

English 492a/IDS 496a

Brendan, the reluctant detective,
surveys the landscape in



Rian Johnson's *Brick* (2005)

American Directors

Fall 2006

M/W: 12:25-2:15 – Caldwell G 107

Dr. Devin Orgeron

Office Hours: M: 2:30-3:30 / W: 11:15-12:15, or by appt.

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Film Studies at NCSU: NCSU offers a Film Studies Minor (15 credit hours) and a Film Major (30 credit hours). For more information, contact Dr. Maria Pramaggiore or visit our website at: www.ncsu.edu/chass/film.

Required Texts:

- 1) King, Geoff, *American Independent Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).
- 2) Horowitz, Josh, *The Mind of the Modern Moviemaker* (New York: Plume, 2006).
- 3) Electronic Reserve Materials – <http://www.lib.ncsu.edu/reserves/> (Orgeron, Devin – Eng492a/IDS 496a)

Course Objectives and Outcomes: What is the American Cinema of the past decade? Who are its artists? What are its motivations? In what direction is American cinema moving? What are these films doing aesthetically? What do these films tell us about our culture? We will explore both “mainstream” popular hits as well as smaller, independent films. A unit in the course will examine contemporary North Carolina directors. The primary focus of the class will be narrative cinema, though we will also consider documentaries, advertisements, and music videos. Discussions/quizzes will focus on screenings and weekly readings. Students will write two term papers and take a cumulative final exam.

Screenings: You are required to be present for **all** screenings. If you have a **documented emergency** and miss a screening, you are responsible for viewing the film(s) on your own time prior to class discussion. The Library’s media center (2nd floor of D.H. Hill, 515-2977) has most of the films we’ll be viewing.

This course focuses on films produced since 2000. Some of the films in this course and some of the films offered as extra credit involve drug-use, nudity, sexuality, violence, extreme language, etc. If you fear that you might be offended by such material, you should meet with me immediately and may want to seek another course.

Class Discussion/Oral Participation: Discussions will revolve around the materials we’ve seen and read so always bring the text being covered to class along with the notes that you have taken during or after the screenings. I frequently call on students to respond to questions or to provide topics for discussion, so be ready to participate on a daily basis. You should feel free to express your opinions and ideas, but also be prepared to draw upon supporting evidence from the films and essays. While I do not officially quantify oral participation in determining your grade, participation *influences* borderline grades. An avid participator with a high “B”

(mathematically) will often receive an “A” in the course, while someone who does not participate regularly with a borderline “B”/“C” will receive a “C” in the course. Students who participate usually receive the highest grades in the course, largely because they use each class session to test their own ideas.

Reading: You are required to complete all reading for each class session and to bring these materials to class (you should print out all assigned and printable e-reserve materials). Read carefully and closely, making comments in the margins of the text and taking notes in order to help your oral responses in class and to prepare you for the papers and final examination.

Written Work: There are two formal papers in this course, both *about* 8 pages. The due dates for both papers are noted on your syllabus. You are encouraged to discuss paper topics or any other assignment with me in advance via email or during my office hours to avoid writing an inappropriate paper. **Proofreading and revision** are essential to good writing and getting another person to read your work often reveals problems that you might miss. Papers are due at the beginning of class on the day that they are due. **Late papers drop a grade per class day that they are late.** Please consider using NCSU’s *free* Writing Tutorial Services. Call 515-3162 or visit http://www.ncsu.edu/tutorial_center/writespeak/index.htm for more information.

Final Examination:

This class also includes a final exam that will be cumulative. *There are no make-up exams.* You are responsible for all material covered in the readings, screenings, lectures, and discussions.

Academic Integrity:

Academic dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated. This includes plagiarism, cheating on assignments or exams, turning in work that has been written (partially or entirely) by someone else (even extra credit), failing to appropriately document sources, fabricating information or citations, turning in work that has been previously submitted for another course, forging documents, or helping another student commit an act of academic dishonesty. In addition to being referred to the Office of Student Conduct and having to undertake that office’s Academic Integrity Program, any student who violates the Code of Student Conduct—whether in a formal paper, an informal writing assignment, an exam, etc. —will receive a failing grade in the course and be placed on Academic Integrity Probation.

Please see http://www.ncsu.edu/student_affairs/osc/AIpage/acaintegrity.html for an explanation of academic integrity and of the consequences involved in violating it. According to University guidelines, it is your responsibility to know the rules.

Attendance:

Attendance is required. If you miss a class, please ask another student for class notes and find out if you missed any assignments. More than four absences will result in the lowering of your grade by 1/3rd for every additional day (an “A” student with six absences will receive a “B+” for the course).

Grades:

Your final grade will be determined as follows:

20% Quizzes/In-Class Writing/Homework

20% Paper #1

30% Final Paper

30% Final

EXTRA CREDIT: 5 points each -- Select up to 2: Attend an American film in theatres now (mainstream or indie, please specify)

Submit a 1.5-2 page, typed write-up (ticket-stub attached) addressing issues/ideas raised in the film that are pertinent to our course. Be sure to identify the director and to research, at IMDB.com the estimated budget/estimated gross at the time of your write-up.

This syllabus is subject to change. You are responsible for all changes announced in class. If you miss some or all of a class session, contact a classmate about changes to the syllabus. Always read the assigned text for the class session on which the assignment appears.

*(AIC) refers to Geoff King's *American Independent Cinema*

*(MMM) refers to Josh Horowitz's *The Mind of the Modern Moviemaker*

*(ER) Refers to E-reserve materials (some are direct links to websites)

Wednesday, Aug. 23

Introduction: Independence, Dependence and the New American Cinema

Identity Crisis

Monday, Aug. 28

Screening: *Lost in Translation* (2003) Sofia Coppola (102 min.)

Wednesday, Aug. 30

Reading: AIC: Introduction (1-10) and Ch. 1 (11-26)

Godfrey Cheshire: "Jaded in Japan" (ER)

Wendy Haslem: "Neon Gothic: *Lost in Translation*" (ER)

Monday, Sept. 4 – NO CLASS – LABOR DAY

Wednesday, Sept. 6

Screening: *Bubble* (2005) Steven Soderbergh (73 min.)

Reading: AIC: Ch. 1 (26-57)

Also, please navigate on your own: <http://www.bubblethefilm.com/> (ER)

Monday, Sept. 11

Screening: *The Brown Bunny* (2003) Vincent Gallo (93 min.)

Wednesday, Sept. 13

Reading: AIC Ch. 2 (pgs. 59-84)

Roger Ebert: "Gallo's *Bunny* Hops to 'all time worst' List" *Chicago Sun Times* (May 22, 2003) (ER)

Roger Ebert: "Review: *The Brown Bunny*" *Chicago Sun Times* (Sept. 3, 2004) (ER)

Also, please navigate on your own Vincent Gallo's site: <http://www.vincentgallo.com/> (ER)

Monday, Sept. 18

Screening: *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004) Michel Gondry (108 min.)

Wednesday, Sept. 20

Reading: AIC Ch. 2 (pgs. 84-104)

Chris Norris: "Movie of the Moment: *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*: Charlie Kaufman and Michel Gondry's Head Trip" (ER)

Nick James: "I Forgot to Remember to Forget" (ER)

MMM "Interview with Michel Gondry" (pgs. 45-59)

Also, please navigate on your own: <http://www.lacunainc.com/home.html> (ER)

Domestic Bliss?

Monday, Sept. 25

Screening: *Pieces of April* (2003) Peter Hedges (103 min.)

Wednesday, Sept. 27

Reading: *AIC* Ch. 3 (pgs. 105-119)

Mark Pfeiffer: "A Conversation with *Pieces of April* Director" **(ER)**

Harry Haun: "Piecing It Together: Writer Peter Hedges Makes Directing Bow with Poignant *April*" **(ER)**

Monday, Oct. 2

Screening: *Tarnation* (2003) Jonathan Caouette (88 min.)

Wednesday, Oct. 4

Reading: *AIC* Ch. 3 (pgs. 119-137)

Kevin Lally: "Survivors Diary" **(ER)**

Paul Arthur: "Feel the Pain" **(ER)**

PAPER #1 Due

Monday, Oct. 9

Screening: *The Life Aquatic* (2004) Wes Anderson (119 min.)

Wednesday, Oct. 11

Wes Anderson's "My Life, My Card" spot for *American Express*

Reading: *AIC*: (137-164)

Mark Olsen: "The Everlasting Boyhoods of Wes Anderson" **(ER)**

Kevin Scott: "Lesser Spotted Fish and Other Stories" **(ER)**

Monday, Oct. 16

Screening: *Girlfight* (2000) Karyn Kusama (110 min.)

Wednesday, Oct. 18

Reading: *MMM* "Interview with Karyn Kusama" (pgs. 163-176)

B. Ruby Rich: "Take It Like a Girl" **(ER)**

Contemporary Genre Revision

Monday, Oct. 23

Screening: *Brick* (2005) Rian Johnson (110 min.)

Wednesday, Oct. 25

Reading: *AIC* Ch. 4 (165-180)

Roger Ebert: "Review: Brick" *Chicago Sun Times* (April 7, 2006) **(ER)**

Kristi Mitsuda with responses from James Crawford and Nicolas Rapold: "A Neo-Noir High School Tale: Rian Johnson's *Brick*" *Indie-Wire* (March 27, 2006). **(ER)**

Also, please navigate on your own the official website: <http://www.brickmovie.net/> **(ER)**

Monday, Oct. 30

Screening: *Saw* (2004) James Wan (103 min.)

Wednesday, Nov. 1

Reading: *AIC* Ch. 4. (180-195)

Monday, Nov. 6

Screening: *Monster* (2003) Patty Jenkins (109 min.)

Wednesday, Nov. 8

Reading: *AIC* Ch. 5 (197-201) and (222-227)
MMM "Interview with Patty Jenkins" (pgs. 118-132)

Caroliniana

Monday, Nov. 13

Screening: *Loggerheads* (2005) Tim Kirkman (95 min.)

Wednesday, Nov. 15

Reading: *AIC* Ch. 5 (227-249)
Also, please navigate on your own the official website: <http://www.loggerheadsmovie.com/>
(ER)

Monday, Nov. 20

COMMERCIAL INTERRUPTIONS:

Advertising, Rock Video, and the New American Director (selected ads and promos screened)

Wednesday, Nov. 22 – NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING

Monday, Nov. 27

Screening: *Junebug* (2005) Phil Morrison (105 min.)

Wednesday, Nov. 29

Reading: Emmanuel Levy: "Regional Cinema" **(ER)**
FINAL PAPER DUE

Monday, Dec. 4

Screening: *All The Real Girls* (2003) David Gordon Green (108 min.)

Wednesday, Dec. 6

Reading: *AIC* Coda (261-263)
MMM "Interview with David Gordon Green" (pgs. 74-88)



DON'T FORGET: Final Exam: Monday, Dec. 11 (1:00-4:00)
Bring exam books!!!