

Simon Fraser University

Labour Studies 389 Studying Labour Through Film

Instructor: John-Henry Harter

COURSE OVERVIEW:

Many people go to the movies to have a good time, to escape their worries and to be entertained. However, even at the movies one cannot escape the issues of the day as much of our understanding of our world comes from mass media. Film is a system of representation that produces and reproduces meaning. The film industry itself is an industrial process that is geared towards profit so it is necessarily bound up with considerations of power relations and class issues. Movies shape our perceptions and ideas; sometimes obviously, through messages or parable, sometimes more subtly; by what they ignore and by how they present ideas, movements, and images.

This course is concerned with the depiction of the working class in film. We will focus on film practices and some of the theoretical perspectives that have emerged to account for them with particular emphasis on class. While we will look at Hollywood films, Independent films, Canadian films and documentaries will also be examined to see how our ideas about labour, trade unions, and employment, have been informed and misinformed by film and film practices. We will discuss how to read film in order to understand some of the techniques and methods it uses, and how they affect us. Since movies are also an industry, we will explore the consequences of having mass, popular, and working class culture turned into something you buy, rather than something you do. This course will also provide students with the basic vocabulary for understanding concepts in the field of film study (questions of narration, realism, and spectatorship). At the same time, the course examine specific themes in labour studies, through the movies themselves and through the issues, incidents, and events they portray.

COURSE FORMAT:

While the format of the classes will vary slightly from week to week, in general each week consists a typical seminar class in which you will be expected to fully participate. This is a film course and in class screenings will be a large part of the format but it is expected that you come prepared to discuss the films in depth. It is highly recommended that you take notes during films to assist you in the week's seminar.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

John Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction*

Timothy Corrigan, *A Short Guide to Writing About Film*

Courseware package

Access to a television and VCR/DVD player is necessary to complete assignments in this course.

EVALUATION:

Seminar Participation	20%	-	based on weekly participation in seminar
Film Critique #1	10%	-	2-3 pages on one film
Film Critique #2	20%	-	4-6 pages on one or more films
Take homeMid-term	15%	-	definitions, terms, and short answer
Final Essay	35%	-	10 -12 page paper*