

English 4578: Special Topics in Film

Autumn 2012
TU/TH 5:30-6:50
Denney Hall 214

Prof. Friedman

Office Hours: TU/TH 4:00-5:00 & by
appointment (Denney 565)

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American Cinema in Times of Transition

Course Description: Throughout the history of the American cinema, major changes to the technology and organizational structure of film production—as well as to the venues where films are exhibited and viewed—have transformed the very nature of the medium. During the resulting periods of “transition,” filmmakers are forced rethink the basic conventions of cinema, the ways in which movies tell stories and address viewers. This course will examine a series of important films that reflect the disruptive and liberating consequences of each major transitional period. In particular, we will be interested in how filmmakers embrace and/or resist redefinitions of cinema and in how transitional films attempt to instruct viewers in new ways of consuming moving images. The transitional moments covered in the course will include: the rise and fall of “nickelodeon” theaters, the coming of recorded sound to cinema, the studios’ attempt to compete with the emergent medium of television, and the rise of the new digital 3-D.

Required Text:

-Jon Lewis, *American Film: A History* (W. W. Norton) Available at B&N OSU, SBX, College
Town, UBX, Buckeye Books; call ahead to check stock.

[-All other assigned texts are available through the course’s Carmen site.]

Requirements:

- Weekly quizzes on film viewings and readings
- A 3-4 page scene analysis essay
- A 4-5 page thesis-driven essay
- A midterm exam
- A final exam
- Regular attendance and active participation in class discussions

Schedule of Screenings, Readings, and Assignments (subject to minor changes):

BEGINNINGS

Weeks 1-2 From “Attractions” to “Story Films”

TH 8/23 Introduction

TU 8/28 Reading Due: *American Film (AF)*: pp. 3-16

In-class Screening: Early films and story films (ca. 1896-1905) (titles t.b.a.)

TH 8/30 Reading Due: *AF*: pp. 16-27, 30-34

In-class Screening: Short narrative films (ca. 1903-1912) (titles t.b.a.)

STORY

Week 3 The Rise of the Classical Narrative Paradigm

TU 9/4 Reading Due: *AF*: pp. 102-106; CARMEN: Richard Jewell, from “Narrative and Style”

TH 9/6 Screening Due: *The Philadelphia Story*, dir. George Cukor (1940)

Reading Due: CARMEN: Rick Altman, from *Film/Genre*

Week 4 Against/Beyond the CNP

TU 9/11 Reading Due: *AF*: pp. 415-424

TH 9/13 Screening Due: *The Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, dir. Michel Gondry (2004)

MEDIUM/SCREEN

Week 5 The Digital Revolution and the End of “Film”(?)

TU 9/18 Reading Due: *AF*: pp. 401-414; CARMEN: Lev Manovich, “Digital Cinema and the History of a Moving Image” (excerpts from *The Language of New Media*)

In-class Screening: Clips from *Titanic*, dir. James Cameron (1997)

TH 9/20 Screening Due: *The Matrix*, dir. Andy and Larry/Lana Wachowski (1999)

<< SCENE ANALYSIS ESSAY DUE >>

Week 6 Animation vs. “Live” Action; The New 3-D

TU 9/25 Screening Due: *Hugo*, dir. Martin Scorsese (2011)

TH 9/27 Reading Due: *AF*: pp. 233-238, 247-250; CARMEN: John Belton, excerpts from *Widescreen Cinema*

Week 7 A Transition to Color?; Widescreen and the Television Threat

TU 10/2 Screening Due: sections of *How the West Was Won*, dir. Ford, Hathaway, Marshall (1962)

TH 10/4 MIDTERM EXAM

Week 8 ***The Transition to Sound***

TU 10/9 Reading Due: *AF*: pp. 91-102, 131-136; CARMEN: Gilbert Seldes, from *An Hour With the Movies and the Talkies*

In-class Screening: Clips from *On With the Show*, dir. Alan Crosland (1929)

TH 10/11 Screening Due: *42nd Street*, dir. Busby Berkeley (1933)

THEATER/AUDIENCE

Week 9 ***The Movie Palace and the Silent Feature Picture; the Rise of the Film Star***

TU 10/16 Reading Due: *AF*: 44-53, 70-73; CARMEN: Lloyd Lewis, “The Deluxe Picture Palace”; John Ebersson, “A Description of the Capitol Theater, Chicago”

TH 10/18 Screening Due: *My Best Girl*, dir. Sam Taylor (1927)

Week 10 ***Production Code Enforcement***

TU 10/23 Reading Due: *AF*: pp. 110-128

TH 10/25 Screening Due: *Baby Face*, dir. Alfred Green (1933)

Week 11 ***The Demise of the Code and the “New Hollywood”***

TU 10/30 Reading Due: *AF*: pp. 238-247, 283-287

TH 11/1 Screening Due: *Bonnie and Clyde*, dir. Arthur Penn (1967)

Reading Due: *AF*: pp. 272-276

Week 12 ***The “Auteur Renaissance”***

TU 11/6 Screening Due: *Easy Rider*, dir. Dennis Hopper (1969)

TH 11/8 Reading Due: *AF*: pp. 289-305

<< THESIS-DRIVEN ESSAY DUE >>

Weeks 13-14 ***Challenges to Hollywood Segregation***

TU 11/13 Reading Due: *AF*: pp. 327-328, 336-347

TH 11/15 *Class does not meet*

TU 11/20 Screening Due: *Uptown Saturday Night*, dir. Sidney Poitier (1974)

TH 11/22 *Class does not meet*

Week 15 The Blockbuster Era

TU 11/27 Screening Due: *Jaws*, dir. Steven Spielberg (1975)

Reading Due: *AF*: pp. 319-327

TH 11/29 Reading Due: *AF*: pp. 353-368, 372-376

TU 12/4 Final Exam Review

<< FINAL EXAM: Wednesday, 12/12, 8:00-9:45 p.m. (in regular classroom) >>

Evaluation Method: Grades will be determined on basis of the midterm (15%) the scene analysis essay (15%), the thesis-driven essay (25%), the final exam (25%), and attendance/participation/quizzes (20%).

Grading Scale: I will use the following grading scale in this course:

A	93+	C+	79-77
A-	92-90	C	76-73
B+	89-87	C-	72-70
B	86-83	D	69-60
B-	82-80	E	59-

Quizzes: In order to assure that all members of the class have engaged with the assigned films and are ready to discuss them, I will give a brief quiz at the beginning of each meeting on which there is a “screening due.” The quizzes will consist of a few (~3) questions of basic fact about plot, character, or setting/situation. I want to devote as little time as possible to these quizzes, and they will not be graded as such: anyone who has viewed the film in its entirety will be able to answer the questions correctly. If a quiz indicates that you have not seen a film, I will contact you to let you know; failure on any quiz following this warning will result in the attendance/participation/film viewing of your grade being dropped by 10 points. The first quiz will be on Thursday, 9/6.

Participation and Attendance: Productive and thought-provoking class discussions depend upon your active participation: you should come to class prepared to comment on the assigned readings and to engage with your classmates’ ideas. In order to be prepared to contribute, I recommend that you take notes on what you watch and read. Civility and respect in the discussion setting are also paramount. While your attendance is required, my evaluation of your “participation” also takes into account your attentiveness during class, as well as the frequency and quality of your contributions to discussion.

*Anything that prevents you from being able to participate in or engage with the goings-on of the class—sleeping, reading or sending text messages, surfing the web on a laptop—will negatively affect this aspect of your grade, counting as a partial absence. Excessive absences (more than 1

unexcused absence) will negatively affect your final grade, with each successive missed class subtracting 5 percentage points from your participation average.

Videos: You are expected to view all assigned films in advance of the specified class meetings. Video streams of these films are available through the university's Secured Media Library. To access our course's "playlist," go to <https://drm.osu.edu/media/> and click on the "Assigned Playlists." There is also a link to the playlist through our course's Carmen site. (In order to play these video streams, the computer you're using will need to have the latest version of RealPlayer installed: see instructions for "Viewing" on main page).

DVD or VHS copies of many of the films are available on 4-hour reserve in Thompson Library. (To access these videos, go to the reserve desk on the first floor and tell the staff person the number of our course and the title you need.) Many of the films are available through Netflix (as DVDs or through their streaming service), if you subscribe to their service. Plan ahead and be resourceful when it comes to your screenings.

Written Assignments: Detailed topics for the essays will be distributed at least two weeks in advance of their due dates (which are listed on the schedule of assignments.) Essays are due in class on the assigned dates; essays submitted after the due date will not be accepted without prior approval.

Academic Integrity: This course follows the standards laid out by the University's Office of Academic Affairs: "Academic integrity is essential to maintaining an environment that fosters excellence in teaching, research, and other educational and scholarly activities. Thus, The Ohio State University and the Committee on Academic Misconduct (COAM) expect that all students have read and understand the University's *Code of Student Conduct*, and that all students will complete all academic...assignments with fairness and honesty. Students must recognize that failure to follow the rules and guidelines established in the University's *Code of Student Conduct* may constitute 'Academic Misconduct' [and lead to subsequent referral to the COAM]. OSU's *Code of Student Conduct* (Section 3335-23-04) defines academic misconduct as: 'Any activity that tends to compromise the academic integrity of the University, or subvert the educational process.' Examples of academic misconduct include (but are not limited to) plagiarism [the unauthorized representation of another's ideas or words as one's own], collusion (unauthorized collaboration), copying the work of another student, and possession of unauthorized materials during an examination." The *Code of Student Conduct* is available online (http://studentaffairs.osu.edu/resource_csc.asp). If you have additional questions, please contact me, or consult the COAM's helpful website (<http://oaa.osu.edu/coam/faq.html#faqlist>).

Disability Services: The Office of Disability Services (150 Pomerene Hall; x2-3307) offers support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Their policies and procedures can be viewed online (<http://www.ods.ohio-state.edu/current.asp>).

The Interdisciplinary Program in Film Studies: This course is approved for the interdisciplinary minor and major (as an elective) in Film Studies. For more information about film studies as a major or minor at OSU, go to <http://film-studies.osu.edu>, or email filmstudies@osu.edu.