

SYLLABUS AND POLICIES
FST/ENG 376: AMERICAN CINEMA 1927-1960

Screening and Lecture: Tues 6:30-9:00 pm in MO 100
Discussion (Section 1): Thurs 9:30-11:15 am in MO 101
Discussion (Section 2): Thurs 11:30 am-1:15 pm in MO 101,

Professor Todd Berliner
Spring 2007

Note: In order to take this course, you must already have completed FST 203 (ENG/THR 270) Introduction to Film Study. If you have not taken FST 203 and still feel that you have the background to take the course, then you must obtain my permission.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course introduces students to the aesthetics and history of American cinema from the beginning of talkies until the break-up of the studio system. We will study the qualities that define the Hollywood style during this period. We will consider, for instance, the American conventions of cinematography and editing, Hollywood *mise-en-scene*, lighting, space, performance, sound and music. We will examine Hollywood narrative form, the traditions of realism and expressionism, the role of film directors, the star system, and the place genre holds in Hollywood filmmaking. We will also look at the impact of events in the history of studio-era filmmaking, such as the advent of sound, color and widescreen film processes, the Hayes Production Code, the blacklist, and the studio system itself. We will not, however, cover these topics systematically. I find that lecturing on, say, “the Production Code Administration” encourages people to scribble notes and understand nothing. If instead we allow the particulars of particular movies to invite comment on these topics, you are less likely than you might otherwise be to come away with pat “knowledge” of matters about which one can only pretend to understand completely. That way of operating will work fine, except that members of the class can never know what they missed if they miss a class, and asking another student probably will not help: Those who attend the class in question are liable to have an understandable but invalid belief that “nothing happened.” Therefore, all members of the class must attend all of every class..

We will always concentrate on the movies *as* movies—as experiences for spectators—and, wherever we are, we will never be far from our central question and the only question about the cinema that I think much about: What is it about the movies people like that makes people like them?

CLASS MEETINGS, SCREENINGS, AND FILMS

Class meets twice each week: on Tuesday evenings, for film screenings and as much lecture as the period will allow, and on Thursdays for discussion. You must attend all of every class, even screenings of movies you have already seen, even if you rented the same movie the night before. Don’t ever ask me if it’s okay to come late or leave early; it isn’t.

Video copies (VHS tape, DVD, and/or laserdisc) of the movies we are studying are on 4-hour reserve in Randall Library. When you write your papers, you will need to see the movies again (and again). Many of the movies we are seeing are also available at video stores, Netflix, and the New Hanover County Public Library.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADES

Students will write between two and five “random observation” papers, an analytical essay, an outline, a bibliography, and an analytical “research paper.” Each student will also take a series of quizzes on the readings. A separate handout has detailed instructions for the writing assignments. The course schedule that follows indicates due dates.

I will calculate your final grades according to the following percentages:

1. “Five Minutes” Essay (18%)
2. Quizzes—top five grades (18%)
3. Outline and bibliography for research paper (20%)
4. Research paper (20%)
5. Class Participation: random-observation papers (top two scores), participation, attendance (24%)

QUIZZES

At the very beginning of at least five class meetings, without warning, you will take a short quiz on the week’s reading. Quizzes are perfunctory, designed merely to make sure that you have done the reading for the week (although quizzes may incorporate material from previous weeks’ readings), that you are understanding what you read, and that you are attending screenings and lectures. They are your only opportunities to score points for diligence and dutifulness. Quizzes cannot be made up or taken late, so arrive to class on time. I can sometimes arrange for you to take a quiz early; you can do that once. If you miss a quiz, you get a zero on it. But, no matter how many quizzes I give, I will count only your best five scores.

OFFICE HOURS, EMAIL, AND CONTACTING ME

I will hold office hours on Tuesdays 3:30-4:30 pm or by appointment. My campus mailbox is located in the Film Studies Department office (LH 116). My office phone number is 962-3336. Email is the best way to reach me: berlinert@uncw.edu.

Students in the course must be reachable by email. If you don’t like your campus email address, which I already have, send me another.

PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism is causing or allowing your reader to believe that another person’s words or ideas are yours, and it is a serious offense. If you plagiarize something, I will give you an F in the course and report you to the Dean of Students for disciplinary action. If you are unsure about how to cite sources or about what constitutes plagiarism, consult me or a composition handbook. Always cite your sources, whether it is a book, a website, an article, another student, one of your professors, or the source of any ideas or information that didn’t originate in your own brain.

WRITING HELP

You can receive free individual tutoring from the UNCW Writing Center in Westside Hall. Its telephone number is 962-7857.

READINGS

All of the readings for the class may be downloaded in PDF format from the Randall library course reserve website: <http://library.uncw.edu/>. Print out and bring each week’s readings with you to class on the days the readings are listed in the schedule.

Course Schedule

FST/ENG 376: American Cinema 1927-1960

Screening and Lecture (150 min.): Tuesday 6:30-9:00 pm in MO 100 (Bryan Auditorium)

Discussion (105 min.): Thurs 9:30-11:15 am (Section 1) or Thurs 11:30 am-1:15 pm (Section 2) in MO 101

Notes:

- When a film is listed, we are seeing it on the day indicated in the schedule.
- Readings must be read before the class period for which they are assigned.
- Turn off your cellular phones before class.

WEEKS 1-2: GERMAN EXPRESSIONISM, HORROR AT UNIVERSAL, AND THE TRANSITION TO TALKIES

1 Jan 11 Thur Introductory Stuff. **Screening:** *Frankenstein* (1931, 71 min., Universal, dir. James Whale)

2 16 Tues **Screening:** *Sunrise* (1927, 97 min., Fox, dir. F. W. Murnau)
Reading: 1) 5-page handout, "Course Syllabus and Policies"; 2) handouts "Writing Assignments General Instructions" and "Five Minutes Assignments"

17 Wed *Last Day to Add or Drop*

18 Thur **Reading:** Thompson.Bordwell.Sound.pdf

Due at the beginning of class: Random Observations of *Sunrise* or *Frankenstein*.

WEEK 2-3: AMERICAN COMEDY, THE STUDIO SYSTEM AND THE STAR SYSTEM OF THE 1930S.

Week 3: Charlie Chaplin; Studio Production and Exhibition

3 23 Tues **Screening:** *City Lights* (1931, 87 min., UA/Charles Chaplin, dir. Charles Chaplin).

25 Thur Clips from *Duck Soup* (1933, 68 min., Paramount, dir. Leo McCarey).

Reading: Balio.exhibition.pdf

Due at the beginning of class: Random Observations of *City Lights*.

Week 4: Screwball Comedy and the Star System

4 30 Tues **Screening:** *The Philadelphia Story* (1940, 112 min, MGM, dir. George Cuckor)

Feb 1 Thur **Reading:** Balio.stars.pdf

Due at the beginning of class: Random Observations of *The Philadelphia Story*.

WEEK 5: FRANK CAPRA AND CLASSICAL HOLLYWOOD NARRATION

5 6 Tues **Screening:** *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939, 130 min, Columbia, dir. Frank Capra).

8 Thur **Reading:** Bordwell.ClassicalHollywood.pdf

Due at the beginning of class: Random Observations of *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*.

WEEKS 6-8: THE WESTERN AND THE HOLLYWOOD STUDIO SYSTEM, 1930-1960

6 13 Tues **Screening:** *Stagecoach* (1939, 99 min., UA/Walter Wanger, dir. John Ford).

15 Thur **Reading:** Thompson.Bordwell.1930-1945.pdf

Due at the beginning of class: Random Observations of *Stagecoach* (last opportunity).

7 20 Tues **Screening:** *Red River* (1948, 134 min. UA/Monterey, dir. Howard Hawks).

22 Thur **Reading:** schatz.western2.pdf

8 26 Mon **Due 1 pm in my box:** "Five Minutes" Essay. For comments, turn in a blank standard-size audio cassette tape with your name on it.

27 Tues **Screening:** *The Searchers* (1956, 119 min., Warner/C. V. Whitney, dir. John Ford).

Mar 1 Thur **Reading:** 1) handout "Research Paper Assignments"; 2) Thompson.Bordwell.1945-1960.pdf

Due at the beginning of class: Students proposing to write research papers on topics other than one of the ones I assigned must hand in a short paragraph describing their topic.

5-9 *Spring Break!*

WEEK 9: THE HOLLYWOOD MUSICAL AND FILM PERFORMANCE

- 9 13 Tues **Screening:** *Singin' in the Rain* (1952, 102 min. MGM, dir. Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen).
15 Thur Meet in the Randall Library main instruction room (RL 1022) for a Library Instruction Session.
Reading: 1) "Resources For Writing About Film"; 2) Feuer.musical.folkart.pdf
Due at the beginning of class: Come to class having chosen a paper topic and prepared to begin research on your final paper, which you will do in class today.

WEEK 10: MARLON BRANDO AND 'THE METHOD'

- 10 20 Tues **Screening:** *On the Waterfront* (1954, 108 min., Columbia Pictures, dir. Elia Kazan)
22 Thur **Reading:** 1) Naremore.Brando.pdf; 2) Handouts "Instructions for Preparing Outlines for Your Papers" and "Sample Outline"

WEEKS 11-14: FILM NOIR

Week 11: Crime Films, Film Regulation, and The Hayes Production Code

- 11 27 Tues **Screening:** *Double Indemnity* (1944, 107 min. Paramount, dir. Billy Wilder). *Last day to withdraw with W.*
29 Thur **Reading:** 1) Koppes.regulation.pdf; 2) production.code.pdf

Week 12: The 'B Movie'

- 12 Apr 3 Tues **Screening (Double Feature):** *Detour* (1945, 68 min, PRC, d. Edgar G. Ulmer) and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956, 80 min. Allied Artist/Walter Wanger, d. Don Siegel).
Reading: Kerr.b-noir.pdf
5 Thur *Easter Break*

Week 13: The Big Caper Film

- 13 10 Tues **Screening:** *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950, 112 min., MGM, dir. John Huston).
11 Wed **Due in my box by 1 p.m.:** Outline and Bibliography for Final Paper
12 Thur **Reading:** Kaminsky.caper.pdf.

Week 14: The End of Noir

- 14 17 Tues **Screening:** *Touch of Evil* (1958, 112 min., U-I, dir. Orson Welles).
19 Thur **Reading:** place.peterson.visualnoir.pdf

WEEK 15: ALFRED HITCHCOCK AND MORE HORROR

- 15 24 Tues **Screening:** *Psycho* (1960, 109 min, Shamley/Alfred Hitchcock, dir. Hitchcock)
26 Thur **Reading:** cook.hitchcock.pdf

May 4 Fri **Due in my box by 1 p.m.:** Final Paper along with your original outline (with my comments).

References for Electronic Reserve Readings

- 1) **FST376syllabus.pdf**
- 2) **FST376assignments.pdf**
- 3) **Thompson.Bordwell.Sound.pdf**

Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell, "The Introduction of Sound," *Film History: An Introduction* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), 193-200.
- 4) **Balio.exhibition.pdf**

Tino Balio, "Feeding the Maw of Exhibition," *Grand design: Hollywood as a modern business enterprise, 1930-1939* (New York: Scribner, 1993) pp. 73-107.
- 5) **Balio.stars.pdf**

Balio, "Selling Stars," *Grand Design*, pp. 142-177.
- 6) **Bordwell.ClassicalHollywood.pdf**

David Bordwell, "Classical Hollywood Cinema: Narrational Principles and Procedures" in Philip Rosen, ed. *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology* (New York: Columbia UP, 1986) 17-34.
- 7) **Thompson.Bordwell.1930-1945.pdf**

Thompson and Bordwell, "The Hollywood Studio System, 1930-1945," *Film History*, 213-238.
- 8) **SchatzWestern2.pdf**

Thomas Schatz, "The Western" in *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking, and the Studio System* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981), 45-80.
- 9) **Thompson.Bordwell.1945-1960.pdf**

Thompson and Bordwell, "American Cinema in the Postwar Era, 1945-1960," *Film History*, pp. 325-352
- 10) **Feuer.musical.folkart.pdf**

Jane Feuerer, "Mass Art as Folk Art," *The Hollywood musical* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982) pp. 1-22.
- 11) **Naremore.Brando.pdf**

James Naremore, "Marlon Brando in *On the Waterfront*," *Acting in the Cinema* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), 213-235.
- 12) **Koppes.regulation.pdf**

Clayton R. Koppes, "Regulating the Screen: The Office of War Information and the Production Code Administration," in Thomas Schatz *Boom and Bust: The American Cinema in the 1940s* (New York: Scribner, 1997) 262-281.
- 13) **production.code.pdf**

"The Motion Picture Production Code" in Richard Maltby, *Hollywood Cinema*, Second Edition (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003) 593-597.
- 14) **Kerr.b-noir.pdf**

Paul Kerr, "Out of What Past? Notes on the B *film noir*" in Alain Silver and James Ursini, *Film Noir Reader* (New York: Limelight Edition, 1996) 107-27.
- 15) **Kaminsky.caper.pdf**

Stuart M. Kaminsky, "Variations on a Major Genre: The Big Caper Film," *American Film Genres* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1974) 100-129.
- 16) **place.peterson.visualnoir.pdf**

J. A. Place and L. S. Peterson, "Some Visual Motifs of Film Noir" in Silver and Ursini, *Film Noir Reader*, 65-76.
- 17) **cook.hitchcock.pdf**

David A. Cook, "Alfred Hitchcock," *A History of Narrative Film*, Third Edition (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996) 323-41.