

AMERICAN FILM HISTORY

A SURVEY

Lecturer:	Univ.-Prof. Dr. Stefan L. Brandt
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Course number:	512.320 · Room and Time: HS 06.02 (Vorklinik), Fri., 13:30-15:00
Course 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 our present day. Examples will include early short films (by Edison, etc.), slapstick films (by Chaplin, Keaton, and Lloyd) as well as <i>film noir</i> (<i>Double Indemnity</i>), monumental cinema (<i>The Birth of a Nation</i>), science fiction (<i>Alien</i>), action thrillers (<i>Falling Down</i>), war movies (<i>Full Metal Jacket</i>), animation films (<i>Ratatouille</i>), and contemporary blockbusters (<i>Avatar</i>). Special emphasis will be placed on the discussion of 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 their strategies of narration and cinematic construction), we will also attempt to situate them within the framework of political and historical events.
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 (Attemsgasse 25, top floor) or, in some cases, online.
Aims:	The aim of this lecture class is to give an overview of the history of American cinema from the 1890s to the present day.
Assessment:	Viewing assignments; final exam.
Important note:	<u>Alternatives to the scheduled exam dates are not possible!</u>

SYLLABUS:

10 March	American Film History – An Introduction Basic texts (recommended): S. Hayward, "Genre" (<i>Key Concepts in Film Studies</i> (1996) (online). Barry Keith Grant et al, "Genre" (definition) (2001) (online).
17 March	National Epics and Historical Films Main film (required): <i>The Birth of a Nation</i> (dir. D.W. Griffith, 1915). Watch online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l3kmVgQHIEY Companion films (optional): <i>Gone with the Wind</i> (dir. Victor Fleming, 1939). <i>The Grapes of Wrath</i> (dir. John Ford, 1940). <i>Forrest Gump</i> (dir. Robert Zemeckis, 1994).
24 March	Slapstick, Screwball, Romantic Comedies Main film (required): <i>Bringing up Baby</i> (dir. Howard Hawks, 1938). Watch trailer: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o-EkAb1h2OM Companion films (optional): <i>Safety Last</i> (prod. Hal Roach, 1923). <i>Gold Rush</i> (dir. Charlie Chaplin, 1925). <i>What's Up, Doc?</i> (dir. Peter Bogdanovich, 1972). <i>Annie Hall</i> (dir. Woody Allen, 1977).
31 March	Art Films & Independent Cinema Main film (required): <i>Citizen Kane</i> (dir. Orson Welles, 1941). Watch online: http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x375wgn Companion films (optional): <i>Mesher of the Afternoon</i> (dir. Maya Deren, 1943). <i>A Woman under the Influence</i> (dir. John Cassavetes, 1974). <i>Reservoir Dogs</i> (dir. Quentin Tarantino, 1992).

- 7 April** **Gangster Films & Film Noir**
 Main film (required):
Double Indemnity (dir. Billy Wilder, 1944). Watch online:
https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x4ftip4_double-indemnity-1944-billy-wilder-full-movie_shortfilms
 Companion films (optional):
The Lady in the Lake (dir. Robert Montgomery, 1947).
The Godfather (dir. Francis Ford Coppola, 1972).
Sin City (dir. Frank Miller & Robert Rodriguez, 2005).
- 28 April** **The Western**
 Main film (required):
The Searchers (dir. John Ford, 1956).
 Companion films (optional):
The Great Train Robbery (dir. Edwin S. Porter, 1903).
High Noon (dir. Fred Zinnemann, 1952).
True Grit (dir. Ethan & Joel Coen, 2010).
- 5 May** **The Musical (No class! Read PPT on Moodle)**
 Main film (required):
Singin' in the Rain (dir. Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen, 1952). Watch online:
http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x15ls8j_singin-in-the-rain-1952-1-2_lifestyle
 Companion films (optional):
Footlight Parade (dir. Lloyd Bacon, 1933).
Top Hat (dir. Mark Sandrich, 1935).
Cabaret (dir. Bob Fosse, 1972).
- 12 May** **Asian American Cinema**
 Guest lecture by Philippa Gates (Wilfrid Laurier University, Canada)
 "Border Crossings: Chines American Immigration and Crime in American Film, 1915-1960"
- 19 May** **Thrillers and Horror Films**
 Main film (required):
Psycho (dir. Alfred Hitchcock, 1960).
 Companion films (optional):
Frankenstein (dir. James Whale, 1931).
The Spiral Staircase (dir. Robert Siodmak, 1946).
The Silence of the Lambs (dir. Jonathan Demme, 1991).
- 26 May** **Science Fiction & Fantasy**
 Main film (required):
Alien (dir. Ridley Scott, 1979).
 Companion films (optional):
Invasion of the Body Snatchers (dir. Don Siegel, 1956).
Star Wars (dir. George Lucas, 1977).
Avatar (dir. James Cameron, 2009).
- 2 June** **War Movies**
 Main film (required):
Full Metal Jacket (dir. Stanley Kubrick, 1987).
 Companion films (optional):
Der Fuehrer's Face (prod. Walt Disney, 1943).
Saving Private Ryan (dir. Steven Spielberg, 1998).
The Thin Red Line (dir. Terence Malick, 1998)
- 9 June** **Action Films**
 Main film (required):
Falling Down (dir. Joel Schumacher, 1993).
 Companion films (optional):
Die Hard (dir. John McTiernan, 1988).
True Lies (dir. James Cameron, 1994).
Enemy of the State (dir. Tony Scott, 1998).
- 23 June** **Animation**
 Main film (required):
Ratatouille (prod. Disney-Pixar, 2007).
 Companion films (optional):
Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (prod. Walt Disney, 1937).
Shrek (prod. DreamWorks Animation, 2001).
Finding Nemo (prod. Pixar Animation Studios, 2003).
- 30 June** **Final Exam**