

**Film and Theology Class**  
**Ancient Hospitality in an Altermodern World**  
**Meadville/Lombard Theological School**

*To be radicant is to be able to actively make one's place in the world, in relation with others, without being bound in place.* - Michael Larson

*Altermodernity is a positive vision of chaos and complexity.* - Nicolas Bourriat

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**Date:** Winter Intensive; January 17-21, 2012

**I. Course Description**

This course takes to heart the liberal religious sensibility that “revelation is not sealed” or, as the United Church of Christ advertises, “God is still speaking.” This course examines movies in a multi-layered context: as an art form, as a cultural medium, as a theological text, and as a visual medium presenting and re-presenting formative narratives about race, class, and sex. While it is valid and essential to discuss the plot, characters, or subject of a movie, this approach is only a partial comprehension and appreciation of the visual art form. Just as viewing only the subject of a museum’s paintings would ignore and limit so many other facets of the art – color, texture, innovation, symbolism, motifs, patterns, emotion, etc. – so it is with movies. Movies, like all visual art, submit a “text” of visual image that compliments the text of content. In this class, our method attends to this holistic and intertwined nature of content and image. In addition, this class will explore the new theory of *altermodernism*, as presented either in individual movies (i.e., *Crash* or *Memento*) or when all the movies in the class are taken as a whole.

**Course Objectives**

By the end of the course, the student will be able to:

- Examine the cultural medium of film as an art form, as theological text, and as a visual medium representing formative narratives about race, class, and gender;
- Articulate a rudimentary understanding of altermodernism;
- Articulate aspects of the conversation between movies and UU beliefs and values;
- Use the tool of film as a liturgical device for congregational worship;
- Understand how film may depict, inspire, and perpetuate the ancient practice of hospitality (“welcoming the stranger”) within a congregation’s life and identity;
- Understand that “the alien” or “the stranger” is not only external, but also internal, and that part of the religious/spiritual journey is about identifying, welcoming and including the internal “stranger” as well;
- Make a connection between systems theory and altermodernism;
- See and discuss film as an analogy, not allegory

**Required movies for the class:**

*Brokeback Mountain*; Ang Lee; 2005; 135 minutes

*Brother from Another Planet*; John Sayles; 1984; 110 minutes  
*Chocolat*; Lasse Hallstrom; 2000; 122 minutes  
*Crash*; Paul Haggis; 2004; 122 minutes  
*Memento*; Christopher Nolan; 2000; 113 minutes  
*Mindwalk*; Bernt Capra; 1990; 112 minutes (we will see this one in class in Chicago)  
*The Second Civil War*; Joe Dante; 1997; 96 minutes  
*Real Women Have Curves*; Patricia Cardoso; 2002; 90 minutes  
*Smoke Signals*; Chris Eyre; 1998; 86 minutes  
*TransAmerica*; Duncan Tucker; 2005; 103 minutes

## Required Texts and Other Readings

### Books

*America on Film: Representing Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality at the Movies*, Second Edition; Harry Benshoff and Sean Griffen; Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.

*The Radicant*; Nicolas Bourriard; Lukas & Sternberg; 2009; 192 pages.

*Theology of Culture*; Paul Tillich; Oxford University Press; 1959; 213 pages.

### Essays and Articles

“Altermodern: A Conversation with Nicholas Bourriard,” by Bartholomew Ryan; *Art in America International Review*; found at: <http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-opinion/conversations/2009-03-17/altermodern-a-conversation-with-nicolas-bourriard/>

“Altermodern Manifesto” at Tate Museum blog: <http://blog.tate.org.uk/turnerprize2008/?p=74>

“Altermodernity and the Ethics of Translation,” by Michael Larson, Point Park University; from “Peninsula: A Journal of Relational Politics,” Vol. 1, No. 1 (2011)  
<http://journals.uvic.ca/index.php/peninsula/article/view/683/1923>

“Art as a Hammer: The Ministry of Imagination”; Kent Saleska; 2001

“The Theological Nature of Human Community: Hospitality as Personal Relationship with the Universal”; Kent Saleska; 2001

Capra, Fritjof; “A Systems View of Life”; from his book, *The Turning Point* (1982); Chapter 8, Part I: [http://www.mountainman.com.au/capra\\_1.html](http://www.mountainman.com.au/capra_1.html)

“Interpretative Narrative Forms: Allegory and Analogy”; Jann Cather Weaver; 2008.

**One-page movie resource:** *Rules, Rights, and Viewing Techniques* for watching and discussing.  
**Class Work and Papers**

- 1) Attendance and class participation is essential.
- 2) By October 21, post a one-page brief introduction of yourself, and your learning goals for the course (a requirement of Meadville/Lombard).
- 3) Students will prepare a one paragraph (3-4 sentences), theological reflection on each film, which will be shared in small groups for each required film (double-spaced, 12 point, Times Roman font). These paragraphs are to be in your “voice,” not quoting someone else’s thoughts on the film. These are Pass/Fail and will be commented on by the instructor.
- 4) Students will write an essay of 750-1000 words articulating your identity in regard to race, gender, and class. Include a brief story about the first time, or a primary incident, when you encountered a person who shook you and caused you to become aware of those who are “other” or “strangers,” and why you chose to write about it.
- 5) A final paper of 10-12 pages providing an in-depth critical theological analysis on the presentation of race, gender, class, and/or sexualities on at least one of the film for the class. The paper will be your analysis, in your voice, and will at least touch on some aspect of hospitality and altermodern theory or practice. This is not to be a research paper, although you can research historical or theological issues related to the film/s’ concerns. Begin with the “text” of the film – including both form (images) and content (dialogue, plot, etc) – not with a theological argument or doctrine to be proven. Papers are to be written in an academic style, with **footnotes** and **bibliography**. (**Style Required:** *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, by Kate L. Turabian, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition.)

**Some Primary Criteria for Evaluation:**

- Integration of assigned reading materials with the films
- Depth and clarity of theological analysis
- Ability to be authentic to the filmic text/s and its theological renderings
- Accurate use of academic style notations

**Assume the instructor knows the movies. That is, please do not recap the movie plot or character descriptions, etc, in your papers/projects.**

**II. Class Schedule and Assignments**

**WEEK ONE/CLASS ONE (Tuesday morning, January 17, 2012)**

**View:** *Mindwalk* – We will watch this in class, though a grainy online version does exist here:  
<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=9107401959308808776#>

**Readings:**

Benshoff, Harry and Sean Griffen. *America on Film*, 3-30 (Chapter 1 and half of 2).

“Altermodern Manifesto” at the Tate Museum – Britain, blog:  
<http://blog.tate.org.uk/turnerprize2008/?p=74>

Capra, Fritjof; “A Systems View of Life”; from *The Turning Point* (1982);  
 Chapter 8, Part I: [http://www.mountainman.com.au/capra\\_1.html](http://www.mountainman.com.au/capra_1.html)

Tillich, Paul. *Theology of Culture*; Chapter One: “Religion as a Dimension in Man’s  
 Spiritual Life,” pages 3-9.

**Due:** 750-1000 word essay articulating your identity in regard to race, gender and class  
 (assignment #3 above), by Friday, October 7, 2011

**WEEK TWO/CLASS TWO (Tuesday afternoon, January 17, 2012)**

**View:** *Chocolat*; Lasse Hallstrom; 2000; 122 minutes

**Readings:**

“Art as a Hammer: The Ministry of Imagination”; Kent Saleska; 2001

Weaver, Jann Cather. “Interpretative Narrative Forms: Allegory and Analogy.”

Tillich, Paul. *Theology of Culture*; Chapter Two: “The Two Types of Philosophy of  
 Religion,” pages 10-29.

**Due:** Movie reflection paragraph, Friday, October 14, 2011

**WEEK THREE/CLASS THREE (Wednesday morning, January 18, 2012)**

**View:** *The Second Civil War*; Joe Dante; 1997; 96 minutes

**Readings:**

Benshoff, Harry and Sean Griffen. *America on Film*, 47-77 (Intro to Part II, “What is Race?” and Chapter 3, “The Concept of Whiteness and American Film”).

Bourriard, Nicolas. *The Radicant*, 7-22 (Preface and Introduction).

Tillich, Paul. *Theology of Culture*; Chapter Twelve, “The Conquest of Intellectual Provincialism: Europe and America,” pages 159-176.

**Due:**

- Movie reflection paragraph, Friday, October 21, 2011
- By today, October 21, 2011, students must post a one-page brief self introduction of yourself, and your learning goals for the course (an M/L school requirement).

**WEEK FOUR/ CLASS FOUR (Wednesday afternoon, January 18, 2012)**

**View:** *Crash*; Paul Haggis; 2004; 122 minutes

**Readings:**

Bourriard, Nicolas, *The Radicant*, 25-44 (Altermodernity; “Roots: A Critique of Postmodern Reason”).

Tillich, Paul. *Theology of Culture*; Chapter Six: “Protestantism and Artistic Style,” pages 68-75.

**Due:** Movie reflection paragraph, Friday, October 28, 2011

**WEEK FIVE/CLASS FIVE (Thursday morning, January 19, 2012)**

**View:** *Memento*; Christopher Nolan; 2000; 113 m

Bourriard, Nicolas, *The Radicant*, 44-60 (Altermodernity; “Radicals and Radicants”).

Tillich, Paul. *Theology of Culture*; Chapter Four: “Aspects of a Religious Analysis of Culture,” pages 40-51.

**Due:** Movie reflection paragraph, Friday, November 4, 2011

**WEEK SIX/CLASS SIX (Thursday afternoon, January 19, 2012)**

**View:** *Brother from Another Planet*; John Sayles; 1984; 110 minutes

**Readings:**

Benshoff, Harry and Sean Griffen. *America on Film*, 78-101 (Chapter 4, “African Americans and American Film”).

Bourriard, Nicolas, *The Radicant*, 60-77 (Altermodernity; “Victor Segalen and the Twenty-First Century Creole”).

“Altermodern: A Conversation with Nicholas Bourriard,” by Bartholomew Ryan; *Art in America International Review*; found at:  
<http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-opinion/conversations/2009-03-17/altermodern-a-conversation-with-nicolas-bourriard/>

**Due:** Movie reflection paragraph, Friday, November 11, 2011

**WEEK SEVEN/CLASS SEVEN (Friday morning, January 20, 2012)**

**View:** *Smoke Signals*; Chris Eyre; 1998; 86 minutes

**Readings:**

Benshoff, Harry and Sean Griffen. *America on Film*, 102-122 (Chapter 5, “Native Americans and American Film”).

Bourriard, Nicolas. *The Radicant*, pages 79-106 (“Aesthetic Precariousness and Wandering Forms”).

Tillich, Paul. *Theology of Culture*; Chapter Three: “The Struggle Between Time and Space,” pages 30-39.

**Due:** Movie reflection paragraph, Friday, November 18, 2011

**WEEK EIGHT/CLASS EIGHT (Friday afternoon, January 20, 2012)**

**View:** *Real Women Have Curves*; Patricia Cordoso; 2002; 90 minutes

**Readings:**

Benshoff, Harry and Sean Griffen. *America on Film*, 143-164 (Chapter 7, “Latinos and American Film”).

“Altermodernity and the Ethics of Translation,” by Michael Larson, Point Park University; from “Peninsula: A Journal of Relational Politics,” Vol. 1, No. 1 (2011)  
<http://journals.uvic.ca/index.php/peninsula/article/view/683/1923>

Tillich, Paul. *Theology of Culture*; Chapter Eleven: “A Theology of Education,” pages 146-157.

**Due:** Movie reflection paragraph, Friday, December 2, 2011

**WEEK NINE/CLASS NINE (Saturday morning, January 21, 2012)**

**View:** *Brokeback Mountain*; Ang Lee; 2005; 135 minutes

**Readings:**

Benshoff, Harry and Sean Griffen. *America on Film*, 305-328 (Intro to Part V, “What is Sexuality?” and Chapter 14, “Heterosexuality, Homosexuality, and Classical Hollywood”).

Saleska, Kent. “The Theological Nature of Human Community: Hospitality as Personal Relationship with the Universal.”

Tillich, Paul. *Theology of Culture*; Chapter Ten: “Moralisms and Morality: Theonomous Ethics,” pages 133-145.

**Due:** Movie reflection paragraph, Friday, December 9, 2011

**WEEK TEN/CLASS TEN (Saturday afternoon, January 21, 2012)**

**View:** *TransAmerica*; Duncan Tucker; 2005; 103 minutes

**Readings:**

Benshoff, Harry and Sean Griffen. *America on Film*, 329-355 (Chapter 15, “Sexualities on Film Since the Sexual Revolution”).

Bourriard, Nicolas. *The Radicant*, pages 106-131 (“Journey-Forms”).

Tillich, Paul. *Theology of Culture*; Chapter Fifteen: “Communicating the Christian Message: A Question to Christian Ministers and Teachers,” pages 201-213.

**Due:** Movie reflection paragraph, Friday, December 16, 2011

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**NOTES on DUE DATES**

It is expected that the due dates will be honored to the best of the student’s ability. Other than the movie “Mindwalk,” all movies are available through local movie stores, public libraries, or Netflix. If a student has difficulty obtaining a movie, please contact the instructor immediately to arrange a revised due date for the paragraphs.

**NOTES on the FINAL PAPER**

A rough draft of the final paper is due in the morning on the first day of the Intensive class: Tuesday, January 17, 2012. If, through discussions and inspiration during the week of the intensive class, the student discovers that they want to revise, or entirely rewrite, their paper, they will have until 5:00 pm on the Friday one week after the class ends to submit the revised and final paper. If the student has another Intensive class following this one, the student has one week (until 5:00 pm on the Friday following) after the last intensive class to submit a revised paper. If the student intends to revise their paper, but then does not get it in by the week later deadline, then the rough draft turned in at the beginning of the Intensive week will be considered the final paper.

**ALL EXTENDED DEADLINES MUST BE APPROVED THROUGH PRIOR CONVERSATION AND AGREEMENT WITH THE INSTRUCTOR.**