Philosophy of Film: A Cognitivist Approach (Phil s24a)
M-Th: 10am-2pm, Bates College
Professor William Seeley, 75 Campus Avenue, rm 202
Office Hours: W/Th 2-3pm
wseeley@bates.edu

Course Description:
In this course we will examine several philosophical problems surrounding film as both a form of fine art and a medium of popular entertainment. What makes film a unique artform? How are movies different from television and documentaries...or not? How do films convey an illusion of reality in the theater? What is the basis for our emotional interactions with characters? Who is the film author? What is the nature of cinematic narration? The course will take a cognitivist approach with a focus on recent research in neuroscience of film. But this is not the only approach to the philosophy of film. Over the course of the semester we will discuss the differences between cognitivist theories of film and a range of alternatives.

Course Goals:
The goals of this course are threefold: First and foremost we will try to come to an understanding of what philosophy of film is and how it differs from other approaches to studying film as an artform. In this context the course will introduce students to the basic problems and methods that define the field. The specific lens we will use to approach this material is a cognitivist theory of film. We will explore and evaluate cognitivist theories as alternatives to traditional positions in film theory. Along the way we will explore and evaluate the ways in which neuroscience has come to contribute to cognitivist approaches to film and philosophy of art more generally.

** This seminar will be of interest to students with a background in philosophy of art and cognitive science. However, the course does not presuppose any prior specialized knowledge of philosophy or psychology and should be of interest to students in film studies, film production, or any student with a general interest in film.

Text:

Requirements:
- Four 4-page papers on assigned topics (40% of your final grade)
- One 8-10 page final paper on a topic of your choosing (50% of your final grade due no later than May 26th).
  All students must clear final paper topics with me before May 18.
- Class participation (10% of your final grade - see below)

*This is a preliminary syllabus. It will change as the semester unfolds to accommodate interests that emerge in class discussion.*
ASSIGNMENTS:

Class Participation – Film Screenings: Class time will be divided between discussion and film screenings. I have set aside time for us to have, on average, six hours of discussion and five film screenings a week. As a general rule that means that we will meet for four 1½ - hour seminars each week, four 2-hour movie screenings, and one afternoon screening outside of class each week (see below). Seminars and screenings will all take place Monday through Thursday in 119 Dana Hall during the class period (10am-2pm). Our actual lunch schedule may change on a day to day bases to accommodate the length of the screening, but in general we will break for lunch from 11:30-Noon. The class is very large. However, I expect everyone to participate in class discussion every day. If I feel that folks aren't coming prepared I will administer a short reading quiz at the beginning of each class the average of which will replace the class participation grade.

This is a short term course. Short term courses are designed as immersion experiences. In this case there are simply a lot of films to see in order to get a good sense of what folks are talking about in the literature. I have set up out of class screenings once a week – Tuesday afternoons from 4pm-6pm in room 301 Pettigrew. These screenings are a part of your weekly homework.

Finally, I will ask folks to view a range of films and television programs from the library’s collection on their own outside of class each weekend.

You are required to attend each screening. The class is too large to enable us to casually view the films on our own from the reserve list in the library. If you must miss a screening I will arrange an alternative time for you to watch the movie in the library.

Four short Analysis Papers 1 (900-1100 words): The purpose of these analysis papers is for you to evaluate a standard argument in the literature. This is not an opinion paper. The method of philosophy is critical analysis. We are interested in understanding the reasons behind the values, beliefs, or theories that we hold. These papers reasons, if good, ought to provide logical support for those values, beliefs, or theories. In the following paper you should: identify the theoretical problem at hand; rehearse the standard argument for the position(s) identified; & evaluate whether these reasons genuinely support that (those) position(s). The first step identifies the problem space that you are addressing. The second step should have the form of a rational reconstruction. In a rational reconstruction one does their best to give an argument a fair shake. You should do your best to make the standard argument(s) as plausible as you can. The final step is to respond. Your response should identify any step(s) in the standard argument(s) that you find to be in error. The key here is that you are not analyzing the truth or falsity of the target position directly. Rather you are analyzing the reasoning offered as evidence for that position.

Topics Distributed: Thursday afternoons on LYCEUM
Due Dates: Midnight Sunday evenings on LYCEUM and in class Monday morning in hardcopy

Final paper: A final paper (8-10 double-spaced pages) . You must clear your topic with me by May 18th.

Topic Discussion: By May 18th
Due Date: Midnight May 26th on LYCEUM
SCHEDULE OF READINGS:

What Is a Cognitivist Theory of Film

Realism & Illusion

Language of Film

The Transparency Thesis
Kendall Walton, “Film, photography, and realism” reprinted in eds. Thomas E. Wartenberg and Angela Curran, The Philosophy of Film (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2005), 70-76.

A Cognitivist Approach

Some Problems in the Philosophy of Film

Non-Fiction Film

Horror & Suspense

Neuroscience of Film: attentional engagement and empathy with characters
W. P. Seeley, “What is the neuroscience of art…and why should we care?” The American Society for Aesthetics Newsletter, 31(2), Fall 2011. (LYCEUM: 1-12)


Who is the author?


What is Cinematic Narration?


Moving Image List

Movies:
The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (Robert Wiene, 1920)
The Battleship Potemkin (Sergei Eisenstein, 1925)
The Rules of the Game (Jean Renoir, 1939)
Citizen Kane (Orson Welles, 1941)
The Purple Rose of Cairo (Woody Allen, 1985)
Prospero’s Books (Peter Greenaway, 1991)
  Solaris (Tarkovsky, 1972)
  Stalker (Tarkovsky, 1979)
Alphaville (Jean-Luc Godard, 1965)
Weekend (Jean-Luc Godard, 1967)
  La Chinoise (Jean-Luc Godard, 1967)
  Breathless (Jean-Luc Godard, 1960)
Sleeper (Woody Allen, 1973)
  Bananas (Woody Allen, 1971)
  Take the Money and Run (Woody Allen, 1969)
The Lady from Shanghai (Orson Welles, 1947)
Thelma and Louise (Ridley Scott, 1991)
Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid (George Roy Hill, 1969)
One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest (Milos Forman, 1975)
Atomic Café (Jayne Loader, Kevin Rafferty, 1982)
King Corn (Aaron Wolf, 2007)
Sherman’s March (Ross McElwee, 1986)
  An Inconvenient Truth (Davis Guggenheim, 2006)
  Roger and Me (Michael Moore, 1989)
Alien (Ridley Scott, 1979)
It Came from Outer Space (Jack Arnold, 1953)
The Blob (Irvin Yeaworth, 1958)
  My Stepmother is an Alien (Richard Benjamin, 1988)
The Fly (David Cronenberg, 1986)
Toy Story (John Lasseter, 1995)
Freaks (Todd Browning, 1932)
  Invasion of the Body Snatchers (Don Siegel, 1956)
  Scream (Wes Craven, 1996)
Muppets from Space (Tim Hill, 1999)
  Close Encounters of the Third Kind (Stephen Spielberg, 1977)
  The Good the Bad and the Ugly (Sergio Leone, 1966)
  The Piano (Jane Campion, 1993)
  Saboteur (Alfred Hitchcock, 1942)
Alien: Resurrection (Jean-Pierre Jeunet, 1997)
  Saving Private Ryan (Stephen Spielberg, 1998)
  Kill Bill, Volume 1 (Quentin Tarantino, 2003)
Rear Window (Alfred Hitchcock, 1954)
Momento (Christopher Nolan, 2000)
The Man Who Knew Too Much (Alfred Hitchcock, 1956)
Frantic (Roman Polanski, 1988)
  Spellbound (Alfred Hitchcock, 1945)
  North By Northwest (Alfred Hitchcock, 1959)
  Mulholland Drive (David Lynch, 2001)
  Apocalypse Now (Francis Ford Coppola, 1979)

TV Episodes:
Cheyenne & The Rockford Files
The Fugitive & The Incredible Hulk
MacMillan and Wife & Veronica Mars
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Readings (*supplementary reading; **screen on your own by date)</th>
<th>Screening / Assignments</th>
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<tr>
<td>04/25</td>
<td>Introduction: NO READINGS</td>
<td>The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari, Potemkin</td>
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<td>04/26</td>
<td>SCREENINGS</td>
<td>Purple Rose of Cairo Prospero's Books</td>
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<td>04/27</td>
<td>Currie, “Film, reality and illusion” (LYCEUM: 325-346)</td>
<td>Alphaville</td>
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<td>Bazin, “Cinematic realism” (LYCEUM: 59-69)</td>
<td>**Breathless</td>
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<td>04/28</td>
<td>Pudovkin, “On editing” (LYCEUM: 9-14)</td>
<td>Weekend</td>
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<td>Henderson, “Toward a non-bourgeois camera style” (LYCEUM: 57-67)</td>
<td>**La Chinoise</td>
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<td>Currie, “The long goodbye…” (LYCEUM: 207-19)</td>
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<td>* Eco, “On the contribution of film to semiotics” (LYCEUM)</td>
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<td>* Eisenstein, Beyond the shot &amp; “The dramaturgy of…” (LYCEUM)</td>
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<td>Bazin, “The evolution of the language of cinema” (LYCEUM)</td>
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<td>05/02</td>
<td>Bordwell, &quot;Convention, construction &amp;…&quot; (LYCEUM: 87-107)</td>
<td>Sleeper</td>
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<td>**Bananas</td>
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<td>**Take the Money and Run</td>
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<td>Analysis Paper 1 due</td>
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<td>05/03</td>
<td>Carroll, “Film as art” (PMP: 7-34)</td>
<td>Lady from Shanghai</td>
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<td>Walton, “Film, photography, and realism” (LYCEUM: 70-76)</td>
<td>One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest</td>
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<td>(P'Grew 301, 4-6)</td>
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<td>05/04</td>
<td>Carroll, The moving picture – the shot (PMP: 80-115)</td>
<td>Thelma and Louise</td>
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<td>Butch Cassidy &amp; the Sundance Kid</td>
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<td>(clips – cliff jump &amp; ending)</td>
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<td>05/05</td>
<td>Carroll, “Moving images – cinematic sequencing and…” (PMP: 116-146)</td>
<td>North by Northwest</td>
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<td>05/09</td>
<td>Carroll, “Affect and the moving image” (PMP: 147-191)</td>
<td>Atomic Café</td>
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<td>King Corn</td>
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<td>**An Inconvenient Truth</td>
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<td>Analysis Paper 2 due</td>
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<td>05/10</td>
<td>Plantinga, “Moving pictures &amp; the rhetoric of…” (LYCEUM: 307-324)</td>
<td>King Corn</td>
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<td>(P'Grew 301, 4-6)</td>
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<td>05/11</td>
<td>Freeland, “Feminist Frameworks for Horror” (LYCEUM: 195-218)</td>
<td>Alien</td>
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<td>Aliens (clip-final scenes)</td>
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<td>05/12</td>
<td>SCREENING:</td>
<td>It Came from Outer Space</td>
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<td>Weekend Screening:</td>
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<td>The Fly</td>
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<td>The Blob</td>
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<td>Toy Story (clip - escape from Sid)</td>
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<td>Freaks (clip – “one of us”)</td>
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<td>05/17</td>
<td>Seeley, “What is the neuroscience of art…” (LYCEUM: 1-12)</td>
<td>The Good the Bad and the Ugly</td>
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<td>Hasson, “Neurocinematics” (LYCEUM: 1-26)</td>
<td>(clip - opening 30 minutes)</td>
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<td>Solaris (P'Grew 301, 4-6)</td>
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<td>05/18</td>
<td>Coplan, “Catching characters emotions…” (LYCEUM: 26-38)</td>
<td>The Piano</td>
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<td>Niedenthal, “Embodying emotions” (LYCEUM: 1002-1005)</td>
<td>(clip - up to leaving beach)</td>
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<td>(clip-Statue of Liberty)</td>
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<td>Alien Resurrection (clip-final scene)</td>
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<td>The Good the Bad and the Ugly (clip- introducing The Bad)</td>
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<td>Rear Window</td>
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<td>(clip-Grace Kelley gets caught)</td>
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<td>Analysis Paper 3 Due</td>
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<td>05/19</td>
<td>Pessoa et al.</td>
<td>“Attentional control...emotional stimuli”</td>
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<td>Pessoa &amp; Adolphs</td>
<td>“Emotion processing and...”</td>
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<td>Duncan &amp; Barrett</td>
<td>“Affect is a form of cognition...”</td>
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<td>05/23</td>
<td>Coplan</td>
<td>“Empathic engagement with narrative...”</td>
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<td>Speer et al.</td>
<td>“Reading stories activates neural...”</td>
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<td>05/24</td>
<td>Hayhoe &amp; Ballard</td>
<td>“Eye movements in...”</td>
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<td>Ballard et al.</td>
<td>“Deictic codes for the embodiment...”</td>
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<td>Thompson &amp; Bordwell</td>
<td>“Observations on film art”</td>
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<td>Zacks &amp; Magliano</td>
<td>“Film, Narrative, and...”</td>
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<td>05/25</td>
<td>Truffaut</td>
<td>“La Politique des Auteurs.”</td>
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<td>Sarris</td>
<td>“Auteur theory and film evaluation”</td>
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<td>Livingstone</td>
<td>“Cinematic authorship”</td>
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<td>Gaut</td>
<td>“Film authorship and collaboration”</td>
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<td>05/26</td>
<td>Bordwell</td>
<td>“Principles of film narration”</td>
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<td>Wilson</td>
<td>“Narration as showing”</td>
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Analysis Paper 1: Film Realism and a Language of Film.
Please write a 3-4 page (900-1000 words) paper on one of the following topics. Your paper should be double-spaced in 12 point font with 1” margins.

Topic a: What is Henderson’s argument about the formal role played by tracking shots in Jean-Luc Goddard’s Weekend. Discuss this claim through a Pudovkin-esque lens. Is Henderson making a formalist claim? Discuss the influence of narrative content and meaning on a formal analysis of the film.

Topic b: Can you provide a Pudovkin-esque reading of the editing and camera work in Alphaville? How do the tracking shots differ from those discussed in Henderson? Do you find Goddard’s technique to be successful for this film?

Topic c: Currie argues that an artwork can be realistic in some aspects but not others. I argued that this claim generates a problem for Currie’s perceptual realism. What is Currie’s theory and what is the problem? Can Currie escape it?

Topic d: Do you find Currie’s claim that cinematic motion is not illusory apparent motion plausible? How does your answer affect your interpretation of his more general argument for perceptual realism in film?

Due: Midnight Sunday May 1 in the dropbox on Lyceum & in hardcopy in class Monday May 2.
Analysis Paper 2: Cognitivist Theories of Film.

Please write a 3-4 page (900-1000 words) paper on one of the following topics. Your paper should be double-spaced in 12 point font with 1” margins. Please feel free (or encouraged) to use the material in Chapter 6: Affect and the Moving Image (Carroll) in constructing your answers.

Topic a: How do the films we have screened so far employ the formal devices introduced by Pudovkin and Carroll to develop their narratives? Choose one narrative aspect of either Purple Rose of Cairo, Lady from Shanghai, or Thelma and Louise and evaluate the way it was developed from Carroll’s Cognitivist perspective. Examples might be the use of attention management techniques in the development of knowledge in Lady from Shanghai or shifts in character in Thelma and Louise.

Topic b: Discuss the concept of closure in the context of one of the movies we have screened so far this semester (e.g., how are the fun house mirrors used as a formal device for closure in Lady from Shanghai).

Topic c: The odd geography of the trip Thelma and Louise take may well be physically impossible – could you really cross through all those landscapes in the time frame of the narrative? Discuss the use of setting in the film as a narrative device to shape our attention and our interpretation of the events. (e.g., at one point towards the end of the film they walk past a horse tied to rail on their way to their car - a clear allusion to the narrative structure of modern Westerns).

Topic d: What does it mean when Thelma says (something like), “I feel so awake,” to Louise towards the end of Thelma and Louise? What formal role does this play in the narrative? How does it shape our interpretation of characters? What does it foreshadow?

Topic e: Discuss the development of McMurphy’s character in One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest? Does the moment of closure precede the penultimate scene? Where is the a tipping point after which he cannot escape?

Due: Midnight Tuesday May 10 in the dropbox on Lyceum & in hardcopy in class Wednesday, May 11.
Analysis Paper 3: Horror and Narrative.
Please write a 2-3 page (600-900 words) paper on one of the following topics. Your paper should be double-spaced in 12 point font with 1” margins. Please use the material in Carroll’s chapter on horror on Lyceum in constructing your answers.

Topic a: Is David Kessler a monster in An American Werewolf in London? Why or why not

Topic b: Construct an argument for a instrumentalist interpretation of documentary film from Carroll’s erotetic model for film narrative.

Topic c: The alien is described as "naturally perfect organism" in the movie Alien. What does this say about the role/concept of the monstrous in the film? Who or what is the monster?

Topic d: Construct an argument against interpreting either Alien or An American Werewolf in London as a horror film.

Topic e: Give an interpretation of One Flew Over the Cuckoo's nest a horror film? Is this interpretation, in the end, sound?

Due: Midnight Tuesday May 17 in the dropbox on Lyceum & in hardcopy in class Wednesday, May 18.
Final Paper Topic List

Please write a 6-8 page (1800-2400 words – 12 point font) paper on a topic of your choosing. The following are some suggested topics. Some of the topics may require you to find and gain access to the film on your own (the library may not have them). The list may grow as the semester unfolds so make sure to check back often. If you choose your own topic make sure to run it by me first. You are also free to choose an analysis paper topic that you did NOT write about and expand it into a 6-8 page paper.

Analyze commonalities between Stephen Spielberg’s Close Encounters of the Third Kind and Tim Hill’s Muppets from Space using the range of critical devices introduced in Noel Carroll’s book Philosophy of the Moving Image. Pay particular attention to the way the Muppet film mimics, and thereby critiques the range of narrative devices employed in Close Encounters.

Analyze It Came from Outer Space and The Blob as exemplars of both Carroll’s discussion of the horror genre and our discussion of the use of the concept of monsters to engage in cultural criticism.

Compare the use of the concept of the monstrous as a narrative device in It Came from Outer Space, I Married a Monster from Outer Space, and My Stepmother is an Alien. Is Kim Bassinger’s character a monster in the traditional sense of the earlier movies. If so/not how is this category (or divergences from its standard application) used to drive the comic aspects of the film. How are these comic aspects used to shape moral expectations and drive the erotetic quality of the latter narrative.

Much of the humor in My Stepmother is an Alien revolves around the emerging romance between Dan Ackroyd and Kim Bassinger’s characters. In large part this humor is inappropriate, to say the least. However, the movie is a canonical example of a 1980s mainstream comedy genre that spoofed scifi horror from the 1950s and the 1960s. The romance element was a critical, albeit clunky, narrative device in these earlier scifi horror movies (see for instance The Blob). Discuss and evaluate this change in the portrayal of the central romance in scifi spoofs from a feminist perspective. Does this move work in My Stepmother is an Alien as a critique of either the earlier genre or related conservative social mores, or does it come across as self-indulgent?

Analyze the concepts of emotional contagion, empathy, and criterial prefocusing in The Good the Bad and the Ugly and The Piano. Make sure to include reference to the facial feedback hypothesis (Plantinga, “The Scene of Empathy”), Amy Coplan, Noel Carroll, and Carl Plantinga in your paper and to discuss the relative merits of each of their theories.

Evaluate the documentaries Atomic Café and King Corn using Plantinga’s instrumentalist theory of non-fiction film. Discuss the way the director used erotetic narrative devices to develop the viewer’s point of view.

Is Sherman’s March a documentary? In formulating your answer make sure to discuss the role of questions of self-identity, questions of realism, truth, and rhetoric, and the general use of erotetic narrative structure as a rhetorical device in the film.

Use Jean-Luc Godard’s Alphaville to analyze the variety of theories of film realism (Illusion, Transparency, Language of Film, and Cognitivism).
Choose three candidate monsters (that you have not already discussed in an analysis paper) from three separate films that we screened this semester. Evaluate their status as monsters and their role as narrative devices in the films. Feel free to be a bit creative with your interpretation here.

I have argued that the construction of the category of art horror, and in particular of monsters, makes horror films good vehicles for deep social commentary. Discuss this claim and illustrate it with examples from the movies we screened this semester.

Is Gonzo a monster in *Muppets from Space*? Make sure to frame your answer as a full discussion of the concept of the monstrous including illustrations from a range of other movies we screened.

Think of something to write about Woody Allen's *Sleeper*. How does it slot into the syllabus? Does it provide us purchase with the concepts of film realism, erotetic narrative, empathy, or criterial prefocusing?

What role does the *Streetcar Named Desire* scene play in Woody Allen's *Sleeper* (I've always wanted someone to tell me)?

We haven't had a chance to talk about television. However the same range of cognitivist devices can be applied to TV dramas. Here are three potential topics that draw from the TV episodes that I have placed on reserve for you for the semester:

Television programs like *The Fugitive* and *The Hulk* are driven by a conflict between a local perception of the protagonist as a monster within the narrative and our global perspective of the same character as a misunderstood hero. Are these dramas within the horror genre? Do their transparent explorations of the concept of self-identity tell us anything interesting about horror?

Westerns traditionally involve a "lone maverick" character whose identity lies between right and wrong. As a result, although he or she pursues justice they may not be hero. Use a comparative analysis of *Cheyenne* and *The Rockford Files* to discuss the role of these characters within the erotetic structure of the Western. Can you give a Carroll-style definition of a "hero." Is Jim Rockford an "anti-hero" – what would that mean?

*MacMillan and Wife* and *Veronica Mars* are in what could be called the family sleuth genre. One could also argue that they fit in a feminist mold. They both involve female leads who occupy subordinate, supporting roles within their fictional worlds...but occupy strong leading roles within the narrative, i.e., Kristen Bell (Veronica) is a child helping her father by answering phones at his detective agency and Susan St. James (Sally) is the Police Commissioner's wife (note the similarities between Rock Hudson and Enrico Colantoni's roles as well). Discuss this suggestion in a comparative analysis of these two TV crime dramas.

Hitchcock's *Rear Window* literally illustrates the full range of issues we have discussed this semester. Please use the movie to explore and analyze theories of film realism, authorship, the shot, the sequence, affect, narrative, and attention in film.

Compare *Rear Window* and *Momento* as examples of the use of criterial prefocusing and attention management devices.

Does Amy Coplan's pluralistic account resolve Noel Carroll's objections to empathy theories of narrative engagement?

Does the psychological and neuroscientific evidence that we discussed this semester support a simulation account of narrative engagement?

Discuss the ways in which the psychological and neuroscientific evidence that we discussed this semester relates to our discussions of criterial prefocusing and the use of attention management devices.