </ul>
<p>11. March 21, 23</p> <p><b>COWBOYS AND INDIANS</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>She Wore a Yellow Ribbon</b> (1949)</li> <li>• <b>Why is the Crown at War with Us?</b> (2002)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• # - <i>America on Film</i>, chapter 5 "Native Americans and American Film"</li> <li>• Alyson McCreedy "Tie a Yellow Ribbon 'Round Public Discourse, National Identity and the War..." <i>Topia</i> issue 23/24, 2010.</li> </ul>	
<p>12. March 28, 30</p> <p><b>SCIENCE FICTION AND SOCIAL CRITICISM</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Avatar</b> (2009)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• @ - <i>Reel Power</i> – p. 119-123</li> <li>• BLOG: Analee Newitz "When will White People Stop Making Movies Like Avatar", io9.com</li> <li>• BLOG: "Avatar: a contradictory movie for contradictory times", gatheringforces.org</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>March 28, 3:05pm - Final paper due</b></li> </ul>
<p>13. April 4, 6</p> <p><b>DOCUMENTARY</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>H2Oil</b> (2009)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>An Introduction to Film Studies</i> ch. 5 "Documentary". (p 187-211)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Exam review</b></li> </ul>

## **ASSIGNMENTS**

### **Critical film response papers (3 x 10%)**

- On each of the three due dates, you will prepare a 500 word **critical response** to either one of the assigned films or a film of your choice. You must draw on or cite at least two concepts from course readings. See the full description on page 8. The assignment will be weighted 75% on content and 25% on form.

### **Mid-term quiz (10%)**

- February 28 - This multiple choice and short-answer quiz will test students' knowledge of the three-part documentary film *Racism: A History*.

### **Essay (30%)**

- A list of essay topics will be distributed later in the term. The essay will be roughly 2,000 words and will ask you to draw on course readings to make an argument about either a single film or several films. In addition you will be responsible for reading TWO additional *academic* texts and drawing on them in your analysis. These may be academic books or peer-reviewed academic articles within the field of cultural studies or film studies. I recommend starting your research early and checking with me to make sure your texts are adequate. The assignment will be weighted 50% on the quality of your thinking and argument, 25% on the quality of your research and the integration of that research into your essay, and 25% on the quality of your writing.

### **Exam (20%)**

- The final exam will address all course material and in-class lectures and discussions. It will be a combination of short-answer and essay questions. Sample questions and other information will be provided in advance of the exam. Students wishing to prepare earlier in the term would do well to use their Critical Film Response Papers as practice and to seek my feedback on these assignments.

### **Participation (10%)**

- Participation will be measured by my observation of your preparedness and willingness to share your ideas in class in an enthusiastic and respectful manner.

**NOTE:** Should I feel the need, I may conduct pop-quizzes on class material. The results of these will be factored into the final grade for the course and may have an impact of up to plus or minus 5%.

## **POLICIES**

### ✓ **MOODLE**

- This course will make use of Moodle to share content and otherwise communicate. Please make sure you have access and know how to use the program, etc.
- I encourage you to make use of Moodle for discussion, to coordinate screenings of films, and to post your thoughts and feedback. I would also encourage you to post some or all of your Critical Film Response Papers so we can have a dialogue.

### ✓ **EMAIL**

- All email **MUST** be sent either from a MSVU account to [Max.Haiven@msvu.ca](mailto:Max.Haiven@msvu.ca) or through Moodle. I cannot guarantee I will read or respond to any email until 48 hours after it reaches my inbox.
- I also cannot communicate more than a few lines over email, so if you have a question or need to speak with me, please come by during office hours or make an appointment.

### ✓ **IN CLASS**

- I do not take attendance in my classes. However, all materials presented in class *could* be on the final exam. See the note on class participation below.
- **Turn off your cell phone** and do not use handheld devices in class. You will be asked to leave.
- I prefer you **not use your computer during class**.
- I work hard to make sure all students get a chance to express themselves. This means (a) I expect you to come to class prepared to discuss your ideas and questions; (b) if you're talking a lot, I'll ask you to wait to give others a chance to talk; (c) I may call on you out of the blue to comment or answer a question. If you suffer from shyness, please seek help from student services, as this will undermine your university experience.

### ✓ **ASSIGNMENTS**

- All assignments should be formatted thus:
  - Use Modern Languages Association (MLA) citation style.
  - Print on standard 8.5"x11" paper with black ink.
  - Use 1" margins on all four sides of the page. Use Times New Roman 12pt font, double spaced. Do not add extra lines between paragraphs.
  - Front-matter/cover-pages for all papers should include: name, student ID number, date of submission, class number (CULS 2294), title of the assignment, and MSVU email address.
  - No funny business.
- All assignments are due on the due date, at the beginning of class (3:05pm). Due dates are always Monday, to allow you the weekend. Assignments handed in at the end of class, or any time during class will be considered "late."
- Students who do not complete all of the assignments cannot pass this course.

### ✓ **LATE ASSIGNMENTS**

- Assignments are due at on Mondays, in class, at exactly 3:05pm.
- All late assignments will be deducted 10% of the grade and will receive no comments. Late assignments may be handed in to the Sociology and Anthropology

office (Evaristus 438) until Friday at 3pm, or at the beginning of class (3:05pm) the Monday following the due date. After this, you will receive a zero. There will be no exceptions.

- Extenuating circumstances (illness, family situations, etc.) must be confirmed with a doctor's note, etc. Even so, the final decision rests with me.

#### ✓ **GRADE APPEALS**

- I am always happy to give you further feedback on your writing and your progress in the course in person during office hours.
- I will entertain grade appeals beginning only 48 hours after I have returned your assignment.
- Grade appeals should be made *in writing*, printed and dropped off for me at the Sociology and Anthropology Office (Evaristus 438). The appeal should contain a clear and persuasive rationale for why the grade should be changed based on the merits of your writing. Please include either the original paper or a photocopy (I don't have these on file). Include your name and email.
- Usually, I will respond via email within a week.

#### ✓ **PLAGIARISM AND ACADEMIC DISHONESTY**

- University regulations on Plagiarism and Cheating and other academic offenses will be strictly enforced. These regulations, including applicable procedures and penalties, are detailed in the University Calendar and are posted on Department notice boards and on the website at [www.msvu.ca](http://www.msvu.ca) on the Current Student's page under Academic Offenses.
- **Do not cheat. I'll catch you. It's not worth it.** If you have any questions, let me know.

#### ✓ **USE OF LANGUAGE**

- Correct use of language is one of the criteria included in the evaluation of all written assignments. Students are also expected to make an effort to use language correctly in all non-graded written materials that they submit, including emails to the instructor, Moodle posts, and class discussion.

#### ✓ **YOU'VE BEEN WARNED!**

- In this course we will be dealing with sensitive and often infuriating material. For instance, one of our central objectives will be to understand the way racism works in popular film, and the way we have all been taught racist beliefs, even if we don't perceive ourselves to be racist. Similarly, we will be looking at pornographic material and material very critical of many social institutions including the military and the police. Cultural studies, as a field, is inherently anti-sexist, anti-racist, pro-queer, and against all forms of oppression and exploitation. You've been warned. You are expected to come to class with an open mind and to think critically about *everything*, including your own feelings and responses. There is material in this class you may find offensive. Our task as scholars of culture is to question *why* and *how* we find texts objectionable and to work to understand the cultural factors that shape them and us. If you find a text objectionable, I look forward to reading your thoughtful and professional analysis in one of the three assigned critical film responses, or in your final paper. But remember: I am interested in your *educated* opinion, not simply your opinion, first impression or impulsive reaction.

## **Hints on Writing Critical Film Response Papers**

As you prepare your response paper, you might entertain one of the following *lines* of question (I DO NOT simply want direct “answers” to these questions):

- ✓ What is this film’s relationship to its genre? How does it echo and/or reinscribe and/or challenge and/or blur the genre of which it is a part? What “generic conventions” does the film mobilize, how and why? Did this film succeed with audiences who typically enjoy this genre? Why or why not?
- ✓ What contemporary social, political and cultural events or tendencies does the film reflect on, intentionally and/or unintentionally? What shape does this reflection take? Is it critical of current events/trends? Is this criticism effective? What events or tendencies does the film ignore or marginalize? What are the unstated *assumptions* about current events that the film operates on?
- ✓ How does this film work along axes of oppression and difference? How does it address (or fail to address) gender, sexuality, race or class? If these are absent from the film, how and why? Does the film rely on stereotypes? Does it challenge them? Are these challenges effective? What might a feminist critic, a queer critic, or an anti-racist critic say about these films? Would you agree? Why or why not?
- ✓ Reflect on your enjoyment of this film. Why did you enjoy it (or not enjoy it)? Go beyond personal feelings. What social and cultural forces might influence why *you* enjoyed or did not enjoy this movie? How are *you*, as a subject, constituted in relation to the film? Is this film meant for “people like you”? How? Why (not)? Look deeply at your feelings and motivations. What about this film spoke to you? What allowed you to “suspend your disbelief” and embrace the magic of the screen? Or what stopped you from doing so?

Papers will receive high marks when they:

- ✓ Show evidence that you have thought carefully and fully about the film and its multiple resonances. I want to see you question yourself and move beyond surface responses and assumptions. I highly recommend writing at least two drafts of your paper: one initial set of reflections, another more polished and streamlined version.
- ✓ Are clear, concise and cogent. Make excellent use of the limited space you are provided.
- ✓ Demonstrate your grasp of course materials. Show that you can handle class concepts and readings with ease and that you can integrate them into your text with both accuracy and acumen.

Remember:

- ✓ Assume I’ve watched these films. There is no need for an extended summary of the plot or characters.
- ✓ This assignment strives to build your skills in *critically* engaging with film, so be sure to be *critical* which means going beyond surface assumptions and impulsive feelings and demonstrating to me you’ve given this some thought and effort. You should also focus on *power relations* in the text you’ve chosen and in the interface between the text and audiences.
- ✓ As these are reflection pieces, you may use “I” statements and write in a less formal way. But be sure to use language efficiently and effectively.