

ENG 6137: Issues and Innovations in Film Studies

Term: Spring 2026

Prof. Trevor Mowchun

Class: Thursday E1-E3, Rolfs 115

Screening: Tuesday E1-E3, Rolfs 115

Office hours: Thursday 4:45-6:15pm

Course Description:

This graduate seminar in film studies will address a number of key theoretical, historical, and aesthetic issues that both define and complicate the field. The seminar places high value on interdisciplinary methods and exploratory exemplars of scholarly innovation which have been vital to the growth of film studies, placing it in dynamic proximity to the complex object that is film and in unpredictable conversation with other fields of knowledge in the humanities that might further unlock its meanings and potential. As a multifaceted and continually evolving artform (the youngest and so the most influenced), film gets underway at the start of what is arguably the most complex century, at least for philosophy and the arts: the 20th. Therefore, one of the more persistent issues we will face is how to situate film in a broader history of art and ideas. Amongst other things, this “long view” of the medium will help us to consider film’s rapid technological development over a relatively short period of time and what the present digital moment affords both the film scholar and filmmaker’s interventionist imaginations, for example the opportunity for enhanced close reading, videographic criticism, or the acrobatic analysis of film fragments. Special attention will also be paid to the handling of certain films which register psychological and/or social instability, becoming in the process fascinatingly unstable or grotesque texts in of themselves with near-limitless interpretive potential.

The instructor is a film scholar/practitioner who recognizes that the backgrounds and levels of experience of students with respect to film studies can be varied and piecemeal. We will work towards building a shared foundation of concerns about film and the intellectual climate surrounding it to help facilitate meaningful dialogue. Students will be encouraged to find new pathways into film studies and to regard the research and writing process as inherently creative, whose challenges are worth taking on in the discovery of our voices as thinkers.

Books:

*Acquire physical or digital copies

- Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (Hill and Wang, 2010).
- Robert Bresson, *Notes on the Cinematograph* (New York Review of Books Classics, 2016).
- Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, enlarged edition (Harvard University Press, 1979).
- Heinrich von Kleist, *Mickael Kohlhaas* (New Directions, 2020).
- Robert Walser, *The Walk and Other Stories* (Serpent’s Tail, 2013).

- Thornton Wilder, *Three Plays: Our Town, The Matchmaker, and The Skin of Our Teeth* (Harper Perennial, 2020).

*Other readings will be available via Course Reserves.

Course Plan:

*Some weeks contain many readings. This workload is mostly unavoidable given that each week tackles a subject that could in theory constitute its own course. Do your best. I will too. The connections between readings and how you synthesize their understanding as a film scholar is just as important as the content itself.

Week 1 (Jan. 15). Introduction *NO SCREENING ON JAN. 13

Week 2 (Jan. 20 + 22). Handling Complex, Unstable, or Grotesque Films

Readings:

- Geoffrey Galt Harpham, "Chapter 1: Formation, Deformation, and Reformation: An Introduction to the Grotesque" and "Chapter 7: To Make You See: Conrad's Primal Words," in *On The Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature* (Princeton University Press, 1982), pp. 3-26 and pp. 179-212, see notes.
- Manny Farber, "White Elephant Art vs. Termite Art," *Film Culture*, No. 27 (Winter 1962-63), pp. 242-6.

Film: *The Master* (Paul Thomas Anderson, USA, 2013)

Week 3 (Jan. 27 + 29). The Ontology of Film: Analogue to Digital

Readings:

- André Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," in *What Is Cinema?*, Vol. 1 (University of California Press, 2005), pp. 9-16. (Originally published in French in 1945)
- Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, enlarged edition (Harvard University Press, 1979). (First published in 1971) *Read up to "More of *The World Viewed*." **Prioritize the preface, chapters 1-6, 11-18.
- D. N. Rodowick, "Part 1" of *The Virtual Life of Film* (Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 1-24.
- Noël Carroll, "Forget the Medium!," in *Engaging the Moving Image* (Yale University Press, 2003).

Film: *Afterschool* (Antonio Campos, USA, 2008)

Week 4 (Feb. 3 + 5). Film in the History of Ideas – Part 1

Readings:

- André Bazin, "The Myth of Total Cinema," in *What Is Cinema?* Vol. 1 (University of California Press, 2005), pp. 17-22. (Originally published in French in 1945)
- Siegfried Kracauer, "Epilogue: Film In Our Time," in *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (Oxford University Press, 1960), pp. 285-311, notes pp. 336-7.

- Stanley Cavell, "More of *The World Viewed*," in *The World Viewed*, enlarged edition (Harvard University Press, 1979). (First published in 1971)
Film: *Simon Killer* (Antonio Campos, USA, 2012)

Week 5 (Feb. 10 + 12). Film in the History of Ideas – Part 2

Readings:

- Trevor Mowchun, "Introduction: The Death of God, the Birth of Film, and the New Metaphysics," in *Metaphysics and the Moving Image: Paradise Exposed* (Edinburgh University Press, 2023), pp. 1-18, notes pp. 231-3.
- Giorgio Agamben, "Notes on Gesture," in *Infancy and History: On the Destruction of Experience* (Verso, 1993), pp. 147-56. (Originally published in Italian in 1978)
- Alain Badiou, "Cinema as Philosophical Experimentation," in *Cinema* (Polity, 2013).
Film: *Christine* (Antonio Campos, USA/UK, 2016)

Week 6 (Feb. 17 + 19). Discovery of Film Forms – Part 1 (Cavell)

Readings:

- Stanley Cavell, "Introduction: Words for a Conversation" and "Chapter 7: The Same and Different: *The Awful Truth*," in *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (Harvard University Press, 1981), pp. 1-43 and pp. 229-63.
- Cavell, "Introduction" and "Chapter 1: Naughty Orators: Negation of Voices in *Gaslight*," in *Contesting Tears: The Hollywood Melodrama of the Unknown Woman* (University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 3-45, notes p. 223, and pp. 46-78, notes p. 223.
Film: *The Awful Truth* (Leo McCarey, USA, 1937, USA)

Week 7 (Feb. 24 + 26). Discovery of Film Forms – Part 2 (Deleuze)

Readings:

- Primer: Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, "Introduction" to *What Is Philosophy?* (Verso, 1994), pp. 1-14. (Originally published in French in 1991)
- Gilles Deleuze, "Chapter 1: Beyond the Movement-Image" and "Chapter 2: Recapitulation of Images and Signs," in *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (University of Minnesota Press, 1989), pp. 1-43, notes pp. 281-8. (Originally published in French in 1985)
- Trevor Mowchun, "Something Possible, Otherwise I Will Suffocate: A Marginal Reading of Chapter 7, Section 2, of Deleuze's *The Time-Image*," in *Gilles Deleuze and Film Criticism: Philosophy, Theory, and the Individual Film*, eds. Dominic Lash and Hoi Lun Law (Palgrave, 2023).
Film: *Gaslight* (George Cukor, USA, 1944)

Week 8 (Mar. 3 + 5). Literature and Film Adaptation

Readings:

- Robert Walser, "The Walk" in *The Walk and Other Stories* (Serpent's Tail, 2013). (Originally published in German 1917)
- Heinrich von Kleist, *Mickael Kohlhaas* (New Directions, 2020). (Originally published in German in 1810)

Film: *One Battle After Another* (Paul Thomas Anderson, USA, 2025)

Week 9 (Mar. 10 + 12). Theater in Film

Readings:

- André Bazin, "Theater and Cinema," in *What Is Cinema?*, Vol. 1 (University of California Press, 2005), pp. 76-124, notes pp. 174-5. (Originally published in French in 1951)
- George Toles, "Introduction: Curtains of Light," in *Curtains of Light: Theatrical Space in Film* (SUNY Press, 2021), pp. 1-31.
- Thornton Wilder, *Our Town in Three Plays: Our Town, The Matchmaker, and The Skin of Our Teeth* (Harper Perennial, 2020). (First published and produced in 1938)

Films:

- *Eh Joe* (Samuel Beckett/Alan Schneider, UK, 1966)
- *Synecdoche, NY* (Charlie Kauffman, USA, 2008)

Week 10 (Mar. 17 + 19). SPRING BREAK – NO CLASSES

Week 11 (Mar. 24 + 26). Logics of the Avant-Garde

Readings:

- Maureen Turim, "Chapter 3: Sound," in *Abstraction in Avant-Garde Films* (UMI Research Press, 1985), pp. 29-50, see notes. (First published in 1978)
- Stan Brakhage, excerpt from *Metaphors on Vision* ("Metaphors on Vision," "The Camera Eye," "My Eye"), in *Essential Brakhage: Selected Writings on Filmmaking* (Documentext, 2001), pp. 11-36. (First published in 1963)
- Hollis Frampton, "Pentagram for Conjuring the Narrative," in *The Avant-Garde Film*, ed. P. Adams Sitney (New York University Press, 1978), pp. 281-9. (First published in 1972)
- Trevor Mowchun, "Moment and Myth in Film" (in progress).

Films:

- *Degree of Difficulty* (Trevor Mowchun, 2026)
- *The Zone of Interest* (Jonathan Glazer, UK/Poland/USA, 2023)

Week 12 (Mar. 31 + Apr. 2). The Voices of Film Criticism

Readings:

- Robert Warshow, "A Feeling of Sad Dignity," in *The Immediate Experience: Movies, Comics, Theatre & Other Aspects of Popular Culture* (Harvard University Press, 2001), pp. 193-212. (First published in 1962)
- Pauline Kael, "Fear of Movies," in *When The Lights Go Down* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1980), pp. 427-40. (First published in 1978)
- James Agee, excerpt from *Film Writing and Selected Journalism* (Library of America, 2005), pp. 270-97. (Collection first published in 1958)
- *The Videographic Essay*, eds. Christian Keathley, Jason Mittell, and Catherine Grant. Website: <http://videographicessay.org/works/videographic-essay/contents>. (Originally published as a book, *The Videographic Essay: Criticism in Sound and Image*, Caboose Books, 2016)

Film: *The Shining* (Stanley Kubrick, UK/USA, 1980)

Week 13 (Apr. 7 + 9). Phenomenologies of the Image

Readings:

- Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (Hill and Wang, 2010). (Originally published in French in 1980)
- T. J. Clark, "Preface (Part 1)," "Introduction" and excerpt from *The Sight of Death: An Experiment in Art Writing*, (Yale University Press, 2006), pp. 1-23, 218-29, see notes.
- Trevor Mowchun, "A PTSD Diary of *The Exorcist*," *Cineaction*, Vol. 101 (2021). Film: *I'm Thinking of Ending Things* (Charlie Kaufman, USA, 2020)

Week 14 (Apr. 14). Film Moments, Text Fragments, and Close Reading

Readings:

- George Toles, "Rescuing Fragments: A New Task for Cinephilia," *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 49, No. (Winter, 2010), pp. 159-66.
- Toles, "Film Death and the Failure to Signify: The Curious Case of Warni Hazard," *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, Vol. 15. Iss. 2 (2017), pp. 211-30.
- Trevor Mowchun, "Chapter 1: Image Breakthrough: Disclosure and Derailment in Painting, Photography, and Film," in *Metaphysics and the Moving Image: Paradise Exposed* (Edinburgh University Press, 2023), pp. 19-59, notes pp. 233-36.

Film: *The Phantom Thread* (Paul Thomas Anderson, USA/China, 2017)

Week 15 (Apr. 21). Film Theory/Practice *We will have a class instead of a screening

Readings:

- Robert Bresson, *Notes on the Cinematograph* (New York Review of Books Classics, 2016). (Originally published in French in 1975)
- Andrei Tarkovsky, "Chapter 3: Imprinted Time" and "Chapter 5: The Film Image: Time, Rhythm, and Editing," in *Sculpting in Time* (University of Texas Press, 1987), pp. 57-81, pp. 104-24, notes pp. 243-4. (Originally published in German in 1985)
- Sidney Peterson, Chapter on *The Lead Shoes*, in *The Dark of the Screen* (Anthology Film Archives, 1980).

Films: *view at home

- *Au hasard Balthazar* (Bresson, France/Sweden, 1966)
- *Mirror* (Tarkovsky, USSR, 1975)
- *The Lead Shoes* (Peterson, USA, 1949) *short film

Coursework

- **Journal:** Each week select two readings and one film. Write 1-2 page reflections on each text. (40%) – Due twice during the semester: March 5 and April 21, submit hardcopy in class.
- **Presentation:** Focus on the issues/innovations from the readings that interest you most and make some connections with the screened film(s). (20 minutes, 20%)
- **Final essay or video essay with written component:** Approximately 10 pages for essays, variable page and time length for video essays with scripts. (30%) – Due: April 26, digital submission
- **Participation:** 10%

Grade Scale

A	4.0	94-100%	C	2.0	73-76%
A-	3.67	90-93%	C-	1.67	70-72%
B+	3.33	87-89%	D+	1.33	67-69%
B	3.0	83-86%	D	1.0	63-66%
B-	2.67	80-82%	D-	0.67	60-62%
C+	2.33	77-79%	E	0.00	0-59%

Policies and Services

- Written work should be 1.5 or double-spaced with standard-sized margins.
- For digital submissions, Word or PDF files are acceptable.
- Late submissions without approval will be penalized. Discuss with me ahead of time if you need an extension.
- Regular attendance is essential. If I see that you are consistently absent then your grade will be adversely affected. Communication with the instructor is crucial to avoid misunderstandings related to absences. These policies are consistent with the UF's attendance policies. For more information on these policies, please visit:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>

- The use of cell phones and internet browsing during class are prohibited.
- Please do not record any class without permission from me.
- Academic Honesty and Definition of Plagiarism. Plagiarism violates the Student Honor Code and requires reporting to the Dean of Students. All students must abide by the Student Honor Code:
<https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/>
- Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.
- Students with disabilities who are requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, <https://drc.dso.ufl.edu/>).

- For information on UF Grading policies:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/grades-grading-policies/>

- For counseling or urgent help you may call the on-campus Counseling and Wellness Center at 352-392-1575, or contact them online: <https://counseling.ufl.edu/services/individual/>

- UF's policy on Harassment: UF provides an educational and working environment that is free from sex discrimination and sexual harassment for its students, staff, and faculty:

<https://hr.ufl.edu/forms-policies/policies-managers/sexual-harassment/>