

Prof. M. Gail Hamner: 443-5716; [mghamner@syr.edu](mailto:mghamner@syr.edu) (Wednesdays after class, 1-2 p.m., and by appointment. ***Please email me with any questions or concerns!*** It may take me 12-24 hours to respond.)

TA: John Borchert, [j.w.borchert@gmail.com](mailto:j.w.borchert@gmail.com)

## COURSE DESCRIPTION AND APPROACH

Movies and religion are extremely powerful forms of social and personal expression.

In this course we will explore various understandings and functions of religion as we discuss films and articles in light of our experiences. Please be aware that for this course religion is less an object of analysis than an *occasion* for analysis. That is, I am invested in getting us to explore plural meanings and ambiguous images of religion in film. This course will not use film to teach *about* specific religions or faith traditions in any substantial or consistent manner. The twelve films we will screen do refer to Buddhism, Judaism, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and indigenous religions, but I do not approach these films as sufficient or authoritative representations of these religions so much as texts that allow us to analyze and debate *how* and *why* the films are making religious references. (If you want a course to teach you about the traditions, texts, and practices of Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, or Christianity, I encourage you to take one of our Department's traditions courses. This semester we are offering "Religions of the World", "Judaism", "Discovering Islam", "Christianity", "Hinduism" and "Indigenous Religions", and "India's Religious Worlds", among others.)

We will wrestle together with questions like the following: When does a film *signal* the religious? Is it by a certain use of light? Is it in the music? Is it through a character's gaze or dress? A certain set of assertions or beliefs? How are specific indices of religion (e.g., mosques, menorahs, crucifixes) filmed? How are viewer presumptions about 'religion' placed in film to construct or suggest certain norms or values? How does film engage the architectural, domestic, or ritual places of various religions? How does film assume or explore the ways in which religions keep bodies (or institutions, or communities) in their expected places—or the ways in which dominant social and political laws and voices keep religions in *their* expected places? What are the ways in which film negotiates the place of indigenous or immigrant religions vis-à-vis dominant assumptions about religion? How does film track the shifting places of religion in response to war, commodification, or social media?

By not giving religion one set definition, this class can use film as the *occasion* for interpreting, analyzing, and debating the meanings, cultural functions, and powerful affective responses generated by images of religion in film. Finally, this course will give you skills for interpreting film, and for analyzing how religion can be used to crystallize and reflect certain political, economic, social, and sexual parameters of human cultures. I have arranged this semester's films in loose conjunction with the Humanities Center's 2016-2017 theme of "Place." The Units cover, 1) the place of violence in and toward religion; 2) the place of non-belief or loss of faith within religion 3) documentaries that engage religion's place in specific social controversies; and 4) religion in and as a place of memory and history

## REQUIRED COURSE MATERIALS:

1. Bill Nichols, *Engaging Cinema: An Introduction to Film Studies*
2. Articles and other class worksheets and handouts will be posted on Blackboard. Please print these out for class.

## REQUIREMENTS (these are spelled out at the end of the syllabus)

- I. **ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION 20%**
- II. **WEEKLY RESPONSES 30%**
- III. **TWO IN-CLASS TESTS 2 x 10% = 20%**
- IV. **TWO TAKE-HOME EXAMS 2 x 15% = 30%**

## GROUND RULES:

- Speak with respect and care for those who might disagree with you.
- Respect the class process and your peers: come to class on time. If you must be late, enter quietly.
- Once in class please don't leave until class is over unless you have a medical emergency.
- If you must leave during class, I expect you not to return. Bring Kleenex and water to class, if you need it.
- All technology must be used only for this class. If any other application is used I reserve the right to ask you to leave class.
- I may change or substitute readings in light of in-class conversation and developments (but the Nichols textbook readings will remain the same)

## Syllabus

### *UNIT 1: The Place of Religious Violence in Film*

#### **Week 1: Introductions:** *How do we See Religion? How do we think Film* (No response due this week)

Mon	Aug 29	Introductions.
Wed	Aug 31	For class, read: Nichols, Introduction Hamner, Introduction (BB)
Fri	Sep 2	Read: Andre Bazin, “Evolution of the Language of Cinema” (BB) <b>As you read, consider this:</b> What do <i>you</i> take for granted about cinematic ‘language’ now that Bazin did not or could not? Are there today other values besides the image and the real? Introduction to Alfonso Cuarón’s <i>Children of Men</i> (2006, 109 min.)

#### **Week 2: *Children of Men*** (Response due Wed. 9/8 this week)

Mon	Sep 5	<b>Labor Day: No Class</b>
Tue	Sep 6	Screen <i>Children of Men</i>
Wed	Sep 7	Discussion of <i>Children of Men</i> .
Fri	Sep 9	For class read: Nichols, Chapter 1 (29-59). <b>Consider:</b> If film is a language, what does this imply about language? Introduction to Hany Abu-Assad’s <i>Paradise Now</i> (2005, 90 min.)

#### **Week 3: *Paradise Now***

Sun	Sep 11	Screen <i>Paradise Now</i>
Mon	Sep 12	Discussion of <i>Paradise Now</i>
Wed	Sep 14	Read: Nichols, Ch. 2 (60-91, reading the examples, pp. 91-98, is optional)
Fri	Sep 16	Read: Arjun Appadurai, <i>Fear of Small Numbers</i> , chapter 3. <b>Consider:</b> Appadurai’s book is subtitled, “a geography of anger.” Of the factors he explores about the rise of anger against minorities within globalization, which fit <i>Paradise Now</i> ? Which fit your assumptions about religion (both as a minority and as a force acting against or on behalf of minorities)? Introduction to Xavier Beauvois’ <i>Of Gods and Men</i> (2010, 122 min.)

#### **Week 4: *Of Gods and Men***

Sun	Sep 18	Screen <i>Of Gods and Men</i>
Mon	Sep 19	Discussion of <i>Of Gods and Men</i> .
Wed	Sep 21	Read: Nichols, Chapter 4 (136-169, examples optional). Wendy Wright, “Of Gods and Men” (JRF) Cavarrero, <i>Horrorism</i> (1-3) <b>Pause:</b> Allow yourself to reflect on large and hard questions about human nature, violence/aggression, and religion. Consider the pros and cons of poetic and more straightforward narrative film forms for engaging your questions. In-class test preparation.
Fri	Sep 23	55 minute <b><u>TEST</u></b> . Please pick up a <b>handout</b> on Kiarostami’s <i>Taste of Cherry</i>

***UNIT 2: The place of non-faith next to faith in film***

**Week 5: Departures**

Sun Sep 25  
Mon Sep 26  
Wed Sep 28

Screen Abbas Kiarostami, *Taste of Cherry* (1997, 95 min.)

Discussion of *Taste of Cherry*

Read:

Nichols, Chapter 5 (175-208)

Fri Sep 30

Read:

Lauren Berlant, “Cruel Optimism” (BB)

**Consider:** For all the close-up on Baadi’s face, we don’t know much about him. What do you imagine are his thoughts? How does Berlant’s ‘cruel optimism’ help or limit our attempts to interpret the religious dynamics of *Taste of Cherry*?

Introduction to Stanley Kramer’s *Inherit the Wind* (128 min)

**Week 6: Taste of Cherry**

Sun Oct 2  
Mon Oct 3  
Wed Oct 5  
Fri Oct 7

Screen *Inherit the Wind*

Discussion of *Inherit the Wind*

Read: Nichols, Chapter 6 (209-247)

Read:

Elizabeth Grosz, “The Inhuman in the Humanities”

**Consider:** Try to imagine that Grosz is talking particularly about religion (as one subset of the humanities). What have you thought or been taught about religion and animals, about religion and science? Do you think that religion and reason contest one another?

Introduction to Bergman’s *Winter Light* (1963, 81 min.)

**Week 7: Winter Light**

Sun Oct 9  
Mon Oct 10  
Wed Oct 12  
Fri Oct 14

Screen *Winter Light*

Discussion of *Winter Light*

Read:

Nichols, Ch. 10 (only 359-383)

**Consider:** Do these three quite different films make any similar claims or raise similar questions about reason and faith? What insights or questions arise when we reflect on the themes of these films alongside the first unit of the semester?

In-class review in preparation for Take Home exam

Introduction to Vikram Gandhi’s *Kumaré* (2011, 84 min.)

**UNIT III: Putting religion in its social place (Documentary film)**

**Week 8: *Kumaré***

Sun Oct 16 Screen Vikram Gandhi's *Kumaré*  
Mon Oct 17 **TAKE HOME #1 DUE**; Discussion of *Kumaré*  
Wed Oct 19 Read:  
Nichols, Ch. 3 (only 99-126)  
Fri Oct 21 Read: Trinh T. Min-ha, "Documentary is/not a Name"  
Intro to S. Dubowski's *Trembling Before G-d* (2001, 94 min.)

**Week 9: *Trembling Before God***

Sun Oct 23 Screen *Trembling Before G-d* Bird DVD # 11032  
Mon Oct 24 Discussion of *Trembling Before G-d*  
Wed Oct 26 Read:  
Nichols, Ch 3 (126-135) and Ch. 10 (383-394)  
Fri Oct 28 Read:  
Hamner, "Affect Theory as a Tool for Examining Religion Documentaries"  
Introduction to George Ratliff's *Hell House* (2001, 85 min.)

**Week 10: *Hell House***

Sun Oct 30 Screen *Hell House*  
Mon Oct 31 Discussion of *Hell House*  
Wed Nov 2 Read:  
Nichols, Chapter 8  
Fri Nov 4 Read:  
Lynn Schofield Clark, "Angels, Aliens, and the Dark Side of Evangelicalism"

**Week 11: *Review and Pause***

Mon Nov 7 In-class discussion of other documentary clips  
Wed Nov 9 Read:  
Nichols, Chapter 7.  
**Consider:** How does it help to categorize films by genre? What is 'documented' by documentary film? What topics about religion would you like to see documented in film?  
Fri Nov 11 In-class **TEST #2**.  
Please pick up a handout on Pawel Pawlikowski's *Ida*

**UNIT IV: The place of memory (history as memory?)**

**Week 12: *Daughters of the Dust***

Sun	Nov 13	Screen <i>Ida</i>
Mon	Nov 14	Discussion of <i>Ida</i>
Wed	Nov 16	Read: Nichols chapter 11
Fri	Nov 18	No class (AAR) At-home assignment: Introduction to Julie Dash's <i>Daughters of the Dust</i> (1991:112 min)

**HAPPY T-DAY BREAK (even if you don't eat turkey)**

**Week 13: *Ida***

Sun	Nov 27	Screen <i>Daughters of the Dust</i>
Mon	Nov 28	Discussion of <i>Daughters of the Dust</i>
Wed	Nov 30	Read: Nichols Chapter 9
Fri	Dec 2	Read: TBA Introduction to Hirokazu Kore-eda's <i>After Life</i>

**Week 14: *After Life***

Sun	Dec 4	Screen Hirokazu Kore-eda's <i>After Life</i> (1998, 118 min)
Mon	Dec 5	Discuss <i>After Life</i>
Wed	Dec 7	Read: TBA
Fri	Dec 9	Read: TBA Course evaluations

**TAKE HOME EXAM #2 DUE DURING EXAM WEEK**

**Note on DVDs:** Bird Library's media center can be unintentionally difficult. Each film will be on "reserve" up through the due date for the paper in which the film will be discussed. This means the DVDs will be in the "reserve drawer".

**REQUIREMENTS**

**I. ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION 20%:** It may be difficult for you to make the shift from watching movies as sheer entertainment to watching movies as a text to be examined, studied and discussed (albeit still entertaining!). You will benefit from attending class regularly and from attending *to* class, both by not accessing cell phones, email, internet (etc.) during class, and by taking notes on the scenes, terms, and concepts we discuss. The readings we do will sometimes be dense, but I will guide you through them and clarify why they are important to read. For some of you, even the Nichols will be a wave of new vocabulary and novel ways of looking at film. I strongly encourage you to create either a vocabulary journal or flashcards for yourselves. I also strongly encourage you to star passages or concepts that you don't understand and either raise them in class, or email (or come see) me about them. The grading criteria for Attendance and Participation is the following:

- A: 0-2 absences, focused attention in class, consistent and committed participation
- B: 3-4 absences, intermittently focused attention, and usually committed participation
- C: 5 absences, occasionally focused attention, and occasional committed participation
- D: more than 5 absences and clear difficulty attending to or participating in the class
- F: overt disrespect for the pedagogical process, including absences and frequent disruptions.

**II. WEEKLY RESPONSES 30%:** I will divide the class into three groups. Each week, one group will write responses that discusses the film in conjunction with Nichols; a second group will write responses that discusses the religious themes

and images in the film; and students in a third group will be responsible for each selecting the *one* scene or short sequence that s/he considers crucial for grasping the argument of the film *and how religion plays a central role in that argument*. These responses need to be emailed to me before class on Monday. Alternately, the class may also opt to post responses on Blackboard and discuss them with each other. In this case, if you experience *any* difficulty in posting, you are responsible for emailing your response to me so that your response counts as 'on time.' The grading criteria for the weekly responses is as follows:

- A: Paragraphs are packed with detail, cite required readings correctly, and demonstrate intelligent and creative insights. These responses indicate extraordinary effort.
- B: Paragraphs have sufficient detail, usually correct citations, and intelligent and/or creative insights. These paragraphs indicate strong effort.
- C: Paragraphs have slim detail, frequent incorrect or missing citations, occasionally poor grammar or spelling, and insights that are relatively more obvious. These paragraphs indicate less effort.
- D: Paragraphs have slim detail, poor grammar or spelling, and few insights at all. These paragraphs indicate rather little effort. I also give D's to students who turn in responses after Monday's class (regardless of the reason).
- F: I typically give F's only to students who fail to turn in a response before class. You may convert the "F" to a "D" by turning in a late response **before the next response is due**.

**III. TWO IN-CLASS TESTS 2 x 10% = 20%:** These tests are 55 minute tests that cover vocabulary and analysis from Nichols, concepts from lectures and articles, and scene analysis from the films. I will go over the test format in class and give you sample questions. The best way to prepare for these tests is to keep up with the reading, use your class participation to ask questions and use the readings on the films we are watching, and take notes in class.

**TWO TAKE-HOME EXAMS, 2 x 15% = 30%:** For Units two and four, I will give you questions for a take-home exam by the end of the first week of the unit. The exam for Unit two is due the Monday we start Unit three; the exam for Unit four is due on the date scheduled for our final exam. I will give you more questions than I will require you to answer (e.g., I'll ask you to answer 3 of the 5, or 4 of the 7 questions). I want you to answer each question in no more than 2 paragraphs (250 words total per question). I expect these answers to be polished, carefully crafted paragraphs with detailed support drawn from Nichols, the articles, lectures, and specific scenes in the films. Grading criteria here matches the criteria for weekly responses.

#### OFFICIAL POLICIES:

**Academic Integrity:** The Syracuse University Academic Integrity Policy holds students accountable for the integrity of the work they submit. Students should be familiar with the Policy and know that it is their responsibility to learn about instructor and general academic expectations with regard to proper citation of sources in written work. The Policy also governs the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments as well as the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verifications of participation in class activities. Serious sanctions can result from academic dishonesty of any sort. For more information and the complete policy, see <http://academicintegrity.syr.edu/>.

**Disability Statement:** Students who may need academic accommodations due to a disability are encouraged to discuss their needs with the instructor at the beginning of the semester. In order to obtain authorized accommodations, students should be registered with the Office of Disability Services (ODS), 804 University Avenue, Room 309 (315) 443-4498 and have an updated accommodation letter for the instructor. Accommodation and related support services such as exam administration are not provided retroactively and must be requested in advance. For more information about services and policy, visit the Office of Disability Services website at <http://disabilityservices.syr.edu/> or contact the office at the addresses below:

Syracuse University	Phone: (315) 443-4498
Office of Disability Services	TDD: (315) 443-1371
804 University Avenue Room 309	Email: odssched@syr.edu

Syracuse, NY 13244-2330

**Emergencies and Religious Holidays:** Please inform me in writing (email) if you must miss class, a film screening, or a paper due date. In fairness to the other students, if you do not notify me *before* the class, screening or due date, I cannot allow you to make up the work. *This policy includes emergencies, deaths in the family, and medical conditions.* By university policy, if you will miss class or assignments because of a religious holiday, I need to be informed in writing *one week* before the holiday. Travel days around the holiday are not excused.