

Dr. Eddy Von Mueller

Film Studies

“Screening Green,” a unit within FILM 270: INTRODUCTION TO FILM

In 2006, Jay Hakes, a pal and the author of the A Declaration of Energy Independence invited to a Carter Center pre-screening of Davis Guggenheim’s An Inconvenient Truth. He let me tag along not as a Fellow Traveler and inveterate ranter against the global petroleum racket, but as a *film guy*. There I sat, the token cineaste – movie critic, film studies scholar, occasional documentarist – knowing that as soon as the credits stopped rolling and the applause died down, I would be asked “what did you think?”

I knew it was going to be a tough question to answer. It is never easy, in film or any other form of cultural production, to sort the message out from the medium, to rationalize the complexities of the relationship between aesthetics and ideology. Great cinema can be wrong-headed and profoundly destructive; lousy movies can move mountains and millions (of people and dollars). Over the course of that screening, more and more issues sprang to mind: what exactly constituted sustainable entertainment? What part did alarmist fantasies like The Day After Tomorrow or Soylent Green effect the way documentaries and newscasts were understood? How did the representations of environmental issues and ideas of sustainability differ in movies made in the developing world as opposed to those made in the industrialized West? And what impact, if any, did all this have on public policy or the popular consciousness?

I decided that I wanted to bring an eco-critical perspective into my film pedagogy (discovering, incidentally, that eco-criticism is virtually absent in contemporary film studies – ironic, given the major role the moving image plays in shaping the global imagination). In particular, I wanted to use issues of environmental awareness and sustainability as a means of exploring how public discourse shapes cinema and vice-versa. The unit also incorporated a number of readings, drawn from classic and contemporary perspectives on the matter, including excerpts of works by Rachel Carson, William Buell, Arne Naesse, and Peter Singer.

In terms of films, we focused on several cornerstones: Alfred Hitchcock’s classic The Birds (released in the context of the frenzied attention received by Silent Spring); the “Greensploitation” films of the ‘70s (such as Frogs, Jaws, and Prophecy); and such contemporary works such as Outbreak, The Proposition, and Guggenheim’s celebrated documentary. We also examined films produced in locales that are themselves at the center of ongoing environmental and sustainability crises, including Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Sudan.

This unit, though, barely served to shed light on the tip of a vast (albeit steadily melting) iceberg. I hope in 2009 to develop an upper division course on eco-cinema.

## **Film 270 – Introduction to Film**

INSTRUCTOR: Dr. Eddy Von Mueller

TIME: T, W, Th 9:00 – 11:15

CONTACT: [emueller@emory.edu](mailto:emueller@emory.edu)

LOCATION: #103 Rich Building

OFFICE HOURS: M, 10:00 – 1:30, #109 Rich building

SCREENING: W, 7:00 – 10:00\*, White Hall Room 205

\* *Material screened may be slightly shorter or longer than the two-hour screening period.*

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION & OBJECTIVES:**

Since the explosive birth of the cinema in 1895, the movies have evolved from a technological novelty and boardwalk curiosity to become one of the most powerful media ever conceived. Motion pictures have helped start wars and topple regimes; they have set standards of beauty, sold commodities and ideas to billions of people, and made international celebrities out of untrained unknowns. Motion pictures now encompass an international industry that serves billions, and makes hundreds of billions of dollars.

So how do the movies do it?

This class attempts to answer that question, and to equip students with the historical perspective and critical tools necessary both to understand and appreciate the moving image and its significance to contemporary culture.

**TEXT:** Film Art: an Introduction by David Bordwell & Kristin Thompson

A Short Guide to Writing About Film by Timothy Corrigan (recommended)

### **COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

*Attendance:* Attendance is mandatory. An attendance sheet will be circulated at the beginning of each class. It is your responsibility to sign the attendance sheet. Late sign-ins will be allowed at the instructor's discretion. After your FIRST unexcused absence, your final course grade will be lowered by one half of one letter grade for each absence.

*Participation:* your courteous and prepared participation in class discussions is appreciated an indeed, essential – participation will count for 10 points toward your final grade.

*Screenings:* every Wednesday night from 7:00 – 10:00 p.m. we will be screening one or more films. These screenings are required, as these films are, in a sense, additional “texts” for the course. You are expected to arrive on time and behave, more or less, like humans during the screening. This means talking back to the movie is fine; talking on your cell, checking your email on your laptop, or txtng during the movie is not.

Attendance will be recorded, and your presence and conduct will factor directly into the assessment of your participation.

There will also be a second film assigned for each week, which you are expected to view on your own time, either in the library or at home. After the 2<sup>nd</sup> of July, you are expected to view these films no later than the Thursday following the date on which it is assigned (in other words, the independent screening assigned for 7/9 will be discussed in class on 7/10).

*Quizzes:* There will be THREE in-class tests, each to be given at the BEGINNING of class on the dates indicated in the course calendar below. The quizzes will ask students to demonstrate their comprehension of and familiarity with the topics and films discussed the preceding class sessions. The first two tests are worth 20 points toward the final grade, the final quiz will be slightly more substantial and worth 25. Late or make-up quizzes will be administered solely at the instructor's discretion.

*Shot-By-Shot Analysis:* Students will be asked to perform a careful analysis of a film selected from a list provided by the instructor, in the course of which they will make a detailed, shot-by-shot examination of a scene(s) or sequence(s) which they feel offers compelling insights into the relationships between form, style, narrative, and meaning. Students should be

prepared to view additional materials or seek out additional resources in the execution of their analysis, which should be presented in a paper of no less than seven pages (typed and double-spaced).

The close reading is worth 25 points towards the final course grade and is due no later than 5:00 pm, June 27<sup>th</sup>. Hard copies only, Please; papers will not be accepted via e-mail. *Laptop Computer Policy*: unless appropriate documentation from Disability Services is provided permitting the use of a computer for note-taking or testing purposes, I would ask that you NOT use your computer during class or class screenings.

## **COURSE CALENDAR:**

\* please note that this is a *provisional* schedule and is subject to modification as the course progresses. You are responsible for keeping up with changes to the course calendar.

### **July 1: Introduction: Photography, Mass Entertainment & the Global Culture Market**

Screen: Kinetoscope & Cinematographe films, A Trip to the Moon,  
The Great Train Robbery, Transformers, Zoolander

### **July 2: Gross Anatomy: the Apparatus and the Shot**

Read: Film Art, pp. 30 - 42; chap. 5

Screen: The Good, the Bad & the Ugly, Stranger Than Paradise, Weekend

SCREENING 7/2: Fallen Angels (Wang Kar-wai, 1995)

INDEPENDENT SCREENING: Touch of Evil (Orson Welles, 1958)

(please view before July 8!)

### **July 3: *Mise-en-Scène* – the Visual Dynamics & Dramatics of Film**

Read: Film Art, pp. 54 – 65, chap. 4

Screen: Greed, Dr. No, Sweeney Todd, Raise the Red Lantern

### **July 8: *Montage* – the Foundations of Cinematic Articulation**

Read: Film Art, pp. 65 – 71, chap. 6

Screen: Breathless, Oceans 11, Yojimbo

### **July 9 : *Stimmung* - Color, Light and Manipulations of Mood**

Read: Film Art, pp. 306 – 316, 410 – 415, 453 – 456

Screen: The Hudsucker Proxy, Oktober 1917, Nosferatu, The Nutty Professor

SCREENING 7/9: Man With a Movie Camera (Dziga Vertov, 1929)

INDEPENDENT SCREENING: Psycho (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960)

### **July 10: Sound and Fury – The Auditory Experience of Cinema**

Read: Film Art, chap. 7

Screen: The Conversation, Dames, Le Million, The Big Sleep

### **July 15:**

#### **Test # 1**

#### **Strut & Fret – Actors, Directors, and Modes of Film Performance**

Read: pp. 83 – 95, 304 – 305

Screen: Naked, Horse Feathers, There Will Be Blood, One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest

### **July 16: “Making of ...” – Reading Modes & Means of Production**

Read: pp. 14 – 29, 444 – 446, 463 – 467

Screen: Killer of Sheep, The Kingdom of Heaven, Jabberwocky, Pi

SCREENING 7/16: Prospero's Books (Peter Greenaway, 1991)

INDEPENDENT SCREENING: Hamlet (Michael Almereyda, 2000)

**July 17: (De) Constructive Methods – Documentary and Animation**

Read: pp. 338 – 354, 370 – 378

Screen: Hands on a Hardbody, Fog of War, Hybrid, What's Opera Doc?

The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers, Dimensions of Dialogue

**July 22: The Director – Foreman, Author or Artist?**

Read: Article to be distributed in class

Screen: Raising Arizona, The Big Lubowski, Miller's Crossing

**July 23: Film Genres – Narrative, Structure, Meaning**

Read: chap. 9

Screen: The Searchers, Dead Man, Blazing Saddles, The Road Warrior

SCREENING 7/23: No Country for Old Men (Joel Coen, 2007)

INDEPENDENT SCREENING: Blood Simple (Joel Coen, 1984)

**July 24: Test # 2**

**Beyond Commerce – Experimental & Non-Narrative Filmmaking**

Read: pp. 355 – 369, 450 – 452

Screen: Scorpio Rising, Neighbors, This Unnameable Little Broom

**July 29: More “Lively Arts” – Aesthetics, Culture, Class**

Read: pp. 419 – 430, 435 – 437, 459 – 460

Screen: The Parent Trap, Natural Born Killers, Bring It On

**July 30: Expressing Identity – Gender, Race, Orientation**

Read: article to be distributed in class, pp. 392 – 396

Screen: Kill Bill vol. I, Brokeback Mountain, The Matrix

SCREENING 7/30: The New World (Terrence Malick, 2005)

INDEPENDENT SCREENING: Pocahontas (Mike Gabriel, 1995)

**July 31: Noble Savages, Virgin Territories & the World According to the Movies**

Read: handout excerpts from Ray, Diawhara

Screen: Mr. Smith Goes to Washington, The Squaw Man, Tarzan the Ape Man, The Planet of the Apes

**Aug. 5: Cinema & Ecology – Environmentalism in First and Third Cinemas**

Read: handout excerpts from Naesse, Buell

Screen: The Scent of Green Papaya, Wolf Cub Among People, Caip's Last Journey

**Aug. 6: Screening Green – Mainstreaming Environmental Consciousness**

Read: handout excerpts from Carson, Singer

Screen: The Birds, Frogs, Gorillas in the Mist, The Day After Tomorrow

SCREENING 8/6: The Proposition (John Hillcoat, 2005)

INDEPENDENT SCREENING: An Inconvenient Truth (Davis Guggenheim, 1997)

**Aug. 8:**

**Test # 3**