

*The Art of Failure*

May 2019

**Instructor Information:**

Prof. Costica Bradatan

Texas Tech University, USA / University of Queensland, Australia

Email: [costica.bradatan@ttu.edu](mailto:costica.bradatan@ttu.edu)

Webpage: <http://www.webpages.ttu.edu/cbradata/>

**Course Description:**

In this intensive interdisciplinary seminar, we will be doing at least three things:

1. We will be asking a number of questions about failure and the human condition. Why do we fail? Why do we succeed? What is failure exactly? Of how many kinds? How does a significant experience of failure affect one's personality and worldview in the long run? Is failure inevitable, necessary, useful? What's the best way to fail? Is there an *art of failing*?
2. To address these questions, we will engage philosophically with works of art and literature – that is, with the *art of failure*. We will be watching films by such directors as Charlie Chaplin, Akira Kurosawa, Ingmar Bergman, and Krzysztof Kieslowski, and will be reading a novel by Albert Camus and a play by Arthur Miller.
3. At a deeper level, then, we will be exploring intensely the nexus *philosophy-literature-film*. We will examine the process whereby philosophical ideas are translated into film through the mediation of story-telling. So here are some further questions we will be asking: What is lost and gained in this process? Can *any* philosophical idea be translated in this fashion? Do we really need such a process? Why?

**Films discussed:**

- Ingmar Bergman: *The Seventh Seal*
- Charlie Chaplin, *Modern Times*
- Krzysztof Kieslowski: *A Short Film about Killing, Blind Chance*
- Akira Kurosawa: *Rashomon*

**Required Texts:**

- Bradatan, Costica. "Transcendence and History in Krzysztof Kieslowski's *Blind Chance*," *East-European Politics and Societies* (Sage), 22: 2 (May 2008), pp. 425-446\*\*
- Camus, Albert *The Stranger*\*
- Miller, Arthur. *Death of a Salesman*\*
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Gay Science*\*\*
- Rorty, Richard. *Contingency, Irony, Solidarity*\*\*
- Singer, Irving. *Ingmar Bergman Cinematic Philosopher. Reflections on his Creativity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press)\*
- Yoshimoto, Mitsuhiro. *Kurosawa: Film Studies and Japanese Cinema* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2000), pp. 53-68, 182-189, 194-204, 303-331\*\*

The two books marked with an asterisk (\*) can be read in English or in Portuguese translation. Materials marked \*\* are in English and can be found here:  
[http://www.webpages.ttu.edu/cbradata/resources\\_for\\_film\\_390.html](http://www.webpages.ttu.edu/cbradata/resources_for_film_390.html)

**Class work:**

- Please keep in mind this is a seminar in which students' active participation is expected, appreciated and strongly encouraged. Please come prepared.

**Class Etiquette:**

- Please switch off your cell phones & other portable devices
- Absolutely no texting or browsing during class

**Schedule of Events**

The readings should be done *before* the respective class meetings.

**Day One** (May 13th, 1p.m - 4p.m)

- *Lecture:* Introduction to the course. The triangle philosophy-literature-film. Philosophical films & philosophical novels. Introduction to Kurosawa's work.
- *Topic:* Failure to grasp the real
- *Film:* Rashomon
- *Texts:* Rorty & Yoshimoto (pp. 182-189)

**Day Two** (May 14th, 11a.m - 2p.m)

- *Lecture:* Introduction to Bergman's world, life, and work.
- *Topic:* Failure, human finitude and the need for meaning
- *Film:* The Seventh Seal
- *Texts:* Nietzsche & Singer (pp. vii-28)

**Day Three** (May 15th, 11a.m - 2p.m)

- *Lecture:* Introduction to Chaplin's world, life, and work.
- *Topic:* Failure and success. How capitalism ruined failure
- *Film:* Modern Times
- *Text:* Miller

**Day Four** (May 16th, 1p.m - 4p.m)

- *Lecture:* Introduction to Kieslowski's work. Philosophical significance of his work.
- *Topic:* Failure to insert into the world
- *Film:* *A Short Film about Killing*
- *Text:* Camus

**Day Five** (May 17th, 11a.m - 2p.m)

- *Lecture:* Total failure
- *Film:* *Blind Chance*
- *Texts:* Summary of Bradatan
- Conclusion of the course