

# UNFILMABLE\_ UNWATCHABLE

*CINEMATIC  
DEPICTIONS OF  
IDENTITY,  
CONFORMITY,  
AND NEURO-  
DIVERGENCE*

AMERICAN STUDIES LEIPZIG  
MEDIA AND SOCIETY  
SUMMER TERM 2023

SEMINAR  
DR. STEFFEN WÖLL

THURSDAY, 1-3PM  
NSG 410

OFFICE HOUR: FRI, 2-3PM

MOODLE





# COURSE DESCRIPTION

In the early days of silent film, twentieth-century Hollywood blockbusters, and in today's stratified media landscape directors and actors strived to map the depths of the human psyche on the silver screen. Narrative tropes and visual styles have been both developed and subverted through filmic journeys to and beyond the boundaries of normative personalities and behaviors.

Lynchian laboratories such as *The Elephant Man* (1980) as well as mainstream films like *Joker* (2019) employ different strategies to address the tensions and pressures that exist between individual experiences and calls for cultural assimilation and social conformity. In this seminar, we will explore how a cross-section of films from different genres and historical contexts depict and narrate human subjectivity, (non-)normative identities, mental Otherness, and more.

To enable productive conversations in class, we will view these films through diverse theoretical lenses and contextualize them within overarching patterns and debates that continue to shape the interplays between media and society.

## TRIGGER WARNING

The materials discussed in this seminar include unsettling and graphic images as well as sensitive mental health topics that may be distressing for some. If you feel that participating will be a detriment to your wellbeing, please consider foregoing this seminar.

## OBJECTIVES

To gain a critical understanding of the dynamics between media representations and social norms by

- identifying dimensions and intersections of film and society
- familiarizing participants with analytical approaches and theoretical perspectives as part of the methodological plurality of American Studies
- developing research interests and pursuing them in writing, presenting, and verbal discourse

# REQUIREMENTS

To successfully complete the seminar, you are expected to

- **attend** class on a regular basis
- **prepare** the readings carefully for each session
- **participate** in discussions and group work
- **pass** the *Prüfungsleistung*

At the start of each session one participant will give a **5-10 minute presentation** that discusses this week's secondary text and movie. You are free to use PowerPoint, handouts etc. and to choose which aspects you critically engage with, but *do not simply summarize the readings*. A link to a randomized schedule is available on Moodle. The final session will have a two-person presentation.

# PRÜFUNGSLEISTUNG

Term paper of 6,500 words to be handed in via Moodle. The deadline is **September 30, 2023**. Further details will be discussed in class. For general guidelines on how to approach a film studies paper, you may refer to the chapter "Writing about Cinema" in Davis et al. *Film Studies: A Global Introduction*, pp. 487-507 (available on Moodle).

# MATERIALS

Movie screenings will be offered via Zoom each Tuesday (during class weeks) at 8.15pm. If you opt to watch movies on your own schedule, make sure to check availability on Netflix or other subscription services ahead of time. All other course readings are available on Moodle.

# SCHEDULE

Apr 6	<b>Session 1</b>	<p>Overview, introductions, requirements</p> <p>Be prepared to introduce yourself and your research interests. Think about what you expect from this seminar and what topics you think should be discussed throughout the semester</p> <p>Keller, "Culture Industries," in Miller &amp; Stam: <i>A Companion to Film Theory</i>: 202–220.</p> <p>Davis et al., "Identification and Identity," in <i>Film Studies: A Global Introduction</i>: 433–458.</p>
Apr 13	<b>Session 2</b>	<p>Siegel, <i>Invasion of the Body Snatchers</i> (1956)</p> <p>Mann, "'You're Next!': Postwar Hegemony Besieged in 'Invasion of the Body Snatchers,'" <i>Cinema Journal</i> 44 (1): 49–62.</p> <p>Hendershot, "The Invaded Body: Paranoia and Radiation Anxiety in <i>Invaders from Mars</i>, <i>It Came from Outer Space</i>, and <i>Invasion of the Body Snatchers</i>," <i>Extrapolation</i> 39 (1): 26–39.</p>
Apr 20	<b>Session 3</b>	<p>Bergman, <i>Persona</i> (1966)</p> <p>Sontag, "Bergman's <i>Persona</i>," in Michaels: <i>Ingmar Bergman's Persona</i>: 62–85.</p> <p>Belting, "Ingmar Bergman and the Face in Film," in <i>Face and Mask: A Double History</i>: 482–505.</p>

Apr 27	<b>Session 4</b>	<p>Scorsese, <i>Taxi Driver</i> (1976)</p> <p>Glass, "Scenes Through the Rearview Mirror: 1970s New York and the Cultural and Spatial Influence of Martin Scorsese's <i>Taxi Driver</i>," <i>Journal of Popular Film and Television</i> 45 (4): 211–218.</p> <p>Kael, "Underground Man," in <i>The New Yorker</i> Feb. 9, 1976.</p>
May 4	<b>Session 5</b>	<p>Lynch, <i>The Elephant Man</i> (1980)</p> <p>Biderman &amp; Tabeka, "The Monster Within: Alienation and Social Conformity in <i>The Elephant Man</i>," in Devlin &amp; Biderman: <i>The Philosophy of David Lynch</i>: 207–223.</p>
May 11	<b>Session 6</b>	<p>Carpenter, <i>Christine</i> (1983)</p> <p>Bryant, "Machinic Assemblages and Entropy," in <i>Onto-Cartography</i>: 75–108.</p> <p>Devereux, "'Made for Mankind': Cars, Cosmetics, and the Petrocultural Feminine," in Wilson et. al: <i>Petrocultures</i>: 162–186.</p>
May 18	<b>No class</b>	<i>Ascension Day</i>
May 25	<b>Session 7</b> I'm at a conference; via Zoom or new date tbd	<p>Cronenberg, <i>Videodrome</i> (1983)</p> <p>McQueen, "Chronic S(t)imulation," in <i>Deleuze and Baudrillard: From Cyberpunk to Biopunk</i>: 53–71.</p> <p>Podoshen, "Reconceptualizing David Cronenberg's <i>Videodrome</i> in the Age of Social Media," <i>Quarterly Review of Film and Video</i> 37 (3): 1–9.</p>

Jun 1	<b>Session 8</b>	<p>Schumacher, <i>Falling Down</i> (1993)</p> <p>Dyer, "White Death," in <i>White</i>: 207–223.</p> <p>Macek, "The Cinema of Suburban Paranoia," in <i>Urban Nightmares</i>: 199–255.</p>
Jun 8	<b>Session 9</b>	<p>Oshii, <i>Ghost in the Shell</i> (1995)</p> <p>Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in <i>Simians, Cyborgs, and Women</i>: 149–181.</p> <p>Cohen &amp; Weiss, "Bodies at the Limit," in <i>Thinking the Limits of the Body</i>: 1–10.</p>
Jun 15	<b>Session 10</b>	<p>Malick, <i>The Thin Red Line</i> (1998)</p> <p>Silberman, "Terrence Malick, Landscape and 'What is this war in the heart of nature?'" in Patterson: <i>The Cinema of Terrence Malick</i>: 164–178.</p> <p>[Optional: Sinnerbrink, "A Heideggerian Cinema?: On Terrence Malick's <i>The Thin Red Line</i>," <i>Film-Philosophy</i> 10 (3): 26–37.]</p>
Jun 22	<b>Session 11</b>	<p>Harron, <i>American Psycho</i> (2000)</p> <p>Abel, "Judgment Is Not an Exit: Representation, Affect, and <i>American Psycho</i>," in <i>Violent Affect</i>: 29–59.</p> <p>Eldridge, "The Generic American Psycho," <i>Journal of American Studies</i> 42 (1): 19–33.</p>

Jun 29     **Session 12**

Linklater, *A Scanner Darkly* (2006)

Schuster, "'What does a scanner see?' Techno-fascination and unreliability in the mind-game film," *Visions of Humanity in Cyberculture, Cyberpunk and Science Fiction*: 1–11.

Barber, "Projecting a Film," in *What Does a Scanner See?* 27–50.

Jul 6        **Session 13**

Peele, *Get Out* (2017)

Poll, "Can One *Get Out*? The Aesthetics of Afro-Pessimism," *Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 51 (2): 69–102.

Brown, "'Stay Woke': Post-Black Filmmaking and the Afterlife of Slavery in Jordan Peele's *Get Out*," in Ashe & Saal: *Slavery and the Post-Black Imagination*: 224–260.

Jul 13      **Session 14**

Phillips, *Joker* (2019)

Kavka, "A tale of two masculinities: Joaquin Phoenix, Todd Phillips, and *Joker*'s double can(n)on," *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 19 (1): 30–40.

Brody, "'Joker' is a Viewing Experience of Rare, Numbing Emptiness," in *The New Yorker* Oct. 3, 2019.