Women and Film
J. Haaken

I. Description

The course explores feminist and psychoanalytic approaches to film criticism and applies these approaches to cinematic representations of women. Films illustrating particular genres, as well as feminist and "women's" films, are discussed and critiqued. This is a previously offered course. No funding or support has been provided for the development of the course.

II. Goals

1. Inquiry and critical thinking. The course approaches film criticism as part of the larger field of cultural criticism. In analyzing films, students learn about processes of gender representation and the psychological and sociohistorical context in which they operate. The course introduces students to critical theoretical perspectives on film, and demonstrates the relevance of theory to analysis of popular culture.

2. Communication. Students complete three film reviews based on the readings. The review papers advance in complexity from a more descriptive to a more analytical approach. In addition, structured discussion groups permit students to exchange ideas and to have experience with group facilitation.

3. Human experience. By analyzing Hollywood films, the course teaches critical thinking skills in an area where students bring a wealth of experience, opinions and ideas. Films are intrinsically interesting to most people and thus provide an accessible bridge to the field of cultural criticism.

4. Ethical issues and social responsibilities. The course encourages students to reflect upon the interests and ideologies that guide the production of cultural knowledge. At the same time, the course provides tools for active participation and dialogue in analyzing popular culture and for the political uses of "oppositional" readings of films.

III. Course Outline

See attached syllabus.

4/12-14  J. Byars, "Gazes\ Voices\ Power" (in FS). B. Hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze" (in BL).

FILM: Desert Hearts

4/19-21  J. Gaines, "White Privilege and Looking Relations" (in Issues).

FILM: Mahogany

SECTION II: Commodity Culture and Representations of Women

4/26-28  B. Hooks, "Eating the Other" and "Selling Hot Pussy" (in BL).

5/3-5  L. Williams, "Feminist Film Theory: Mildred Pierce and the Second World War" (in FS).

FILM: Mildred Pierce

SECTION III: Female Spectators and the Subversive Gaze

5/10-12  M. Turim, "Gentlemen Consume Blondes"; L. Arbuthnot & G. Seneca, "Pre-text and Text in Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" (in Issues).

FILM: Gentlemen Prefer Blondes

5/17-19  C. Gledhill, "Pleasurable Negotiations" (in FS); J. Stacey, "Desperately Seeking Difference" (in Issues); B. Hooks, "Madonna" (in BL).

FILM: Desperately Seeking Susan

SECTION IV: Alternative Visions


FILM: Daughters of the Dust

5/31-6/2  A. Kuhn, "Textual Politics"; F. Jacobowitz & L. Spring, "Unspoken and Unsolved: Tell Me a Riddle" (in Issues)

FILM: Tell Me A Riddle