

# AMERICAN CINEMA

## **The Course:**

This course will present a critical understanding and historical knowledge on American Cinema. We will explore American Cinema from the early years to the New American Cinema through historical, cultural, political and social perspectives. These perspectives will be illustrated with the iconic examples from American Cinema.

## **About the Professor**

Dr. Susan Smith Nash has developed numerous literature courses in the humanities, including world literature, American literature, and film. She earned her Ph.D. from the University of Oklahoma, where she currently teaches, and is widely published in the areas of literature, film criticism, e-learning, and discourse of science. In addition, she has served as editor for journals focusing on literature and literary criticism.

## **Course Content:**

Early Cinema

1920'S : Silent Era

1930's : Golden Era

1940's : War

1950's : Postwar

1960's

1970's

1980's-1990's : New, New Cinema

2000's : Digital Age



## Week 1 **Early Cinema**

### *Historical Background*

The world's first film production studio, known as the **Black Maria**, was built in West Orange, New Jersey around 1890 within Thomas Edison's laboratories. It was a black, tar-paper covered building with a flip-up roof, and it was designed to take advantage of natural sunlight. Early films shot and produced at the Black Maria featured "slice of life" neighborhood scenes, firemen, trains, as well as staged vaudeville, plays, dances, acts from Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, boxing matches, and scantily-clad women.

### *Industry*

Technological innovations in filmmaking as well as in projection resulted in the ability of theaters to show loops of black and white film. The earliest was developed by Edison, although in France the Lumiere Brothers quickly developed what was considered a superior system for filming and projecting. Later the technologies were integrated which resulted in longer, more dramatic movies.

### *Filmmakers*

Georges Melies: French filmmaker and the innovator of many special effects. He was one of the first to use multiple exposures, time-lapse photography, dissolves, and hand-painted color.

Mack Sennett: A Canadian-born American known as the father of slapstick comedy, from around 1915 to the 1930s. He also originated the concept of film "bathing beauties."

### *Readings*

Lewis, pp. 3 – 41

Day-Mayer, H., & Mayer, D. (2008). Griffith in the Twilight. *Nineteenth Century Theatre & Film*, 35(1), 48-51. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.

### **Must the Players Keep Young?": Early Hollywood's Cult of Youth**

Heather Addison

*Cinema Journal* , Vol. 45, No. 4 (Summer, 2006), pp. 3-25

Published by: [University of Texas Press](#) on behalf of the [Society for Cinema & Media Studies](#)

Article Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4137165>

### Essay Questions

1. Describe the themes of early cinema.
2. Explain how film techniques in early silent films explored the idea of gazing upon, watching in a self-reflexive way, aspects of everyday life.
3. List early short films, the actors, plot lines and their impact that they had on audiences.
4. Discuss how and when special effects were used in early science fiction films.

## Week 2-3 **1920's : Silent Era**

### *Historical Background*

1920s-era films were silent, and they dealt with themes, topics, and subjects that fascinated the American public which included the Ku Klux Klan (*The Birth of a Nation*), exotic cultures (*The Thief of Baghdad*), spectacles of history (*Intolerance*), urban life (*City Lights*), and westerns (*Out West*). The star system often led to lavish excess and scandal, which also fascinated audiences.

### *Industry*

While the earliest American films were produced in many different locations throughout the U.S., the film production was consolidated in Hollywood with the birth of the studio system in 1915. The studios, which were led by hard-nosed businessmen, emphasized developing a star system and films intended to a broad American audience.

### *Filmmakers*

D. W. Griffith: A pioneer in American film who became best known for his 1915 film, *Birth of a Nation*, and *Intolerance* (1916), both of which explored dangerous themes of racism.

Cecil DeMille: A huge aficionado of jodhpurs and knee-high riding boots, as though he had just come from a steeplechase event, DeMille was renowned for his flamboyant directorial style and extreme showmanship in such early film classics as *Cleopatra*, *The Greatest Show on Earth*, and *The Ten Commandments*.

Stroheim: An Austrian-born film "auteur" who was a star during the silent era of film and who became famous for being extremely demanding as a director. He was simultaneously parodied and immortalized in Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard* in which he acted, portraying the part of Max von Mayerling (1950).

Ince: The "father of the Westerns," Thomas Ince was an actor, director, director, and producer of more than 100 films. He became well-known for his ability to streamline the filmmaking process. It is rumored that he was shot to death by William Randolph Hearst over a quarrel over actress Marion Davies.

Murnau: German director in the 1920s, whose work became emblematic of German Expressionism.

### *Comedy*

Charlie Chaplin: Silent film star known for his "Little Tramp" role.

Buster Keaton: actor, filmmaker, writer, known for his comic roles and physical comedy in silent films

Harold Lloyd: Silent film actor and producer, best known for his "Glasses Character" who embodied the plucky attitudes of the Roaring Twenties.

Laurel and Hardy: Acting duo whose slapstick comedy appeared in a total of 107 films, both silent and sound, in shorts as well as full-length features.

### *Readings*

Lewis 43-89

### **Making "It" in Hollywood: Clara Bow, Fandom, and Consumer Culture**

Marsha Orgeron

*Cinema Journal* , Vol. 42, No. 4 (Summer, 2003), pp. 76-97

Published by: [University of Texas Press](#) on behalf of the [Society for Cinema & Media Studies](#)

Article Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1566529>

### **Showdown at the Hollywood Corral: Wyatt Earp and the Movies**

Paul Andrew Hutton

*Montana: The Magazine of Western History* , Vol. 45, No. 3, Popular Culture Issue (Summer, 1995), pp. 2-31

Published by: [Montana Historical Society](#)

Article Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4519813>

### Essay Questions

1. Describe the characteristics of "talkies" and how the equipment used for recording sound reduced some of the visual effects in movies and replaced them with an emphasis on dialogue.
2. Explain the importance of melodrama in early silent film and also talkies, using at least three examples.
3. Discuss the difference between shorts and full-length features.
4. Evaluate the characteristics of heroes and heroines in early films

### **Week 4-5 Golden era**

#### *Overview*

Technological advances resulting in sound and color revolutionized American cinema and allowed new, innovative cinematic forms to emerge. At the same time, genre film flourished, including film noir, screwball comedy, gangster films, westerns, psychological thrillers, and romance. The Hayes Code attempted to allay fears that Hollywood exerted a negative moral influence on the American public. The studio system evolved and changed, which influenced the type of films that actors worked on as well as the kinds of images they could portray. Often referred to as the "Golden Age of Hollywood," the 1930s culminated with classics including *Gone With the Wind*, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, *Ninotchka*, *Stagecoach*, *The Wizard of Oz* and *Wuthering Heights*. In France,

both Marcel Carné's *Daybreak* (aka *Le Jour Se Lève*) and Jean Renoir's *The Rules of the Game* (considered by some to be the greatest film of all-time, but banned during the German occupation) were released. Other major classic films in 1939 included *Beau Geste*, *Dark Victory*, *Destry Rides Again*, *Love Affair* (later remade as *An Affair to Remember*), *Only Angels Have Wings*, *Gunga Din*, *Midnight*, *Of Mice and Men*, *The Women*, *Young Mr. Lincoln*, and many more.

### *Technology*

**Sound.** For the first time, all films became "talkies." Instead of the one-reel shorts, "feature length" movies of an hour or so became commonplace. Greta Garbo starred in her first talkie, MGM's *Anna Christie* (1930), advertised with the tagline: GARBO TALKS! The Best Actress-nominated actress, in the role of the title character, spoke her first line of dialogue with: "Give me a whisky, ginger ale on the side. And don't be stingy, baby." The film, the second screen version of Eugene O'Neill's 1922 play about the Minnesota-raised Swedish girl and ex-prostitute, was co-produced by Irving Thalberg and directed/produced by Clarence Brown.

**Color movies** were first widely shown in the late thirties, with the advent of Technicolor. *The Wizard of Oz* was considered one of the early masterpieces of Technicolor.

### Industry

contract system: Actors were contracted to the studios, who exercised complete control over their image, roles, and acting careers.

**Censorship:** Public pressure (mainly from the Catholic Church) came down hard on Hollywood and insisted that the films stop featuring (and promoting) pre-marital sex, alcoholism, immoral and criminal activity, among other subjects. To keep from losing markets, Hollywood capitulated with the Production Code or Hays Code.

### *Genres*

**Animation:** In addition to Disney studios, animated films featuring animals (often with very adult themes) were popular, most notably *Looney Tunes*.

**Comedy:** Comedy evolved from the 1920s with the advent of sound. The Marx Brothers were noted for their humorous dialogue that blended with physical comedy.

**Horror:** Often utilizing the techniques of German Expressionism, horror films became popular in the 1930s, with *Frankenstein*, *Dracula*, *The Mummy*, and others.

**Screwball Comedy:** Comedies characterized by wacky, escapist humor with often quirky relations between men and women.

**Cowboy / Western:** Very popular genre in the 1930s – Hopalong Cassidy perhaps the most prolific.

### *Filmmakers*

Thalberg: Ground-breaking director, worked with studio system

**Fritz Lang:** German director and master of German Expressionism who became famous with *M* and *Metropolis* before moving to the U.S. where he helped establish the techniques used in film noir.

### *Readings*

*Lewis* 91-145

### **Latitude in Mass-Produced Culture's Capital: New Women and Other Players in Hollywood, 1920-1941**

Brett L. Abrams

*Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* , Vol. 25, No. 2 (2004), pp. 65-95

Published by: [University of Nebraska Press](#) Article Stable URL:

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3347305>

### **The Most Romantic Art of All: Music in the Classical Hollywood Cinema**

Carol Flinn

*Cinema Journal* , Vol. 29, No. 4 (Summer, 1990), pp. 35-50

Published by: [University of Texas Press](#) on behalf of the [Society for Cinema & Media Studies](#)

Article Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1225315>

### *Essay Questions*

1. Select a film genre that emerged in the 1930s and trace its evolution and changes, with examples from film.
2. Explain how the role of women evolved in films in the 1930s.
3. Select a film and discuss three other films that are similar to it.
4. Explain how technological advances such as sound and color revolutionized certain aspects of film in the 1930s.

### **Week 6-7 1940's: War**

#### *Historical Background*

Wartime cinema in the U.S. often focused on promoting the war effort, and it did so by promoting valor, sacrifice, and heroism in the theatres of war as well as on the home front. The impact of the war on the everyday life was a core theme, and the efforts were widely acknowledged. Hitchcock's *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943) and *Now, Voyager* (Rapper, 1942) worked on the psychological issues that manifest themselves during a time when men are

largely absent. The trauma of war and the often painful reintegration of veterans became an important theme, which appeared in the groundbreaking *The Best Years of Our Lives*. In the 1940s, genre became very important, with comedy films leading the way. Preston Sturges was the premier director of highbrow, while lowbrow comedy was represented by Abbot and Costello, the Bob Hope, and the Three Stooges. Social anxieties were reflected in early film noir, such as *Double Indemnity* (Wilder, 1944). Later film noir became even darker both stylistically and thematically. After the war, films such as the *Blue Dahlia* (Marshall, 1946) revolved around dangerous women who were often manipulative, unpredictable, and self-actualizing. Clearly it was not good to leave the women home alone during the war.

### *Industry*

After the war, in the fall of 1947, the House Committee on UnAmerican Activities (HUAC) subpoenaed nineteen studio employees (writers, directors, producers) and asked them to testify. Many individuals in Hollywood were accused of "UnAmerican" activities that were purported to destabilized America and to foment Communism. The resulting Hollywood Blacklist had a devastating impact on the film industry, largely by shutting out some of the best and brightest talents.

New film techniques were brought to the forefront with new cameras and camera work, such as "deep focus," extended tracking shots, rear lighting, along with extremely metaphoric mise-en-scene, such as a hall of mirrors

### *Genres*

Women's picture: a film genre which features female protagonists, a women-centered story line, and a focus on the lives of women

Comedy: popular up-beat genre used by several actors as vehicles for "trademark" series. Bob Hope, Abbott and Costello, and others were popular.

film noir: cinematic term that describes a genre with roots in German Expressionism, and is characterized by dark themes and shadows / light.

### *Filmmakers*

Selznick: A director who controlled the studio system.

Orson Welles: Director of *Citizen Kane*, often considered one of the top American films. He was known for deep focus and elaborate mise-en-scene.

Curtiz: Hungarian-born director of classic films, especially romantic ones, including *Casablanca*.

Vincent Minnelli: Prolific director, married to Judy Garland.



William Wyler: Well-known director of dramatic, epic films, including Ben-Hur, The Best Years of Our Lives, Wuthering Heights, Funny Girl.

## Readings

Lewis 147-191

### **DIFFERENT, EXCEPT IN A DIFFERENT WAY: MARRIAGE, DIVORCE, AND GENDER IN THE HOLLYWOOD COMEDY OF REMARRIAGE**

HEATHER GILMOUR

*Journal of Film and Video* , Vol. 50, No. 2 (Summer 1998), pp. 26-39

Published by: [University of Illinois Press](#) on behalf of the [University Film & Video Association](#)

Article Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20688177>

## *Essay Questions*

1. Select two war-themed films and describe the way they approached the theme of war.
2. Describe how techniques such as deep focus added a metaphorical level to film narrative.
3. Discuss the changes in the roles of women in the films of the 1940s.
4. Explore the film techniques, themes, and impact of film noir.

## Week 8-9 **1950's: Postwar**

### *Historical Background*

The impact of the Hollywood Blacklist, the collapse of the studio system, and the advent of television had a profound effect on Hollywood, ushering in what came to be known as the "New Hollywood," which rewarded more individualized effort, with merging of director / producer / screenwriting roles. Between 1955 and 1967, Hollywood underwent a transformation. In order to compete with television, Hollywood explored technologies and themes that were not possible in television. For example, ultra widescreen films such as CinemaScope and VistaVision gave the screen a very wide, panoramic potential. Themes in films were deeper and darker than in television, and more graphic depictions of sexuality and violence than before became common. In addition, remakes or adaptations of European films were popular, which helped bring the "nouvelle vague" (New Wave) films and techniques to the American big screen.

### *Technology*

Television

### *Trends*

Suburbia: The growth of suburbia had an impact on film in that it encouraged families to purchase televisions rather than going to the cinema.

Paramount case: 1948 anti-trust case that essentially broke up the Hollywood studio system and changed the way that movies were produced, distributed, and exhibited.

HUAC: House Un-American Activities Committee, an investigation into writers, producers, and actors in Hollywood with the goal of determining who might be promoting Communism. It resulted in a black list.

### *Genres*

Film Noir: genre that explored the dark side of humanity and human nature, characterized by femmes fatales, "bad" women, and flawed, often broken men.

### *Filmmakers*

Hawks: Influential director of wide range of genres, with hits including Red River, Gentlemen Prefer Blondes, and The Thing from Another World.

Billy Wilder: Director of comedies, including Some Like It Hot.

Elia Kazan: Director of many films that used method acting, including A Streetcar Named Desire.

### *Readings*

*Lewis 193-231*

#### **Side of the Angels: Dalton Trumbo, the Hollywood Trade Press, and the Blacklist**

Tim Palmer

*Cinema Journal* , Vol. 44, No. 4 (Summer, 2005), pp. 57-74

Published by: [University of Texas Press](#) on behalf of the [Society for Cinema & Media Studies](#)

Article Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3661125>

#### **The Studios Move into Prime Time: Hollywood and the Television Industry in the 1950s**

William Boddy

*Cinema Journal* , Vol. 24, No. 4 (Summer, 1985), pp. 23-37

Published by: [University of Texas Press](#) on behalf of the [Society for Cinema & Media Studies](#)

Article Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1224894>

### *Essay Questions*

1. Discuss the use of film technique to reinforce characterization and theme in film noir in the 1950s. Use examples from at least three films.
2. Explain how the blacklist affected film production in Hollywood in the 1950s and beyond.
3. Discuss how television affected Hollywood.

## Week 10 1960's

### *Historical Background*

The 1960s also ushered in a new philosophy of direction, new "auteur" style garnered respect for directors, and it was grounded through the publication of scholarly articles and film criticism in the journal, *Cahiers du Cinema*. Filmmakers viewed themselves changed in a profound way, resulting in self-reflexive and self-referential with deliberate re-envisionings of the old classics to reflect a context and times. Groundbreaking films included *Lolita*, *The Graduate*, *Bonnie and Clyde*, *Midnight Cowboy*, *Easy Rider*, and *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

### *Genres*

Western: Popular, but with themes that reflected the times of the 1960s rather than the actual 1800s.

Youth movies: The 1960s and 70s were noted for movies that reflected the youth culture, and a revolutionary ethos.

### *Filmmakers*

Hitchcock: Master of suspense, a prolific director whose films include *Vertigo*, *Rope*, *Rear Window*, *North by Northwest*, *Stranger on a Train*, *The Birds*, *Marnie*, and others.

### *Readings*

Lewis 233-279

#### **Ugly Americans in Togas: Imperial Anxiety in the Cold War Hollywood Epic**

GERALDINE MURPHY

*Journal of Film and Video* , Vol. 56, No. 3 (FALL 2004), pp. 3-19

Published by: [University of Illinois Press](#) on behalf of the [University Film & Video Association](#)

Article Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20688460>

#### **Closing the (Heterosexual) Frontier: "Midnight Cowboy" as National Allegory**

Kevin Floyd

*Science & Society* , Vol. 65, No. 1, Color, Culture and Gender in the 1960's (Spring, 2001), pp. 99-130

Published by: [Guilford Press](#)

Article Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40403886>

### *Essay Questions*

1. Identify major themes in New American Cinema and explain how they represent a break from the past. Use at least three films to illustrate your point.

2. Describe the way in which the introduction of a ratings system, the influence of the French "New Wave" and the incorporation of contemporary social and political themes manifested themselves in films of the "New American Cinema." Select at least three films and describe them.

Week 11-12 **1970's**

### *Historical Background*

Starting with the new rating system established in the 1960s, the number of movies designated For Mature Audiences rose each year after it was implemented in 1966. By the 1970s, many of the blockbuster films had the Mature rating, including *Midnight Cowboy*, *Easy Rider*, *Bonnie and Clyde*, and *I Am Curious (Yellow)*, which took full advantage of the rating system. Social change, including the civil rights movement and the women's rights movement, anti-war, along with a critique of all "establishment" values found expression in popular films. Themes that were previously taboo or not even envisioned now became mainstays. The 1970s ushered in an "auteur renaissance" in which directors took advantage of new levels of creative power.

### *Genres*

Ultraviolent western: In the 1960s and 1970s, the Western became violent, with anti-heroes and outlaws, which echoed the violent zeitgeist of the times.

Horror: Horror expanded to include gruesome, violent films that often revolved around a theme of revenge for bullying, or punishment for teenage sexual awakening. Examples include *Carrie* and *Dawn of the Dead*.

Comedy: Comedy often revolved around the changing roles of men and women in society, and generational clashes.

Blaxploitation: Films that featured the African American subculture, including its music, fashion, style, and culture.

Women's film: Often feature female protagonists dealing with issues including single parenting, divorce,

### *Filmmakers*

Coppola: Director of the anti-war "Apocalypse Now," "Chinatown" and other films.

Polanski: Director who established himself with *Rosemary's Baby* and *Chinatown*, and then was deported for having sex with an underage minor.

Robert Altman: Director known for his naturalistic but stylized film style / mise-en-scene, with films including *M.A.S.H.* and *McCabe and Mrs. Miller*.

Kubrick: Director of the satirical "Dr. Strangelove" and the highly influential science fiction work, "2001."

Martin Scorsese: Director known for films that address themes of guilt and redemption, including Mean Streets, Taxi Driver, Raging Bull.

Lucas: Star Wars trilogy, LucasFilms,

Steven Spielberg: Director whose melodramas influenced an entire generation; notable hits include E.T., AI, The Color Purple, Schindler's List.

### *Readings*

*Lewis 281-349*

### **Banal and Magnificent Space in "Electra Glide in Blue" (1973), or an Allegory of the Nixon Era**

Mark Shiel

*Cinema Journal* , Vol. 46, No. 2 (Winter, 2007), pp. 91-116

Published by: [University of Texas Press](#) on behalf of the [Society for Cinema & Media Studies](#)

Article Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4137183>

### **The Future of Allusion: Hollywood in the Seventies (And beyond)**

Noël Carroll

*October* , Vol. 20, (Spring, 1982), pp. 51-81

Published by: [The MIT Press](#)

Article Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/778606>

### **Fassbinder and Altman: Approaches to Filmmaking**

Carrie Rickey

*Performing Arts Journal* , Vol. 2, No. 2 (Autumn, 1977), pp. 33-48

Published by: [Performing Arts Journal, Inc.](#)

Article Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3245335>

### *Essay Questions*

1. Identify films and techniques used to question American involvement in the Vietnam war.
2. Explain the "auteur" movement and its impact on films in the 1970s.
3. Discuss how the themes of alienation and political disenfranchisement manifested themselves in 1970s films.

Week 13-14 **1980's-1990's**: New, New Cinema

### *Historical Background*

Deregulation in the 1980s allows businesses to become very large and to dominate. Conglomerates owned and controlled the studios which owned production, distribution, publicity, theaters, and aftermarket products. To assure profits, they had a need for blockbusters in order to assure sufficient profits. While the large vertically integrated entertainment companies focused on blockbusters, there was a new opportunity for independent filmmakers, which included (Quentin Tarantino, John Sayles, Joel and Ethan Coen, Allison Anders, Nancy Savoca, Spike Lee). The Screen Actors Guild (SAG) went on strike in 1980, with the goal of allowing actors to have more control over their economic / financial status and more say in the distribution of revenues. The actors lost, and the multinational entertainment conglomerates were able to exercise more control than ever. As a result, many actors chose to work with independent films where they had more autonomy, and occasionally better financial rewards.

## Industry

Mergers: Studios, distribution channels, and production companies merged in the 1990s.

Blockbusters: Big-budget films were made with the expectation of turning them into blockbusters.

## Technology

VCR: The ability to record and watch films easily at home developed a broader market for new and older films.

## *Genres*

Action-adventure: genre characterized by exciting action sequences and very little character development.

Comic-book adaptations: Movies based on comic books; many in the 1990s were popular including Batman, The Green Hornet, The Crow, and more.

Science-fiction: The film genre corresponds to the literary genre, which takes a futuristic view and puts people in unusual situations.

Comedy: A mainstay of film, with a focus on humor, with a goal of entertaining the audience and making them laugh.

## *Filmmakers*

Spielberg: Main films – AI, The Color Purple, Schindler's List, Indiana Jones, Raiders of the Lost Ark, Jurassic Park, E.T., Close Encounters of the Third Kind.

Lucas: Star Wars Trilogy

Oliver Stone: Platoon, Wall Street, Born on the Fourth of July, Natural Born Killers, W. The Doors.

Spike Lee: African-American director whose movies probed controversial themes such as race relations, sexism, and street / gang culture.

Independents: Came to the fore when studios did not allow actors to share in profits / residuals; notable independents include John Sayles, Spike Lee, and Kevin Smith.

### *Readings*

Lewis 351-399

### **Deconstruction and the Question of Violence: Fictions Legitimes versus Pulp Fiction**

Peter Baker

*symplokē* , Vol. 4, No. 1/2, special issue: Rhetoric and the Human Sciences (1996), pp. 21-40

Published by: [University of Nebraska Press](#)

Article Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40550382>

### **Looking for the Gaze: Lacanian Film Theory and Its Vicissitudes**

Todd McGowan

*Cinema Journal* , Vol. 42, No. 3 (Spring, 2003), pp. 27-47

Published by: [University of Texas Press](#) on behalf of the [Society for Cinema & Media Studies](#)

Article Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1225903>

### **But Compared to what?: Reading Realism, Representation, and Essentialism in School Daze, do the Right Thing, and the Spike Lee Discourse**

Wahneema Lubiano

*Black American Literature Forum* , Vol. 25, No. 2, Black Film Issue (Summer, 1991), pp. 253-282

Published by: [St. Louis University](#)

Article Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3041686>

### **The Sense of an Ending: Youth Apocalypse Films**

RICHARD BENJAMIN

*Journal of Film and Video* , Vol. 56, No. 4 (WINTER 2004), pp. 34-49

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Article Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20688472>

### *Essay Questions*

1. Explain how Pulp Fiction and other films utilized metanarrative to develop a self-reflexive film text.

2. Explain how Spike Lee and other directors incorporate the ideas of deconstructive philosophy to problematize the dominant culture's view of history.
3. Discuss the importance of blockbusters in the 1990s.
4. Explain how filmmakers used film in the 1990s to advance a personal view or political agenda.

## Week 15 **2000s: Digital Age**

### *Historical Background*

Distribution of films underwent a sea-change as digital technologies made distribution easier, more immediate and more diffuse. Production of films was dramatically changed by digital technologies as well. Marketing also changed, and vertical integration made no sense in the new world. All this made the old ways of doing business completely obsolete. New technologies also meant new formats and media. New formats like IMAX were introduced which offered an alternative to the multiplex experience. The Internet meant that films could be viewed "on-demand" in a number of different situations (via computer, tablet, hand-held).

### *Industry*

The industry was still dominated by conglomerates, but this changed as many underwent changes and divestitures. As a result, independent films were important, with the Sundance Festival a key place to showcase and publicize them.

### *Genres*

Blockbusters and Box-Office hits continued to be extremely important in the 2000s. A blockbuster is recognizable by the speed and sound, plus the amount of money spent to produce the film. One popular approach to being able to develop a blockbuster or box-office hit was to base films on popular literature. Examples included The Lord of the Rings trilogy, Harry Potter, the James Bond series, and comic book adaptations, which included X-Men, Spider-Man, Batman, Hulk, and others. Remakes of classics were also the fodder of blockbusters. Examples included The Mummy, Tarzan, and King Kong.

### *Filmmakers*

M. Night Shyamalan: director and writer of films including The Sixth Sense.

David Fincher: Director of indie films, including Fight Club.

Wes Anderson: Director of The Royal Tenebaums, Rushmore, Life Aquatic, and other quirky indie films.

Mel Gibson: Actor and director (Braveheart, Apocalypto, The Passion of Christ)



Michel Gondry: writer and director of *The Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*.

Michael Moore: Documentary filmmaker / director of *Roger & Me*, *Bowling for Columbine*, *Sicko*, and *Fahrenheit 9/11*.

Sofia Coppola: Indie filmmaker / director of *Somewhere*, *The Virgin Suicides*, *Lost in Translation*, *Marie Antoinette*.

### *Readings*

Lewis 401-425

#### **Information, Blockbusters, and Stars: A Study of the Film Industry**

S. Abraham Ravid

*The Journal of Business* , Vol. 72, No. 4 (October 1999), pp. 463-492

Published by: [The University of Chicago Press](#)

Article Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/209624>

#### **The New Hollywood Racelessness: Only the Fast, Furious, (And Multiracial) Will Survive**

Mary C. Beltrán

*Cinema Journal* , Vol. 44, No. 2 (Winter, 2005), pp. 50-67

Published by: [University of Texas Press](#) on behalf of the [Society for Cinema & Media Studies](#)

Article Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3661094>

#### **Myth, Shadow Politics, and Perennial Philosophy in *Minority Report***

*Minority Report* by Steven Spielberg; Jon Cohen; Scott Frank; Philip K. Dick; *The Minority Report and Other Classic Stories*

Review by: Cathleen Rountree

*The San Francisco Jung Institute Library Journal* , Vol. 23, No. 2 (May 2004), pp. 77-88

Published by: [University of California Press](#) on behalf of [The C.G. Jung Institute of San Francisco](#)

Article Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/jung.1.2004.23.2.77>

#### ***Grindhouse*: An Experiment in the Death of Cinema**

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### *Essay Questions*

1. Explain the impact of digital technologies on films and filmmaking in the early 2000s.
2. Identify two or three themes that emerged in films in the 2000s, discuss how they

manifest in representative films.

3. Explain how race was redefined in the 2000s in film.

## Syllabus

### General Course Objectives: For Specific Learning Objectives, Refer to the Study Guide

- O1. Identify major works and to analyze them from different critical stances.
- O2. Demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the works by responding to questions focusing on the context, authors, themes, and motifs.
- O3. Compare works and documents from different periods, traditions, and sub-genres.
- O4. Apply critical reading strategies to determine alternative interpretive possibilities, as well as motifs, figurative language, and potential interpretive possibilities,
- O5. Discuss the historical, social, cultural, or biographical contexts of the works' production
- O6. Compare and contrast themes, genres, and movements.

### General Program Objectives

1. To provide students with a broad perspective of approaches to world humanities and an understanding of the various ways in which they manifest themselves and to assess students' ability to express their perspectives through exams and essays.
2. To provide students with a deeper understanding of diverse traditions in the humanities the course focus and to express this deepened understanding in written tests and a critical essay.
3. To provide an overview of textual analysis and interpretation methods at a graduate level and help students apply these skills in writing essay examinations and a critical essay.
4. To read widely and critically in a variety of literary forms found in different genre studies and to demonstrate the depth and breadth of this reading in a critical essay.
5. To conduct graduate-level library research on a particular text or body of work, an individual writer, or an issue in the area of genre studies and to write a critical essay which incorporates their research.

### Course Content:

1. Texts that have been designated as being produced within the category of the course topic.
2. Discussion of the historical, social, cultural and biographical contexts in which those works were produced.
3. Literary movements in various periods.
4. Discussion of the theoretical issues and questions related to historical, social, cultural, and biographical approaches to the study of the course topic.
5. Historical contexts.
6. Criticism and reflection upon political and economic systems as reflected in literature.
7. Discussion of the relevance of course readings to the understanding of contemporary global issues.
8. Critical analysis and interpretation.
9. Scholarly research on and off-line.

### Course Outline:

For the detailed course outline, please see the Study Guide.

### **Course Readings:**

For a list of course readings, please see the Readings page on the Study Guide

### **Course Preparedness:**

This course is a graduate-level literature course. It assumes the mastery of prerequisite college-level skills in spelling, grammar, punctuation, paragraphing, and essay writing. It also assumes the ability to read and analyze literary texts. This course provides instruction in world literature and does not address remedial writing issues at the sentence, paragraph, or essay level.

This course focuses on literary texts and analysis and requires college-level writing skills that exceed those required at the secondary level.

However, in some cases, students who have not yet completed a bachelor's degree may be allowed to take the course.

### **Course Workload:**

For a sixteen-week course, students can expect to devote a minimum of 6 hours of independent study per week in order to complete the coursework. If students are taking the course in an accelerated 8-week mode, they can expect to devote a minimum of 12 hours per week of study.

### **Assessment Strategy**

Learners will demonstrate their knowledge of the subject and their ability to engage in critical thinking and problem solving activities.

- *Journal Entries/Discussion Questions.* Designed to help students identify authors, their works, literary terms, and concepts. Students will also analyze texts, connect the authors, texts, and critical concepts. Finally, students look at texts from multiple perspectives in order to evaluate their own thought processes.
- *Synchronous Online Activities.* Designed to help learners apply the concepts in the course to texts, and to share their insights.
- *Essay / Research Paper.* Designed to help students write scholarly papers and engage in literary analysis. Students will develop a clear thesis which they support with literary citations, a close reading of the text, application of critical theories and perspectives. Students will focus on developing multiple interpretations of a single text, or will look at multiple texts within a movement, genre, or author's oeuvre.