Course Objectives: The “Action Film” is the highest-grossing, most-exported genre to come out of Hollywood in the last 50 years. In this course, we will examine cinematic ‘action’ with a view to the values screened via entertainment. We will begin with a look at the action hero and his/her relation to the heroic tradition of ritual sacrifice and redemption, as well as the history of the “Motion Picture” and the exigencies of the medium. Then, along with some readings in film studies, philosophy of action and practical reason, we will explore the action genre’s formulas, tropes and narratives, its reflections of the socio-political climate of the times and its relation to the narrative of our selves. Throughout, we will pay close attention to the portrayal of key values such as strength, courage, goodness and effective agency.

Texts: In the Bookstore:


Made available in Reserve and on the CourseSpaces course site:

- Plato, *The Republic* (selections)
- Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (selections)
- Yvonne Tasker, *Spectacular Bodies* (selections)
- J. David Velleman, “Self as Narrator” (CourseSpaces)
Assignments:

Two Short Papers (20% each): 40%
Final Term Paper: 30%
In-Class Writings (6x5% each)
And Class Attendance: 30%

Description of Assignments:

**Two short papers** (5-7 pgs; 1200-1700 Words): Explaining/Exploring your choice of topic from a list provided by me. These will be evaluated on your understanding of the material, and the clarity and presentation of your argument.

**Class Attendance/Study Questions**: I expect you to read, attend class, think and participate. Since watching movies will be a regular part of your home assignments, every other week there will be short-answer writing assignments due on questions relating the readings to the films. Each will count as 5% of your grade. These will be in class on the designated day. No late assignments accepted. It will not be possible to make them up.

**Final Paper**: There will be a substantial (7-10 pgs./1700-2500 words) paper due at the end of the semester, analyzing a film of your choice in light of the readings and discussions of the course. I will provide a list of possible films, but you are free to choose one of your own, as long as you speak with me in advance. This paper should include narrative, ethical and stylistic/aesthetic analyses and should cite at least two secondary sources not included in course readings.

**Late Papers**: Papers are due on the due date. Late papers will lose a grade for each calendar day they are late (ex: An ‘A’ paper due on Monday becomes an ‘A-‘ on Tuesday). **No papers will be accepted more than 7 days after the deadline. No exceptions.**

**Grading**: Percentages will convert to a letter grade according to the standard University scheme:

- A+ = 90-100
- B+ = 77-79
- C+ = 65-69
- D = 50-59
- A = 85-89
- B = 73-76
- C = 60-64
- F = 0-49
- A- = 80-84
- B- = 70-72

What the Grading Scale Means:

- **A+, A, or A-** Earned by work which is technically superior, shows mastery of the subject matter, and in the case of an A+ offers original insight and/or goes beyond course expectations. Normally achieved by a minority of students.

- **B+, B, or B-** Earned by work that indicates a good comprehension of the course material, a good command of the skills needed to work with the course material, and the student’s full engagement with the course requirements and activities. A
B+ represents a more complex understanding and/or application of the course material. Normally achieved by the largest number of students.

C+ or C Earned by work that indicates an adequate comprehension of the course material and the skills needed to work with the course material and that indicates the student has met the basic requirements for completing assigned work and/or participating in class activities.

D Earned by work that indicates minimal command of the course materials and/or minimal participation in class activities that is worthy of course credit toward the degree.

F Work that is not worthy of course credit toward the degree.

**Academic Misconduct:** Academic integrity requires commitment to honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility. Any action that contravenes these values, including but not limited to plagiarism, falsification, multiple submissions, or cheating of any kind undermines the purpose of scholarly work and violates the fundamental academic rights of members of our community. Please read the University Calendar’s “Policy on Academic Integrity.”

**Diversity:** UVic is committed to promoting, providing and protecting a supportive and safe learning and working environment for all its members.
PHIL 290 - Philosophy and Film
Schedule of Classes

January 4th
Week One: Enter the Hero

Topic: Why Heroes?
View: Spiderman II (Raimi-2004)

January 11th
Week Two: Rites and Rituals

Topic: Heroic Narratives/Hollywood Formulas
Read: Raglan, “Myth and Ritual” (CourseSpaces);
     MacIntyre, After Virtue (selections) (CourseSpaces)
     Save the Cat (CourseSpaces)
View: “Star Wars” (Lucas, 1977); “Ironman” (Favreau, 2008)
     ** Study Questions**

January 18th
Week Three: Week Two: “Motion Picture”

Topic: Art as Illusion; Origins and History of Action in Cinema;
     ‘Reading’ a Film
Read: Plato, Republic, Bk. VII (The Cave);
     Griffith/Eisenstein, Closely Watched Films, Chpts. 1&2 (CourseSpaces)
View: “Battleship Potemkin” (Eisenstein); “The General”; “Hazards of Helen”

January 25th
Week Four: Birth of a Genre

Topic: What is dramatic Action? What is an ‘Action Film’?
Read: Lichtenfeld, Action Speaks Louder, Introduction, Prelude, Ch. 1;
     O’Brien, Action Movies, Intro and Chapter I, through pg 31;
     Aristotle (CourseSpaces)
View: “Dirty Harry” (Don Siegel, 1971); “The Wild Bunch” (Peckinpah, 1969)
     Suggested: (Westerns) “The Searchers”; “High Noon”;
     (Film Noir) “The Big Heat”; “The Maltese Falcon”
     ** Study Questions**
February 1st

Week Five: **Virile Virtue**

**Topic:** Manly Virtues/Manly Deeds

**Read:** Lichtenfeld, Chapter II; O’Brien, Ch. II; (Love & War)

Yvonne Tasser, *Spectacular Bodies*, Ch. 4&5. (CourseSpaces);

Tom Digby, *Love & War* (excerpts-Coursespaces)

**View:** “Rambo: First Blood II” (Cosmatos, 1985); “Commando” (Lester, 1985)

Suggested: “First Blood” (Kotcheff, 1982);

**First Short Paper Due**

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February 15th

Week Six - Reading Break

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February 22th

Week Eight: **Bigger, Louder, Faster**

**Topic:** Hero as ‘Action in Action’/Action Without Agency

**Read:** O’Brien, Ch. 1, pp 32-40; Lichtenfeld, Ch. 5;

Rikke Schubart, “Passion and Acceleration” (CourseSpaces)

Leitch, “Aristotle vs. the Action Film”

**View:** “Terminator” (Cameron, 1984); “Bourne Identity” (Liman, 2002)


**Study Questions**

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February 29th

Week Nine: **Narratives of the Self**

**Topic:** Fiction and the Story of Our Selves

**Read:** J. David Velleman, “Self as Narrator” (CourseSpaces)

Alasdair MacIntyre, “Intelligibility” (CourseSpaces)

**View:** “Big Country” (Wyler, 1958); Gran Torino (Eastwood, 2008)

**Study Questions**
March 7th
Week Ten:  *Everyman-Kinasthetics*

**Topic:** Hero as Everyman; Body as Weapon; Kinasthetics

**Read:** O’Brien, Ch. 3, 69-86; Lichtenfeld, Ch. 3, pg 116-124 and Ch. 5 and Anderson, “Action in Motion” (online)

**View:** “Die Hard” (McTiernan, 1988); “Enter the Dragon” (Clouse, 1973); “Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon” (Lee, 2000)

**Second Short Paper Due**

March 14th
Week Eleven: *Saviors and Super-Heroes*

**Topic:** Greater/Less than Human; Affect of CGI on the heroic narrative.

**Read:** Lichtenfeld, Ch. 7; Wood, “Collapse of Reality and Illusion in the Matrix”;

**View:** The Matrix (Wachowskis, 1999); Batman Begins (Nolan, 2005)
Suggested: “Man of Steel” (Snyder, 2013)

March 21
Week Twelve: *Aesthetics of Violence*

**Topic:** Aesthetics of Violence, Hero as Assassin

**Read:** O’Brien, CH. 4, pp. 87-96; Devereaux, ”Beauty & Evil”;
Medved, ”Hollywood’s 4 Big Lies”; Barker, ”Violence redux”;
Purse, ”Action Cinema After 9/11”

**View:** “Kill Bill” (Tarrantino, 2003-4) “John Wick” (Stahelski/Leitch, 2014)
“Haywire” (Soderberg, 2011); “Hanna” (Wright, 2011)

**Study Questions**

March 28th
Week Thirteen: **Easter Monday**

April 4th
Week Fourteen- Reflect/Return /Reboot

**Topic:** Self-Reflection and Parody

**Read:** O’Brien, Ch. 4; Lichtenfeld, Conclusion;
Noel Carroll, ”Art, Narrative, & Moral Understanding”

**View:** “Skyfall” (Medes, 2012); “Birdman” (Iñarritu, 2014)

**Final Paper Due: April 18th**