

IDS 125 – Reading the Movies

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Texts:

M. Puso, *The Godfather*

P.K. Dick, *The Phillip K. Dick Reader*

D. Woodrell, *Winter's Bone*

R. Guzman, *Writing Well Wherever You Work*

L. Corsino, *The Neighborhood Outfit*

A. Proulx, *Brokeback Mountain: Story to Screenplay*

...plus the films: *The Godfather*, *Minority Report*, *Winter's Bone*, and *Brokeback Mountain*. We will try to arrange hours outside of regular class time to finish viewing films, **and/or** students should plan to find ways to watch these films on their own. In some cases, films may be put on reserve in the college library. Note: Some classes may run until 6:25 p.m.

Course Goals:

IDS 125 – Reading the Movies was originally team-taught by Judy Walters of the college's computer science department and Dr. Richard Guzman (English and Leadership Studies) for several years. It studies how literature—mainly novels and short stories—has been adapted into film. It is an *interdisciplinary* course, exploring the way different disciplines have influenced this literature-into-film process, and how different disciplines can be used to interpret the results of this process and place the literature-film pair into a broader intellectual and social context. Besides learning how to interpret literature and film, students will also get to practice turning a piece of literature into a film script.

Tentative Schedule:

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|-------------|-----------|---|
| Jan | 2 | Introduction. What makes a great read or great watch? |
| | 4 | Read P.K.Dick: "Minority Report." <i>Minority Report</i> – part 1 |
| | 9 | Read R.Guzman: Chapters 4-6. <i>Minority Report</i> – part 2 |
| | 11 | Writing a great film opening. Writing the Film Review. |
| | 16 | Documentaries. Guest: Steven Martin, documentary film maker |
| | 18 | Library Information Session. (Meet in Library) |
| | 23 | Read M.Puso: Chapter 1. <i>The Godfather</i> – part 1 |
| | 25 | Read M.Puso: tba. <i>The Godfather</i> – part 2 |
| | 30 | Read L.Corsino: Preface, Chapters 1-3 |
| Feb. | 1 | Read L.Corsino: Chapter 4, Conclusion. Guest: Professor Lou Corsino |
| | 6 | Read A.Proulx: "Brokeback Mountain" story |
| | 8 | Read A.Proulx: The essays by Proulx and others. Writing the Script. |

	13	Read A.Proulx: The script. <i>Brokeback Mountain</i> – part 1
	15	<i>Brokeback Mountain</i> – part 2
	20	Read D.Woodrell: pp. 3-101
	22	Read D.Woodrell: pp. 102-150. <i>Winter's Bone</i> – part 1
	27	Read D.Woodrell: 151-193. <i>Winter's Bone</i> – part 2
Mar.	1	Group meetings for film project
	6	Class Presentations
	8	Class Presentations

Grades will be based on...

1) Class participation. Be in class and *present* in class. Participate in discussions, being willing to share insights, comments, and questions. Contribute equally to your team project. If you have any devices in class—computers, tablets, phones—these must be used *only* for class purposes in the moment, like taking notes or looking up something we're discussing right then. (50 points)

2) Movie Review. A review of one film, either documentary or feature, which changed the way some social issue was viewed. About 1000 words (4 pages, *excluding* bibliography). You must consult *at least* four reviews of the film and *at least* one article on the social issue the film addresses. (100 pts.) DUE Jan. 25th

3) Team Project. You'll work in teams of two or three to produce the following on a Phillip K. Dick story you'll partly choose and partly be assigned.

a: A medium length research paper (about 6-7 pages) on the social or cultural issue surrounding the story you've chosen. (75 pts.) DUE Feb. 8th

b: The first 8-10 pages of the script for your film. (50 pts.) Feb. 22nd

c: An "Afterword" to your film script (4-5 pages) which describes: 1) Your ideal cast for your film; 2) The "arc" of the whole story. (25 pts.) DUE March 6th

ALSO, note that teams will probably be assigned to do one short presentation on the social/cultural issue surrounding a film. (25 pts.)

4) Short assignments. *Short* papers (no more than about 250 words) and online or in-class quizzes relating to class topics, readings, or films you're watching on your own. (About 5-6 of these, with points varying between 5-10 depending on length.)

Statement on Plagiarism

Do your own work and cite other peoples' work and ideas when you use them. Penalties for plagiarism are severe, including failing the class and even possible dismissal from the college.

❑ ON WRITING:

Writing is very important to the college, which requires that at least 30% of the grade for every assignment be given for the writing.

Besides being grammatically correct, good writing style requires that your work contains a VARIED sentence structure, as well as lean and smoothly flowing—not awkward—prose.

Rules of thumb:

❑ **Structure/Length:** Don't write any more than three sentences in a row that have roughly the same structure or length. For example, you don't want to write like this:

The Wizard of Oz is a movie that I enjoyed very much. It is a movie that many think of as a “classic.” The plot that the director uses is one which is full of suspense. We are rooting for Dorothy and Toto almost from the very beginning. The “wizard” is not capable of returning them to where they came from.

❑ **Lean Prose:** Eliminate as much as possible (you can't always), the following words:

TO BE verbs—*is, was, were* ...

PREPOSITIONS—*in, of, from, out...*

RELATIVE PRONOUNS—*that, which, who* ...

This will eliminate an astonishing 70% of your wordiness and awkwardness. For example, revise these sentences.

- This movie **is** very honest **in** the way it portrays how the Jewish people **were** treated **by** the Nazis, **which was** quite awful.
- The characters **in** the film **are** so similar **to** us **that** as an audience we connect and relate easily **to** them **on** a personal level.
- The movie “Hardball,” directed **by** Brian Robbins, highlights the hardships faced **by** young boys living **in** the inner city **in** a story of a man **with** terrible habits and a large amount **of** debt **who** agrees to coach Little League **in** the projects **for** a loan.
- This documentary **is** very effective **in** connecting **with** the audience.

Consider revising any sentence having more than three words like these.

We will be reading more about these revision techniques in Dr. Guzman's book *Writing Well Wherever You Work*, available at <http://richardguzman.com>

□ ON WRITING A MOVIE REVIEW

The movie review usually comes in four parts and focuses on one issue.

- It opens by making reference to the issue it will focus on.
- It provides a *brief* synopsis of the overall plot
- It identifies specific scenes or images directly related to the focus issue.
- It ends by circling back to the beginning, which we now see in a fuller, more complex light.

Consider this review by Roger Ebert...

and find more of his (and others') reviews at <http://www.rogerebert.com/>

Apocalypse Now (1979)

BY ROGER EBERT / November 28, 1999



[Francis Ford Coppola's film "Apocalypse Now"](#) (Note: This link takes you to his 1979 review) was inspired by *Heart of Darkness*, a novel by Joseph Conrad about a European named Kurtz who penetrated to the farthest reaches of the Congo and established himself like a god. A boat sets out to find him, and on the journey the narrator gradually loses confidence in orderly civilization; he is oppressed by the great weight of the jungle all around him, a pitiless Darwinian testing ground in which each living thing tries every day not to be eaten.

What is found at the end of the journey is not Kurtz so much as what Kurtz found: that all of our days and ways are a fragile structure perched uneasily atop the hungry jaws of nature that will thoughtlessly devour us. A happy life is a daily reprieve from this knowledge.

A week ago I was in Calcutta, where I saw mile upon square mile of squatter camps in which hundreds of thousands live generation after generation in leaky huts of plastic, cardboard and scrap metal, in poverty so absolute it is impossible to see any hope of escape. I do not mean to equate the misery of those hopeless people with a movie; that would be indecent. But I was deeply shaken by what I saw, and realized how precious and precarious is a happy life. And in such a mood I watched "[Apocalypse Now](#)" and came to the scene where Col. Kurtz ([Marlon Brando](#)) tells Capt. Willard ([Martin Sheen](#)) about "the horror."

Kurtz is a decorated hero, one of the best soldiers in the Army, who has created a jungle sanctuary upriver inside enemy territory, and rules Montagnard tribesmen as his private army. He tells Willard about a day when his Special Forces men inoculated the children of a village against polio: "This old man came running after us and he was crying, he couldn't see. We went back there, and they had come and hacked off every inoculated arm. There they were in a pile, a pile of little arms. . . ."

What Kurtz learned is that the Viet Cong were willing to go to greater lengths to win: "Then I realized they were stronger than we. They have the strength, the strength to do that. If I had 10 divisions of those men, then our troubles here would be over very quickly. You have to have men who are moral and at the same time who are able to utilize their primordial instincts to kill without feeling, without passion, without judgment." This is the "horror" that Kurtz has found, and it threatens to envelop Willard, too.

The whole movie is a journey toward Willard's understanding of how Kurtz, one of the Army's best soldiers, penetrated the reality of war to such a depth that he could not look any longer without madness and despair.

The film has one of the most haunting endings in cinema, a poetic evocation of what Kurtz has discovered, and what we hope not to discover for ourselves. The river journey creates enormous anticipation about Kurtz, and Brando fulfills it. When the film was released in 1979, his casting was criticized and his enormous paycheck of \$1 million was much discussed, but it's clear he was the correct choice, not only because of his stature as an icon, but because of his voice, which enters the film from darkness or half-light, repeating the words of T.S. Eliot's despairing "The Hollow Men." That voice sets the final tone of the film.

Another crucial element in the ending is the photojournalist ([Dennis Hopper](#)) who has somehow found Kurtz's camp and stayed there, stoned, as a witness. He blathers to Willard that Kurtz is "a poet-warrior in the classic sense" and "we're all his children." In the photographer's spaced-out ravings we hear disconnected snatches of the poetry he must have heard Kurtz reciting: *If you can keep your head when all about you . . . I should have been a pair of ragged claws, scuttling across the floor of a silent sea. . . .* The photographer is the guide, the clown, the fool, providing the balance between Willard and Kurtz.

Why has "[Apocalypse Now](#)" been so long bedeviled by rumors that Coppola was not happy with this ending? At the film's premiere at Cannes, I saw the confusion begin. Coppola originally intended to show the movie as a 70mm roadshow with no credits (they would be printed in a booklet). But the 35mm release would need end titles. After he was finished filming on the huge set of the Kurtz compound, Coppola was required by the Philippine government to destroy it, and he photographed it being blown up. He decided to use this footage over his closing 35mm credits, even though (this is crucial) he did not intend the destruction of the compound as an alternative "ending" to the film. Alas, confusion about the endings spread from Cannes into movie folklore, and most people thought that by "ending" he meant all of the material involving Kurtz. In the 20th anniversary DVD release, Coppola patiently explains all of this once again.



In any event, seen again now at a distance of 20 years, "[Apocalypse Now](#)" is more clearly than ever one of the key films of the century. Most films are lucky to contain a single great sequence. "[Apocalypse Now](#)" strings together one after another, with the river journey as the connecting link. The best is the helicopter attack on a Vietnam village, led by Col. Kilgore ([Robert Duvall](#)), whose choppers use loudspeakers at top volume to play Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries" as they swoop down on a yard full of schoolchildren. Duvall won an Oscar nomination for his performance and its unforgettable line, "I love the smell of napalm in the morning." His emptiness is frightening: A surfing fanatic, he agrees to the attack only to liberate a beach said to offer great waves ("Charlie don't surf").

There is also the sequence where the patrol boat stops a small fishing boat with a family on board. A little girl makes a sudden dash, and the jumpy machine-gunner (a young [Laurence Fishburne](#)) opens fire, wiping out the entire family. It turns out the girl was running for her puppy. The mother is not quite dead. The boat chief ([Albert Hall](#)) wants to take her for medical treatment. Willard puts a bullet into her; nothing can delay his mission. He and "Chief" are the only two seasoned military men on the boat, trying to do things by the book; later, in a scene with peculiar power, the chief is astonished to be killed by a spear.

For me the most remarkable visuals in the film occur when Chef (Fredric Forrest), one of Willard's crew members, insists on venturing into the forest in search of mangos. Willard can't stop him, so he joins him. The great cinematographer Vittorio Storaro shows them as little human specks at the foot of towering trees, and this is a Joseph Conrad moment, showing how nature dwarfs us.

The rock 'n' roll soundtrack opens and closes with "The End" by the Doors, and includes disc jockeys on transistor radios ("Good morning, Vietnam!"). The music underlines surrealistic moments, as when Lance ([Sam Bottoms](#)), one of Willard's crew, water-skis behind the boat. It also shows how the soldiers try to use the music of home, and booze and drugs, to ease their loneliness and apprehension.

Other important films such as "[Platoon](#)," "[The Deer Hunter](#)," "[Full Metal Jacket](#)" and "Casualties of War" take their own approaches to Vietnam. Once at the Hawaii Film Festival I saw five North Vietnamese films about the war. (They never mentioned "America," only "the enemy," and one director told me, "It is all the same--we have been invaded by China, France, the U.S. . . .") But "[Apocalypse Now](#)" is the best Vietnam

film, one of the greatest of all films, because it pushes beyond the others, into the dark places of the soul. It is not about war so much as about how war reveals truths we would be happy never to discover.

In a way I cannot quite explain, my thoughts since Calcutta prepared me to understand the horror that Kurtz found. If we are lucky, we spend our lives in a fool's paradise, never knowing how close we skirt the abyss. What drives Kurtz mad is his discovery of this.



...To See Before You Die **CURRENT TV**, *hosted by Morgan Spurlock*

Note: When naming or citing films in your papers, use *ITALICS* for film names, not quotes.

50. *Spellbound* (2002)
49. *Madonna: Truth or Dare* (1991)
48. *The Kid Stays in the Picture* (2002)
47. *One Day in September* (1999)
46. *Little Dieter Needs to Fly* (1998)
45. *Decline of Western Civilization: The Metal Years* (1988)
44. *Burma VJ* (2008)
43. *When the Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Acts* (2006)
42. *Catfish* (2010)
41. *The King of Kong: A Fistful of Quarters* (2007)
40. *When We Were Kings* (1996)
39. *Biggie and Tupac* (2002)
38. *March of the Penguins* (2005)
37. *Inside Job* (2010)
36. *Taxi to the Dark Side* (2007)
35. *Paragraph 175* (2000)
34. *Brother's Keeper* (1992)
33. *Tongues Untied* (1989)
32. *Dogtown and Z-Boys* (2001)
31. *Jesus Camp* (2006)
30. *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004)
29. *Man on Wire* (2008)
28. *GasLand* (2010)
27. *Tarnation* (2003)
26. *Murderball* (2005)
25. *Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room* (2005)
24. *Paradise Lost: The Child Murders at Robin Hood Hills* (1996)
23. *The Eyes of Tammy Faye* (2000)
22. *Shut Up & Sing* (2006)
21. *Exit Through The Gift Shop* (2010)
20. *Capturing the Friedmans* (2003)
19. *Touching the Void* (2003)
18. *Food, Inc.* (2008)
17. *Street Fight* (2005)
15. *Crumb* (1994)
16. *Bus 174* (2002)
14. *Dark Days* (2000)
13. *The Fog of War* (2003)
12. *Bowling For Columbine* (2002)
11. *Paris Is Burning* (1990)
10. *Grizzly Man* (2005)
9. *Trouble the Water* (2008)
8. *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006)
7. *The Celluloid Closet* (1995)
6. *The War Room* (1993)
5. *Super Size Me* (2004)
4. *Waltz with Bashir* (2008)
3. *Roger and Me* (1989)
2. *The Thin Blue Line* (1988)
1. *Hoop Dreams* (1994)

A Few (very few) Leading Periodicals

Your library information session will focus on scholarly journals, but some of the country's finest magazines or university journals are also well worth your while and will be permitted as good sources for your papers.

Atlantic Monthly

One of the best general interest magazines. Many articles on culture, society, and politics. Good, long book reviews.

The New Yorker

Perhaps the nation's best literary and public affairs magazines—though note that *The Virginia Quarterly* (see below) is often close behind...and sometimes ahead. Great movie reviews, though its critics don't tend to like a lot of films.

The Virginia Quarterly

Perhaps the best of the leading "University" journals. Art, Literature, General Interest (like *The Atlantic*), and—like *The Atlantic*—a good website.

Commentary

Neoconservative, establishment. Influential, but some think it's overrated.

Harper's

Another great general interest magazine, famous for its statistical renderings of popular topics.

The Harvard Business Review

Perhaps the leading publication on business management and leadership.

Mother Jones

Radical, left point of view, but famous for its investigative reporting.

The Nation

One of the country's longest running left-leaning magazines.

National Review

Perhaps the most interesting conservative magazine.

The New Republic

Long established liberal political magazine.

Rolling Stone

Long established magazine on music, culture, politics. Short, but good, film reviews.

Also look for University "Centers" – for example...

The Stanford Center for Poverty and Inequality

The John Hope Franklin Center for Interdisciplinary and International Studies (Duke)

Film Studies Center, Film Study Center, Film and Screen Studies at University of Chicago, Wesleyan University, Yale, Harvard, etc.

A few good film magazines...

Sights and Sounds
Film Journal

Cineaste
Senses of Cinema

Film Comment

Reviews also at: RogerEbert.com
 Siskel Film Center (<http://www.siskelfilmcenter.org/>)
 Rotten Tomatoes
 Imdb
 HeaveMedia.com *

* Now—regrettably—closed, this site still contains wonderful lists and reviews of music, food, film, etc. Many of its founders and staff were North Central College grads.