English 441A: American Film Directors
Dr. Wood
Fall 2007

Texts (all on electronic reserve):

Raymond Carney, American Vision: The Films of Frank Capra
Lester Friedman, Citizen Spielberg
Sam Girgus, The Films of Woody Allen
Diane Jacobs, Christmas in July: The Life and Art of Preston Sturges
Les Keyes, Martin Scorsese
Charles Maland, Chaplin and American Culture
Leland Poague, Hollywood Professionals, volume 7
Edward Wagenknecht and Anthony Slide, The Films of D. W. Griffith
Martin Williams, Griffith: First Artist of the Movies
Robin Wood, Hitchcock’s Films
---, Howard Hawks

Class Schedule

August 28: Introduction to Course

September 4: D. W. Griffith
  Film: True Heart Susie (1919)
  Reading: John Belton, from The Silent Picture 17 (1973), rptd. in Wagenknecht and Slide, pp. 119-20, and Williams, “Hearts of the World and True Heart Susie,” pp. 93-108

September 11: Charlie Chaplin
  Film: The Gold Rush (1925)
  Reading: Maland, “From The Kid to The Gold Rush,” pp. 55-93

September 18: Frank Capra
  Film: Mr. Deeds Goes to Town (1936)

September 25: Howard Hawks
  Film: Bringing Up Baby (1938)

October 2: John Ford & PAPER #1 DUE
  Film: Drums Along the Mohawk (1939)
October 9: Preston Sturges
   Film: *Sullivan’s Travels* (1941)
   Reading: Jacobs, Chapter 18, pp. 241-61

October 16: MID-TERM EXAM

October 23: FALL BREAK

October 30: Billy Wilder
   Film: *Sunset Boulevard* (1950)

November 6: Alfred Hitchcock
   Film: *Rear Window* (1954)
   Reading: Wood, “Rear Window,” in *Hitchcock’s Films*, pp. 68-76

November 13: Stanley Kubrick
   Film: *Dr. Strangelove* (1964)

November 20: Woody Allen
   Film: *Annie Hall* (1977)
   Reading: Girgus, Chapter 2 (“Desire and Narrativity in *Annie Hall*”), pp. 25-42.

November 27: Martin Scorsese & PAPER #2 DUE
   Film: *Raging Bull* (1980)
   Reading: Keyser, Chapter 6, pp. 105-22.

December 4: Steven Spielberg
   Film: *E.T.* (1982)
   Reading: Friedman, Chapter 1 (“I’m Sorry I Didn’t Tell You about the World”: Science-Fiction and Fantasy Films,” pp. 11-62.

December 11: FINAL EXAM & READING JOURNAL DUE

Course Requirements

1. We will follow the Humanities Division attendance policy. Three absences= warning; 5=failure.

2. My office is in HH 301, where I have office hours: 1-4MW, 9-9:30, 10:30-12T; 9-9:30, 12-12:30R, 9-12F. My office phone number is 471-3284.
3. All assignments are due on the dates noted in the class schedule. Late work will be marked down one letter grade for each day late.

4. The instructor may need to modify the schedule and/or requirements during the semester. You will be responsible for any of the changes announced in class.

5. When we use numerical scores in the class, we will use the following scale:

   - A  90-100
   - B  80-89
   - C  70-79
   - D  60-69
   - F  Below 60

6. Your grade will be calculated by averaging the two papers, Mid-Term and Final, and the Reading Journal, each counting 20%.

7. This class will be based on respect for individual feelings, points of view, and ideas. Therefore, you will be asked to behave appropriately, demonstrating your ability to listen to and care for others. If you do not fulfill this requirement of the course, the instructor reserves the right to remove you from class and you will be held responsible for all class work.

8. Any student with a special documented disability (sight, hearing, language, mobility, etc.) which may affect class activities should contact Dr. Rebecca Van Cleave, ext. 3268; office room 15 in Chambliss, and provide appropriate documentation.

9. No extra credit will be given in this class.

The Papers

In addition to the work in class, students will write papers (approximately 5 pages) on two films. The first will use the analytical techniques we develop in class to study a film representative of a director/star not covered in the course. Included should be (1) a summary of the story, (2) a description of its major stylistic features, (3) its position in the canon by that artist, and (4) a personal evaluation based on the knowledge and approaches gained in this course.

Suggested Directors/Artists: Buster Keaton (The Navigator, The General), Harold Lloyd (Safety Last, The Freshman), Erich von Stroheim (Greed), Tod Browning (Dracula, Freaks), George Cukor (The Philadelphia Story, Adam’s Rib), Mervyn LeRoy (Little Caesar, I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang), Michael Curtiz (Yankee Doodle Dandy, Casablanca, Mildred Pierce), Val Lewton (Cat People), Orson Welles (Citizen Kane, Touch of Evil), William Wyler (Dodsworth, The Best Years of Our

The second paper will be written on another film from a director covered in class. Follow the same process of analysis as on the first paper.


The Reading Journal

I would also like you to take focused notes on each reading assignment. In a spiral notebook, describe (1) the main idea in the entry, (2) your overall impression of the piece, and (3) how this essay contributes to your understanding of film authorship (or if not, why not). One page on each reading will be sufficient. The journal will be handed in at the final exam period and will count 20% of your grade.

Course Objectives

1. Ability to identify the major directors in the history of American film.
2. Familiarity with representative works of major American directors.
3. Understanding the basic terminology from film criticism.
4. Analysis of single work, placing it in the historical contexts developed in the course.
5. Write a clear, coherent comparative study of works by same director.