

# *Myth and Ritual on Film*

RELI 20803

Texas Christian University, 2004

Instructor: Dr. S. Brent Plate

Time: MW 1.00-1.50; Lab T 3.30-5.30ish

Office hours: 10.00-11.00am Monday/ Wednesday, or by appointment  
Room 222 Beasley Hall

## **Course Description:**

Religion is about the creation of worlds. Film is about the re-creation of worlds. Religions typically provide myths about the creation of the world, and then, through reorderings of space and time, religions establish rituals to reenact those myths. Film works on a level similar to religious ritual in that it begins with the raw (albeit abstract) material of space and time and bends them each in new ways. The result of both film and religious ritual is a re-created world: a world of recreation, a world of fantasy, a world of ideology, a world we may long to live in or a world we wish to avoid at all costs. In the end we will enquire about how cinema might help to reinvent traditional religious rituals in our contemporary age, as well as how a deeper understanding of the aesthetic nature of religious rituals might alter the production of film.

Through readings and film screenings, students will be able to detect the formal structures that comprise film (e.g., cinematography, mise-en-scene, editing), and to discern how these each contribute to the creation of new worlds on screen. With this in the foreground, students will be able to see analogies to the ways in which religious myths and rituals are constructed, and thus be able to analyze the formal components of religious practices.

## **Course Texts:**

### **Required:**

-Robert Kolker, *Film, Form and Culture*, w/CD-ROM, (abbreviated: *FFC*)

-*Film as Religion*, John Lyden (abbreviated *FaR*)

-Other readings at online syllabus website.

## **Course Requirements:**

- ☀ **Presence.** 25% of the final grade. "Presence" entails a general sense of bringing both body and mind to the classroom for discussions. "Presence" means not coming to class and asking what you were *supposed* to have read; "presence" means listening to the others in the classroom; "presence" means not checking your watch every 10 minutes; "presence" means, to use the title of one religious film, "being there."

This course is a seminar, and therefore relies on informed comments by students on a regular basis. The grade for "Presence" includes attendance, which is required for the regular MW meetings and the film screenings every Tuesday. The grade also entails that students have read assigned readings *before* class, and come prepared to discuss the readings in conjunction with the film screenings. You will be graded on your ability to analyze and synthesize films and readings; on the frequency, relevance and insights of your comments; and on your ability to present your ideas coherently to the class. Presence grades will be calculated from: 1) my own notes from class sessions, in which I note who was significantly involved in discussion, 2) your own self-assessment of your contributions to class discussion, and 3) your assessment of others

in the class (more about this in class). Assessment will occur twice during the semester, and I will calculate your presence grades based on the three components listed here at that time and report them back to you.

☀ **Critical Response Papers.** 30% of final grade. About one per week (12 total), students are required to submit a critical response paper, commenting on the film screened that week, and incorporating all the readings for that week. Paragraphs should be approximately 250-300 words, typewritten. Although these are short and should not take long to compose, they should be carefully written and thoughtful. The purpose of these papers is to engage the readings and films and to articulate your engagement succinctly and clearly in writing. Be prepared to share your work in class.

☀ **2 Film Review-essays + 1 Draft + 1 Oral presentation.** 45% of final grade in total (7.5% for the draft, 7.5% for oral presentation, 15% for each of the two reviews). The two final review-essays are to be 4-6 pp. each (1200-1500 words) typed, double-spaced. Note on the syllabus the dates these are due.

Each review-essay is of a film of your choosing; however, many suggestions are given at the online syllabus. Because thinking critically about film is a vital component to this course, students are required to submit a draft of the first review-essay. This is intended to stimulate you to think about the film you wish to review at an early date, and to make sure you are heading in the right direction for your approach to the review-essay. More information on this will be given in class. The first review-essay should be related to topics brought up in the first half of the course under the topics “Religious Myths on Film,” or “Worlds.” The second review-essay should be on some dimension of ritual, including topics on “Sacred Time” or “Sacred Space.” You will be graded on your ability to critically interact with the film as well as your ability to apply insights learned from the class to an analysis of the films.

**Course Outline:**

	<b><u>Introduction: Sacred Seeing/Seeing the Sacred</u></b>
25 Aug-Wed	Introductions
30 Aug-Mon	<u>Readings:</u> <i>FaR</i> , 41-55
31 Aug-Tue	<u>Screening:</u> <i>Baraka</i> (dir. Ron Fricke) 87min.
1 Sep-Wed	<u>Readings:</u> <i>FFC</i> , pp 1-17, + see “Introduction” to the CD-ROM. <b>First CRP due: Question: Does <i>Baraka</i> show us the “real world”?</b>
6 Sep-Mon	<b>No Class – Labor Day</b>
7 Sep-Tue	<u>Screening:</u> <i>Cinema Paradiso</i> (dir. Giuseppe Tornatore) 123min <u>Readings:</u> William Paden, “Worlds” (Online)
8 Sep-Wed	Discuss <i>Cinema Paradiso</i> and religious worlds <b>CRP 2 Due: Question: How does <i>Cinema Paradiso</i> display a “religious world”?</b>

	<b>I. Religious Myths on Film</b>
13 Sep-Mon	<u>Reading:</u> <i>FaR</i> , “Myths about Myth” 56-78
14 Sep-Tue	<u>Screening:</u> <i>The Matrix</i> (dir. Wachoski bros., 136 min.)
15 Sep-Wed	<u>Readings:</u> John Ford on <i>The Matrix</i> (online) <b>CRP 3 Due: Question: What are the myths of <i>The Matrix</i>? How does the film “clothe conceptions of a general order of existence”?</b>
20 Sep-Mon	<u>Readings:</u> <i>FFC</i> , 22-33, + see CD-ROM “mise-en-scene”
21 Sep-Tue	<u>Screening:</u> <i>Breaking the Waves</i> (dir. von Trier, 152 min.)
22 Sep-Wed	<u>Readings:</u> Kyle Keefer and Tod Linafelt on <i>Breaking the Waves</i> (online) <b>CRP 4 Due: Question: What are the myths of <i>Breaking the Waves</i>? How does the use of <i>mise-en-scene</i> bring out these myths?</b>
	<b>II. Sacred Time</b>
	<b><u>Cyclical Time: Repetition</u></b>
27 Sep-Mon	<u>Readings:</u> <i>FaR</i> , pp. 79-82.
28 Sep -Tue	<u>Screening:</u> <i>Before the Rain</i> (dir. Milcho Manchevski) 112 min
29 Sep-Wed	Eliade, “Sacred Time and Myths” (online) <b>CRP 5 Due: What type of mythical time does <i>Before the Rain</i> portray? How?</b>
4 Oct-Mon	<u>Readings:</u> <i>FFC</i> , 38-49 + CD-ROM on “continuity editing” & “montage”
5 Oct-Tue	<u>Screening:</u> <i>Antonia’s Line</i> (dir. Marleen Gorris) 102 min
6 Oct-Wed	<u>Readings:</u> Lesley Northrup, “Ritualizing Space and Time” (online) <b>CRP 6: Question: How does <i>Antonia’s Line</i> counteract Eliade’s versions of time?</b>
	<b><u>Ending Time: Apocalypse</u></b>
11 Oct-Mon	<b><i>Draft of First Film Review Essay due.</i></b> Reading: <i>FaR</i> , pp. 83-94
12 Oct-Tue	<u>Screening:</u> <i>La Jetee</i> (dir. Chris Marker) 30 min.
13 Oct-Wed	<u>Readings:</u> Peter Berger, “The Sacred Canopy,” & D.H. Lawrence, from <i>Apocalypse</i> (online) <b>CRP 7: Question: Is this the end, or just the beginning?</b>
18 Oct-Mon	Discussion of Apocalypse.

19 Oct-Tue	<u>Screening:</u> $\pi$ (dir. Darren Aronofsky) 85 min
20 Oct-Wed	<u>Readings:</u> Briggs and Peat, Forward and Prologue from <i>The Turbulent Mirror</i> . (online). <b>CRP 8: Question: How does the end of time correlate with the beginning of time?</b>
	<b>III. Sacred Space</b>  <b><u>Moving Through Space: Pilgrimage</u></b>
25 Oct-Mon	<b><i>Final First Film Review-Essay Due</i></b>
26 Oct-Tue	<u>Screening:</u> <i>Wizard of Oz</i> (dir. Victor Fleming) 100min
27 Oct-Wed	<u>Readings:</u> David Carrasco, “Those who go on a Sacred Journey” (online) <b>CRP 9: Question: Is <i>The Wizard of Oz</i> a pilgrimage? How and Why?</b>
1 Nov-Mon	<u>Readings:</u> <i>FFC</i> , 36-37 + CD-ROM “point of view” & “camera”
2 Nov-Tue	<u>Screening:</u> <i>The Straight Story</i> (dir. David Lynch) 112min
3 Nov-Wed	<u>Readings:</u> Frederick Ruf “Postmodern Pilgrimage” (online) <b>CRP 10: Question: Just why is the journey so important?</b>
	<b><u>Staying in Place: Communal Life</u></b>
8 Nov-Mon	<u>Readings:</u> Eliot Deutsch, “Community as Ritual Participation” (online)
9 Nov-Tue	<u>Screening:</u> <i>You Can’t Take it With You</i> (dir. Capra) 126min
10 Nov-Wed	<b>CRP 11: Question: Are the Sycamores “creative anarchists”? How and Why?</b>
15 Nov-Mon	<u>Readings:</u> Interview w/Daniel Sack about “food and religion” (online)
16 Nov-Tue	<u>Screening:</u> <i>Chocolat</i> (dir. Hallström) 121min
17 Nov - Wed	<b>CRP 12: Question: Is it the food or the symbol?</b>
22-24 Nov	<b>NO Class</b>

	<b><u>Death and Afterlives</u></b>
29 Nov-Mon	<u>Readings</u> : Ronald Grimes, “Living With the Dead” (online)
30 Nov-Tue	<u>Screening</u> : <i>The Sweet Hereafter</i> (dir. Egoyan) 112min
1 Dec-Wed	No CRP.
6 Dec-Mon	Oral presentation on second film review
7 Dec-Tue	Oral presentation on second film review
8 Dec-Wed	Oral presentation on second film review
10 Dec-Fri	<b><u>Second Film Review-Essay Due by 5.00pm</u></b>