Summer 6-1-2000

LS 381.01: War on Film

Lynn Purl
University of Montana, Missoula
Course Description:
An examination of cinematic depictions of war and its effects in the U.S. and abroad, from Hollywood to the Holocaust, gung-ho John Wayne action movies to anti-war films, comedies to battle films, propaganda to serious documentaries. We will pay special attention to race and ethnicity, to the roles of women in wartime, and to constructions of masculinity and images of the warrior and conquering hero. While questions have been raised about the possibility of art in the wake of the Holocaust, Vietnam seems to have been the real watershed in American movies’ changing attitudes toward war.

Required texts: Selected readings on reserve or online from the Mansfield Library.

Course requirements: A journal, a turn at leading class discussion, and a term paper, as well as class attendance and participation.

Journal: The journal can take any format you choose and may be typed or handwritten. You should write approximately one page in response to the readings and viewings. I’d like to see that you are familiar with the material and that, even if you haven’t yet mastered it, that you are engaging with it; beyond the one page you may also write about the ways in which issues raised in class intersect with your own life, current events, or anything else you find helpful. The journal is a good place to formulate questions you’d like to raise in class, to begin developing ideas for your paper, and to work through difficult or intriguing concepts.

Discussion sessions: You will each take a turn facilitating class discussion. This can take any form you like: asking discussion questions, giving a presentation and asking class members to respond, showing film clips in class, or whatever you feel will get a lively conversation going.

Paper: A 6-8 page term paper will be due at our last meeting. You will receive a handout with details.

There is no good way to study film without actually watching films, so attendance at all class sessions and film screenings is mandatory. I’ll allow 2 skips, no questions asked. After that, you will need a legitimate excuse, or your grade will be affected. Watching movies is more enjoyable when it’s a collective experience anyway. In addition to being here, you need to keep up with the reading and participate in class discussions.

Grading: The breakdown will be as follows:

Journal: 25%
Paper: 25%
Discussion facilitation: 20%
Participation: 20%
Attendance: 10%
Week 1:
M 5/22 Introduction; watch The Combat Film (1994, the Annenberg/CPB Collection)
T 5/23 View All Quiet on the Western Front (1930, Lewis Milestone, USA, 105m)
W 5/24 Read “Disillusion—Then the Clouds Regather” by Ivan Butler; discussion
Th 5/25 View To Be or Not to Be, (1942, Ernst Lubitsch, USA, 99m)
F 5/26 Read chapter on Paths of Glory; view Paths of Glory (1957, Stanley Kubrick, USA, 86m); journals due.

Week 2:
M 5/29 Memorial Day
T 5/30 Read “Hollywood Goes to War” by Thomas Cripps; view The Sands of Iwo Jima (1949, Allan Dwan, USA, 110m)
W 5/31 Discussion; propaganda examples.
Th 6/1 View The Best Years of Our Lives (1946, William Wyler, USA, 170m)
F 6/2 Read “The Uncertain Peace: The Best Years of Our Lives” by Martin A. Jackson; discussion; journals due.

Week 3:
M 6/5 Read “The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nicolai Leskov” by Walter Benjamin; view Hiroshima mon amour (1959, Alain Resnais, France/Japan, 91m)
T 6/6 Discussion: view Hearts and Minds (1974, Peter Davis, USA, 110m)
W 6/7 Read “‘Charlie Don’t Surf’; Race and Culture in the Vietnam Films” by David Desser; discussion
Th 6/8 View The Deer Hunter (1978, Michael Cimino, USA, 183m)

Week 4:
M 6/12 View Night and Fog (1955, Alain Resnais, France, 30m)
T 6/13 View parts 1-3 of Shoah (1985, Claude Lanzmann, France, 566m)
W 6/14 Read Lanzmann article and “Mishegoss: Schindler’s List, Holocaust representation and film history” by Frank Manchel; discussion.
Th 6/15 View Life Is Beautiful (1997, Roberto Benigni, Italy, 116m)
F 6/16 Discussion; journals due

Week 5:
M 6/19 Read “The Pentagon and Hollywood: Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb” by Lawrence Suid; view Dr. Strangelove (1964, Stanley Kubrick, UK, 93m)
T 6/20 View Saving Private Ryan (1998, Steven Spielberg, USA, 169 m)
W 6/21 Discussion; journals due.
Th 6/22 View Before the Rain (1994, Milcho Manchevski, Macedonia, 120m)
F 6/23 PAPERS DUE; discussion.

NO FINAL EXAM