

**English/Cinema Studies 272: American Cinema: The Possibilities of
Art in the Entertainment Business Spring 2004**

**Pat Day Rice 114 ext. 8574 william.patrick.day@oberlin.edu
Office Hours: Th 2:30-4:30 & 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 1967-74 in order to understand the way "the system" we call Hollywood fostered distinctive types of moviemaking at different points in 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 or Blackboard	Supplementary Movie
Week 1 2/9		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>	
Week 2 2/16	<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>	<u>King's Row</u> , 1942
Week 3 2/23	<u>Stagecoach</u> 1939		<u>Destry Rides Again</u> 1939 <u>Dodge City</u> 1939
Week 4 3/1	<u>Rebecca</u> 1940	Thomas Schatz from <u>The Genius of the System</u>	<u>Jezebel</u> 1938
Week	<u>His Girl</u>	Gareth Jowett, ed. From <u>Film: The</u>	<u>The Philadelphia</u>

5 3/8	<u>Friday</u> 1940 <u>The Maltese Falcon</u> 1941	<u>Democratic Art: Part Three: A Mature Oligopoly</u>	<u>Story</u> 1940 <u>The Awful Truth</u> 1940 <u>My Favorite Wife</u> 1937 <u>High Sierra</u> 1941 <u>Double Indemnity</u> 1944 <u>The Big Sleep</u> 1946
Week 6 3/15	<u>Citizen Kane</u> 1941		
Week 7 3/22			
3/29	Break Week		
Week 8 4/5	<u>The Graduate</u> <u>Bonnie & Clyde</u> 1967	Jowett from <u>Film: The Democratic 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>	<u>Five Easy Pieces</u> 1970 <u>Harold and Maude</u> 1971
Week 9 4/12	<u>Night of the Living Dead</u> 1968 <u>The Last Picture Show</u> 1971		<u>The Exorcist</u> 1973 <u>Airport</u> 1970
Week 10 4/19	<u>American Graffiti</u> 1973		<u>The Poseidon Adventure</u> 1972
Week 11 4/26	<u>The Godfather</u> 1971	Robert B. Ray from <u>A Certain Tendency of Hollywood Cinema</u> "The Godfather and Taxi Driver"	
Week 12 5/3	<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> Paul Schrader, "Notes on Film Noir"	<u>Dirty Harry</u> 1971 <u>The Long Goodbye</u> 1973
Week 13 5/10			

Showings for the course will be Sunday at 7 pm. Mudd 050

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. We only have 39 classes, less than 39 hours over the semester. More than 4 absences will affect your grade. The issue is not why you are absent but that you have missed class, which is an essential part of the course; missing class sessions is no different than not handing in written work. In the economy of your existence, some things may seem more important to you than attending class; I recognize that and don't take such choices personally, but you need to understand there are consequences to such decisions. You may get sick or have family emergencies, but the best way to deal with that is to make sure you come to class, so if those things happen, illness and emergencies won't affect your grade.

This 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. Its 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.

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 & Responses

I'll assign each of you 2 days (one each module) on which you have a short essay due. Essays should be about 1000 words. These essays will be posted to Blackboard. I'll also assign each of you to respond to 2 essays, the responses, about 500 words, to be posted on Blackboard.

Viewing Journal

Each of you should keep a notebook in which you record responses to the movies we watch. These responses need not be long, they can easily pose more questions than you answer, but entries should be made right after you see the movie. I'll collect these journals periodically across the semester.

Midterm Essay

#2. 1500 words. A more detailed explanation of the assignment will be handed in week six. Due the Friday 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 500 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 responses to your essay, asking questions, raising issues you may want to consider in writing the next prep essay. For specific advice on writing we should set up a conference.

Grading

Though you will get comments and responses to your work, 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.

I also think that micro-evaluation becomes overbearing and keeps people from learning how to realistically evaluate their own work, which I think is a major goal of liberal arts education.

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.

Occasionally students will ask about a response to an essay or a final grade by saying "I worked very hard on this essay." I assume, absent clear evidence to the contrary, that *everybody* works hard. I can't evaluate anything but what I can see and hear--the things you write, what you say in class, etc. The grade in a course can't really evaluate how hard you worked, just as it doesn't directly reflect what you have learned. It reflects my professional evaluation of the work you produced. This doesn't seem at all unfair to me--it is simply built into the grading system as it exists.

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.

I don't have any grade quotas--if everybody in the course does A work, I have no problem giving everybody an A. But I want to make clear that I consider B- or B to be a perfectly good grade; if you think that anything lower than a B+ is unacceptable to you, maybe you should consider taking another course.

The Quality of Your Writing

One thing which seems to define the arts is the inextricable relationship between what we say and how we say it. This is as true in cinema as in literature. I think this also applies to critical writing in the humanities. Each essay should be interesting to

read not only for its ideas but how those ideas are expressed. Therefore, how you write is an important aspect of your essay and something I take into account when I evaluate it. I'm not talking here just about technical correctness (spelling, grammar, format, etc) though those things matter. I'm talking about the quality of style and form which gives the essay an individual voice and shape. The essays you write in this course shouldn't be just machines to carry ideas but should show a rhetorical awareness of the reader and an organization based on the specific argument you're making. I'm not asking for your essay to be particularly experimental or "artistic," just to be something I, or anyone else in the course, will actually enjoy reading.

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 Hawks, 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 Embassy Pictures/Lawrence Turman, Inc/MGM p Lawrence Turman d. Mike Nichols scr. Clader Willingham and Buck Henry ph Robert Surtees pd Richard Sylbert m Dave Grusin, Paul Simon 1967

Bonnie and Clyde Tatira-Hiller Prod./Warner Bros.-Seven Arts p Warren Beatty d. Arthur Penn scr David Newman, Robert Benton and Robert Towne (uncredited) ph Burnett Guffey pd Dean Tavourelais, mus Flatt & Scroggs, Charles Strouse, 1967

The Last Picture Show BBS Prodcutions/Columbia Pictures p. Stephen J. Friedman and Peter Bogdanovich, ph Robert Surtees pd Polly Platt mus. John Philip Sousa, Hank Williams 1971

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