

EngLit 0400
Spring 2007
Klein, A.

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Introduction to Film

Mondays, 6:00-9:50pm
David Lawrence 209
CRN: 12177

The goal of this course, as its title suggests, is to "introduce" you to the broad field of film studies. And since we have only 13 classes in which to address this vast topic, we will not have the time to examine each topic to its fullest. In fact, just about every class topic could be a course in itself. Therefore I want you to view each class as an "introduction" to a particular subject, or as a jumping off point for further discussion and investigation, rather than as the "last word" on any subject. Furthermore, I have limited our screenings to American films (with the exception of class 1) to provide some continuity in our film history. I have based my choices on films which I feel will explain, complicate or even refute the readings and class discussions.

The first part of the class (weeks 1-7) will focus on primarily American film history, moving from the early silent film shorts of the late 1800s to the color, feature length films of the studio system and onto the blockbusters of the 1980s. During these classes we will focus on the evolution of film narrative, composition, lighting, editing, and acting styles over the course of the first half of film history. By using the word "evolution" I am not indicating that the silent shorts of Lumiere in the early 1900s are "primitive" in comparison with the color spectacles of the 1950s. In fact, part of our work will be to examine how technical "innovations" such as sound or Technicolor altered the way films were made and why certain cinematic styles, such as the use of sound or shot reverse shot, became more "mainstream" than others.

The second part of the class (weeks 8-13), focuses on the many ways in which films might be categorized: by genre (the Western), by form (experimental), by budget (the exploitation film), etc. While the goal of this portion of the class is to identify the development, characteristics and theories behind each of these film "types," we will also be investigating how these definitions can be limiting or inaccurate, and when these definitions overlap or blur. When or why is it useful to place a film in a particular category? How do these lenses help us to understand a particular film's structure and meaning?

Required Texts

Belton, John. *American Cinema/American Culture*. 2nd Ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2005.

Plus a course packet containing excerpts from:

Schaefer, Eric. *"Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!": A History of Exploitation Films, 1919-1959*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1999.

Wood, Robin. *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.

Warshow, Robert. *The Immediate Experience: Movies, Comics, Theatre and Other Aspects of Popular Culture*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001.

Feuer, Jane. *The Hollywood Musical*. 2nd Ed. Bloomington: Indiana University Press,

Reid, Mark. *Redefining Black Film*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.

Bordwell, David and Kristin Thompson. *Film Art: An Introduction*. 7th Ed. Boston: McGraw Hill, 2004.

Assignments and Grade Breakdowns

Class Participation/Screening Notes: 15%

Exam 1 (½ take home/ ½ in class): 20%

Exam 2 (½ take home/ ½ in class): 20%

Exam 3 (all take home): 20%

Final Exam (in class): 25%

Exams

Since we have a limited amount of time to cover a lot of material, part of each exam will be take-home, with a brief in class portion. The final exam will be all take-home. These exams will test your understanding of the reading, lectures and film screenings.

Reading Assignments

Reading assignments must be completed **before** coming to class. You are expected to read critically and carefully, marking any passages you find interesting, troubling or challenging. You will be expected to bring all assigned readings to class with you and to be prepared to discuss them.

Film Screenings

In every class we will watch one film in its entirety, along with clips from films that are relevant to the day's topic. Screenings are not times for you to: sleep, read, go to the bathroom, or hold hands with your neighbor. Rather, I expect you to take CAREFUL, DETAILED NOTES on every screening so that you can participate in class discussion as well as have something to study for exams and essays.

Screening Notes

Since this is a course about analyzing films it is of the utmost importance that you learn how to take good screening notes. If you do not learn this skill, you will not be able to properly do the work of this course, or any film course for that matter. Therefore, I will periodically collect your screening notes and grade them based on their detail and progress.

Class Participation

I expect every one of you to participate in each class discussion. The more you add to the class, the better your grade will be (and vice versa). Class participation should likewise reflect the following: that you have read each assignment *carefully* and *on time*, that you have taken notes during each screening, that you have paid attention and that you have taken notes during class lecture and discussion.

Reading and Screening Schedule:

Note: films are subject to change

Week 1

January 8th

Introduction: The Origins of Film

Screening: various shorts from Georges Melies, The Lumiere Brothers, Edwin S. Porter, etc.

PART I: A SURVEY OF FILM HISTORY

Week 2

January 22nd

Silent Cinema and the Advent of Sound

Screening: *The Crowd* (1928, King Vidor)

Excerpts from: *Birth of a Nation* (1914, DW Griffith), *The Lights of New York* (1928, Bryan Foy)

Reading: Belton pp. 3-20

Week 3

January 29th

Classical Hollywood Cinema: Part I

Screening: *His Girl Friday* (1940, Howard Hawks) or *It Happened One Night* (1934, Frank Capra)

Excerpts from: *The Maltese Falcon* (1941, John Huston), *Casablanca* (1944, Michael Curtiz, 102 minutes)

Reading: Belton 22-64

Week 4

February 5th

Classical Hollywood Cinema: Part II

Screening: *Singin' in the Rain* (1952, Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly)

Excerpts from: *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953, Howard Hawks), *Sunset Boulevard* (1950, Billy Wilder)

Reading: Belton 91-125

Week 5

February 12th

Targeting a Market: The 1950s Teenpic

Screening: *I Was a Teenage Werewolf* (1957, Gene Fowler, Jr.)

Excerpts from: *Teenage Doll* (1957, Roger Corman), *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955, Nicholas Ray) *Rock Around the Clock* (1956, Fred F. Sears)

Reading: Belton 304-323

Exam 1 TAKE HOME/IN CLASS

Week 6

February 19th

The Blockbuster and Film School Generation

Screening: *E.T.* (Steven Spielberg, 1982)

Excerpts from: *The Untouchables* (1980, Brian DePalma), *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980, George Lucas)

Reading: Belton, pp. 348-373, Robin Wood's "Papering the Cracks: Fantasy and Ideology in the Reagan Era," (Course Packet, pp. 162-180)

Week 7

February 26th

The Rise of the Independent Film

Screening: *She's Gotta Have It* (Spike Lee, 1986)

Excerpts from: *Clerks* (Kevin Smith, 1994), *Mallrats* (Kevin Smith, 1995)

Reading: Belton, pp. 375-412

PART II: GENRES AND TYPES:

Week 8

March 12th

Exploitation Film

Screening: *Glen or Glenda?* (1953, Edward D. Wood Jr.)

Excerpts from: *Maniac* (1934, Dwain Esper), *Ed Wood* (1994, Tim Burton), *Reefer Madness* (1936, Louis J. Gasnier)

Reading: "A Hodge-Podge of Cuttings and Splicings" by Eric Shaeffer (Course Packet, pp. 42-95)

Exam 2: TAKE HOME/IN CLASS

Week 9

March 19th

Documentary

Screening: *Isle of Flowers* (Jorge Furtado, 1989), *American Movie* (Chris Smith, 1999)

Excerpts from: *High School* (Frederick Wiseman, 1968)

Reading: *Film Art*: Chapter 5, (Course Packet, pp. 128-146)

Week 10

March 26th

Experimental Cinema

Screening: *La Jetee* (Chris Marker, 1963, 30 minutes), *Ballet Mécanique* (Fernand Léger and Dudley Murphy, 1924, 19 minutes), *Meshes of the Afternoon* (Maya Deren, 1943, 18 minutes), *The Seashell and the Clergyman* (Germaine Dulac, 1928, 9 minutes), various Stan Brakhage shorts

Reading: *Film Art*: Chapter 5, (Course Packet, pp. 146-171)

Week 11

April 2nd

Genre: The Western

Screening: *Stagecoach* (1939, John Ford)

Excerpts from: *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (John Ford, 1962), *Deadwood*

Reading: Belton 248-276, Robert Warshaw's "The Westerner" (Course Packet)

Week 12

April 9th

Genre: The Musical

Screening: *Meet Me in St. Louis* (Vincente Minnelli, 1944)

Excerpts from: *The Jazz Singer* (Alan Crosland, 1927), *The Bandwagon* (Vincente Minelli, 1953), *Pennies from Heaven* (Herbert Ross, 1981)

Reading: Belton 150-169, Jane Feuer's "Mass Art as Folk Art," (Course Packet, pp. 1-22)

Exam 3: TAKE HOME PORTION DUE

Week 13

April 16th

The Film Cycle: Blaxploitation

Screening: *The Mack* (1973, Michael Campus)

Excerpts from: *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* (1971, Melvin Van Peebles), *Superfly* (1972, Gordon Parks, Jr.), *Coffy* (1973, Jack Hill), *American Pimp* (1999, Allen and Albert Hughes)

Reading: "The Emancipation Orgasm: Sweetback in Wonderland" by Lerone Bennett (hand out), "Black Action Film" by Mark Reid (Course Packet, pp. pp. 69-91), Belton 341-343

April 23rd

FINAL EXAM