

Englit 1920  
Spring 2003  
Lowenstein, A.

LIT 1920

**ADVANCED SEMINAR IN FILM STUDIES:  
THEORIES OF GENRE AND SPECTATORSHIP**

ENGLIT 1920 (CRN 22855), Spring 2003, Tuesdays 1-5pm, LAWRN 209  
Dr. Adam Lowenstein

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**Course Description.** This capstone course for senior Film Studies majors focuses on two concepts central to current theoretical discourse in the field: "genre" and "spectatorship." Although students surely will have encountered these terms in previous courses, this seminar demands an in-depth, advanced investigation of their formulation and intersection in order to discuss contemporary debates at the heart of film studies scholarship. How do our ways of seeing film change when we watch films belonging to different genres? Do certain genres apply pressure to theories of spectatorship relying on psychoanalytic, cognitivist, phenomenological, or other conceptual frameworks? How do issues of gender, nation, history, identification, and reception shape our notions of both genre and spectatorship? Difficult, demanding readings in film theory and film history will open up our discussion of such questions, and students will pose (and answer) questions of their own in essays and presentations. A wide variety of film genres (melodrama, horror, science fiction, film noir, etc.) will be covered, drawn from an equally diverse range of historical time periods.

**Course Requirements.** 1. Active, vocal, engaged class participation. 2. A journal with weekly entries focusing on reactions to each unit's readings, including questions to raise in class. These journals should be brought to each class, but kept in a separate notebook from your class notes. They must be typed, as they may be collected periodically or distributed among classmates. 3. An oral presentation designed to spark discussion of that particular week's unit by offering a fresh vantage point – ideally by presenting research beyond that week's assigned material. 4. A short midterm paper (5 pages). 5. A final research paper (10 pages) that applies the seminar issues to original areas of scholarly inquiry. Please note that all due dates are FIRM; extensions will not be granted. 6. An expert knowledge of the textbook *Film Art* by David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson will be assumed; students are strongly advised to review this text BEFORE the course begins.

**Course Texts** (available at the University of Pittsburgh Book Center and on Hillman reserve):  
The two-letter abbreviations following each title provide a key to their appearances in the seminar schedule:

- Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (London: British Film Institute, 1999) [FG]
- Nick Browne, ed., *Refiguring American Film Genres: Theory and History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998) [RA]
- Janet Staiger, *Perverse Spectators: The Practices of Film Reception* (New York: New York University Press, 2000) [PS]
- Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby, ed., *Hollywood Spectatorship: Changing Perceptions of Cinema Audiences* (London: British Film Institute, 2001) [HS]
- Linda Williams, ed., *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film* (New Brunswick: Rutgers

University Press, 1995) [VP]

### Seminar Schedule

#### WEEK 1, JAN. 7 – INTRODUCTION: IMAGINING GENRE AND SPECTATORSHIP

Screening: *Peeping Tom* (Michael Powell, 1960, Great Britain) 109m

In-Class Writing Exercise

#### WEEK 2, JAN. 14 – THE AUDIENCE’S ROLE: “JUDGING” GENRE AND SPECTATORSHIP

Screening: *Twelve Angry Men* (Sidney Lumet, 1957, USA) 96m

Reading: Linda Williams, “Introduction” [VP]; Rick Altman, “What’s at Stake in the History of Literary Genre Theory?” and “What is Generally Understood by the Notion of Film Genre?” [FG]; Carol J. Clover, “The Eye of Horror” [VP]; Carol J. Clover, “‘God Bless Juries!’” [RA]; Melvyn Stokes, “Introduction: Historical Hollywood Spectatorship” [HS]

#### WEEK 3, JAN. 21 – BLOCKBUSTER CINEMA AND THE TENSIONS BETWEEN “NARRATIVE” AND “ATTRACTIONS”

Screening: *Jaws* (Steven Spielberg, 1975, USA) 124m

Reading: Tom Gunning, “An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)Credulous Spectator” [VP]; Miriam Hansen, “Early Cinema, Late Cinema: Transformations of the Public Sphere” [VP]; Janet Staiger, “Modes of Reception” [PS]

#### WEEK 4, JAN. 28 – CLASSICAL HOLLYWOOD CINEMA AND (OR VERSUS?) MELODRAMA

Screening: *Way Down East* (D.W. Griffith, 1920, USA) 147m

Reading: Linda Williams, “Melodrama Revised” [RA]; Janet Staiger, “The Perversity of Spectators: Expanding the History of the Classical Hollywood Cinema” [PS]; Rick Altman, “Are Genres Subject to Redefinition?” [FG]

#### WEEK 5, FEB. 4 – VIEWING HISTORY, WATCHING THE WAR FILM

Screening: *Wake Island* (John Farrow, 1942, USA) 87m

Reading: Thomas Schatz, “World War II and the Hollywood ‘War Film’” [RA]; Judith Mayne, “Paradoxes of Spectatorship” [VP]; Janet Staiger, “Writing the History of American Film Reception” [PS]

#### WEEK 6, FEB. 11 – VIEWING HISTORY, WATCHING FILM NOIR

Screening: *The Killers* (Robert Siodmak, 1946, USA) 103m

Reading: Vivian Sobchack, “Lounge Time: Postwar Crises and the Chronotope of Film Noir” [RA]; Vivian Sobchack, “Phenomenology and the Film Experience” [VP]; Rick Altman, “Are Genres Stable?” [FG]

#### WEEK 7, FEB. 18 – RACE AND IDENTIFICATION: OF JEWS, BLACKS, AND BLACKFACE

Screening: *Home of the Brave* (Mark Robson, 1949, USA) 86m

Reading: Michael Rogin, “‘Democracy and Burnt Cork’: The End of Blackface, the Beginning of

Civil Rights” [RA]; Jane M. Gaines, “Green Like Me” [HS]; Rick Altman, “Where Do Genres Come From?” [FG]

\*\*\*MIDTERM PAPER DUE\*\*\*

WEEK 8, FEB. 25 – THE RECEPTION OF MIXED GENRES: DISASTER AND SCIENCE FICTION

Screening: *On the Beach* (Stanley Kramer, 1959, USA) 133m

Reading: G. Tom Poe, “Historical Spectatorship Around and About *On the Beach*” [HS]; Rick Altman, “Where Are Genres Located?” and “Why Are Genres Sometimes Mixed?” [FG]

WEEK 9, MAR. 4 – \*\*\*SPRING BREAK\*\*\*

WEEK 10, MAR. 11 – SPECTATORSHIP AS COUNTERCULTURE: VOICES FROM EXPERIMENTAL CINEMA

Screening: *Shadows* (John Cassavetes, 1959, USA) 87m

Reading: Janet Staiger, “Finding Community in the Early 1960s: Underground Cinema and Sexual Politics” [PS]; Rick Altman, “How Are Genres Used?” [FG]

WEEK 11, MAR. 18 – ANXIOUS HYBRIDS: RACE AND GENRE REVISION

Screening: *Buck and the Preacher* (Sidney Poitier, 1972, USA) 102m

Reading: George Lipsitz, “Genre Anxiety and Racial Representation in 1970s Cinema” [RA]; “Hybrid or Inbred: The Purity Hypothesis and Hollywood Genre History” [PS]; Rick Altman, “What Role Do Genres Play in the Viewing Process?” [FG]

WEEK 12, MAR. 25 – THE SPECTATOR AS CINEPHILE AND COLLECTOR

Screening: *The Wicker Man* (Robin Hardy, 1973, Great Britain) 99m

Reading: Barbara Klinger, “The Contemporary Cinephile: Film Collecting in the Post-Video Era” [HS]; Anne Friedberg, “Cinema and the Postmodern Condition” [VP]; Rick Altman, “Have Genres and Genre Functions Changed Over Time?” [FG]

WEEK 13, APR. 1 – NATION, NATURE, AND VARIATIONS ON “THE WESTERN”

Screening: *The Last Wave* (Peter Weir, 1977, Australia) 106m

Reading: Leo Braudy, “The Genre of Nature: Ceremonies of Innocence” [RA]; Rick Altman, “What Can Genres Teach Us About Nations?” [FG]

WEEK 14, APR. 8 – THE TEEN FILM AT THE CROSSROADS OF CULTURE AND IDEOLOGY

Screening: *Ferris Bueller’s Day Off* (John Hughes, 1986, USA) 103m

Reading: Janet Staiger, “The Places of Empirical Subjects in the Event of Mass Culture: Jeanie Bueller and Ideology” [PS]; Rick Altman, “Conclusion: A Semantic/Syntactic/Pragmatic Approach to Film Genre” [FG]

WEEK 15, APR. 15 – CONCLUSION: REIMAGINING GENRE AND SPECTATORSHIP

Screening: *The Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, 1991, USA) 118m

Reading: Mark Jancovich, “Genre and the Audience: Genre Classifications and Cultural Distinctions in the Mediation of *The Silence of the Lambs*” [HS]; Janet Staiger, “Taboos and

Totems: Cultural Meanings of *The Silence of the Lambs* [PS]  
\*\*\*RESEARCH PAPER DUE\*\*\*