

The **TROUBLE** with **HITCHCOCK**

Psychology and Suspense in Alfred Hitchcock's American Films, 1940-1980

Course number: ENP.02036UB

Room and time: Seminar Room 34.D2 (Attemsgasse 25, Top Floor), Fri, 4:00 - 5:30 p.m.

UniMeet link: <https://unimeet.uni-graz.at/b/bra-lcu-fva-bpy>
(in case we need to go online)

Lecturer: Univ.-Prof. Dr. Stefan Brandt

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Office hours: Thur, 4-6 p.m.
<https://moodle.uni-graz.at/course/view.php?id=24980>

Course tutor: Veronika Rom (veronika.rom@uni-graz.at)

Short description: Explore the cinematic oeuvre of Alfred Hitchcock, one of Hollywood's most enigmatic directors. In this course, we will examine the narrative construction of cultural and individual identity in Hitchcock's works while addressing the problematic depiction of women and sexual minorities. With a focus on his "golden period" from 1940 to 1963, we will discuss the cultural, social, and psychological context of seminal films such as *Rebecca* (1940), *Rope* (1948), *Rear Window* (1954), *The Trouble with Harry* (1955), *Psycho* (1960), and *The Birds* (1963). We will analyze the aesthetic achievements and the postulated subtext of the films, including themes of red scare, cold war paranoia, sexuality, queerness, and fragmentation of the self. By exploring moments of representativeness and ambivalence, we will gain a nuanced understanding of Hitchcock's exploration of American culture. We will also examine aspects of film reception and aesthetics.

Materials: All films are made available in the Department's Film Library (Heinrichstr. 18 / 1st floor) and via YouTube. Relevant theoretical texts will be uploaded on Moodle.

ASSESSMENT:

A.) Regular attendance (no more than 2 absences!), **active participation**, and at least **six substantiated entries** in the **Moodle discussion forum (1/3)** (not including your own session);

B.) Expert Session, Handout, and Revised Presentation (to be held in class and then uploaded onto the Moodle course site in a *revised, adapted, and extended form*) **(1/3)**;

Important: For the correct mode of citation, follow the style sheet on Moodle.

C.) 2-page research proposal plus **12-15-page final paper** (5,000 – 6,000 words, including bibliography, but excluding title page, table of contents). Please use templates on Moodle! **(1/3)**.

Note: You need to pass each section to pass the whole course.

A.) REGULAR ATTENDANCE, CLASS, PARTICIPATION, AND MOODLE DISCUSSION FORUM

Regular attendance and **active participation** in class sessions are crucial to the success of the course. *Absences* must be explained in writing, preferably prior to class. No more than two absences are allowed. You are expected to be present in our meetings, not only having read the assigned material, but also prepared to fully engage with the material, ask questions, offer perceptive interpretations, and even argue for your way of reading the text at hand. Note: There might be **pop quizzes** (i.e.,

unannounced tests at the beginning of a session) to check whether you have read the materials.

You need to **post at least six substantial entries** in the **Moodle discussion forum**. Make sure you are well informed *before* answering the three discussion questions. This means: Watch the required movie/read the required text. Conduct some **additional online research** according to your own research interests. When making an entry, refer to useful materials you found on the internet (clips, articles, etc.). Ideally, you will also **respond to other entries** already uploaded by other students.

B.) EXPERT SESSION, REVISED PRESENTATION, AND HANDOUT

As an expert, you will prepare **three short questions** for the discussion forum, focusing on composition, background, and effect in the main text (to be uploaded 6 days in advance), potentially together with links to **clips** or **images**. Show your discussion questions to me 1 week before your session (or send them to me via email)!

In class, you can start with some **essential information** on the topic (look at the keywords on the syllabus first), then pose questions to trigger a **lively discussion**. Choose **examples** related to the topic of the session that you can discuss in class (for example, in group work). Be **interactive**. Show images and clips, launch a game, pick up questions. Do not stick to your schedule *too much*!

Revise, adapt, and extend your PPT carefully after the session (answering all questions brought up in the expert session) and **upload it** together with a **handout** (3 pages) on Moodle **within one week after the session**!

C.) RESEARCH PROPOSAL AND FINAL PAPER

The **research proposal** (2 pages), containing a basic outline for your final paper, is due **June 2, 2023**. The form for the research proposal is available on Moodle. Fill it out and upload it together with an **editable Google docs version** or **OneDrive version** of that same document in the 'upload section' for research proposals on Moodle. **Insert the link to the Google docs version or OneDrive version in the comment function to your post on Moodle.** (Do not put it somewhere in the document itself!)

Important: Consult the secondary texts on the Moodle website! (Search for your topic under the respective session.)

The **final paper** (max. 15 pages including bibliography, but excluding title page, table of contents, and declaration of honesty; all in all, 5,000 – 6,000 words) should be uploaded (together with an **editable Google Docs version** or **OneDrive version**) in the respective forum on Moodle.

Important: Insert the link to the Google docs version or OneDrive version in the comment function to your post on Moodle. (Do not put it somewhere in the document itself!)

The final paper should show your name and email address, the course title, the instructor's name, the date of submission, and the number of words. Primary and secondary sources need to be cited according to the Uni Graz guidelines for style and format. The **deadline** for submission of the final paper is **Monday, 17 July 2023**. Keep in mind: A good paper is a finished paper. There is **no extension** of this deadline.

Important: Cite all sources according to the Uni Graz guidelines (see style sheet on Moodle). (Do not use APA or other modes of citation.)

Note: All required texts for this course are available on Moodle.

SYLLABUS

Week 1: March 17 – Master of Suspense – An Introduction to Alfred Hitchcock's American Era

Session Tasks:

- Introduction to Alfred Hitchcock and his American phase
- Brief overview of Hitchcock's career
- Discussion on Hitchcock's style and themes

Keywords: Auteur; Genre; Hollywood; Suspense.

Week 2: March 24 – Film Theory and Analysis – An Overview

Main Text (reading required):

Amy Villarejo, "The Language of Film" (2013)

Learning Objectives:

- Providing an overview of film theory and analysis.
- Examination of the fundamental elements of film language (camera angles, lighting, editing techniques, etc.).
- Discussion of the theoretical tools and critical vocabulary needed to analyze films.

Keywords: Camera Movement; Color; Framing; Lighting; *Mise en Scène*; Montage; Sound.

Week 3: March 31 – Exploring the Gothic World of Manderley

Main film (viewing required): **Rebecca (1940)**

Session Tasks:

- Look at the novel *Rebecca* by Daphne du Maurier and compare it to the film adaptation by Hitchcock.
- Analyze the use of lighting and cinematography to create a gothic atmosphere.
- Isolate the 'Hitchcock Touch' in the movie:
 - subjective camera movements / point-of-view shots
 - suspense and ambiguity to create a sense of mystery
 - use of symbolism (letter 'R' on objects to signify Rebecca)
 - MacGuffin (the death of Rebecca)

Keywords: Adaptation; Class; Gothic; Identity; Manderley; Romance; Secrets.

Week 4: April 21 – Discovering the Darkness Within

Main film (viewing required): **Shadow of a Doubt (1943)**

Session Tasks:

- Discuss the theme of duality in the film, particularly in relation to the characters of Uncle Charlie and his niece.
- Examine the use of Hitchcock's signature techniques, such as suspense and tension, to explore moral ambiguity in the film.
- Analyze the film's commentary on the dark underbelly of American suburbia.
- Isolate the 'Hitchcock Touch' in the movie:
 - creation of suspense and tension (to explore moral ambiguity)
 - subjective camera movements (scene of discovery of Charlie's true identity)
 - visual motifs (pair of glasses → Charlie's criminal past)
 - use of contrast (shots of playing kids contrasted with shots of Uncle Charlie)

- MacGuffin (various incriminating items that reveal Charlie's identity)

Keywords: Dark Humor; Double Life; Doubt; Family; Innocence; Small Town.

Week 5: April 28 – Diving into the Depths of the Unconscious

Main film (viewing required): *Spellbound (1945)*

Session Tasks:

- Explore the film's use of dream sequences and psychoanalytic themes.
- Discuss the collaboration between Hitchcock and Salvador Dalí in creating the dream sequences.
- Analyze the film's portrayal of mental illness.
- Isolate the 'Hitchcock Touch' in the movie:
 - visual motifs and symbols (fork, fence, etc.)
 - use of light and shadow (opening sequence)
 - subjective camera movements
 - MacGuffin – (?)

Keywords: Dreams; Freudian Analysis; Guilt; Imagery; Psychology; Surrealism.

Week 6: May 5 – Morality, Murder, and Nietzsche

Main film (viewing required): *Rope (1948)*

Session Tasks:

- Examine the film's philosophical themes, particularly in relation to the ideas of Nietzsche.
- Analyze the relationship between the two main characters and their motivations for committing murder.
- Isolate the 'Hitchcock Touch' in the movie:
 - long takes and continuous shots
 - use of visual motifs to convey meaning
 - subjective camera movements and angles
 - experimental approach to filmmaking, innovative use of cinematic techniques
 - MacGuffin (the chest containing the body of the murder victim)

Keywords: Intellectual Arrogance; Justice; Long Take; Morality; Nietzsche; Staging.

Week 7: May 12 – The All-Seeing Eye: Decoding the Themes of Voyeurism and Identity

Main film (viewing required): *Rear Window (1954)*

Session Tasks:

- Discuss the film's exploration of voyeurism and surveillance culture.
- Analyze the use of the rear window as a framing device and metaphor for the viewer's relationship to the film's events.
- Isolate the 'Hitchcock Touch' in the movie:
 - use of confined space to create tension and suspense (claustrophobia/isolation)
 - visual motifs (focus on objects across the courtyard)
 - lighting and camera angles / subjective camera movements
 - editing techniques to amplify a sense of unease
 - MacGuffin ('Mrs. Thorwald' herself)

Keywords: Disability; Ethics; Gender; Human Nature; Neighbors; Urbanism; Voyeurism.

Week 8: May 26 – The Troubled Death in Hitchcock's Comedic Universe

Main film (viewing required): *The Trouble with Harry* (1955)

Session Tasks:

- Discuss the comedic elements in the film (and how they intersect with the themes of death and mortality).
- Analyze the film's visual style and its use of color.
- Isolate the 'Hitchcock Touch' in the movie:
 - unconventional storytelling (told in non-linear fashion → playfulness)
 - unique camera angles (low angle shots, bird's eye views to create an overall light tone)
 - quirky characters (unconventional figures with unique personalities)
 - MacGuffin (Harry's various burials and exhumations)

Keywords: Color; Comedy; Death; Mortality; Nature; Satire; Symbolism; Visual Style.

Week 9: June 2 – Madness and Gender in Hitchcock's 'Masterpiece'

Main film (viewing required): *Psycho* (1960)

Session Tasks:

- Discuss the film's use of psychological horror and suspense.
- Analyze the representation of gender and sexuality.
- Isolate the 'Hitchcock Touch' in the movie:
 - strategic use of music (iconic score with screeching violins)
 - surprise twists (revelation of Norman Bates as killer; the discovery of Mrs. Bates).
 - strategic editing (quick cuts and jump cuts used to create disorientation).
 - use of close-ups to emphasize the characters' emotions and create intimacy.
 - MacGuffin (the \$40,000)

Keywords: Gender; Horror; Madness; Repression; Sexuality; Shock; Suspense; Voyeurism.



DUE DATE
RESEARCH PROPOSAL

Week 10: June 9 – Nature's Revenge in Hitchcock's Apocalyptic Vision

Main film (viewing required): *The Birds* (1963)

Session Tasks:

- Discuss the film's exploration of nature's power and humanity's vulnerability.
- Analyze the film's use of suspenseful music (layering of sound effects to build tension).
- Isolate the 'Hitchcock Touch' in the movie:
 - use of long takes and wide shots (establishing the setting and the characters' positions in relation to the birds).
 - point of view shots (POV shots from the perspective of the birds → foreboding and unease).
 - strategic editing (quick cuts and jump cuts → a sense of disorientation).
 - MacGuffin (the 'lovebirds').

Keywords: Apocalypse; Bird Motif; Gender Roles; Nature; Sound Design; Symbolism.

Week 11: June 16 – Spy Games: Decoding the Suspense in Hitchcock's Spy Thriller

Main film (viewing required): *Torn Curtain* (1966)

Session Tasks:

- Discuss the themes of espionage, betrayal, and trust (genre of the spy thriller).
- Situate the movie within the cultural context of the Cold War.
- Isolate the 'Hitchcock Touch' in the movie:
 - suspenseful music (used to create an atmosphere of impending danger).
 - strategic editing (cutting away from the action at key moments, leaving the audience to wonder what is happening).
 - long takes (camera lingers on scenes for an extended period of time to create a sense of realism, danger and suspense).
 - use of close-ups
 - MacGuffin (the 'top-secret formula').
- Compare and contrast *Torn Curtain* with other Hitchcock films.

Keywords: Berlin Wall; Cold War; East Germany; Espionage; Mystery; Spy Thriller.

Week 12: June 23 - Academic Writing – Preparation of Final Paper

Teaching Objectives:

- to familiarize the students with academic writing, its importance, and the key elements that make up academic writing.
- to discuss research methodology (how to design a research question, and develop a hypothesis).
- to prepare for the final paper (overview of the requirements, including the word count and deadline, with tips on how to develop a research plan, gather data, and organize ideas).

Week 13: June 30 - Final Paper Workshop

Bring a revised version of your research proposal and have the following sections prepared:

Title / Research Questions / Main Thesis / Primary Work / Secondary Works

Teaching Objectives:

- to workshop final papers in small groups (students will receive constructive feedback on their work and identify areas that need improvement).
- to discuss paper structure and content (key elements of a good academic paper will be highlighted, such as a clear introduction, well-structured body paragraphs, and a concise conclusion).
- to provide feedback from peers and instructor (in order to identify areas that need improvement and revise final papers).

DEADLINE FINAL PAPER:

MONDAY, 17 JULY 2023