

Instructors:

Sec A – (Fall Term) Samantha Wilson [samantha.wilson@concordia.ca] & (Winter Term) Andrée Lafontaine [hellodd@gmail.com]

Sec B – Donato Totaro [donato.totaro@concordia.ca]

Sec AA – Johanne Larue [jojohannelarue@gmail.com]

The Final Exam screening film is *In the Cut* (2003) 119 min.

Director: Jane Campion (USA)

Screenplay: Jane Campion, Susanna Moore (from her novel)

Director of Photography: Dion Beebe

Original Music: Hilmar Örn, Hilmarsson

Editor: Alexandre de Franceschi

Production Design: David Brisbin

Art Direction: David Stein

Set Decoration: Andrew Baseman

Cast: Meg Ryan (Frannie Avery), Jennifer Jason Leigh (Pauline), Mark Ruffalo (Detective Giovanni A. Malloy), Nick Damici (Detective Ritchie Rodriguez), Michael Nuccio (Frannie's younger Father), Kevin Bacon (John Graham)

The take-home exam should be submitted to the Cinema Office (FB-319) on Wednesday, April 16, 2014, before 6:00pm. **Late work will be penalized.** It can be written in either English or French and must be typed and double-spaced.

- 1) Be certain that both your name and your instructor's name are on the exam.
- 2) If you would like your graded take-home exam returned to you with comments you must attach a stamped, self-addressed envelope to your exam, and it will be mailed to you after corrected. If you decide to forego this option, your paper will be graded and (probably) discarded.
- 3) This is not an historical research paper, hence we expect you to restrict your sources to the required course readings (David Bordwell & Kristin Thompson, André Bazin, Noel Carroll, Susan Sontag, Anne Sheppard, and Anne Friedberg). When you do refer to the readings do not forget to cite all the sources in footnotes or endnotes. Limiting your sources in this way will help us in evaluating your understanding of the notions presented in class.

YOU MUST WRITE ESSAY I AND ESSAY II DESCRIBED BELOW :

Part 1 is worth 30% and Part 2 is worth 10%, for a total of 40% of your course grade.

PART 1: 30%

I) You are to write a critical-evaluative essay between 1,750 and 2,000 words in length on *In the Cut* (please include separate word counts for part 1 & 2). This course has been organized to encourage you to look at films more closely than you may have done previously. This goal is one of the reasons why we take the time in class to closely analyze sections from films on DVD, Blu-Ray, Laserdisc, or VHS. This final essay is expected to reflect a similar visual and aural awareness of film.

We want you to relate and support your evaluation with precise description and interpretation. Remember, this is not a research paper but an exposition of your views based on DESCRIPTION, INTERPRETATION AND EVALUATION, with the emphasis being on how you relate your evaluation to your interpretation(s) and descriptions. Although you are free to discuss what YOU think the film is about, as you assess its style and overall value, you are **strongly encouraged** to consider **one** of the following groupings of formal aspects as part of your interpretation:

- a) editing and sound
- b) moving camera and framing
- c) lighting and colour

You may also add ONE other formal element from one of the other two groupings you have not chosen for a total of three formal elements (i.e. add editing to group 'b' or framing to group 'c', etc.). Please list the two (or three) formal elements you are using as your essay header (or along with your title, if you choose to title your essay). **As a reminder, your essay should not include a plot summary.**

As a further aid to your analysis, you can use the following discussion as a trigger point for your paper. According to Noël Carroll's essay (included in the coursepack) "Introducing Film Evaluation," part of the process of properly evaluating a film "involves placing the film...in a certain category....To evaluate, one categorizes" (p. 150). Jane Campion's *In the Cut* was a box-office failure when it was released in 2003, largely because audiences were not able to properly gauge its genre or, to quote Carroll, resolve "the problem of the correct category" (p. 151). Ostensibly a serial killer/thriller film, *In the Cut* also has elements of the 'art film' in its foregrounded stylisation (color, framing, composition, narrative structure), complex female characters, and frank depiction of sexual representation. Your evaluative essay can be based on this dichotomy between expectation and execution. Is *In the Cut* compromised because it fails to meet the populist expectations of a serial killer/thriller film? Or is it to be lauded for challenging the genre by adding an 'art film' sensibility to its story and form?

Remember the emphasis of this essay is not to present the most 'clever' interpretation but on how the interpretation can be best supported by visual and sound components of the film. This is an EVALUATIVE essay, but there is no evaluation without description and interpretation.

The film will be screened twice on Blu-ray, with a short break in-between each screening. Although the film is readily available on DVD and Blu-ray, it is **strongly recommended** that you stay for both screenings. Seeing the film on a big screen will give you a greater appreciation and awareness of the film's visual and aural detail and texture. The first screening will proceed with the house lights all the way down. For the second screening the lights will be turned on slightly so that you can take notes.

PART 2: 10%

II) The second part of the take-home exam will test your comprehension of the course ideas by enabling you to delve deeper into one of three key course readings. You will choose **one** of the three topics below and write a short essay (approx. 500 words).

a) In "Against Interpretation," Susan Sontag discusses the necessity of recovering our senses and learning how "to see more, to hear more, to feel more," in order to find an appropriate critical vocabulary that would "dissolve considerations of content into those of form". What are some of the factors which determine Sontag's position in regards to art criticism? In what way can her position be beneficial to an analysis of **one** of the following films: *Wavelength*, *Mouvement perpétuel*, *Very Nice, Very Nice*, *Day of Wrath*, *L'année dernière à Marienbad*, *Black Narcissus*, *Night Mayor*, *Trees of Syntax*, or *Touch of Evil*?

b) In "The End of Modernity: Where is Your Rupture?", Anne Friedberg uses Andreas Huyssen's distinction between modernism and the avant-garde as a way toward understanding postmodernism as a cultural and discursive 'divide' rather than a temporal/historical 'divide.' In this theorisation modernism clearly separates itself from mass/popular culture, whereas the avant-garde rejects any clear 'divisions' from mass/popular culture and attempts to incorporate or appropriate elements of mass/popular culture. In this reading, the historical avant-garde is seen as a forebear to postmodernism, with its blurring of low art and high art. How does *In the Cut* fit into this discourse? Is *In the Cut* a 'modernist' or 'avant-garde/postmodernist' film?

c) In the essay "Formalism and Critical Evaluation" Noël Carroll writes: "Many works of art are created within social frameworks where more is being attempted than formal accomplishment and where those works are used by consumers—that is, appreciated, discussed, and prized—in terms of considerations that go beyond the formal. Given that our practices (and their subtending purposes) with regard to some art involve attending to more than formal virtue, our evaluative standards should be somewhat broader. This, it seems to me, implies that cognitive and moral insight can count favourably in the artistic evaluation of some artworks" (p. 331). The above quote synthesizes one of the central points in Carroll's essay: that good interpretation and evaluation must be based on more than a strict formalist reading of an isolated text. He refers to this position as 'soft formalism'. How might this argument be applied to the understanding and appreciation of (choose **ONE** film) *David Holzman's Diary*, *One Way or Another*, *Seven Beauties*, *Black Narcissus*, *Reassemblage*, *An Autumn Afternoon*, *Mean Streets*, or *In the Cut*?