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### **The Dead Hand of Tradition**

Walter Metz

#### **Abstract**

This paper, with accompanying syllabus and student course evaluations, are the result of teaching an online course on contemporary film multiple times over the last three years. The course not only teaches up-to-date theory on contemporary film to the students but teaches them to become not only critical consumers of film but also critical reviewers of the films and of popular culture. The method, teaching them the thinking, research, and writing strategies employed in the author's own review process, is explored in within the article. The response of the students to the course is included to balance professorial expectations to student realities while providing a clearer metric of what knowledge is actually transferred or attained.

#### **Keywords**

Film studies, pedagogy, on-line teaching, active learning strategies

#### **Özet**

Bu makale, ekteki ders izlencesi ve öğrenci ders değerlendirmele-ri ile birlikte, son üç yıl içinde birden çok kez öğretilen çevrimiçi çağdaş sinema dersinin bir sonucudur. Bu ders yalnızca çağdaş sinema ilgili güncel kuramları öğretmekle kalmayıp öğrencilere sinemanın eleştirel tüketicileri değil aynı zamanda filmleri ve popüler kültürün eleştirel izleyicileri olmalarını öğretir. Yazarın kendi gözden geçirme sırasında edindiği düşünme, araştırma ve yazma tekniklerini içeren bu yöntem makalede ele alınmaktadır. Makalede, öğrencilerin dersle ilgili düşün-celeri öğretim elemanının öğrenci gerçeklerini göz önünde bulunduran

beklentileriyle dengelenmekte ve ne tür bilginin aktarıldığını gösteren açık bir ölçüt sunulmaktadır.

### **Anahtar Kelimeler**

Film çalışmaları, pedagoji, çevrim içi öğretmenlik, aktif öğrenme teknikleri

For the past three summers and winter breaks, I have been teaching an on-line course at Southern Illinois University in the USA which proposes to model an intelligent, learned encounter with contemporary cinema, for both majors and non-majors. The cinema remains a crucial communications and artistic medium through which we come to understand our relationships to each other and to our cultures. For students of any major, a necessary skill—as a useful citizen who productively participates in a global culture driven by American images—is to be able to think and talk effectively about their encounters with the cinema. My course defines and nurtures the skills needed to do so.

The course is designed to be eminently contemporary by applying long-standing critical methods and theories to films in current release. Students are required to see films at movie theatres as close to their release date as possible. The instructor selects brief readings in theory, history, and criticism that illuminate the films that students are seeing. Via Panopto video capture (which students can stream directly from the web), the instructor lectures about the intertextual, historical, and cultural linkages between the film under discussion and the discipline of film studies as presented in the assigned reading. Then, via discussion threads on Desire 2 Learn [D2L, commercial course management software licensed by the University], students write 750 word pieces of film criticism about the film, detailing their own encounters with the films, informed, but not determined, by the instructor-driven course content. Students are required to write paragraph responses to their peers' criticism in the D2L discussion threads. The instructor provides formal critique of the student work, establishing basic analytical approaches—narrative, cultural, and ideological—to the films.

The course is subject to the films at hand. For example, as I wrote the proposal for the course in 2001, *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* was the number one film at the box office. If I were going to assign this film in “Film Criticism,” I would have the students see the film at the theatre. I would then post .pdf files of readings on

D2L so that the students could prepare for my lecture. These readings would be: a selection from T.A. Shippey's *The Road to Middle Earth* (Houghton Mifflin, 1983), an academic yet flattering study of Tolkien, and a less hagiographic piece from Judith Johnson's *J.R.R. Tolkien: Six Decades of Criticism* (Greenwood Press, 1986). These works establish the friction between the immense popularity of Tolkien and his surprisingly low standing in academia. The lecture version of my review of the film has three major features: 1. a comparison with previous *Lord of the Rings* films (two animated features: one by Rankin and Bass for children and another by Ralph Bakshi for adults); 2. a comparison with other films by Peter Jackson, particularly his gross-out early work such as *Meet the Feebles* and his sublime murder fantasy, *Heavenly Creatures*; and an argument about the conservative nature of fantasy in general, using argumentation from my readings of *Star Wars* and the films of Steven Spielberg.

At its most basic level, the process of teaching this course offers the most efficient and productive way that I can think of to translate what I do as a film scholar for students with only a passive and/or passing interest in the cinema. For years when I was younger, I wrote popular film reviews for *The Bozeman Daily Chronicle* and *The Tributary*, a local arts monthly published in Bozeman, MT. I now do radio reviews for WSIU, our local NPR affiliate in Carbondale, IL. Most of my reviews are collected on my website: <http://waltermetz.com>. While I write reviews of the new films along with the students, it helps to have an archive of film reviews that can demonstrate the many possibilities for analyzing films about which there initially seems very little to say.

After I've watched a film chosen for review, I sit down and analyze its historical, cultural, and ideological significance, and then formulate a thesis argument. I then do some research into previous criticism and film history and write the review. The result is a quick and dirty, yet provocative, application of my professional skills as an academic applied film theorist to the world of popular cinema as encountered and enjoyed by the populace at large. The goal of this course is to bottle that process and model it for students, so that they may exit the course with the skills to think critically and more complexly about the media world that surrounds them. Having students privy to my formulation of a completed review (from ideation through research through revision) proves extremely pedagogically effective in transforming their own writing skills.

The frightening nature of the course is that I cannot predict in advance what there will be to say about the films in the class. Most instructors hide behind the familiar as they formulate courses: it is a bit unequal, to say the least, for an expert on Chaucer who has studied *The Canterbury Tales* for decades to ask students to write essays about medieval poetry. This course, by necessity, forces me to nakedly put my skills to the test on a daily basis, with very little time for elaborate preparation. Because of this, it is the most exciting course I've ever taught, and also the most effective with students.

The course is also subject to the quality of films that are widely released by the studios at any given moment, mostly blockbusters in the summers, and mostly Oscar bait during the winter break. Some films are likely to be automatically provocative and interesting. Most will not be. The success of the course, however, does not depend on a miraculous flourish of great cinema. Instead, intelligent people should be able to expound on the banalities of our culture as well. "Bad films," particularly Hollywood blockbusters, are not usually engaged by academic discourse, but they should be, because these are the works that students and their families know. Students need to learn for themselves how to discriminate between useful and dangerous cultural artifacts. This course gives them experience in both, if only by engaging crass commercial Hollywood cinema and then comparing it with provocative art about similar topics. However, often times, the films we expect to be interesting are not (*Prometheus*), and the films we expect to be terrible are shockingly provocative from the standpoint of academic film studies (*Grudge Match*).

As a kid who loved watching movies with my dad, the great disappointment of academic film studies was how little my instructors and colleagues actually seemed to like watching the films my working class family adores (in the 1980s, the videotapes of the *Star Wars* and *Rocky* series—among the most loathed films in academic film studies—were constantly playing at family get-togethers). My "Film Criticism" course attempts to find a middle ground between the taste communities represented by my students (closer in sensibilities to my family, and popular, journalistic film reviewers) and academic film studies (who tend to favor experimental, independent, and art cinema, and write theoretically-inflected criticism in boutique journals). I teach my students to transform both journalism and academia, writing clear prose without footnotes while at the same time applying complex history and theory to the films they are seeing when they are first released. While plagiarism is a concern as it is everywhere else in academia, I encourage

students to see that their own ideas about the films are all that is available to them, and that others' theoretical ideas are necessary, but only a starting point for uncovering useful things to say about films no one else has ever considered before.

Appendix A features the course content for the Summer 2015 version of the course. The selection of films attempts to mix genres to capture various student interests (in the summer, heavily weighted toward action films, but with children's films, animation, and comedies to cut against the explosions). The students write every day at 750words.com, a diary website meant for personal expression, but of tremendous use for academic writing. The site gives badges for the number of days 750 words of writing has been completed by 11:59pm. The great advantage of an online course is that it directs student work almost exclusively in the direction of writing. 750words.com gives the students a private space in which they can draft, document their activity, and then cut and paste their chosen writing into posts in D2L for their peers and the instructor to then critique.

Appendix B features two thoughtful student evaluations of a winter break version of the course. Therein, what becomes clear is that the major disadvantage of an online course is the loss of the personal interaction common in lightly enrolled upper-division courses in the humanities. To respond to this critique, I followed a technique taught to me by my colleague, William Freivogel, a professor of Journalism at Southern Illinois University. He runs a weekly, 90-minute synchronous discussion forum with the students, simply using the Discussion function in D2L. He polls the students for a time when most can be present online at the same time. At the beginning of the session, he asks a provocative question. Within ten minutes, many other students have responded to his question so diversely that ideas begin spiraling outward, out of control. By the end of the session, so many threads have developed, and the instructor is responding to so many good ideas at once, entire conversations are being driven solely by peer-to-peer student interaction. These interactive discussions are the most tiring, but pedagogically productive sessions I have ever had as a teacher. For students that cannot attend the live session, all of the comments are archived in the discussion tool in D2L; those coming to the discussion after the fact can easily catch up and write new comments. The instructor is able to see all of the comments in order to grade the student activity in the discussion portion of the course, as well as offer more comments to the students in a most leisurely setting, as time allows.

**Appendix A: Daily Activities for “Film Criticism” Course,  
Summer 2015**

Monday, June 15

- Lecture Panopto: Welcome and Introduction to the Course
- Reading Walter’s Criticism: *Moulin Rouge* [write with a hook] {D2L}  
Walter’s Criticism: *Avengers: Age of Ultron*  
[learn from others] {D2L}
- Student Work Write at 750words.com

Tuesday, June 16

- Lecture Panopto: Two Kinds of Film Criticism (Journalistic and Academic)
- Reading Mick LaSalle, Review of *Georgia Rule* {D2L}  
Walter Metz, “Driving Miss Lohan” {D2L}  
Walter’s Criticism: *Moonrise Kingdom*  
[be provocative] {D2L}
- Screening *Tomorrowland* [release date: May 22, 2015]
- Student Work Write at 750words.com

Wednesday, June 17

- Lecture Panopto: Middle-Ground Film Criticism
- Reading Peter Biskind, *Seeing is Believing*  
(Intro: “It’s Only a Movie”) {D2L}  
Walter’s Criticism: *Grudge Match*  
[keep an open mind] {D2L}
- Student Work Write at 750words.com

Thursday, June 18

- Topic Three Methods of Film Analysis: History,  
Theory, and Criticism

## The Dead Hand of Tradition

Reading Elsaesser and Buckland, “Film Theory, Methods, and Analysis” {text}

Walter’s Criticism: *Promised Land*

[carefully attend to motifs] {D2L}

Student Work Draft Review of *Tomorrowland* and upload to D2L by 11:59pm

Student Work Write at 750words.com

### Friday, June 19

Topic Classical Hollywood Cinema: The 1950s

Reading Biskind, *Seeing is Believing*

(Ch. 1: “Who’s In Charge Here?”) {D2L}

Elsaesser and Buckland, “Classical/Post-Classical”

[*Die Hard*] {text}

Walter’s Criticism, *Breaking Dawn, Part 2*

[find your own voice] {D2L}

Student Work Write comments to your colleagues about their reviews of *Tomorrowland*

Student Work Write at 750words.com

### Weekend of June 20-21

Screening *Jurassic World* [release date: June 12, 2015]

Student Work Write at 750words.com

### Monday, June 22

Topic David Bordwell and Neo-Formalist Analysis

Reading Bordwell, “Pt 1: A Real Story” in *The Way Hollywood Tells It* {text}

Walter’s Criticism: *Flight* [carefully attend to the visual design] {D2L}

Student Work Draft Review of *Jurassic World* and upload to

D2L by 11:59pm

Student Work Write at 750words.com

Tuesday, June 23

Topic David Bordwell and Neo-Formalist Analysis {cont'd}

Reading Bordwell, "Pt 2: A Stylish Style" in *The Way*

*Hollywood Tells It* {text}

Walter's Criticism: *Argo* [don't forget the rest of the world]

{D2L}

Student Work Write comments to your colleagues about their  
reviews of *Jurassic World*

Student Work Write at 750words.com

Wednesday, June 24

Lecture Panopto: Walter's Secrets to Writing Good Film Criticism

Reading Walter's Criticism, *Fellowship of the Ring*

[say the unexpected] {D2L}

Student Work Write at 750words.com

Thursday, June 25

Topic Four Great Masters of Criticism

Reading Roland Barthes, *S/Z* [excerpts]

{D2L George Bernard Shaw, "The Technical Novelty of  
Ibsen's Plays" {D2L}

Walter Benjamin, "Work of Art in the Age of  
Mechanical Repro" {D2L}

T.S. Eliot, "Hamlet and His Problems" {D2L}

Student Work Write at 750words.com



Friday, June 26

**Take Exam #1** and Write at 750words.com

Weekend of June 27-28

Screening *Inside Out* [release date: June 19, 2015]

Student Work Write at 750words.com

Monday, June 29

Lecture Panopto: The Thomas Schatz Dilemma, Or How to Extend Others' Ideas

Reading Peter Biskind, *Seeing is Believing* (Conclusion:

“Coming Apart”) {D2L}

Walter's Criticism: *The Prestige* [use cultural theory] {D2L}

Student Work Write at 750words.com

Tuesday, June 30

Lecture Panopto: Popular, Journalistic Film Criticism

Reading Robert Corber, “Draped in the American Flag”

(Chapter 1) {D2L}

Walter's Criticism, *Lincoln* [attend to academic historiography] {D2L}

Student Work Draft Review of *Inside Out* and upload to

D2L by 11:59pm

Student Work Write at 750words.com

Wednesday, July 1

Lecture Panopto: Academic Film Criticism

Reading Metz, “Blockbusters That Failed”

(Chapter 8 of *Engaging Film Criticism*)

Walter's Criticism, *Inception* [combine film theory and history] {D2L}

Student Work Write comments to your colleagues about their reviews of *Inside Out*

Student Work Write at 750words.com

### Thursday, July 2

Topic How an Academic Scholar Thinks and Writes

Reading Robert Corber, “There are many such stories”  
(Chapter 5) {D2L}

Walter’s Criticism: *The Place Beyond the Pines*  
[film structure] {D2L}

Student Work Write at 750words.com

### Friday, July 3

Lecture Panopto: Film Criticism Skill #1 (Intertextuality)

Reading Walter Metz, Chapter 1: Introduction to  
*Engaging Film Criticism* {text}

Walter Metz, Chapter 3: “Romancing the National  
Security” {text}

Walter’s Criticism, *National Treasure*  
[intertextual connections] {D2L}

Student Work Write at 750words.com

### Weekend of July 4-5

Screening *Ted 2* [release date: June 26, 2015]

Student Work Write at 750words.com

### Monday, July 6

Lecture Panopto: Intertextuality Case Study  
(A Close Reading of *Star Wars*)

Reading Robert Stam, *New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics*  
{excerpt}{D2L}

Reading Walter's Criticism, *The Artist* [research other reviews]  
{D2L}

Student Work Draft Review of *Ted 2* and upload to D2L by 11:59pm

Student Work Write at 750words.com

### Tuesday, July 7

Lecture Panopto: Film Criticism Skill #2 (Star Studies)

Reading Richard Dyer, "Introduction" to *Heavenly Bodies*{D2L}  
Richard Dyer, "Paul Robeson" from *Heavenly Bodies*{D2L}  
Walter's Criticism, *The Dictator* [consider star intertexts]  
{D2L}

Student Work Write comments to your colleagues about their  
reviews of *Ted 2*

Student Work Write at 750words.com

### Wednesday, July 8

Lecture Panopto: Star Studies Case Study (Dustin Hoffman)

Reading Walter Metz, Chapter 2: "From Microfilm to Microbes"  
{text}  
Walter's Criticism, *Men in Black III* ["bad" blockbusters]  
{D2L}

Student Work Write at 750words.com

### Thursday, July 9

Lecture Panopto: Film Criticism Skill #3  
(Ideological and Historical Analysis)

Reading Stephen Greenblatt, "Fiction and Friction" {D2L}  
Walter's Criticism, *Cabin in the Woods*  
[consider genre] {D2L}

Student Work Write at 750words.com

Friday, July 10

Lecture Panopto: Historical Analysis Case Study  
(A Close Reading of *Jaws*)

Reading Stephen Heath, “*Jaws*, Ideology, and Film Theory” {D2L}  
Walter’s Criticism, *Brave* [the rule of threes] {D2L}

Student Work Write at 750words.com

Weekend of July 11-12

Screening *Terminator: Genisys* [release date: July 1, 2015]

Student Work Write at 750words.com

Monday, July 13

Lecture Panopto: Ideological Analysis Case Study  
(A Reading of *Falling Down*)

Reading Walter’s Criticism, *Young Adult*  
[consider history and ideology] {D2L}

Student Work Draft Review of *Terminator: Genisys* and upload to D2L by 11:59pm

Student Work Write at 750words.com

Tuesday, July 14

Lecture Panopto: Adaptation Studies

Reading Walter’s Criticism, *Easy A*  
[consider literary source material] {D2L}

Student Work Write comments to your colleagues about reviews of  
*Terminator: Genisys*

Student Work Write at 750words.com

Wednesday, July 15

Topic Walter Metz’s *Engaging Film Criticism*

## The Dead Hand of Tradition

- Reading Walter Metz, Chapter 4: “Breaking the Cycle” {text}  
Walter Metz, Chapter 5: “Another Being We  
Have Created...” {text}  
Walter Metz, Chapter 6: “Consuming The Graduate” {text}

Student Work Write at 750words.com

### Thursday, July 16

- Topic Walter Metz’s *Engaging Film Criticism* {cont’d}
- Reading Walter Metz, Chapter 7: “The Redemption of Domestic  
Violence” {text}  
Walter Metz, Chapter 9: “The Ghost in the Postmodern...”  
{text}  
Walter Metz, Chapter 10: “I Was a Teenage Messiah” {text}  
Walter Metz, Chapter 11: Conclusion to *Engaging Film  
Criticism* {text}

Student Work Write at 750words.com

### Friday, July 17

**Take Exam #2** and Write at 750words.com

### Weekend of July 18-19

Screening *Minions* [release date: July 10, 2015]

Student Work Write at 750words.com

### Monday, July 20

- Topic Film Studies Methods: Formalist Criticism
- Reading Elsaesser and Buckland, Chapter 3:  
“Mise-en-scene Criticism” {text}  
Walter’s Criticism: *The Way, Way Back*  
[beginnings and endings] {D2L}

Student Work Draft Review of *Minions* and upload to D2L by 11:59pm

Student Work Write at 750words.com

Tuesday, July 21

Topic Film Studies Methods: Deconstruction

Reading Elsaesser and Buckland, Chapter 4: “From Thematic Criticism...” {text}

Walter’s Criticism: *Hugo* [think beyond auteurism] {D2L}

Student Work Write comments to your colleagues about their reviews of *Minions*

Student Work Write at 750words.com

Wednesday, July 22

Topic Film Studies Methods: Semiotics and Reader-Response Criticism

Reading Elsaesser and Buckland, Chapter 5: “S/Z, the Readerly Film...” {text}

Walter’s Criticism: *Room 237* [other film modes] {D2L}

Student Work Write at 750words.com

Thursday, July 23

Topic Film Studies Methods: Cognitive Film Theory

Reading Elsaesser and Buckland, Ch. 6: Cognitive Theories of Narration” {text}

Walter’s Criticism: *Prisoners* [wrongly neglected films] {D2L}

Student Work Write at 750words.com

Friday, July 24

Topic Film Studies Methods: Realism and the Digital Image

Reading Elsaesser and Buckland, Ch. 7: “Realism in the Photographic...” {text}

Walter’s Criticism: *American Hustle*

[write with passion] {D2L}

Student Work Write at 750words.com

Weekend of July 25-26

Screening *Pixels* [release date: July 24, 2015]

Student Work Write at 750words.com

Monday, July 27

Topic Film Studies Methods: Psychoanalysis

Reading Elsaesser and Buckland, Chapter 8:

“Oedipal Narratives...” {text}

Walter’s Criticism: *Paddington* [children’s cinema] {D2L}

Student Work Draft Review of *Pixels* and upload to D2L by 11:59pm

Student Work Write at 750words.com

Tuesday, July 28

Topic Film Studies Methods: Post-Structuralism

Reading Elsaesser and Buckland, Chapter 9:

“Feminism, Foucault, and...” {text}

Walter’s Criticism: *Blue Jasmine*

[the world’s great filmmakers] {D2L}

Student Work Write comments to your colleagues about their reviews of *Pixels*

Student Work Write at 750words.com

Wednesday, July 29

Topic The State of Contemporary Cinema: Science-Fiction

Reading Walter Metz, “Notes on the Hollywood Blockbuster” {D2L}  
Walter Metz’s Reviews of *Cowboys and Aliens*, *Star Trek* (2009), *Star Trek: Into Darkness*, *Oblivion*, *Prometheus*, *World War Z*, *Elysium*, *Gravity*, and *Snowpiercer* {D2L}

Student Work Write at 750words.com

Thursday, July 30

Topic The State of Contemporary Cinema: Comedy

Reading Walter Metz’s Reviews of *The Guilt Trip*, *Parental Guidance*, *Clear History*, *Bad Grandpa*, *Anchorman 2*, *Top Five*, and *The Interview* {D2L}

Student Work Write at 750words.com

Friday, July 31

Topic The State of Contemporary Cinema: Literature

Reading Walter Metz’s Reviews of: *The Tempest* (2010), *Life of Pi*, *Les Misérables*, *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty*, *Much Ado About Nothing* (2012), *The Double*, *The Great Gatsby* (2013), and *Wild* {D2L}

Student Work Write at 750words.com

Weekend of August 1-2

Screening *Mission: Impossible—Rogue Nation*

Student Work Write at 750words.com

Monday, August 3

Topic The State of Contemporary Cinema: The Biopic

Reading Walter Metz’s Reviews of *Agora*, *Hitchcock*, *Jobs*, *Saving Mr. Banks*, *The Imitation Game*, and *The Theory of Everything* {D2L}



Student Work Draft Review of *Mission: Impossible* and upload to  
D2L by 11:59pm

Student Work Write at 750words.com

Tuesday, August 4

Lecture Panopto: Revising Film Reviews for the Radio

Student Work Write comments to colleagues about their reviews of  
*Mission: Impossible*

Student Work Revise one of your pieces to 500 words for radio

Student Work Upload 2-3 minute Audio Criticism file to D2L

Student Work Write at 750words.com

Wednesday, August 5

Student Work Listen to All Audio Criticism Pieces

Class Activity Select the Best 3 Audio Pieces for Possible  
Airing on WSIU

Student Work Write at 750words.com

Screening “Exam” Film: *Ant-Man* [release date: July 17, 2015]

Thursday, August 6

**Final Exam with questions directed at *Ant-Man***

Student Work Write at 750words.com

Friday, August 7

**Course Evaluations**

E-mail Screen Captures of Your June, July, and August Headers on  
750words.com

E-mail Your Final Writing Portfolio

(revised versions of all film criticism)

Walter will post final grades to D2L by Monday, August 10

**Appendix B: Film Criticism Course Feedback {gathered: September 18, 2013}**

Graduate Student

My experiences in the online “Film Criticism” course were extremely positive. It was one of the most challenging and fruitful classes I feel that I have taken here during my time at SIU. The class was based around some movies that I probably would have seen anyway, “Les Miserables” and “The Hobbit” to name two, and some that I would not have seen, like “Parental Guidance.” Most importantly, to me, was that the class forced me to write and organize my thoughts about the movies I was seeing. I often come out of movies in the theater with thoughts on those movies, but too often do not organize and write those thoughts because I am busy with other concerns. The class forced me to make time to write those reviews. The class was overwhelming, and demanding, and occurred, at least in part because I was out of town for some of the class. Still the online format allowed me to complete the class away from Carbondale, and for that I was grateful. Overall the class pushed me beyond what I thought I was capable of, and I was proud of the work that I did.

Mostly any criticism I can think of relates mainly to the format of an online course. For example, I thought G-chat office hours, instead of just relying on email communication, or optional group chats would have been good for stimulating discussion, and dispatching with any confusion. In class we used discussion boards, but the role of those boards for commenting was somewhat unclear, though I think they were helpful. Perhaps more clarification about role of any discussion groups or forums would be good.

Undergraduate Student

The “Film Criticism” course presented last Winter Break (Dec. 2012/Jan. 2013) was a new experience in that it required digesting a full semester worth of material in slightly less than a month, and in addition was conducted online. This presented some challenges, but some hidden advantages as well.

The first and most obvious obstacle of an online course is that it eliminates, or greatly reduces, the amount of physical real time interplay between instructor and student/class. For math or biology or whatever, this might not be a huge problem, but in areas that benefit more from discussion and interchange of ideas such as film studies or any of the fine arts, the lack of a realtime public forum can be an obstacle to fully exploring the concepts presented in class. In Walter's class, the posted lectures were very helpful in overcoming this limitation. He was also very approachable by email for an exchange of questions/answers and exchange of opinions, and I enjoyed that. I still missed that 'public forum' feel of the classroom; perhaps an occasional "discussion room" via Skype would be enjoyable if it could be arranged?

The amount of writing required for the course, in the form of the film reviews and the 'daily pages', was daunting but definitely valuable as it forced us to gather, then edit, our thoughts into a (hopefully) focused paper. This is always a good exercise for any of the film students who are more production/visually oriented. It had been several years since I had personally written that much (in such a brief span of time) so it turned out to be an excellent brain massage.

The reading, which I thought I would enjoy even more, turned out to be too much and I was unable to complete all of the reading assignments. The overriding value in the reading though, for myself at least, was that it made reference to subjects and authors of which I had only been peripherally aware over the years, and incited me to do further background reading in those areas (to the time detriment of the assigned readings, but to my great personal satisfaction and learning). Much of the assigned reading was, I must admit, beyond my grasp as I did not have the necessary background knowledge required to thoroughly understand it, or to at least be conversant in it.

As regards the time frame for the course, well, it was tough, but everyone knew what they were getting into. I had an advantage in that I did not travel for the holidays, and my wife shares my enthusiasm for this subject, so we had many an enjoyable film theory/criticism discussion around the fireplace. In a way, that made up for the lack of a classroom environment. Knowing that the full credit for the course would be available if the time and energy commitment was made was also an inducement to dive in and live with it for a month. The benefit I received from the course, in the form of extended knowledge and awareness of the subject, was certainly worth it and I would recommend it to anyone else willing to make the sincere commitment that the course requires.