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HSS 403-006: Multiculturalism in Cinema

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L. Castronova
Senior Seminar

Spring, 2019
HSS 403

Multiculturalism in Cinema

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S E M I N A R S Y L L A B U S

REQUIRED TEXTBOOK: Bergan, Ronald. THE FILM BOOK - A COMPLETE GUIDE TO THE WORLD OF CINEMA. New York: DK Publishing, 2011.
ISBN: 978-0-7566-8676-5 (Available as a very inexpensive text in the NJIT bookstore or online.

ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENT: Subscription to NETFLIX or a similar movie-streaming service. Please note: Students have used FILMSTRUCK.com in the past, but the site has been shuttered, to be replaced this spring with The Criterion Channel. Therefore, I am unable to assign this art house/classic/international film website at the moment. Hopefully, students will be able to find any homework-assigned films on NETFLIX or a similar streaming service available at minimal cost.

COURSE DESCRIPTION: In this senior seminar, the instructor and the students will present films for discussion and analysis. We have a large group for a seminar setting, but by dividing seminar members into groups, we will be able to focus on the film chosen by each group of students. (Of course, the channels of communication need to be open, and students need to interact both in class and outside of it- in their respective groups- in order to prepare their presentations). In this seminar, we are aiming for "art house," international or classic works in the vast world of cinema. Perhaps the subjects will be very diverse, but the common connection should be that these are all windows on the human spectrum of how we live, our longings, our mistakes, our failures, our triumphs or our willingness to find humor to cushion the struggles as we move along. Our mission in this course is to share interesting films. We want to view these with open minds. Moreover, we should try and share each director's artistic vision of how a tale might be told on screen. We will aim to see each director's angle and can freely comment on the success or failure of what we believe to be his or her intentions. Does the film in question succeed or fail, in whole or in part? Does the director engage us? Stir our emotions? Lose us somewhere along the story path? Might the director use casting to illuminate the tale being told on screen or miss his or her mark with what we might feel is miscasting? Does the filmmaker give us a dose of reality? Or, might a particular movie be a temporary escape hatch from life's woes? We have heard it so often: "escape to the movies!"

Critiquing is a vital part of this seminar. Sometimes viewers think that reviewing films has to be a negative endeavor. Quite the contrary! It depends on each viewer's "take." Students are free to celebrate their viewing experience, or they can trash a particular film for whatever valid reasons they might find. Of course, there

might also be a middle ground, including a combination of good and bad points. The key, however, is to explain the reasons for negative or positive comments.

Further, students are asked to be open minded in regard to all films. Many times, we, ourselves, cannot identify with the action and/or the characters. Sometimes these do not mirror our own lives. However, an open minded viewer knows that lots of stories, novels, poems or movies are simply NOT about us. This does not make these artistic works invalid or worthless. Sometimes we, ourselves, are simply nowhere in the picture...but other human beings are vividly being portrayed up there on the screen. An open minded viewer is AWARE of that, absorbs the story seen on film and then decides what it might indicate about life, love, loss, anger, joy and any and all other aspects that make us human. Lives outside of our own, stories from other lands, these are all part of the larger picture of movies: WORLD CINEMA. Venturing beyond the familiar can make life a unique and intriguing journey.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS: Students in this seminar have CHOSEN a face-to-face connection with other students and the instructor. Therefore, all class members are asked to be PRESENT and to be sure to PARTICIPATE! Plan to be a part of the conversation/discussion between students and the instructor and share your impressions! SOME of the films may be subtitled so that we can hear the richness of the dialogue in its original language. (No dubbing allowed in this class).Of course, INTERNATIONAL FILMS SHOWN MUST HAVE ENGLISH SUBTITLES. Every language has its own unique sounds or musicality. For subtitled films, students will need to READ those subtitles and stay focused.

REFRAIN FROM:

MAKING PHONE CALLS OR TEXTING. PLEASE do NOT light up the darkness by opening up a computer or any other tech device. Also, please DO NOT WRITE while films are being shown. You are asked to share thoughts and impressions, but do this AT HOME—not in a darkened classroom. WATCH the movie from start to finish. Then write some feedback later. THANK YOU FOR YOUR CO-OPERATION.

Complete the textbook readings (and any additional online readings which may be assigned.) The textbook offers a huge and informative picture of world cinema. All readings are intended to enhance our grasp of the subject of movies. Read the text with an inquiring mind. Consider the author of the textbook, Ron Bergan, a film scholar, as he shares insights into great movies and accomplished directors. Read about the scope of movies as a global art form.

Respond with a written response to various assigned movies by offering a personalized MOVIE BLOG or FILM JOURNAL that captures your impressions. Once again, unless otherwise indicated, this feedback is to be written OUT OF CLASS –not while films are actually being shown. (How long? At least a page...but many students, in the past, have really taken off like a rocket on what a film means from their perspective. They have shared some beautiful observations and insightful concepts about characters, situations, a director's success or failure, an actor's triumph in a basically weak story, etc.) There

are definitely no right or wrong responses---only interesting, supported observations and opinions to be shared. FYI.....YOU WILL USE THIS BLOG OR JOURNAL for reference during the mid-term and final exam. So...please make the writings a vital source of recorded impressions.

COMPLETE THE (REQUIRED) WRITTEN RESEARCH ASSIGNMENT! (Details will be given in class). THIS ASSIGNMENT IS MANDATORY.

FINALLY, BE AN ACTIVE PARTICIPANT in your group when it presents the movie selected by all group members. Students in each respective group will be a part of a panel discussion BEFORE showing their film selection and AFTER the viewing.

There are guidelines and time boundaries. (These will be detailed later and distributed on the Group Instruction page). Believe me, there will be plenty of room for creativity!

Successful completion of a mid-term exam and a final exam. (Details on both will be given in class). Student film choices and presentations will be a part of the final exam writings. So...stay tuned and be attentive to what your classmates have to share with us.

HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS will be made for out-of-seminar viewing. (details will be given in class.) Students are responsible for seeing these films, and these selections will also be a part of the exams.

FYI: INSTRUCTOR will sometimes send emails and/or post assignments via MOODLE...so please check for messages/details on an assignment-- on a regular basis. THANKS!

TEXTBOOK READINGS:

The Story of Cinema pages 12-59 (These two chapters are on the
How Movies are Made pages 63-75 beginnings of movie making.)

Movie Genres pages 79-125 (classification of films)
World Cinema pages 129-177 (a global perspective)

A - Z of Directors pages 180-251 (important directors who have made
strides in world cinema)

TOP 100 Movies pages 257-343 (a look at influential films)

CALENDAR: SENIOR SEMINAR- MULTICULTURALISM IN CINEMA

FYI: Alas! This calendar is not written in stone. Just as in real life, changes are sometimes necessary. The same holds true for the listings below. Hopefully, these entries will all work out as planned. Any changes? Students will be notified via email.

HONORS CREDIT REQUIREMENTS will be posted on the MOODLE PAGE.

Week 1- MARTIN LUTHER KING HOLIDAY. NO CLASS.

Week 2- Review of seminar requirements. Student introductions. Discussion and exchange of ideas on cinema, past, present, future, etc. Be ready to talk. (I look forward to hearing your ideas). Forming groups for presentations at a future date.

If time permits, a film will be shown during our first session.

Weeks 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 – Instructor's selection of films for discussion/evaluation will be shown. QUIZZES may be given AFTER each viewing OR first thing during the following seminar session.

REMINDER: for every film shown, students are asked to write feedback in which they evaluate the highlights (and/or low points) of each selection. THINK: film blog or journal.

Week 8 – MID TERM EXAM on all films (seen in the seminar and those assigned online) EXAM will be done during Week 8 seminar session. It will cover all films viewed in class and those from any homework assignments.

Also... research paper details will be given in class.

Week 9 – S E M E S T E R B R E A K !

Next up.....

WHAT DO STUDENTS OF THE CINEMA SEMINAR WANT US TO SEE?

Students will then be sharing their own film choices as we move into the next section of the seminar. STUDENTS ENROLLED FOR HONORS CREDIT WILL BE THE FIRST PRESENTERS.

Week 10 STUDENTS' CHOICE – GROUP 1 (FOUR students take charge!)

Discussion, introduction. FYI: These student group/panel presentations should be acceptable to all five group members. Each student needs to conduct some RESEARCH on the selected film.

Various aspects of the film should be assigned to each group member. (This needs to be worked out within each group!) Of course, we don't want to lose the energy of a spontaneous and interesting interchange between the presenters (group members), all other class members, and the instructor. So each group needs to leave some time and space for questions and answers, etc. Individual grades as part of this group effort will be based on each student's contribution to the discussion along with his or her ability to engage the audience.

REMINDER: ART HOUSE FILMS OR CLASSICS. (Select something new and unfamiliar to many! Intrigue and surprise us! Of course I will be on hand to assist each group in making a choice that is appropriate for the seminar.)

Week 11 STUDENTS' CHOICE – GROUP 2 (FOUR students)

PRESENTATION and FILM. INDIVIDUAL RESEARCH TOPICS MUST BE GIVEN to the instructor for approval.

Week 12 Group 3 (FOUR Students) PRESENTATION AND FILM

Week 13 GROUP 4 (FOUR Students...PRESENTATION AND FILM

Week 14 GROUP 5 (FIVE Students...PRESENTATION AND FILM (RESEARCH PAPERS ARE DUE BY THE DEADLINE: WED. APRIL 24th)

Week 15- GROUP 4 (FIVE STUDENTS) PRESENTATION AND FILM.

Week 16- FILM-RELATED ASSIGNMENT FOR ALL SEMINAR MEMBERS

There will be a Final Exam in regard to our Multiculturalism in Cinema seminar. Details will be posted on the Final Exam Schedule.

HAVE AN ENJOYABLE SEMESTER!