

English/Cinema Studies 272

American Cinema: The Possibilities of Art in the Entertainment

Business

Spring 2002

Pat Day Rice 114 ext. 8574 william.patrick.day@oberlin.edu

Office Hours: T W 3-4:30 & by arrangement

In this course we'll explore what it means to look at cinema through the lens of a particular national tradition, our example being American cinema. An underlying concern of the course is not only how do we "discover" a tradition but what kind of critical perspective and limitations such an approach offers.

The tradition of American cinema is largely, though not exclusively, the tradition of the Hollywood entertainment industry, the self-proclaimed "dream factory." We will look at two eras which are arguably the high points of this Hollywood system, 1939-42 and 1971-75 in order to understand the ways "the system" we call Hollywood fostered distinctive types of moviemaking over its history. Many of the readings will focus on industrial history and the nature of the production system; the movies we will look at are presented in some measure as "examples" of the Hollywood traditions. A central question we will deal with is the degree to which we want to think of the movies made in this system as "products" and the degree to which we want to think about them under the rubric of "art." Or, as director William Wellman put it, we'll inquire about the relation of "canned goods to caviar."

Reading & Viewing Schedule

Date	Movie	Readings, Available on ERes	Supplementary Movie
Week 1 9/2		Margaret Farrand Thorp from <u>America at the Movies</u> Appendix IV: The Production Code of the Motion Picture Producers and Directors of America, Inc. Boardwell, Staiger & Thompson from <u>The Classical Hollywood Cinema</u> Robert B. Ray from <u>A Certain Tendency of Hollywood Cinema: "Introduction" and "Formal and Thematic Paradigms"</u> Richard Maltby <u>Hollywood: An Introduction</u>	<u>The Wizard of Oz</u> 1939
Week 2 9/9	<u>Gone With the Wind</u> 1939	from Richard Harwell, ed. <u>Gone With the Wind as Book and Film</u> from Leonard Leff <u>The Dame in the Kimono</u>	
Week 3 9/16	<u>Stagecoach</u> 1939	Peter Wollen "The Auteur Theory" Robert Rosenblum & Robert Karen from <u>When the Shooting Stops...the Cutting Begins.</u>	<u>Destry Rides Again</u> 1939 <u>Dodge City</u> 1939
Week 4 9/23	<u>Rebecca</u> 1940	Thomas Schatz from <u>The Genius of the System</u>	<u>Jezebel</u> 1938 <u>Suspicion</u> 1941 <u>Shadow of a Doubt</u> 1942
Week 5 9/30	<u>His Girl Friday</u> 1940	Gareth Jowett, ed. From <u>Film: The Democratic Art: Part Three: A Mature Oligopoly</u>	<u>The Philadelphia Story</u> 1940 <u>The Awful Truth</u> 1940 <u>My Favorite Wife</u> 1937 <u>The Lady Eve</u> 1940
Week 6 10/7	<u>The Maltese Falcon</u> 1941		<u>High Sierra</u> 1941 <u>Double Indemnity</u> 1944 <u>The Big Sleep</u> 1946
Week 7 10/14	<u>Citizen Kane</u> 1941		
10/21	<u>Break Week</u>		
Week 8	<u>The</u>	Jowett from <u>Film: The Democratic</u>	<u>Five Easy Pieces</u>

10/28	<u>Graduate Bonnie & Clyde</u>	<u>Art:The Uncertain Future</u> Robert Sklar from <u>Movie-made America: A Cultural History of American Movies</u> Gerald Mast, ed. from <u>The Movies in Our Midst</u>	1970 <u>Harold and Maude</u> 1971
Week 9 11/4	<u>Chinatown</u> 1974	Mast, Cohen, Braudy, ed. From <u>Film Theory and Criticism</u> John Cawelti, "Chinatown and Generic Transformation" Robert Benedetto "The Two Chintowns" from <u>Creative Screenwriting</u>	<u>The Long Goodbye</u> 1973
Week 10 11/11	<u>Taxi Driver</u> 1976	Paul Schrader, "Notes on Film Noir" Robert B. Ray from <u>A Certain Tendency of Hollywood Cinema</u> "The Godfather and Taxi Driver"	<u>Dirty Harry</u> 1971
Week 11 11/18	<u>The Godfather</u> 1971		<u>Mean Streets</u>
Week 12 11/25	<u>American Graffiti</u> 1973		<u>The Last Picture Show</u> 1970
Week 13 12/2	<u>Night of the Living Dead</u> 1968		<u>The Exorcist</u> 1973
Week 14 12/9			

Mechanics of the Course.

1) I assume valuable things happen in class sessions. I take attendance; I expect you to keep track of your attendance too, because "I didn't realize I'd missed that many classes" is not an excuse. You get two unexcused absences, absences other than illness or family emergency. "I had a paper due for another course, my fish was depressed, I don't do Wednesdays, I'm in a production of The Sunshine Boys and we had rehearsal" are not excusable absences.

We only have 39 classes, less than 39 hours over the semester. More than 2 unexcused absences and your grade goes down; after 6 unexcused absences,

you've no-entry-ed the course. I really mean this--it happened to two students last semester.

Attendance also means showing up on time. I'm aware that things happen, but regularly strolling in 5 minutes after class starts is a very bad idea.

2) You have to participate in the class. Participation doesn't mean talking a lot, it means being engaged in the interchange among the members of the class: asking good questions, responding to other people's questions, thinking before you talk. Talking in groups such as a class is a skill, every bit as much as writing is. It's a skill worth having, because in fact a lot of work in all institutions gets done in that way. Being able to talk effectively in a group is, as they say, an important "self-empowerment." I know that a number of people have trouble speaking up in class. You should feel as free to consult me on strategies and methods for doing that as you'd consult me about your writing.

3) You have to form, with other members of the course, a discussion group that meets outside of class once a week. Some groups prefer to meet before discussions and/or lectures, other prefer to meet after. Right after the showing of the movie on Sunday might be a good time to meet. That's up to each group to decide. Groups should be 4 or 5 people maximum. Each week I want each group to hand in a question/comment you've come up with together. This should come via email and hard copy and the hard copy should be signed by each member of the group. If somebody doesn't show up or participate, then it has to be turned in without their signature.

Incomplete Policy

Academic or emergency incompletes are yours to take if you want, as long as you are in good standing in the course. You don't need to tell me the story, unless you want to; I trust that you wouldn't take an incomplete without a good reason. "Good Standing" means that you have completed all the work assigned for the first module and at least some of the work for the second.

The Honor Code

It should go without saying that I expect you to hand in your own work, not somebody else's. But in this course I expect you to read each other's writing and talk to each other about your ideas. Having a real intellectual life does not mean hiding from other people's thoughts in hopes of staying "original" but instead responding imaginatively and creatively to the influence of other people's ideas. Thus obvious cheating--buying papers off the net, using somebody else's essay from another course, lifting unacknowledged sections from other people's writing--is plagiarism. You simply can't learn anything from this sort of thing,

so it violates the whole point of education. If discussions with other people in the course or in the readings you do for the course or in other contexts influences your thinking to an unusual degree, you should acknowledge them.

Writing Assignments

- * Written work must be handed in on time.
- * Late essays will be accepted at the discretion of the instructor
- * All work must be handed in to get credit for the course.
- * Hard copies of essays must be typed, double spaced, stapled together, pages numbered.
- * Backs of previously used paper is fine for drafts; final version should be printed on both sides of the sheet.
- * Essays must have a title, though they don't have to have a cover sheet.
- * References should be in the following form: (Wordsworth, "Preface" p. 2) with full citation in end notes

Short Assignments

The class will be divided into writing groups. Each week one group will write a short essay due by 5 p.m. on Tuesday, another will write a sort essay due by 5 PM on Thursday. Essays should be about 600 words (two typed pages) These essays will be posted to a course listserve.

Initial Assignment

#1. A 600 word essay explaining why you're taking the course, what specifically you want to get out of it, and what you think you know about American cinema.

Midterm Essay

#2. 1500 words. This is a short critical essay; I'll ask you to focus on the relation of style to meaning in a single movie. Due the week before Spring Break.

The Final Essay

A 3000+ word essay on a topic of your choice. I am open to proposals for different kinds of final projects, though they will require a proposal, a progress report, and a final report/reflection on the project. The essay will be developed in three stages.

#1 Proposal. A brief 300 word explanation of what you think you want to write about and why you think this is important. Due week 11

#2 First Draft. Due week 13. I'll read and comment on this draft. It should be as complete as possible, but I don't expect a "finished" product.

#3 Final Draft. Due at the end of Reading Period.

How I comment on your written work.

The comments on your writing will be, as one former student put it, "ambiguous." I don't do much "this is good, that's bad" commenting. The comments I make will be directed to making you think about what you're writing about, raising issues you may want to consider in revising, or writing about in the next prep essay. I won't always comment on your prep essay. I do this not because they aren't important, but because you need to develop the ability to judge your own work, rather than to always expect to be told whether it is good or bad by someone else. For specific advice on how to revise, what to do with a particular argument, etc., we should set up a conference.

Grading

You won't receive any grades over the course of the semester. This isn't because the grade is unimportant (if it was unimportant we wouldn't give it, would we?) but because the work in the course is part of a process, rather than a sequence of discrete units. If I am trying to encourage you to use your writing to be experimental and speculative, leading to your final essay, it makes little sense to grade it along the way. But if you want a sense of how you're doing, you should feel free to come and speak to me about your work. I will be able to tell you if you are making what I see as reasonable progress, what things you may want to work on, what things you seem to be doing best. I won't be able to be extremely precise about a grade equivalent, however. On a rough scale, though, I would say that if you are doing intelligent analysis of the works we consider and are able to state your own views clearly, that is C- to C+ work. If you are able to interpret the material we are working with, discuss not only what is "said" but what its significance might be, you would be in the B- to B range. If in addition you can demonstrate a capacity for self-reflective critical work (thinking about your own way of thinking and what it means to think as you do) you would be in the B+ to A range. So these are the kinds of mental activity you will be doing in the course: analysis & response, interpretation, and self-reflection.

Filmography for American Cinema

Gone With the Wind 1939, MGM/Selznick, prod. David O. Selznick, dir. Victor Fleming; uncredited directors: George Cukor, Sam Wood, David Selznick, scr. Sidney Howard and others, ph Ernst Haller, Ray Renaham, mus. Max Steiner, pd. William Cameron Menzies, ad Lyle Wheeler 1939

Stagecoach UA/Walter Wanger, prod. John Ford, dir. scr. Dudley Nicholas, ph Bert Gennon, Ray Binger, mus, 5 composers, md Boris Morros 1939

His Girl Friday 1940, Columbia, prod./dir. Howard Hawkes, src. Charles Lederer from The Front Page, Charles MacArthur and Ben Hecht ph Joseph Walker 1940

Rebecca , Selznick International, prod. David O. Selznick, dir. Alfred Hitchcock; scr. Robert Shrewood, Joan Harrison, ph George Barnes, mus Franz Waxman 1940

The Maltese Falcon, Warner Brothers, prod. Henry Blanke, dir. John Huston, scr. John Huston ph Arthur Edson, mus. Arnold Deutsch 1941

Citizen Kane, RKO, prod./dir. Orson Welles scr. Joseph Mankiewicz, ph Gregg Toland, mus Bernard Hermann, ad Van Nest Polglase 1941

The Graduate UA/Embassy dir. Mike Nichols scr. Calder Winglham & Buck Henry ph Robert Surtees pd Richard Sylbert mus. Dave Grusin. Paul Simon 1967

Bonnie & Clyde Warner/Seven Arts/Tatira/Hiller Warren Beatty d. Arthur Penn scr. David Newman, Robert Benton, ph Burrent Guffey mus. Charles Strouse, Earl Scruggs 1967

The Godfather Paramount/ Alfran Albert S. Ruddy, prod. dir. Francis Ford Coppola, scr. Francis Ford Coppola and Mario Puzo from his novel, ph Gordon Willis, pd Dean Tavourelais, mus. Nino Rota 1972

Chinatown. Paramount/Long Road Robert Evans, prod. dir. Roman Polanski, scr. Robert Towne, ph John Alonso, pd Richard Sylbert, mus Jerry Goldsmith 1973.

American Graffiti Universal/Lucasfilm/Coppola Company (Francis Ford Coppola & Gary Kurtz) dir. George Lucas, scr George Lucas, Gloria Katz, Willard Huyck, ph Ron Eveslage, Jan D'Alquen, Lazlo Kovacs (uncredited) mus; various sources. 1973

Taxi Driver Columbia/Italo-Jdeo (Michael and Julia Phillips) dir Martin Scorsese, scr. Paul Schrader, ph Michael Chapman, mus. Bernard Herrmann 1976

