

FST 377: AMERICAN CINEMA SINCE 1961
SYLLABUS AND POLICIES

Screening and Lecture: Mon 9:00 am-12:15 pm (195 min) in KI 101
Discussion Section 1: Wed. 9:30 – 10:45 am in KI 104
Discussion Section 2: Wed. 11:00 am – 12:15 pm in KI 104

Professor Todd Berliner
Fall 2009

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The course introduces students to some of the history and formal properties of American film since the end of the Hollywood studio system. I haven't tried to represent all of the styles, genres and voices that have come out of American film in the past 50 years. Instead, I have picked exemplary movies that help me say the things I think you should know about American cinema during this period.

We will often engage in what some scholars call an “historical poetics” of contemporary American cinema, as we seek to understand the conditions that enabled American cinema to assume the form it has in the last half century. In so doing, we will consider all of the major topics discussed by historians of the period, including the break-up of the motion picture studios, demographic changes, the emergence of the film ratings system, the “blockbuster syndrome,” the “event film,” home video, market globalization, and other stuff like that. We will not, however, cover these topics systematically. I find that lecturing on, say, “the effect of tax shelters on American independent filmmaking, 1970-1976” encourages students to scribble notes and understand nothing. If instead we allow the particulars of particular movies to invite comment on such 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.

Throughout, we will study movies *as* movies—that is, as experiences for spectators—and we will not stray far from what I regard as our central question and the only question about the cinema that I spend much time thinking about: What is it about the movies people like that makes people like them?

Prerequisite: FST 200; and prerequisite or corequisite: FST 205; or permission of instructor.

CLASS MEETINGS, SCREENINGS, AND FILMS

Class meets twice each week: on Mondays for film screenings and as much lecture as the period will allow, and on Wednesday 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 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 in Randall Library. Many of the movies we are seeing are also available at video stores, Netflix, and the New Hanover County Public Library.

I've reflected for some time over the next directive: You may not use laptops during class time. I've found that they encourage students to multi-task, rather than attend to the activities of the course, and distract other students.

The course has controversial and potentially upsetting material. Please see me if you have concerns.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADES

There's quite a lot of reading in this course, and you'll have to read carefully and take notes, but the writing assignments don't begin until midway through the semester.

At the very beginning of at least seven 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 in the semester. 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 six scores.

During the second half of the semester, students will work on individual research projects, together worth 55% of the course grade. A separate handout has detailed instructions for the writing assignments, and the course schedule below indicates due dates.

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

1. Quizzes (best six scores) (25%)
2. Prospectus and Working Bibliography for Final Paper (10%)
3. Detailed Outline and Refined Bibliography for Final Paper (20%)
4. Final Paper and List of Works Cited (25%)
5. Attendance, punctuality, participation, preparedness for class (20%)

OFFICE HOURS, EMAIL, AND CONTACTING ME

I will hold office hours on Mondays 1:30-3:00 pm., or by appointment, in King Hall 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.

If I need to reach you, I'll use your campus email address.

PLAGIARISM AND HONOR CODE

Plagiarism is 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. All members of UNCW's community are expected to follow the academic Honor Code, as covered in the UNCW Student Handbook.

WRITING RESOURCES

Randall library has a webpage devoted to film studies resources: <http://library.uncwil.edu/subject/Film/>. Liza Palmer (962-4234, palmerl@uncw.edu), the film studies librarian, will help you obtain materials for your papers.

You can receive free individual help on your papers from The Learning Center (WE 1056, 962-7857).

TEXTS

Bring each week's readings with you to class on the days they are listed in the syllabus, including print outs of the reserve readings.

Required

- David Bordwell, *The Way Hollywood Tells It: Story and Style in Modern Movies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006)
- Electronic Reserve. The reserve readings may be downloaded from the Randall library course reserve website at <http://library.uncwil.edu/>.

Recommended

- Subscription to Netflix or another mail-order DVD service.

FST 377: American Cinema Since 1961 – Schedule

Screening and Lecture: Mon 9:00 am-12:15 pm (195 min) in KI 101

Section 1: Wed. 9:30 – 10:45 am in KI 104

Section 2: Wed. 11:00 am – 12:15 pm in KI 104

Notes:

- Study the readings before the class meeting for which they are listed. Bring the week’s readings with you to class, including print-outs of the PDF files.
- “*TWHTP*” stands for David Bordwell’s *The Way Hollywood Tells It*.
- Titles with “.pdf” at the end can be downloaded from Randall Library electronic reserve page for this course.

WEEKS 1-3: AMERICAN CINEMA IN THE SIXTIES

- 1 Aug 19 Wed **Screening:** *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence* (1962, 122 min., John Ford). See the remainder of the film on your own by August 26.
- 2 24 Mon **Screening:** *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967, 111 min., Arthur Penn)
Reading: “Syllabus and Policies” (this handout)
- 26 Wed **Reading:** 1) Hollywood1965.pdf
2) *TWHTI* (pp. 1-18)
Last day to add or drop.
- 3 31 Mon **Screening:** *Faces* (1968, 130 min., John Cassavetes).
Sep 2 Wed **Reading:** 1) ModernClassicism.pdf (pp. 1-21 only)
2) Carney.Faces.pdf

WEEKS 4-6: CORPORATE HOLLYWOOD, THE BLOCKBUSTER SYNDROME, AND MAINSTREAM EXPLOITATION CINEMA

- 4 7 Mon *Labor Day Holiday*
9 Wed **Reading:** 1) *TWHTI* (pp. 19-50)
2) Gomery.corporate.pdf
- 5 Sep 14 Mon **Screening:** *The Godfather* (1972, 175 min., Francis Ford Coppola).
16 Wed **Reading:** 1) Cook.DecadeofChange.pdf
2) Blockbuster.pdf
- 6 21 Mon **Screening:** *The Exorcist* (1973, 121 min., William Friedkin).
23 Wed **Reading:** 1) Horrorexploitation.pdf
2) *TWHTI* (pp. 115-120)
3) Writing Assignments handout (pp. 1-2)

WEEKS 7-9: NEW HOLLYWOOD AUTEURISM

- 7 28 Mon **Screening:** *Nashville* (1975, 160 min., Robert Altman)
I’ll have office hours this week on Tuesday (not Monday) 12:30-2pm.
- 29 Tues **Due in my office hours (12:30-2:00) or by appointment by September 30:** Students writing research papers on topics other than one of the ones indicated in the Writing Assignments handout must meet with me with a prepared paper topic.
- 30 Wed **Reading:** 1) King.Auteurs.pdf (pp. 85-105 only)
2) Cook.Altman.pdf
- 8 Oct 5 Mon *Fall Vacation!*
7 Wed **Workshop:** Meet today in the Randall Library main instruction room (RL 1039) for a Library Instruction Session.
Due in class: Come to class having determined your final paper topic and prepared to begin research on it.

8 Thur Last day to withdraw with a W

- 9 12 Mon **Screening:** *Taxi Driver* (1976, 113 min., Martin Scorsese)
14 Wed **Reading:** 1) Cook.Auteur.pdf
2) Scorsese.TaxiDriver.pdf (pp. 53-67 only)
3) "Writing Assignments" handout (p. 3)
4) Sample prospectuses (e-reserve)

WEEKS 10-11: RE-IMAGINING GENRE: SCIENCE FICTION AND THE WESTERN

- 10 19 Mon **Screening:** *Blade Runner* (1982, 117 min., Ridley Scott)
21 Wed **Reading:** *TWHTI* (pp. 121-157)
Workshop: How to Develop a Strong Thesis and Other Unsolicited Writing Advice
23 Fri **Due in my box by noon:** Prospectus and Working Bibliography
- 11 26 Mon **Screening:** *Unforgiven* (1992, 131 min., Clint Eastwood)
28 Wed **Reading:** 1) SchatzWestern1.pdf (pp. 25-36 only)
2) Allen.technology.pdf

WEEKS 12-13: HYPER-CLASSICISM AND THE ENTERTAINMENT ECONOMY

- 12 Nov 2 Mon **Screening:** *Die Hard* (1988, 131 min., John McTiernan)
4 Wed **Reading:** 1) *TWHTI* (pp. 104-114)
2) Entertainmenteconomy.pdf
3) "Writing Assignments" handout (pp. 4-5)
4) Sample Outlines (e-reserve)
- 13 9 Mon **Screening:** *Jerry Maguire* (1996, 139 min., Cameron Crowe)
10 Tues **Due in my box by noon:** Detailed Outline and Refined Bibliography (along with original prospectus and working bibliography with my comments)
11 Wed **Reading:** 1) *TWHTI* (pp. 51-71)
2) Balio.globalization.pdf

WEEK 14: THE NETWORK NARRATIVE AND INDIE CINEMA

- 14 16 Mon **Screening:** *Magnolia* (1999, 188 min., Paul Thomas Anderson)
18 Wed **Reading:** 1) *TWHTI* (pp. 72-103)
2) Schamus.indieeconomics.pdf
3) sample papers (e-reserve)

WEEKS 15-16: SOME CURRENT STYLISTIC AND NARRATIVE TRENDS

- 15 23 Mon **Screening:** *United 93* (2006, 111 min., Paul Greengrass)
Reading: *TWHTI* (pp. 158-179)
25 Wed *Thanksgiving Break*
- 16 30 Mon **Screening:** *Michael Clayton* (2007, 119 min., Tony Gilroy)
Dec 2 Wed **Reading:** *TWHTI* (pp. 180-189)
4 Fri **Due in my box by noon:** Final Paper, along with original outline (with my comments).

References for Electronic Reserve Readings

1. **MLAStyleGuide2.pdf**
A reference guide for formatting your papers and bibliographies.
2. **Hollywood1965.pdf**
David Cook, "Hollywood, 1965-Present" in *A History Of Narrative Film*, 3rd Edition (New York: Norton, 1996), 919-33.
3. **ModernClassicism.pdf**
Kristin Thompson, "Modern Classicism" in *Storytelling in the New Hollywood: Understanding Classical Narrative Technique* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999) 1-44.
4. **Carney.Faces.pdf**
Ray Carney, "Noncontemplative Art (*Faces*)" in *The Films of John Cassavetes: Pragmatism, Modernism, and the Movies* (Cambridge [England]; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 74-113.
5. **Gomery.corporate.pdf**
Douglas Gomery, "Hollywood Corporate Business Practice and Periodizing Contemporary Film History," in Steve Neale and Murray Smith, ed., *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998) 47-57.
6. **Cook.DecadeofChange.pdf**
David Cook, "Introduction: A Decade of Change" in *Lost Illusions: American Cinema in the Shadow of Watergate and Vietnam, 1970-1979* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2000), 1-7
7. **Blockbuster.pdf**
Cook, "Manufacturing the Blockbuster: The Newest Art Form of the Twentieth Century" in Cook, *Lost Illusions*, 25-51.
8. **Horrorexploitation.pdf**
Cook, "Horror and the Mainstreaming of Exploitation" in Cook, *Lost Illusions*, 220-238.
9. **King.Auteurs.pdf**
Geoff King, "From Auteurs to Brats: Authorship in New Hollywood," *New Hollywood Cinema: An Introduction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002) 85-115.
10. **Cook.Altman.pdf**
Cook, "Robert Altman" in Cook, *Lost Illusions*, 89-98.
11. **Cook.Auteur.pdf**
Cook, "The Auteur Cinema" in Cook, *Lost Illusions*, 67-72.
12. **Scorsese.TaxiDriver.pdf**
David Thompson and Ian Christie, ed., "*Mean Streets—Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore—Taxi Driver*," *Scorsese on Scorsese* (London and New York: Faber and Faber, 1996), 38-67.
13. **SchatzWestern1.pdf**
Thomas Schatz, "The Western" in *Hollywood Genres : Formulas, Filmmaking, and the Studio System* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981), 45-80
14. **Allen.technology.pdf**
Michael Allen, "From *Bwana Devil* to *Batman Forever*: Technology in Contemporary Hollywood Cinema," in Neale and Smith, 109-129.
15. **Entertainmenteconomy.pdf**
Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell, "American Cinema and the Entertainment Economy: The 1980s and After" in *Film History: An Introduction*, Second Edition (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2003), 679-704.
16. **Balio.globalization.pdf**
Tino Balio, "'A Major Presence in All of the World's Important Markets': The Globalization of Hollywood in the 1990s," in Neale and Smith, 58-73.
17. **Schamus.indieeconomics.pdf**
James Schamus, "To the Rear of the Back End: The Economics of Independent Cinema," in Neale and Smith, 91-105.
18. **Sample prospectuses, outlines, and papers.**
Exemplary work by students in previous courses.