

**FST 376: AMERICAN CINEMA 1927-1960**  
**SYLLABUS AND POLICIES**

*Screening and Lecture:* Monday 12:30-3:45 pm (195 min) in KI 101  
*Discussion:* Wednesday 1:00-2:15 pm (75 min) in KI 104

Professor Todd Berliner  
Spring 2016

**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, arguably the most influential, fertile, and entertaining period in world cinema.

We will conduct an “historical poetics” of American cinema, as we seek to understand the historical conditions that enabled American cinema to assume the form it had during the studio era. We will examine, for instance, the Hollywood studio system, its narrative and stylistic practices, the role of film producers and directors, the star system, and the place genre holds in Hollywood filmmaking. We will study important American filmmakers, such as Frank Capra, John Ford, Howard Hawks, John Huston, and Alfred Hitchcock. We will examine the impact of events in the history of studio-era filmmaking, such as the advent of sound technologies, color and widescreen film processes, the Hays Production Code, the blacklist, and whatever else comes up.

We will not, however, cover the topics systematically. If instead we allow the particulars of particular movies to invite commentary, 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 cannot 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.

Throughout, we will study movies *as* movies—as experiences for spectators—and we will never stray far from our central question and the only question about cinema that I care much about: What is it about the movies people enjoy that makes people enjoy them?

**CLASS MEETINGS, SCREENINGS, AND FILMS**

Class meets twice each week: on Monday for film screenings and lecture and on Wednesday for discussion. You should plan to 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 ask if it’s okay to come late or leave early; it isn’t.

Video copies of the movies we are studying are on reserve for this course.

You may not use laptops during class time; they’re distracting.

**ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADES**

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

1. Quizzes (best ten scores) (30%)
2. Motion Picture Production Code Report (10%)
3. Detailed Outline and Bibliography for Final Paper (20%)
4. Abstract, Final Paper, and List of Works Cited (25%)
5. Class Participation (15%): Primarily attendance, punctuality, and preparedness for your individual conference with me, but also, to a lesser degree, participation in discussion. More than four absences will cause you to fail class participation. Two tardies equals an absence.

Grade scale (minimums): A (93.3), A- (90), B+ (86.7), B (83.3), B- (80), C+ (76.7), C (73.3), C- (70), D+ (66.7), D (63.3), D- (60).

### *Readings and Quizzes*

The course sometimes has a lot of reading. You'll want to read carefully and take notes on what you read. At the very beginning of at least eleven class meetings, without warning, you will take a short quiz on the week's reading and lecture material. 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. 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. 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 ten scores.

### *Optional Reading Summaries (extra credit)*

You may write a brief summary of the readings each week, paraphrasing (putting in your own words) the main points of each assigned readings so that I know you understand them. Summaries condense and distill the authors' main points: State the author's *points* (arguments/conclusions), not just the topics of article. *Write your summaries so that the authors themselves would agree with what you have written.* Write separate summaries for each reading. Each summary should be no longer than 1½ pages. I will add up to 25 percentage points to your week's quiz grade (even if the added points bring your score over 100%), depending on the strength of your summary and the clarity of your writing. A reading summary is entirely optional, and, if there is no quiz, you get no points for writing one. Summaries are due at the very beginning of the discussion section meeting.

### *Writing Assignments*

The first writing assignment is to report on the correspondence between the Production Code Administration and the studios about a film of your choosing. During the second half of the semester, students will work on individual research projects. A separate handout (FST376assignments.doc) has detailed instructions for the writing assignments, and the course schedule below indicates due dates.

### **STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES**

This course satisfies the film history requirement in the Film Studies major and the Information Literacy Requirement in University Studies. Students in Film Studies history courses learn to:

- Conduct individual research projects, using library and other resources.
- Complete research assignments that establish the scope of information needed to answer a question pertaining to film history, as well as a method for answering the question.
- Master bodies of research on discrete topics in film history and critically analyze information pertaining to those topics.
- Find, use, and critically analyze information for the purpose of writing persuasive, cogent, and valid essays, informed by historical research, on topics in film.

### **OFFICE HOURS, EMAIL, AND CONTACTING ME**

I will hold office hours on Monday 9:45-11:15 am or by appointment on Monday, Wednesday, or Friday, in KI 106D.

My campus mailbox is located in the Film Studies Department office in King Hall. My office phone number is 962-3336. Email is the best way to reach me: [berlinert@uncw.edu](mailto:berlinert@uncw.edu).

### **UNCW STUDENT ACADEMIC HONOR CODE**

All students are subject to the UNCW Student Academic Honor Code, which says, "UNCW students are committed to honesty and truthfulness in academic inquiry and in the pursuit of knowledge."

Plagiarism is a form of academic corruption in which you cause or allow your reader to believe that another person's words, work or ideas are yours. If you plagiarize, I will give you an F in the course and report you to the Dean of Students for disciplinary action. Always cite your sources, whether it is a book, a website, an article, another student, one of your other professors, or the source of any ideas that are not common knowledge and that didn't originate in

your own brain.

Students in this course may not submit work that they have submitted or intend to submit for another course.

## CAMPUS RESOURCES

### *Writing and Research Resources*

Randall library has a webpage devoted to film studies resources: <http://library.uncw.edu/subjects/film-studies>.

The Writing Center provides one-on-one consultations by trained writing tutors (962-7857, [ulc@uncw.edu](mailto:ulc@uncw.edu), <http://www.uncw.edu/ulc/writing/center.html>). You may make an appointment to see a tutor, drop in at the Writing Lab (DE 1003), or use their Online Writing & Learning (OWL) program that allows you to receive personal responses to your developing papers. Tuition and taxes pay for these services; you might as well use them.

### *Students with Disabilities*

Students with disabilities should supply me with a letter from the Office of Disability Services (962-7555) that details any necessary class accommodations. If you require accommodation for test taking, please make sure I have the referral letter at least a week before a test or quiz.

### *Violence and Harassment*

UNCW does not tolerate violent or harassing behavior. If you experience violence or harassment, contact the police at 911 (in cases of emergency) or UNCW CARE at 962-2273. Resources for individuals concerned with a violent or harassing situation can be located at <http://www.uncw.edu/wsrc/crisis.html>.

## REFERENCES FOR ELECTRONIC RESERVE READINGS

Readings may be downloaded from the Blackboard website for this course at <https://learn.uncw.edu/>. After logging into to the course, click "Course Content." Contact TAC (962-4357) if you need help with Blackboard.

### 1. **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.

### 2. **Balio.stars.pdf**

Tino Balio, "Selling Stars," *Grand Design: Hollywood as a Modern Business Enterprise, 1930-1939* (New York: Scribner, 1993) pp. 142-177.

### 3. **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.

### 4. **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.

### 5. **Crafton.1930-31.pdf**

Donald Crafton, "The Well-Tempered Sound Track, 1930-1931," *The Talkies: American Cinema's Transition to Sound, 1926-1931* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 355-380.

### 6. **FST376assignments.doc**

### 7. **FST376syllabus.doc**

### 8. **Keating.technicolor.pdf**

Patrick Keating, "The Promises and Problems of Technicolor," in *Hollywood Lighting from the Silent Era to Film Noir* (New York: Columbia UP, 2009), 201-221.

### 9. **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.

### 10. **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.

**11. Lev.early50s.pdf**

Peter Lev, “The American Film Industry in the Early 1950s,” *The Fifties: Transforming the Screen 1950-1959* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 7-32.

**12. MLAStyleGuide2.pdf**

A reference guide for formatting your papers and bibliographies.

**13. 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.

**14. Neve.HUAC.pdf**

Brian Neve, “HUAC, the Blacklist, and the Decline of Social Cinema” in Peter Lev, *The Fifties: Transforming the Screen 1950-1959* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 65-86.

**15. place.peterson.visualnoir.pdf**

J. A. Place and L. S. Peterson, “Some Visual Motifs of Film Noir” in Alain Silver and James Ursini, *Film Noir Reader* (New York: Limelight Edition, 1996) 65-76.

**16. Prince.cruelty.horror.pdf**

Stephen Prince, “Cruelty, Sadism, and the Horror Film” in *Classical Film Violence: Designing and Regulating Brutality in Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1968* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2003), 30-86.

**17. production.code.pdf**

“The Motion Picture Production Code” in Richard Maltby, *Hollywood Cinema*, Second Edition (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003) 593-597.

**18. Schatz.prewar.pdf**

Thomas Schatz, “Prewar Stars, Genres, and Production Trends,” *Boom and Bust: The American Cinema in the 1940s* (New York: Scribner, 1997), 79-127.

**19. SchatzWestern2.pdf**

Thomas Schatz, “The Western” in *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking, and the Studio System* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981), 45-80.

**20. Thompson.Bordwell.1930-1945.pdf**

Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell, “The Hollywood Studio System, 1930-1945,” *Film History: An Introduction* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994) 213-238.

**21. Thompson.Bordwell.1945-1960.pdf**

Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell, “American Cinema in the Postwar Era, 1945-1960,” *Film History: An Introduction* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), pp. 325-352

**22. Thompson.Bordwell.Sound.pdf**

Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell, “The Introduction of Sound,” *Film History: An Introduction* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), 193-200.

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### SCHEDULE

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Spring 2016

#### Notes:

- Study the readings before the class meeting for which they are listed.
- Bring the week's readings with you to class on the days they are due.

#### UNIT 1: GERMAN EXPRESSIONISM, HORROR AT UNIVERSAL, AND THE TRANSITION TO TALKIES

- 1 Jan 11 Mon **Screening:** *Sunrise* (1927, 97 min., Fox, dir. F. W. Murnau)  
**Lecture:** "Sunrise and German Expressionism in American Cinema"
- 13 Wed **Screening:** *Frankenstein* (1931, 71 min., Universal, James Whale)  
**Reading:** 1) FST376syllabus.pdf (this handout)  
2) FST376assignments.pdf (p. 1)
- 2 18 Mon *MLK holiday!*  
19 Tues *Last day to add/drop*  
20 Wed **Reading:** 1) production.code.pdf  
2) Prince.cruelty.horror.pdf
- 3 25 Mon **Screening:** *City Lights* (1931, 87 min., UA/Charles Chaplin, Charles Chaplin).  
**Lecture:** "City Lights and the Transition to Sound Cinema"
- 27 Wed **Reading:** 1) Thompson.Bordwell.Sound.pdf  
2) Thompson.Bordwell.1930-1945.pdf  
3) Crafton.1930-31.pdf (374-376 only)

#### UNIT 2: THE PRODUCER-UNIT SYSTEM, PRODUCER-DIRECTORS, AND THE STAR SYSTEM

- 4 Feb 1 Mon **Screening:** *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939, 130 min, Columbia, Frank Capra).  
**Lecture:** "The Hollywood Aesthetic"
- 3 Wed **Reading:** 1) Balio.exhibition.pdf  
2) Balio.stars.pdf
- 5 8 Mon **Screening:** *The Philadelphia Story* (1940, 112 min, MGM, George Cuckor)  
**Lecture:** "Aesthetic Functions of Hollywood Style, Part I: Clarity, Expressiveness, and Decoration"
- 10 Wed **Reading:** Schatz.prewar.pdf (pp. 79-116 only)
- 12 Fri **Due by email (MS Word attachment) by noon:** Motion Picture Production Code Report. The title of your attachment should start with your last name (e.g. "yourlastname\_outline.doc").

#### UNIT 3: THE WESTERN

- 6 Feb 15 Mon **Screening:** *Stagecoach* (1939, 99 min., UA/Walter Wanger, John Ford).  
**Lecture:** "Classical Hollywood Narration"  
**Due in office hours:** Students who want to write on their own paper topic must come to my office hours by today prepared to present their topic (including a written description) and obtain my approval.
- 17 Wed **Reading:** 1) Bordwell.ClassicalHollywood.pdf  
2) FST376assignments.doc (pp. 2-8)
- 19 Fri **Due:** Sign up for a 15-minute conference with Professor Berliner to discuss your paper. Sign-up sheets are outside my office door (KI 106D). Come to your conference prepared to answer the five questions indicated in the Writing Assignments handout.

- 7 22 Mon **Screening:** *Red River* (1948, 127 min. UA/Monterey, Howard Hawks).  
**Lecture:** “Aesthetics of Hollywood Storytelling”
- 24 Wed **Reading:** 1) Thompson.Bordwell.1945-1960.pdf  
2) Sample outlines (Blackboard)  
**Writing Workshop:** How to Develop a Strong Thesis
- 26 Fri *Last day to withdraw with a W*
- 8 29 Mon **Screening:** *The Searchers* (1956, 119 min., Warner/C.V. Whitney, John Ford).  
**Lecture:** “The Studio-Era Western”
- Mar 2 Wed **Reading:** schatz.western2.pdf  
**Writing Workshop:** How to Organize a Paper
- 7-11 *Spring Break!*

#### UNIT 4: FILM NOIR, TECHNICOLOR, AND FILM REGULATION

- 9 Mar 14 Mon **Screening:** *Double Indemnity* (1944, 107 min., Paramount, Billy Wilder)  
**Lecture:** “Gangsters, Private Eyes, Low Lives—*Film Noir*”
- 16 Wed **Reading:** Koppes.regulation.pdf
- 10 21 Mon **B-Movie Double Feature:** *Detour* (1945, 68 min, PRC, Edgar G. Ulmer) and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956, 80 min. Allied Artist/Walter Wanger, Don Siegel).  
23 Wed **Reading:** 1) place.peterson.visualnoir.pdf  
2) Kerr.b-noir.pdf
- 11 28 Mon **Screening:** *Leave Her to Heaven* (1945, 110 min, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, John M. Stahl)  
**Lecture:** “Aesthetic Functions of Hollywood Style, Part II: Harmony and Dissonance”
- 30 Wed **Reading:** Keating.technicolor.pdf
- 12 Apr 4 Mon **Screening:** *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950, 112 min., MGM, John Huston).  
**Lecture:** “Ideology and Aesthetics in Crime Films during the Period of the Production Code Administration”
- 5 Tue **Due by email (MS Word attachment) by noon:** Detailed Outline and Bibliography. The title of your attachment should start with your last name (e.g. “yourlastname\_outline.doc”).
- 6 Wed **Reading:** Lev.early50s.pdf

#### UNIT 5: BRANDO, DEAN, KAZAN AND HUAC

- 13 Apr 11 Mon **Screening:** *On the Waterfront* (1954, 108 min., Columbia Pictures, Elia Kazan)  
**After screening:** Optional final-paper conferences with Professor Berliner
- 13 Wed **Reading:** Naremore.Brando.pdf
- 14 18 Mon **Screening:** *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955, 111 min., Warner Bros., Nicholas Ray)  
**After screening:** Optional final-paper conferences with Professor Berliner
- 20 Wed **Reading:** Neve.HUAC.pdf

#### UNIT 6: ALFRED HITCHCOCK AND MODERN HORROR

- 15 25 Mon **Screening:** *Psycho* (1960, 109 min, Shamley/Alfred Hitchcock, Alfred Hitchcock)  
**After screening:** Optional final-paper conferences with Professor Berliner
- 27 Wed **Reading:** cook.hitchcock.pdf
- May 2 Mon **Due by email (MS Word attachment) by noon:** Abstract, Final Paper, and List of Works Cited. The title of your attachment should start with your last name (e.g. “yourlastname\_essay.doc”).