

American Film History– A Survey

- Lecturer:** Univ.-Prof. Dr. Stefan L. Brandt
- Contact:** stefan.brandt@uni-graz.at
- Room and Time:** <https://unimeet.uni-graz.at/b/bra-evl-59i-8oa> (UniMeet) · Fri., 1:30 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.
- Course number:** 512.320
- Short description:** One of the reasons for the enormous success of U.S. popular culture can be found in the lasting attraction of Hollywood cinema. This lecture series will discuss the fascination the 'dream factory' has exerted upon mass audiences from the beginnings of modern entertainment culture to the present day. Examples will include early short films, slapstick films (by Chaplin, Keaton, and Lloyd) as well as *film noir* (*Double Indemnity*), monumental cinema (*The Birth of a Nation*), science fiction (*Alien*), action thrillers (*Falling Down*), war movies (*Full Metal Jacket*), animation films (*Ratatouille*), and contemporary blockbusters (*Avatar*). Special emphasis will be placed on American movie genres and their tradition, the genealogy of cinematic techniques, and the emergence of the classical Hollywood system. While discussing these films on an aesthetic level (examining strategies of narration and cinematic construction), we will also situate them within the framework of political and historical events.
- Course tutor:** Katie Neubert (katie.neubert@uni-graz.at)
- Teaching Method:** Interactive presentations of important genres and timelines in American film history (mainly in the form of PowerPoint presentations to be made available on Moodle after the session).
- Materials:** ***All films will be available at the Media Archive of the Department of American Studies*** (Heinrichstr. 18, 1st floor). Extra-screenings of some mandatory films take place Fridays 3:05 – 5:05 p.m. (<https://unimeet.uni-graz.at/b/bra-evl-59i-8oa>).
- Aims:** The aim of this lecture class is to give an overview of the history of American cinema.
- Assessment:** Viewing assignments; final exam.
- Exam dates:** 30 June, 2022 (Thur) / 7 Oct, 2022 (Fri) / 20 Jan. 2023 (Fri)
- Important note:** Alternatives to the scheduled exam dates are not possible!

Guidelines and UNIMEET Etiquette

Set your screen name

Make sure to set your screen name to the name you want to be addressed by, typically your first and last name, so that your instructor and your fellow students can refer to you by your proper name in discussions. If you want to, you can also add your preferred pronouns (he/she/they) in parentheses so others know how to refer to you.

Switch your webcam off (when not in use)

Keep your webcam switched off during class (unless you want to say something). Switch your microphone to mute whenever you aren't talking.

Syllabus

11 March American Film History – An Introduction

18 March Early Cinema, National Epics, and History Films

Main film (viewing required):

The Birth of a Nation (dir. D.W. Griffith, 1915).

Companion films (optional):

Gone with the Wind (dir. Victor Fleming, 1939).

The Grapes of Wrath (dir. John Ford, 1940).

Forrest Gump (dir. Robert Zemeckis, 1994).

25 March Slapstick, Screwball, and Romantic Comedies

Main film (viewing required):

Bringing up Baby (dir. Howard Hawks, 1938).

Companion films (optional):

Safety Last (prod. Hal Roach, 1923).

Gold Rush (dir. Charlie Chaplin, 1925).

What's Up, Doc? (dir. Peter Bogdanovich, 1972).

Annie Hall (dir. Woody Allen, 1977).

1 April Art Films & Independent Cinema

Main film (viewing required):

Citizen Kane (dir. Orson Welles, 1941).

Companion films (optional):

Meshes of the Afternoon (dir. Maya Deren, 1943).

A Woman under the Influence (dir. John Cassavetes, 1974).

Sex, Lies, and Videotape (dir. Steven Soderbergh, 1989).

Being John Malkovich (dir. Spike Jonze, 1998).

Moonlight (dir. Barry Jenkins, 2016).

29 April Gangster Films & Noir

Main film (viewing required):

Double Indemnity (dir. Billy Wilder, 1944).

Companion films (optional):

The Lady in the Lake (dir. Robert Montgomery, 1947).

Kiss Me Deadly (dir. Robert Aldrich, 1955).

The Godfather (dir. Francis Ford Coppola, 1972).

Pulp Fiction (dir. Quentin Tarantino, 1994).

Memento (dir. Christopher Nolan, 2000).

6 May The Western

Main film (viewing required):

The Searchers (dir. John Ford, 1956).

Companion films (optional):

The Great Train Robbery (dir. Edwin S. Porter, 1903).

Stagecoach (dir. John Ford, 1939).

High Noon (dir. Fred Zinnemann, 1952).

Johnny Guitar (dir. Nicholas Ray, 1954).

True Grit (dir. Ethan & Joel Coen, 2010).

13 May The Musical

Main film (viewing required):

Singin' in the Rain (dir. Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen, 1952).

Companion films (optional):

Footlight Parade (dir. Lloyd Bacon, 1933).

Top Hat (dir. Mark Sandrich, 1935).

Cabaret (dir. Bob Fosse, 1972).

Mamma Mia! (dir. Phyllida Lloyd, 2008).

20 May	Thrillers and Horror Films Main film (viewing required): <i>Psycho</i> (dir. Alfred Hitchcock, 1960). Companion films (optional): <i>Frankenstein</i> (dir. James Whale, 1931). <i>The Spiral Staircase</i> (dir. Robert Siodmak, 1946). <i>The Silence of the Lambs</i> (dir. Jonathan Demme, 1991). <i>Scream</i> (dir. Wes Craven, 1996). <i>Saw</i> (dir. James Wan, 2004).
3 June	Science Fiction & Fantasy Main film (viewing required): <i>Alien</i> (dir. Ridley Scott, 1979). Companion films (optional): <i>Invasion of the Body Snatchers</i> (dir. Don Siegel, 1956). <i>Star Wars</i> (dir. George Lucas, 1977). <i>Independence Day</i> (dir. Roland Emmerich, 1996). <i>Minority Report</i> (dir. Steven Spielberg, 2002). <i>Avatar</i> (dir. James Cameron, 2009).
10 June	War Movies Main film (viewing required): <i>Full Metal Jacket</i> (dir. Stanley Kubrick, 1987). Companion films (optional): <i>All Quiet on the Western Front</i> (dir. Lewis Milestone). <i>Der Fuehrer's Face</i> (prod. Walt Disney, 1943). <i>Saving Private Ryan</i> (dir. Steven Spielberg, 1998). <i>The Thin Red Line</i> (dir. Terence Malick, 1998). <i>American Sniper</i> (dir. Clint Eastwood, 2014).
17 June	Action Films Main film (viewing required): <i>Falling Down</i> (dir. Joel Schumacher, 1993). Companion films (optional): <i>Die Hard</i> (dir. John McTiernan, 1988); <i>True Lies</i> (dir. James Cameron, 1994). <i>Speed</i> (dir. Jan de Bont, 1994). <i>Mission Impossible</i> (dir. Brian de Palma, 1996). <i>Enemy of the State</i> (dir. Tony Scott, 1998). <i>Wonder Woman</i> (dir. Patty Jenkins, 2017).
24 June	Animation Main film (viewing required): <i>Ratatouille</i> (prod. Disney-Pixar, 2007). Companion films (optional): <i>King Kong</i> (dir. Merian C. Cooper & Ernest B. Schoedsack, 1933). <i>Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs</i> (prod. Walt Disney, 1937). <i>Shrek</i> (prod. DreamWorks Animation, 2001). <i>Finding Nemo</i> (prod. Pixar Animation Studios, 2003). <i>Frozen</i> (prod. Walt Disney, 2013). <i>Minions</i> (prod. Illumination Entertainment, 2015). <i>Zootopia</i> (prod. Walt Disney, 2016).
30 June	Final Exam Location: WALL, Schuhmeister room (Thursday, 6:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.)