

FST 110 CONCEPTS IN FILM
AESTHETIC PLEASURE IN HOLLYWOOD CINEMA

Syllabus and Policies
Fall 2018

Professor Todd Berliner

Wednesday 12:30-4:45 (255 min) in KI 101

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Hollywood makes the most widely successful pleasure-giving artworks the world has ever known. The American film industry works the assumption that pleasurable aesthetic experiences, among huge populations, translate into box office success. With that goal in mind, Hollywood has systematized the delivery of aesthetic pleasure, packaging and selling it on a massive scale.

This course studies the chief attraction of Hollywood cinema worldwide: its entertainment value. We will examine a range of films that span Hollywood history in order to understand American commercial cinema's aesthetic design. Many people dismiss Hollywood cinema as mere entertainment and leave it at that. In this course, we will explore how Hollywood creates, for massive numbers of people, some of their most exhilarating experiences of art.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

FST 110 partially satisfies University Studies II: *Aesthetic, Interpretive, and Literary Perspectives* (AIL):

1. AIL 1. Employing the methods and terminology of film studies, students critically analyze and make cogent subjective judgments about cinema's formal properties and how movies tell stories, convey meaning, and create experiences.
2. AIL 2. Students demonstrate an understanding of films and film modes within the contexts of their production, with attention to cinema's role as a product of particular technologies and industrial conditions.
3. AIL 3. Students demonstrate an understanding of the importance of artistic expression and open-minded inquiry by analyzing the contribution of cinema to people's understanding of art and experience.

CLASS MEETINGS, SCREENINGS, AND FILMS

Class meets once a week for an unholy amount of time: four hours and fifteen minutes, including screening, lecture, discussion, and in-class work. Nonetheless, you must attend all of every class meeting, even if you have already seen the movie, even if you rented it the night before. Please don't ask me if it's okay to miss class, arrive late, or leave early; it isn't.

During class, you may not use cell phones, laptops or tablets, which distract people. If you have a special reason for needing to use one of these devices during class, please contact me ahead of time for permission.

We are seeing 16 movies in class. For further study, the films are available through Randall Library on disc or streaming (through [Kanopy](#) or [Swank](#)).

QUIZZES

Starting Week 2, at the very beginning of every class meeting, you will take a short quiz on the day's reading and the previous lecture and screening. Quizzes are perfunctory, designed merely to make sure that you have done the reading for the week, 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; however, I will drop your two lowest scores.

FINAL EXAM

The final exam will cover material presented throughout the semester and will consist of questions drawn from all of the readings and lectures, as well as identifications of plot elements from each of the screened films. The final exam will be curved. If you have a qualified time conflict during the scheduled time of our exam or a disability that permits extended time, please notify me by week 10 so that I may arrange for you to take the exam at another time or in a special setting.

IN-CLASS PUZZLES

After each screening, starting in Week 2, I will hand out “puzzles” that ask you to answer, in teams, a set of questions pertaining to the film and topic of the week. I will collect your work, grade it, and sometimes discuss your answers in class. I will grade you on the energy, effort, and thoughtfulness of your work (not the length). I don’t want the most obvious answers: I want to see how deeply and keenly you engage with the questions. If you miss a puzzle, you get a zero on it; however, I will drop your two lowest scores.

ATTENDANCE

Attendance during screenings, lectures, and classwork is essential; it is, in fact, the most valuable part of the class. At least three times at each class meeting, I will use *check-ins* to keep track of your attendance: 1) a quiz at the top of class, 2) an in-class puzzle in the middle, and 3) a sign-in sheet at the end. If you do all three, you get full attendance credit. For 2, you get half credit. For only 1, you’ll be marked absent. I will also mark you absent if you miss the in-class puzzle—even if you checked-in at the beginning and end—because I’ll assume you missed most of the class meeting.

If you check-in deceptively, I will report you to the Dean of Students for disciplinary action; the same goes if you check-in for someone else. Deception means allowing me to believe that you attended more of the class than you really did (e.g., checking in, leaving, then coming back later to check in again).

GRADES

1. Quizzes (two dropped): 35%
2. Final Exam: 20%
3. In-class Puzzles (two dropped): 10%
4. Attendance: 35%.

Your attendance grade depends on how many class meetings you miss:

- 0 missed = 100%
- 1 missed = 95%
- 2 missed = 87%
- 3 missed = 75%
- 4 missed = 58%
- 5 or more = fail the course

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), F (0).

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.”

OFFICE HOURS AND CONTACT INFORMATION

Professor Berliner will hold office hours on Tuesdays 2:00-3:15 pm or by appointment on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, or Thursdays in King Hall 106D. My campus mailbox is located in the Film Studies Department office in King 102. My office phone number is 910-962-3336. Email is the best way to reach me: berlinert@uncw.edu.

READINGS AND TEXTS

- 1) **Todd Berliner, *Hollywood Aesthetic: Pleasure in American Cinema*** (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017). You may buy it in either print or e-book format; the e-book includes direct links to film clips.
- 2) Electronic materials may be obtained on [Blackboard Learn](#). After logging into the course, click “Content Area.” Contact [TAC](#) if you need help with Blackboard.
 - **Allen.technology.pdf**
Allen, Michael. “From *Bwana Devil* to *Batman Forever*: Technology in Contemporary Hollywood Cinema” in *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*, edited by Steve Neale and Murray Smith (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 109-129.
 - **FST110.syllabus.pdf** (this handout)

- **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.
- **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.
- **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.
- **Schatz.Western2.pdf**
Thomas Schatz, "The Western" in *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking, and the Studio System* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981), 45-80.
- **Thompson.Bordwell.Entertainmenteconomy.pdf**
Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell. "American Cinema and the Entertainment Economy: The 1980s and After." *Film History: An Introduction*, Second Edition. Boston: McGraw Hill, 2003. 679-704.
- **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.
- **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

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COURSE SCHEDULE**

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Notes:

- Study the readings *before* the class meetings for which they are listed.
- Readings with “.pdf” at the end can be found on Blackboard

PART I: INTRODUCTION TO HOLLYWOOD AESTHETICS

- Aug 22 **Screening:** *City Lights* (1931, 87 min., Charles Chaplin) and *His Girl Friday* (1940, 92 min, Howard Hawks)
Lectures: “*City Lights* and the Transition to Sound Cinema”
 “Narrative and Stylistic Complexity in *His Girl Friday*”
- Aug 29 **Screening:** *Double Indemnity* (1944, 107 min., Billy Wilder)
Lecture: “The Hollywood Aesthetic”
Reading: 1) *Hollywood Aesthetic*, Preface and Introduction (pp. ix-11)
 2) Thompson.Bordwell.1930-1945.pdf
Last day of Add/Drop

PART II: NARRATIVE

- Sep 5 **Screening:** *The Big Sleep* (1946, 114 min, Howard Hawks)
Lectures: “Classical Hollywood Narration”
 “Aesthetics of Hollywood Storytelling”
Reading: *Hollywood Aesthetic*, Chapter 1 (pp. 13-32) and Chapter 2 (pp. 33-47)
- Sep 12 **Screening:** *Red River* (1948, 127 min, Howard Hawks)
Lecture: “Shifting Story Logic in *Red River*”
Reading: *Hollywood Aesthetic*, Chapter 3 (pp. 49-71)
- Sep 19 *Class cancelled for Yom Kippur*
Reading: *Hollywood Aesthetic*, Chapter 4 (pp. 73-81)

PART III: STYLE

- Sep 26 **Screening:** *Clueless* (1995, 97 min., Amy Heckerling)
Lecture: “Aesthetics of Hollywood Style, Part I: Clarity, Expressiveness, and Decoration”
Reading: Thompson.Bordwell.1945-1960.pdf
The quiz this week is based on last week’s and this week’s readings.
- Oct 3 **Screening:** *Leave Her to Heaven* (1945, 110 min, John M. Stahl)
Lecture: “Aesthetics of Hollywood Style, Part II: Harmony and Dissonance”
Reading: 1) Keating.technicolor.pdf
 2) *Hollywood Aesthetic*, Chapter 5 (pp. 83-100 only)
- Oct 10 **Screening:** *Raging Bull* (1980, 129 min, Martin Scorsese)
Lecture: “*Raging Bull*’s Stylistic Dissonance”
Reading: 1) Allen.technology.pdf
 2) *Hollywood Aesthetic*, Chapter 5 (pp. 100-113 only)

15 Mon *Last day to withdraw with a W*

PART IV: IDEOLOGY

- Oct 17 **Screening:** *Film noir double feature: Pickup on South Street* (1953, 80 min., Samuel Fuller) and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956, 80 min, Don Siegel)
Lectures: “The House Un-American Activities Committee and the Hollywood Blacklist”
 “Ideology and Aesthetic Pleasure in Hollywood Cinema”
Reading: 1) Neve.HUAC.pdf
 2) *Hollywood Aesthetic*, Chapter 6 (pp. 115-129)
- Oct 24 **Screening:** *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950, 112 min., John Huston)
Lecture: “Crime Film Aesthetics during the Period of the Production Code Administration”
Reading: 1) Koppes.regulation.pdf
 2) *Hollywood Aesthetic*, Chapter 7 (pp. 131-155)
- Oct 31 **Screening:** *Starship Troopers* (1997, 129 min., Paul Verhoeven)
Lecture: “Genre and Ideology in *Starship Troopers*”
Reading: *Hollywood Aesthetic*, Chapter 8 (pp. 157-168)

PART V: GENRE

- Nov 7 **Screening:** *Star Wars* (1977/2015 “Despecialized Edition,” 121 min., George Lucas)
Lecture: “Genre Expertise and Aesthetic Pleasure (or Why Film Scholars Didn’t Like *Star Wars*)”
Reading: 1) *Hollywood Aesthetic*, Chapter 9 (pp. 169-182)
 2) Thompson.Bordwell.Entertainmenteconomy.pdf
- Nov 14 **Screening:** *Singin’ in the Rain* (1952, 103 min., Stanley Donen & Gene Kelly)
Lecture: “The Hollywood Musical and *Singin’ in the Rain*”
Reading: *Hollywood Aesthetic*, Chapter 10 (pp. 183-201)
- 21 *Thanksgiving Holiday!*
- Nov 28 **Screening:** *Unforgiven* (1992, 131 min., Clint Eastwood)
Lecture: “*Unforgiven* and the Evolution of the Western”
Reading: 1) *Hollywood Aesthetic*, Chapter 11 (pp. 203-218)
 2) Schatz.Western2.pdf
Tip: Purchase a Scantron Form 30423 (large form) this week for the final exam; the bookstore sometimes runs out during finals week.

PART VI: PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER NARRATIVE • STYLE • IDEOLOGY • GENRE

- Dec 5 **Screening:** *Get Out* (2017, 104 min, Jordan Peele)
Reading: *Hollywood Aesthetic*, Chapter 12 and Conclusion (pp. 219-240)
- Dec 7 **Final Exam.** 11:30 am – 2:30 pm in KI 101.
Purchase and bring: Scantron Form 30423 (large form) and a few sharp #2 pencils.