Dale 1101

Fall 2012

**Critical Review (Visual Text/Film)**

**Purpose(s):**

* To write a critical review which combines personal reaction, detailed description, original analysis, and critical/cultural assessment.
* To consolidate "opinion" into a dense and provocative format.
* To assess film and culture at a sophisticated intellectual level.

**Audience:** A person who has already seen the film, so no need to worry about “spoiler alerts.” More formal than your first essay, but less formal than a purely academic paper.

**Page Length**: between 4-6 pages

**Peer Review** will be Thursday, October 4th, bring two copies of your rough draft to class

**Final Draft DUE:** Thursday, October 11th, at the beginning of class. Make sure your hardcopy is typed, doubled-spaced, and stapled. **INCLUDE** a copy of all peer review work. (As per the syllabus, you are also required to upload your paper to Turnitin.com)

**Requirements:**

1. View one of the films on the attached list; if this may be a problem for you please see me as soon as possible.
2. Although *some* plot summary may be relevant, focus your work on both criticism and analysis.
3. Select at least one area of critical assessment **AND** one area of cultural assessment
4. Your conclusion may be a recommendation explaining who the film is suitable or not suitable for, or why you would recommend/not recommend it.

Remember that this is a formal paper; follow the **MLA** guidelines. Also review my requirements for formal papers found on your syllabus.

**Writing Strategies:**

* Take careful notes while watching the film.
* Consider focusing on a single scene or several scenes to illustrate your area(s) of critical and cultural assessment.
* Organize your ideas into a logical and clear outline.
* Ensure that each paragraph conveys adequate detail and relates to your dominant theme. Qualify your opinion with both **positive** and **negative** assessments.

**What is a critical review?** An evaluation of a text eg: an article, report, essay or book (we will be using a visual text). You are asked to make **judgments**, positive or negative, about the text using a set of criteria. The information and knowledge in the text needs to be evaluated, and the criteria that should be used can vary depending on your discipline. All critical reviews, involve two main tasks: **summary and evaluation.**

Areas of Critical Assessment (directly related to your film):

* Visual Impact (colors, costumes, scenery)
* Emotional impact (music, dialogue, acting)

Areas of Cultural Assessment (within your film):

* Social commentary
* Moral significance
* Political implications

**Grading Rubric**

**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Responsiveness (15 pts) --** The writer’s attentiveness to the requirements of the assignment (page length, topic), as well as the needs of the subject and audience.

**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Organization (30 pts) --** The effectiveness in which the writer has “composed” (put together, connected, and organized) information and details; the extent to which the individual parts connect to the whole.

**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Fullness (25 pts) --**The depth and amount of detail or thinking about the subject to include sensory (evocative) details and specifics related to the film. Clear justification for critical conclusions and clarity of expression.

**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Power (10 pts) --** The extent to which the writing moves reader to think deeply, visualize freshly, ask hard questions, or examine their own assumptions.

**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Risk (5 pts)** “Degree of difficulty” associated with the writing task. (More challenging the subject, form, or approach, the more “risk” involved.)

**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Presentation (15pts)** Textual features including craft, tone, and vividness of voice. Grammatical correctness, and page layout.

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| GRADE | A+/A/A- | +B/B | B-/C+ | C/C- | D+/D/D- | F |
|  | Strong | Very Good | Good | Competent | Barely There | Unacceptable |
| **TOTAL:** | 99-90  | 89-84  | 83-77  | 76-70  | 69-60  | 59 and below |

Adapted from: Qualley, Donna. “Learning to Evaluate and Grade Student Writing: An Ongoing Conversation.” *Preparing College Teachers of Writing.* Eds. Betty P. Pytlik and Sarah Liggett. New York: Oxford UP, 2002. 278-91. Print.

**FILM CHOICES**

**The Virgin Suicides (1999) (R)** A group of male friends become obsessed with four mysterious sisters who are sheltered by their strict, religious parents after one of them commits suicide.

Based on the novel by Jeffrey Eugenides and Directed by Sofia Coppola

Stars: Kirsten Dunst, Josh Hartnett, Kathleen Turner, James Woods

Thematic elements: Religion, Suicide, Coming-of-Age, Parent/Child Ideology, Obsession, Love

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**\*Girl, Interrupted (1999) (R)** Based on the real life account of a young woman’s 18-month stay at a mental hospital in the late 1960s and the patients she encounters. (\*Available in our library and currently streaming on Netflix)

Based on the memoir by Susanna Kaysen and Directed by James Mangold

Stars: Winona Ryder, Brittany Murphy, Angelina Jolie, Whoopi Goldberg

Thematic elements: Vietnam War, Coming-of-Age, 1960s, Mental Illness, Suicide, Friendship

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**\*American Beauty (1999) (R)** A “perfect” suburban family

Written by Alan Ball and Directed by Sam Menedes

Stars: Kevin Spacey, Annette Bening, Thora Birch, Wes Bentley

Thematic elements: Suburbia, Coming-of-Age, Familial Relationships, Depression

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**Big Fish (2003) (PG-13)** A son tries to learn more about his dying father by reliving stories and myths he told about his life.

Based on the novel by Daniel Wallace and Directed by Tim Burton

Stars: Albert Finney, Ewan McGregor, Billy Crudup, Jessica Lange

Thematic elements: Death, Myths, Father/Son relationships, Love, Fantasy v. Reality

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**Crash (2004) (R)** Several interwoven stories are told during two days in Los Angeles involving a collection of inter-related characters. (Currently streaming on Netflix)

Based on a real-life incident, Written and Directed by Paul Haggis

Stars: Don Cheadle, Sandra Bullock, Chris Bridges, Terrence Howard, Ryan Phillippe

Thematic elements: Racism, Human Frailty & Connections, Assumptions, Crime

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**Garden State (2004) (R)** A quietly troubled young man returns home for his mother's funeral after being estranged from his family for a decade.

Written and directed by Zach Braff

Stars Zach Braff, Natalie Portman, and Peter Sarsgaard

Thematic elements: Identity, Broken Homes, Familial Relationships, Love, Fitting In

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**\*The Constant Gardener (2005) (R )** Intense and dramatic, a widower is determined to get to the bottom of a potentially explosive secret involving his wife's murder, big business, and corporate corruption.

Based on the novel by John le Carré and Directed by [Fernando Meirelles](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0576987/)

**Stars:** [Ralph Fiennes](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000146/), [Rachel Weisz](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0001838/) and [Hubert Koundé](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0468003/)

Thematic elements: Corporate Greed, Social Change, Poverty, Activism

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**Running with Scissors (2006) (R)** A young boy absorbs experiences that make for a shocking memoir: the son of an alcoholic father and an unstable mother, he's handed off to his mother's therapist, and spends his adolescent years as a member of Finch's family.

Based on the memoir by Augusten Burroughs and Directed by Ryan Murphy

Stars: Annette Bening, Joseph Fiennes, Evan Rachel Wood, Alec Baldwin

Thematic elements: Identity, Childhood, Broken Homes, Alcoholicism, Mental Illness

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**\*Atonement (2007) (R)** Fledgling writer Briony Tallis, as a 13-year-old, irrevocably changes the course of several lives when she accuses her older sister's lover of a crime he did not commit.

Based on the novel by Ian McEwan and Directed by Joe Wright

Stars: James McAvoy, Keira Knightley, Saoirse Ronan

Thematic elements: WWI, War, Secrets, Lies, War, Sibling Relationships, Love

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**Evening (2007)** **(PG-13)** A drama exploring the romantic past and emotional present of Ann Grant and her daughters. She remembers, and is moved to convey the defining moments in her life, when she was a young woman (50 years prior).

Based on the novel by Susan Minot and Directed by Lajos Koltai

Stars: Claire Danes, Toni Collette, Natasha Richardson, Patrick Wilson, Meryl Streep

Thematic elements: 1950s, Sibling & Mother/Daughter Relationships, Secrets, Happiness

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**Doubt (2008) (PG-13)** In a Bronx Catholic School in 1964 a popular priest's ambiguous relationship with a troubled 12-year-old student is questioned by the school's principal.

Based on the play (and directed) by John Patrick Shanley

Stars: Meryl Street, Phillip Seymour Hoffman, Amy Adams

Thematic elements: Religion/Faith, Racism, Humanity, Tradition v. Modernity

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**Away We Go (2009) (R)** A young expectant couple travel cross country in order to find the perfect place to raise their unborn child.

Directed by Sam Mendes

Stars: John Krasinski, Maya Rudolph, Allison Janney, Jim Gaffigan, & Maggie Gyllenhaal Director:Sam Mendes

Thematic elements: Home, Family, Identity, Fitting In, Expectations, Parenting, Love

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**Everything Must Go (2010) (R)** After losing his wife and job, relapsed alcoholicNick Halsey holds a yard sale on his front lawn in an attempt to start over. (Currently streaming on Netflix)

Based on the story “Why Don’t You Dance” by Raymond Carver, Directed by Dan Rush

Stars: Will Ferrell, Rebecca Hall and Christopher Jordan Wallace

Thematic elements: Home, Family, Identity, Friendship, Expectations

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**Films available in the Georgia College library:**

* *Girl, Interrupted*
* *American Beauty*
* *Atonement*
* *The Constant Gardener*

**Films currently streaming on Netflix:**

* *Girl, Interrupted*
* *Crash*
* *Everything Must Go*
* *The Constant Gardener*

**Other suggestions:**

* Netflix ([www.netflix.com](http://www.netflix.com))
* Amazon Instant Video (www.amazon.com)
* iTunes (some available for 24 hour rental)
* Wal-Mart Video on Demand ([www.walmart.com/cp/Video-On-Demand-by-VUDU/1084447](http://www.walmart.com/cp/Video-On-Demand-by-VUDU/1084447))