

# HUMN 3??: Food and Film

Discussion: TR 5:00-5:50 PM  
Activity: W 7:00-9:50 PM

Instructor: Dennis Rothermel  
Office: Trinity 121A  
Office Phone: 898-6183  
Office Hours: TR 3:00-5:00 PM

## Course Description

This course explores themes about food in international cinema, with special attention to the social, cultural and historical context of food as depicted in film, the cultural issues regarding national, ethnic and gender identity, and how the art and history of cinema have presented the many roles that food plays in our lives. This is an approved General Education course for Theme V: Consuming Interests: Food and Society.

## Course Goals and Objectives

1. Experience in the task of interpretation of cinema as a means of comprehending the ideas or message imparted by a work of cinema
2. Explore how the cinema represents the many roles that food plays in our lives – as sustenance, as expression of identity, as a form of entertainment, as ritual, and as a means to bring people together into a community
3. Explore how film shows how food transmits culture and constitutes national, gender, and ethnic identity
4. Explore the social, cultural, and historical context of food, as depicted in film
5. Exercise general reading and writing skills, oral communication, as well as skill in insight, observation, analytical thought, critical thinking, and creative thought

## Course Requirements

1. Four short papers (2-3 pp. each).
2. Six in-class quizzes.
3. Final exam.
4. Class attendance and participation.
5. Brief responses for four approved public events outside class.

The **preliminary calculation of the course grade** will be the average of the letter grades

assigned to the four short papers, the final exam, and the letter grade assigned to the cumulative performance on the six in-class quizzes. The four individual short papers and the grade for the quizzes have equal weight in this average, whereas the final exam is counted twice. Thus each individual paper counts for one seventh (14%) of the final grade, the cumulative grade for the six in-class quizzes counts for one seventh (14%), the final exam counts for two sevenths (29%). All members of the class need to submit four individual papers in order to receive credit for the course.

**Six quizzes** will be held during the course, according to a schedule and listing of topics below. These quizzes will be multiple-choice in format and will serve to direct attention to the topics they cover. Each quiz score will be translated into a letter grade according to a curve devised specifically for that quiz, and the cumulative grade for the six quizzes will be determined as the strict average of the five best quiz grades. The worst quiz grade is dropped automatically.

**The final exam** final exam will focus readings that will have been assigned and discussed during the semester. The final exam will have two parts, the first of which will be multiple choice in format and the second part consisting in a written essay. The essay part of the final exam will be an opportunity to discuss the theoretical concepts found in these readings as applied to the films studied during the course of the semester.

**Discussion Groups** will be assigned a heuristic question to consider for fourteen film showings. These questions will be discussed during the Thursday session following each film showing on Wednesday evening. Time will be set aside during these Thursday sessions for the Discussion Groups to meet and jot down a few sentences regarding their assigned questions. Each group will submit this brief written response, signed by all members present. The written responses will be graded as “terrific” (“√+”), “fine” (“√”) or “bizarre” (“?”). At the end of the course, an individual’s contribution to class discussion -- as measured by steady collaboration in “terrific” (2 points) or “fine” (1 point) brief, written responses to heuristic questions will be treated as a separate grade item. The tabulation of these points will be the primary basis of assessing **class participation**.

Performance in group discussions on selected Tuesday afternoon sessions concerning assigned readings will also contribute to the calculation of the **class participation** segment of the course grade, in a manner similar to Thursday afternoon group discussions of the films shown on Wednesday evenings. Class participants should read the assigned article in advance and complete a brief quiz on-line via the WebCT/Vista site for the course by 3:00 PM on the day designated for discussion of the assigned reading in class. Performance on the on-line quiz will also contribute to the tabulation of points for **class participation**: one point for completing the quiz with good performance. Also, discussion of film theory reading assignments on selected Tuesdays will provide a good opportunity for impromptu in-class writing. These will be assessed as “terrific,” “fine” or “bizarre,” and contribute two, one or zero points to the class participation tabulation accordingly.

At least four **brief responses on approved films shown outside class** may be submitted, which can augment the tabulation of points for class participation. These assignments will consist in submitting brief (one paragraph) written responses for specified film showings on campus or in Chico commercial theaters. Approved films and events will be announced periodically in class and posted on the class WebCT/Vista site. Submission of a brief report will contribute up to five points to the tabulation of points for **class participation**. Failure to complete four of these brief responses will result in demotion of the final grade by one step in the grading scale, e.g., from B to B-.

A high score for **class participation** will increase the final grade for the class by one step in the grading scale, e.g., from a B+ to an A-. A low score for class participation will decrease the final grade for the class by one or more steps in the grading scale.

A special accounting of **attendance** will apply to the **Wednesday evening sessions**. Students need to sign an attendance sheet at the beginning of the session, and again at the end. The two signings complete registered attendance for the showing. Missing more than four evening sessions will result in the demotion of the final grade by one full letter, e.g., from an A- to a B-.

Any case of cheating or plagiarism will result in a grade of “F” for the course. In any such case, your instructor will report the incident to Student Judicial Affairs.

## Schedule of Film Showings

Week 1:      Short films on film techniques and style:  
                 *Basic Film Terms: A Visual Dictionary*  
                 *A Nickel for the Movies*  
                 *Film: the Dynamic Illusion*

### **Segment I.    The Chef**

Week 2:      Hark Tsui, *The Chinese Feast* (1995)  
Week 3:      Fina Torres, *Woman on Top* (2000)  
Week 4:      Sandra Nettlebeck, *Mostly Martha* (2001)  
Week 5:      Adrienne Shelly, *Waitress* (2007)

### **Segment II:    Chocolate**

Week 7:      Claire Denis, *Chocolat* (1988)  
Week 8:      Alfonso Arau, *Like Water for Chocolate* (1992)  
Week 9:      Anne Wheeler, *Better Than Chocolate* (1999)  
Week 10:     Claude Chabrol, *Merci pour le chocolat* (2000)

### **Segment III:   Dinner and Social Class**

Week 11:     Jean Renoir, *Rules of the Game* (1939)  
Week 12:     Luis Buñuel, *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* (1972)  
Week 13:     Martin Scorsese, *The Age of Innocence* (1993)  
Week 14:     Robert Altman, *Gosford Park* (2001)

## General Advice on Writing Papers

General Requirements. Roughly, a minimum of two pages of type-written prose (at 250 words per page) is necessary for even the simplest exposition of ideas concerning any of the topics at hand. It would entail an unusual degree of succinctness of expression to expect that a very good, or excellent effort could be restrained to less than this lower limit of three pages. At the other limit, efforts that exceed three pages are not discouraged. The limiting case here will

be the paper that, so far as its content would warrant, *could* have been much shorter but wasn't. Nearly all of the papers that your instructor has received for these assignments that have exceeded the limit have been well worth the effort of reading them, and not just because they were longer, but because their content warranted that length.

General Objectives of the Paper Assignments. The assigned papers are primarily exercises in interpretation. To an equal degree, they will also rely upon your developed powers of observation and description. Issues of aesthetics, such as you might be willing to invoke and discuss, will be welcome and may contribute to the worth of a paper, but such is not necessary for a good or excellent effort. Criticism, i.e., judgment and evaluation, is not the issue here. For that matter, your instructor is not interested in whether you liked the films or not, and he summarily ignores any such testimony, either positive or negative. What is important for the task of interpretation is what you have to say about a film that reveals your comprehension of it. This presumes first of all – and as prerequisite to any significant discussion – that you have understood the film, and are able to grasp the *film-maker's* meanings and intentions. The effort to acquire this understanding should be paramount in your viewing of the film, as well as in your thinking about it for the sake of class discussion and also in preparation of your written work for the class. The exercise of writing about film can be counted as educational just insofar as individuals need to strive hard to come to terms with a film in order to understand it, and in order to have some perspective upon what the film-maker has to say. It also entails the transformation of the rich visual experience of viewing a film into a linguistic discourse about that visual experience. This is real work, and, for the sake of education, the harder the better. The confession that “I couldn't really get into this movie” will be taken by your instructor as a request for a failing grade.

What Counts as Quality in the Grading of the Papers. There are no specific or simplistic right or wrong answers to any of the questions offered as parts of the paper topics; yet it is not at all difficult to distinguish between a good essay and a meek one. Central to the issue of interpretation – and the paper assignments are intended as exercises in interpretation – is the ability to fathom and relate the structures of meaning and significance that the film-maker has imbued into the film. The lack of attentiveness to what the film-maker means to say amounts to *misrepresentation* of the film – sometimes willfully so – and this will suffice to render an interpretation very clearly misbegotten. The films selected for our schedule all are sufficiently rich and complex in meaning so that simply pursuing this one goal – i.e., what does the film-maker (usually the person credited as the “director”) have to say? – will easily suffice, if pursued earnestly, to discover and explicate much that is insightful and revealing, even though much, much more might remain unrevealed and unmentioned.

Grading Standards. Generally, your instructor expects *excellent* work to be marked heavily by genuine and original insight, observation and/or analysis. *Good* work will have at least some of this same content. *Satisfactory* work exhibits minimal original effort or content. Thus, merely regurgitating your instructor's ideas counts as having absorbed aspects of *one* developed interpretation but having added nothing to that by way of one's own contribution. This may show that you have listened carefully and absorbed what your instructor has said, but merely repeating this constitutes no better than satisfactory work. If you can use your instructor's ideas as a springboard for the development of your own ideas and analysis, then that warrants a better grade, to what degree dependent upon the amount and quality of this addition on your part. Blatant disregard of the purposes of the exercise will warrant an evaluation of *poor* or *failing* work. Any case of cheating or plagiarism will result in a grade of “F” for the course. In any

such case, your instructor will personally see to it that the offending party is subjected to proper disciplinary action, in accordance with university policy.

Paper Delivery. All papers will be due 5:00 PM, usually on a Friday. Papers will be deliverable via the course WebCT/Vista site. It is advised that papers should be prepared as a word-processor file and the contents then copied and pasted into the location provided on the WebCT site.

Policy on Late Papers. Late papers will be demoted. When in a quandary as to whether to submit a poor paper on time or a better paper late, please attempt to consult with your instructor for proper advice. Generally speaking, your instructor prefers better papers to poorly conceived papers, but in fairness to those who submit papers on time, late submission will have its cost. All members of the class need to submit four individual papers in order to receive credit for the course.

## **Weekly Routines**

### **Tuesday In-Class Quiz Routine**

#### **Quiz procedure:**

- Your friendly instructor will display the quiz on the front screen.
- Put your name at the top of a blank sheet of paper.
- Mark your answers next to the corresponding question numbers on your paper.
- On a separate sheet of paper, maintain a copy of your answers to consult afterwards.
- When you have completed the quiz, place your sheet on the table at the front of the room.

#### **Quiz post mortem:**

- As soon as everyone is finished with the quiz, your friendly instructor will display the quiz again and go over each question, explaining what is the right answer in each case.
- Compare your answers.

### **Tuesday Reading Assignment Discussion Routine**

#### **In advance:**

- Read the assigned essay.
- Visit the WebCT/Vista site and complete the brief quiz on the reading by 3:00 PM on the day that discussion of the essay is scheduled for class.

#### **Beginning of class:**

- Your friendly instructor will offer some further commentary on the structure and important points of the essay.

#### **Further discussion:**

- A brief in-class writing exercise based upon one or another idea or theory from the reading will complete the class session.

### **Wednesday Night Film Showing Routine**

#### **In advance:**

- Review the Cast and Credits and Synopsis for the film available on the WebCT/Vista site
- Review the heuristic question assigned to your discussion group, also on the WebCT/Vista site.

**At the beginning of class:**

- Sign the attendance sheet, first column (“7:00 PM”).
- Check announcements displayed on the screen.
- Review the heuristic question assigned to your group (except February 1).

**Beginning of class:**

- Your friendly instructor will offer some commentary on the structure and important points of the evening showing’s film and filmmaker.

**At the end of the movie showing:**

- Sign the attendance sheet, second column (“9:50 PM”).

**Thursday Film Discussion Routine**

- Gather into discussion groups; **commence discussion** of the heuristic question assigned to your discussion group for the previous night’s film showing.
- One member of the group needs to serve as **secretary**, to compose a brief discussion summary, consisting of a few of the ideas that the group comes up with.
- Everyone present in the discussion group should **sign the discussion summary**.
- One member of the group needs to serve as **spokesperson** for the group, to report orally to the rest of the class regarding your group’s heuristic question.
- After approximately 20 minutes of discussion, the instructor will ask spokespersons from the various groups to report to the class for a broader discussion.
- At the end of class, the discussion group secretary should **give the discussion summary to your friendly instructor**.

**In-Class Quiz Schedule and Topics**

In-Class Quiz #1:	Tuesday, Week 2:	the Syllabus; Tips on Writing about Film.
In-Class Quiz #2:	Tuesday, Week 3:	Common Technical Terms in the Cinema, Parts 1 & 2.
In-Class Quiz #3:	Tuesday, Week 4:	Common Technical Terms in the Cinema, Parts 3 & 4.
In-Class Quiz #4:	Tuesday, Week 6:	Films and readings, Weeks 2-5
In-Class Quiz #5:	Tuesday, Week 11:	Films and readings, Weeks 7-10
In-Class Quiz #6:	Tuesday, Week 15:	Films and readings, Weeks 11-14

**Readings**

Ann Fadiman, “Ice Cream,” and “Coffee,” from *At Large and At Small* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2007).

Calvin Trillin, excerpts from *Travels with Alice* (New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1989) and *Third Helpings* (New Haven and New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1983).

M.F.K. Fisher, excerpts from *The Art of Eating* (New York: Macmillan, 1990).

Carolyn Korsmeyer, excerpts from *Making Sense of Taste: Food and Philosophy* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999).

Miriam López-Rodriguez, "Cooking Mexicanness: Shaping National Identity in Alfonso Arau's *Como agua para chocolate*" in Anne L. Bower, ed., *Reel Food: Essays on Food and Film* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004).

Margaret H. McFadden, "Gendering the Feast: Women, Spirituality and Grace in Three Food Films" in Bower, ed., *Reel Food*.

Roland Barthes, "Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption" from Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik, eds., *Food and Culture* (New York and London: Routledge).

Forbes Morlock, "Solid cinema: Claire Denis's strange solidarities" *Journal of European Studies*, Mar-Jun2004, Vol. 34 Issue 1/2, p82-91.

Janice Morgan, "The Spatial Politics of Racial and Cultural Identity in Claire Denis" *Chocolat, Quarterly Review of Film & Video*, Apr-Jun 2003, vol. 20, issue 2, pp. 145-149.

Tony McKibbin, "The Chaos of the Organs: Isabelle Huppert's Reverse Pygmalionism," *Studies in French Cinema*, 2005, vol. 5 issue 1, pp. 17-26.

Jacques Derrida, "'Eating Well,' or the Calculation of the Subject: An Interview with Jacques Derrida," *Who Comes after the Subject?*, ed. Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, Jean-Luc Nancy, trans. Peter Connor and Avital Ronell (New York: Routledge, 1991)

C. Philibert, "From Betrayal to Inclusion: The Work of white Woman's Gaze in Claire Denis's *Chocolat*," in S. Najmi and R. Srikanth (eds), *White Women in Racialized Spaces: Imaginative Transformation and Ethical Action in Literature* (Albany: SUNY Press).

Mia Carter, "Acknowledged absences: Claire Denis' Cinema of Longing," *Studies in European Cinema* 3: 1, pp. 67-81.