

RELS/HUM/CA/RTVF 134

RELIGION, FILM AND MEDIA

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This class focuses on the depiction of religion, religions, religious behavior, and religious propaganda in film and media. We will explore these from a variety of points of view (e.g. emic and etic, cross-national, aesthetic) and examine the murky problem of 'the truth' in the depiction of religious and spiritual experience. Students will have the opportunity to examine on their own a particular genre, religious tradition, and or concern (such as, religious conflict) as it is defined and depicted in film and media. We will examine the relationship between religion, film and media both historically and in the current and shifting social and political climate. We will not be 'just watching movies' or considering text, TV, the internet and mixed media but rather, finding multiple meanings, messages and interpretations implicit in both form and content. In essence, the course addresses the 'so what?' of fact, fiction and film. In addition to films shown in class, students will be expected to watch films on their own in preparation for class lecture and discussion. Expect to delve into some of the 'hot' topics of the day as they are embroidered and spun.

REQUIRED READING *SELECT THREE OF THE FOLLOWING*

Anderson, W.T.	Reality isn't what it used to be: Theatrical Politics, Ready-to-Wear Religion, Global Myths, Primitive Chic, and other Wonders of the Postmodern World
Blythe, T. and D. Wolpert	Meeting God in Virtual Reality: Using Spiritual Practices with Media
Bordwell, D.	Making Meaning: Influence and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema
Claussen, D.	Sex, Religion, Media.
Ellul, J.	The Humiliation of the Word. (transl J.M. Hanks)
Goethals, G.	The Electronic Golden Calf: Images, Religion and the Making of Meaning
Hoover, S.	Religion in the Media Age.
Lyden, J.	Film as Religion: Myths, Morals and Rituals
Martens, J.	The End of the World: Apocalyptic Imagination in Film and Television
Martin, J. and C. Ostwalt	Screening the Sacred: Religion, Myth and Ideology in Popular American Film
Medved, M.	Hollywood vs America: Pop Culture and the War on Traditional Values
Meyer, B. & A. Moors	Religion, Media and the Public Sphere [electronic resource]
Postman, N.	Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business
Riley, R.	Film, Faith and Cultural Conflict: The Case of Martin Scorsese's Last Temptation of Christ
Said, E.	Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World
Shaheen, J.	Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People
Stout, D. & J. Buddenbaum	Religion and Popular Culture: Studies on the Interaction of Worldviews
Tatum, W.B.	Jesus at the Movies: A Guide to the First Hundred Years

These books provide very different approaches to the study of religion, film and media. Look for the basic assumptions of each approach, methodology, and the problem of consequences—what difference, if any, does it make what you portray and perceive religion and religions? You do not need to like an approach to find it useful! There is a huge literature on this subject. Additional resources will be offered throughout the term. See also last page of syllabus.

Please consult the following online sources throughout the term:

Journal of Religion and Film (University of Nebraska at Omaha)

Center for Religion and Media (New York University)

See also **THE RELIGION, FILM AND MEDIA LIST** posted online for this class.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Class will meet Mondays from 1:30–4:15 PM in SH 241. Lectures, films, media and discussion will follow the course syllabus and include the week's assigned readings and films. Required readings, films and media cover only part of the material tested. Participation is an essential component to making this a dynamic seminar and will be evaluated along with written work. Participation is evaluated based upon positive contributions to discussion, preparedness, insight, consideration of the ideas of others, creativity and facilitation of class process. We will discuss grading criteria in class. If you have any questions, please bring them up in class meetings or during office hours. See THE COURSE GUIDELINES posted online for general information and requirements regarding writing, research, and grading of written and oral work.

GRADING

3 Short Essays and brief presentations	[50+50 pts]	100 points each	300 points
Term Project: Term Paper and Presentation	[100+100 pts]	200 points	200 points
Participation		100 points	100 points
Final Exam		100 points	100 points

SHORT ESSAYS: These essays can be between two to six pages long, double-spaced (or as long or short as it takes you to say what you have to say!). These papers are not book or film reviews or critiques. They should focus on a particular idea, aspect, methodology or 'problem' in each of your sources. A good way to approach these essays is to TEST THE AUTHOR'S LINE OF REASONING BY APPLYING HIS/HER ANALYSIS AND SEE WHERE IT TAKES YOU. Pick topics that interest you—don't try to figure out what might interest me. We'll discuss how to approach these assignments in class.

TERM PROJECT: The Term Project will entail focus on a particular problem or question addressed in the depiction of religion in film and/or media. A separate file will be posted giving the specifics of this assignment. The project will be presented in class for discussion and also turned in as a Term Paper.

FINAL EXAM: The final exam will encompass the entire course and all readings, films, additional resources and class discussion. The final will be handed out the last day of class and will be due at our scheduled final exam period. Don't leave papers in the hallway or slipped under the door. Make sure your name (and exam) is legible, staple extra pages together, and be sure to keep a copy of your work. It's a good idea to think about the exam question for a day or two, write a draft, revise your thoughts and draft, and only then print out your final exam answer.

STUDENT PRESENTATIONS: You are welcome to present your papers either by reading them aloud and facilitating discussion or by simply presenting the ideas that you covered in your paper, and then facilitating discussion of those ideas. You are encouraged to try both methods: reading aloud and presenting the core of your thesis. Students are expected to respond to the ideas presented both in class discussion and in helpful notes and comments for the presenter. We will keep these presentations short and informal and use them to facilitate discussion of the very different approaches each student will have been reading on his/her own.

THE COURSE GUIDELINES: Posted online is a document entitled *COURSE GUIDELINES*. It includes requirements and suggestions regarding reading, writing, and analysis of course material, and of original research, and covers both form and content. The Guidelines also include grading criteria for both written and oral work, as well as point allocations and points deducted for late work. Note that in order to process an *Inc.*, you must fill out a university Incomplete Form, which must be signed by the instructor. When submitting completed work, make sure I have your name, the course number, course code, semester and year, your student ID number, address and telephone number. Note: Grading and processing of make-up work does NOT take priority over the work of current students! Bottom line: try to avoid incompletes—they're a nuisance for everyone.

OFFICE HOURS

DR. MIRA Z. AMIRAS

→ Course materials and assignments available at ←

<http://sjsu.edu/faculty/amiras/>

CLARK HALL 437

(408) 924-1364

LEAVE A CLEAR MESSAGE

M & W 12:00-1:15 PM

M & W 4:30-5:45 PM

OR BY APPOINTMENT

THESE ARE YOUR OFFICE HOURS

USE THEM WHEN YOU NEED THEM!

email: mira.amiras@sjsu.edu

Note: subject heading should specify course title

Please do not email writing assignments or drafts

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY POLICY

From the Office of Student Conduct and Ethical Development: “Your commitment to learning, as evidenced by your enrollment at San Jose State University, and the University’s Academic Integrity Policy, require you to be honest in all your academic course work. Faculty members are required to report all infractions to the Office of Student Conduct and Ethical Development.” The full policy on academic integrity can be found at:

<http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/AS1350.pdf>.

Honor Code: “I have read the Honor Code and agree with its provisions. My continued enrollment in this course constitutes full acceptance of this code. I will NOT:

1. Take an exam or quiz in place of someone else, or have someone take an exam in my place.
2. Give information or receive information from another person during a written quiz or exam.
3. Use more reference material during an exam or quiz than is allowed by the instructor.
4. Plagiarize: i.e., knowingly or unknowingly incorporate the ideas and/or words of another without giving appropriate credit, and representing the product as one’s own work.
5. Obtain a copy of an exam or quiz prior to the time it is given.
6. Discuss the contents of a quiz or exam with students who have not yet taken the exam in question.
7. Alter an exam, quiz or paper after it has been graded, and then return it to the instructor for re-grading.
8. Leave the classroom without returning the quiz or exam to the instructor.

DISABILITIES:

If you need special accommodations because of a disability, or if you need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please see me at the beginning of the term, either at my regularly scheduled Office Hours or at another time scheduled by appointment, to discuss your needs. Presidential Directive 97-03 requires that students with disabilities register with the Disabilities Resource Center (DRC) to establish a record of their disability.

SCHEDULE OF LECTURES

WEEK

TOPIC

ASSIGNMENTS

→ PLEASE WATCH AT LEAST ONE OF THE FILMS LISTED ←
FOR EACH WEEK'S ASSIGNMENT

AUG 27

INTRODUCTION TO RELIGION, FILM AND MEDIA

Course requirements, readings, film, media and expectations. What's at stake. Introduction to readings and the basic theoretical concepts we will be using. Emic/etic approaches in film and media, and the problems of perspective. Course requirements and expectations.

Look over list of readings. Select your readings. Look over film & media selections

SEPT 5

LABOR DAY—NO CLASS

SAMPLE FILMS:

SEPT 10

'PRISTINE' RELIGIONS, ANIMISM AND RITUAL

Shamanism, paganism and mythological pure systems and ideal types in ethnographic film and popular imagination. Uses and abuses of ethnographic sources. Depiction of ritual and visionary experience, and these juxtaposed to 'modernity' and secular reasoning. Emic/etic distinctions: whose story is this anyway? The films of Jean-Pierre Hallet.
IN CLASS: Pomo Shaman / segments of Emerald Forest

The Emerald Forest, Guardians of the Flutes, Pygmy Kitabu, Witness, Pomo Shaman, The Wicker Man (original only)
FIRST BOOK.

SEPT 17

THE PROBLEM OF DEATH AND THE 'HEREAFTER'

The 'problem' of death, what happens after death—and by extension, souls and spirits—are universal questions addressed by religion. They also make for great and awful cinematic experiences that color popular perceptions of what 'really' happens after death. Depictions of 'eternal life.'
IN CLASS: Dead Birds

Antigone, Iphigenia, Ghost, Dead Again, The Red Violin, 9th Gate, The Seventh Seal, Pasolini's Salo

SEPT 24

MYSTICAL STATES, ALTERED STATES AND SPIRIT POSSESSION

Good and evil spirits at the movies. Depiction of ritual and visionary experience, and these juxtaposed to 'modernity' and secular reasoning. The problem of 'evil'/the politics of horror films/or the horror of politics in film.
IN CLASS: Holy Ghost People

The Exorcist I & II, Diva, Bee Season, The Craft Pan's Labyrinth, The Doors, Pasolini's Teorema Dervishes of Kurdistan

OCT 1

CHARISMA, CLERGY, AND CORRUPTION

Popular film and the cult of the charismatic figure. Superheroes from Christ to Neo(-Christ). How a focus on character misses the larger point. Backdrops of corrupt institutions and the infallibility of saviors.

→ **FIRST SHORT PAPER DUE IN CLASS/DISCUSSION**

Malcolm X, The Mission, The Order, Saved, The Last Temptation of Christ, Godfather 3, O Brother Where Art Thou? Blues Brothers (first film only)

OCT 8

RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS IN MEDIA AND FILM—I—THEORY

Theoretical approaches to the rise and fall of religious movements. How these help us see the structure (and set up) in current events and film. Depictions of the conditions under which religious movements flourish. Introducing the core principles of Linton, Wallace, Talmon and Hoffer.
IN CLASS: Les Maîtres Fous

Fight Club, Matrix I Star Wars, Dune, Cabaret, The Message, Malcolm X Divine Intervention, Paradise Now, The Guru, Jonestown: The Life and Death of People's Temple

SCHEDULE OF LECTURES

WEEK

TOPIC

ASSIGNMENTS

SAMPLE FILMS:

OCT 15

RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS IN MEDIA AND FILM—II—EVIDENCE

Examining the evidence. Edward Said's critique of Western 'news' media and the films that both reinforce and belie his view. The paradox of filmic rebel saviors and the vilification of them in the press. Seeing the 'deep structure' of religious movements. Stepping away from plot and character, no matter how charismatic. The mixed messages of media and film.

→ **SECOND SHORT PAPER DUE IN CLASS/DISCUSSION**

The Siege, Paradise Now
The Postman, RIZE,
Cup Final
SECOND BOOK.
RAMJI ARTICLE pdf

OCT 22

THE POWER AND PRIMACY OF BELIEF/OTHERING THE OTHER

Teaching intolerance through warm-hearted affirmations of faith. Simplicity, complexity, and context. Visual set-ups and good lighting. Selling theologies, ideologies, and the appropriation of appropriate sanctity. Syncretism as shorthand in film. Antidotes to crises in faith.

IN CLASS: The Disputation

Saved, Walk on Water,
The Name of the Rose,
Leap of Faith, Contact
The Boys from Brazil
Sophie's Choice, RIZE,
Fictitious Marriage

OCT 29

VISUAL PERSUASIONS AND PROPAGANDA

The ability to sway an audience and readership through evocative imagery. Power, influence and responsibility in filmmaking and journalism, as well as the reader's and audience's responsibility to evaluate the power of media. Internet transmissions of sanctity and salvation. Tony Shaw's article, "Martyrs, Miracles, and Martians: Religion and Cold War Cinematic Propaganda in the 1950s" J. of Cold War Studies V.4 No.2 Sp 2002:3-22

IN CLASS: South Park's Passion of the Jew

→ **THIRD SHORT PAPER DUE IN CLASS/DISCUSSION**

Joshua Project, Looking for
Comedy in the Muslim
World, Protocols of the
Elders of Zion, Dhimmis
Nazi film: The Eternal Jew
Red Planet, hatecrime.org,
THIRD BOOK

NOV 5

APOCALYPSE THEN—APOCALYPSE NOW

Film and media's love affair with a good apocalyptic vision. Reprise of the theoretical perspectives of Linton, Wallace, Talmon, Neil Postman and Eric Hoffer. Apocalypse as teacher, preacher, politician, and deserved ecological nightmare. Implicit and explicit godlessness and ecological disaster. Preparations for a post-apocalyptic planet.

IN CLASS: Segments of Altered Oceans /

The Postman, Testament,
28 Days Later, The Day
After, The Day After
Tomorrow, Terminator x3
Planet of the Apes (1973)
12 Monkeys, Shaun of the
Dead, Thunderdome, The
Quiet Earth, Omega Man

NOV 12

VETERAN'S DAY—NO CLASS

NOV 19

STUDENT PRESENTATIONS

NOV 26

STUDENT PRESENTATIONS

DEC 3

STUDENT PRESENTATIONS

DEC 10

REVIEW: ALL THE WORLD'S A STAGE

→ **REVIEW AND SUMMARY / RECEIVE TAKE-HOME FINAL EXAM**

DEC 17

FINAL EXAM SESSION SCHEDULED AT 12:15-2:30 PM

ADDITIONAL SOURCES

Mediatedcultures.net

<http://mediatedcultures.net/>

Studying how people use YouTube and other digital technologies is a rapidly growing academic enterprise, and Professor Michael Wesch and his colleagues at Kansas State University are doing some interesting work in this area. Visitors can learn about their work by clicking on the “Our Projects” section which includes profiles of their separate research initiatives, such as “Explorations of Mediated Culture” and “Digital Ethnography of YouTube”. As one might expect, the site is not populated with research reports, but a selection of rather compelling YouTube videos that cover such ground as “The History of YouTube”, “Authenticity on the Tube”, and “A Global Community”. The site is rounded out by the World Simulation Project, which is an interactive and recursive classroom experience that is designed to create a map that mimics the geographical, environmental, and biological diversity of the real world. [KMG]

Film & Television Literature Index with Full Text

<http://libaccess.sjlibrary.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?authtype=ip,uid&profile=ehost&defaultdb=f3h>

This is a comprehensive bibliographic and full-text database covering the entire spectrum of television and film. Subject coverage includes film & television theory, preservation & restoration, writing, production, cinematography, technical aspects, and reviews. The database provides cover-to-cover indexing and abstracts for more than 270 publications (and selected coverage of more than 300), as well as full text for 70 journals and nearly 50 books. The database has been designed for use by a diverse audience that includes film scholars, college students, and general viewers.
