

Political Science 319
Topics in Political Culture
Winter Quarter 2017

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SYLLABUS

This course is an advanced seminar on political culture utilizing the intersection of politics and cinema to explore fundamental questions in political culture and society. The issue of fantasy and its many reflections of and interventions in contemporary culture and politics is one that I have only begun recently to appreciate, and one that I now understand plays a great – if not always clear – role in the lives of younger people (which is why, among other reasons, that this will be a highly collaborative course in which your involvement and contributions will be central). While I teach many courses and write on the dynamic influence of the young in American society, it now appears that in this era of political closure, denial, and repression, its role is more important than ever.

Where from early education to organizational careers American society imposes the claim that there are no alternatives to the existing system and way of life, many people – including many youth and young adults – are not persuaded that the present society is the best or only framework. Since it is difficult if not impossible to express or discuss alternative conditions and aspirations, it is often in the spaces of fantasy that social and political and personal dreams are expressed – both covertly and explicitly. Of course, a great deal of fantasy and imaginative production is escapist and/or acting out the frustrations and anger and dystopian feelings stoked by present society. So our goal in the course is to explore the cinema (and literature) where these alternatives are being developed.

In this course, we will focus on films that have pursued this inquiry into the realm of constructive and visionary fantasy as a first effort to understand how these forms of expressions can be guides to lives and communities of greater meaning and value. The course will thus encourage class members to reflect on and explore these themes in their own relation to both the public realm and to the priorities through which they shape their own lives in society. We live candidly in the Age of Trump, in which efforts to quash alternative dreams is everywhere (and it has been for a long time), and separating out what is possible from these mental and imaginative chains is difficult work. Even more difficult is the task or problematic of trying to discern, identify, and expose what real and authentic possibilities can emerge in one's own life and in one's social setting. This course will not offer a definitive guide to these issues, but rather encourage

through conversation and dialogue the exploration of these themes as we build on our shared insights.

MECHANICS: The format of the course is meant to be a discussion seminar. This course will be such a discussion course in every class meeting from the beginning of the course to the end of the term. I proceed in the course by means of the Socratic method, which involves a continual process of questions and responses, followed by more questions and responses on a continuing basis. There are no right answers in this discussion. It is meant to be a forum for the participation of each class member, and for the questioning of assumptions and the clarification of ideas. I do not offer my own clarification at the end of class, but continue the process where we left off in the next class. Not only is there no right answer expected by participants, but there are often many right answers depending on the experiences, backgrounds and values of each participant. That means that much of our work in class is tentative in nature, provisional hypotheses that can be added too and altered as the course proceeds. This course as a result requires a tolerance for ambiguity, for leaving issues linger and working them out in discussion, reflection, paper writing and life experience.

I further expect that each member of the class will participate in each and every class meeting, and I work hard both to ensure and encourage full participation and the broadest expression of ideas and reflections. If you must miss a class, it is your responsibility to get the assignments. Moreover, more than two classes without excused absence will have a significant impact on the final grade and will quite likely result in failure in the course.

TEXTS: The following movies will be the basis of course discussion along with some handouts.

Her
Phoebe in Wonderland
Beasts of the Southern Wild
Pan's Labyrinth
Moonrise Kingdom
Rebel Without a Cause
Little Buddha
Off the Map
Angels in Stardust
Tamasha
Goodbye World
Waking Life

ASSIGNMENTS:

The requirements for the course in addition to an active role in class discussion

will be a series of written works. Each class member will be responsible for writing four mini-essays due on movies of your choice **at the class they are being discussed**, in which members of the class will be asked to treat the assigned materials in light of course themes. **THERE ARE NEVER TO BE PLOT SUMMARIES OR GENERAL DESCRIPTIONS IN THESE MINI ESSAYS (NO FACTS) – THEY MUST BE WHOLLY REFLECTIVE EXPLORATIONS OF THEMES, CONFLICTS, CHOICES, DIRECTIONS TAKEN AND RESOLUTIONS WHERE APPLICABLE.**

In addition there will be two final projects. The first will be a longer final essay on the themes of the course as a broader reflection on contemporary politics and social reality. Finally, each member of the class will be expected to come up with a movie of their choice which provides further and/or different insight on the themes of the course to present in a discussion during the classes of the tenth week and finals week. Of this presentation and the written assignments I will say more in class. This final class is required for course credit as a commitment to the class process and to all members presenting.

COURSE OUTLINE:

Week #1: *Her*

Week #2: *Phoebe in Wonderland*

Week #3: *Beasts of the Southern Wild*

Week #4: *Pan's Labyrinth*

Week #5: *Moonrise Kingdom* (see *Rebels* before class)

Week #6: *Little Buddha*

Week #7: *Angels in Stardust* (see *Off the Map* before class)

Week #8: *Tamasha*

Week #9: *Goodbye World*

Week #10: *Waking Life*

Week #11: PRESENTATIONS