

FILM 234/334 National Cinema B: Contemporary Hollywood Cinema

Trimester 1 2009
(Monday 2 March – Friday 5 June 2009)

22/24 points
CRN 8638/6669

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STAFF

Course Coordinator: Tim Groves

Room 83FT 303

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Phone: 463 5410

Office Hours: These will be posted on Blackboard

Tutors:

Brady Hammond; Gavin McKibbon

The location and contact details of tutors will be posted on Blackboard

CLASS TIMES AND ROOMS

Lectures & Screenings

Monday, Wednesday 2.10-5.00pm, HM LT 105

Tutorials

Tutorials will take place on Thursday in either 85FT 108 or 77FT 205, starting at 10am, 11am, 12pm or 1.10pm. Full details will be posted on S-Cubed and Blackboard. Students should enrol for tutorials through S-Cubed.

COURSE CONTENT

This course will survey some of the key features of Hollywood cinema since about 1990. It will examine the aesthetic and economic dimensions, and the philosophical and ideological implications of the blockbuster. It will consider Bordwell and Thompson's argument that contemporary Hollywood filmmaking remains essentially classical in terms of both narrative and visual style. The course will explore the work of a range of directors: Stephen Spielberg, Clint Eastwood, Sofia Coppola, Steven Soderbergh and Paul Thomas Anderson. It will also deal with serial killer and "smart" films, and genres such as comedy and crime.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- To provide students with a broad understanding of some of the key debates within Film Studies about contemporary Hollywood cinema.
- To give students specific knowledge of the Hollywood blockbuster, the narrative vs spectacle debate, the films of Clint Eastwood, Sofia Coppola, Steven Soderbergh, and Paul Thomas Anderson, the “smart” film, the serial killer film, genres such as crime and comedy, and representations of gender.
- To improve the textual analysis and independent research skills of students.
- To enhance the ability of students to write essays and work in small pairs and groups.

COURSE DELIVERY

This course will consist of two 3 hour lecture/screenings and one 1 hour tutorial per week. The lecture/screening sessions will normally involve a film screening followed by a lecture. There will be some student discussion and interaction during the lecture. The tutorial will discuss weekly topics, lectures, screenings and assigned readings. It will be structured around a range of learning activities, such as pair and small group work, and whole class discussions.

EXPECTED WORKLOAD

For FILM 234 students, the University expects you to be able to devote about 15 hours per week to the course during the teaching period, and about 40 hours outside this time. If you attend seven (7) hours of classes per week, you should expect to spend eight (8) hours per week during the teaching period reading, watching films, preparing for classes and working on assignments.

For FILM 334 students, the University expects you to be able to devote about 16 hours per week to the course during the teaching period, and about 48 hours outside this time. If you attend seven (7) hours of classes per week, you should expect to spend nine (9) hours per week during the teaching period reading, watching films, preparing for classes and working on assignments.

GROUP WORK

There will be some informal group work during lectures and tutorials. The informal group work in tutorials will contribute to the assessment for Assignment One.

READINGS

There is no set text for this course. Each week you will be expected to have completed a list of assigned readings that will help prepare you for the tutorials. A list of these will be distributed early in week 1 and will be posted on blackboard. Each reading will be available via Electronic Closed Reserve in the Central Library.

ASSESSMENT

All assessment for this course will be internal. There will be four assignments. FILM 334 students will have to write longer essays for assignments three and four. Their work will also be graded at a higher level for all four assignments.

Assignment One: Tutorial Participation (10%)

Due Date: Tutorials in weeks 3-12

You will be assessed on the quality of your contributions to tutorials throughout the semester, starting in week 3. This assignment will enable you to demonstrate your knowledge of issues raised in the course. It will also develop your critical skills, and enhance your verbal skills. Non-attendance at tutorials without a valid excuse (such as illness) will affect your grade.

Assignment Two: Reading Logs (10%)

Due Date: Tutorials in weeks 4, 5, 8, 9, 10

In this assignment you will summarize an assigned tutorial reading in weeks 4, 5, 8, 9 and 10 in 150 words. This summary should identify the main points of the article and any questions you have about it. This assignment will develop your knowledge of key texts about the filmmakers you will study, as well as your analytical, critical and expression skills.

Assignment Three: Essay (40%)

2500-2700 words for FILM 234 students; 2800-3000 words for FILM 334 students

Due Date: Monday, April 27th, 2pm

This assignment will cover topics discussed in the first six weeks of the course, such as the aesthetic and economic dimensions of blockbuster cinema, the narrative vs spectacle debate, the philosophical and ideological implications of special effects, intensified continuity, and the work of Clint Eastwood. This assignment will enable you to develop your textual analysis, critical and argumentation skills. It will also improve your written expression.

Assignment Four: (40%)

2500-2700 words for FILM 234 students; 2800-3000 words for FILM 334 students

Due Date: Monday, June 15th, 2pm

This assignment will cover the issues discussed in weeks 7-12 of the course, such as female authorship, romantic comedy, neo-noir, heist, serial killer and “smart” films. This assignment will enable you to develop your textual analysis, independent research, critical, argumentation and analytical skills. It will also enhance your written expression.

PENALTIES AND EXTENSIONS

Work submitted late without an extension will be penalised two percent per working day. Except under exceptional circumstances, no work will be accepted more than two weeks after the due date unless specific prior arrangements have been made.

Extensions

If you require an extension, you must complete an extension request form (available on your course Blackboard site) prior to the assignment due date. This must be accompanied by relevant documentation (e.g. a doctor's certificate) where appropriate. Extension requests must be submitted to the Course Co-ordinator. Tutors cannot grant extensions.

MANDATORY COURSE REQUIREMENTS

In order to pass this course, you must complete all assignments by the due dates. You must receive at least a “C” grade overall. You must also attend at least eight (8) tutorials.

HANDING IN ASSIGNMENTS

Assignments should be placed in the drop box in 85 Fairlie Terrace. *Do not submit your essay to your tutor.* Make sure you keep a copy of your assignment before submitting it. Assignment cover sheets and extension forms can be found on Blackboard or outside the Programme office. Remember to fill in your tutor's name.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND PLAGIARISM

Academic integrity means that university staff and students, in their teaching and learning are expected to treat others honestly, fairly and with respect at all times. It is not acceptable to mistreat academic, intellectual or creative work that has been done by other people by representing it as your own original work.

Academic integrity is important because it is the core value on which the University's learning, teaching and research activities are based. Victoria University's reputation for academic integrity adds value to your qualification.

The University defines plagiarism as presenting someone else's work as if it were your own, whether you mean to or not. ‘Someone else's work’ means anything that is not your own idea. Even if it is presented in your own style, you must acknowledge your sources fully and appropriately. This includes:

- Material from books, journals or any other printed source
- The work of other students or staff
- Information from the internet
- Software programs and other electronic material
- Designs and ideas
- The organisation or structuring of any such MATERIAL.

Find out more about plagiarism, how to avoid it and penalties, on the University's website:
<http://www.victoria.ac.nz/home/study/plagiarism.aspx>

COMMUNICATION OF ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Any additional information concerning the course, including changes, will be posted on Blackboard.

GENERAL UNIVERSITY STATUTES AND POLICIES

A copy of the General University Statutes and Policies can be found on Blackboard.

COURSE PROGRAMME

Screenings and Weekly Topics

Please note that the films listed here are provisional and have to be confirmed.

- Week 1:** **Monday:** Introduction to the Course
 Wednesday: Is It All Over?
- Screenings:** *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls* (Kenneth Bowser, Canada/UK, 2003)
 The Player (Robert Altman, USA, 1991)
- Week 2:** **Monday:** Citizen Spielberg and the Rise of High Concept
 Wednesday: Marketing the Blockbuster (Brady Hammond)
- Screenings:** *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (Stephen Spielberg, USA, 1981)
 Jurassic Park (Stephen Spielberg, USA, 1993)
- Week 3:** **Monday:** Narrative and Spectacle
 Wednesday: Sublime Special Effects
- Screenings:** *Con Air* (Simon West, USA, 1997)
 Sunshine (Danny Boyle, UK/USA, 2007)
- Week 4:** **Monday:** Digital Cinema and Philosophy
 Wednesday: Digital Cinema and Ideology
- Screenings:** *The Matrix* (Wachowski Brothers, USA, 1999)
 Forrest Gump (Robert Zemeckis, USA, 1994)
- Week 5:** **Monday:** The Persistence of Narrative
 Wednesday: Intensified Continuity
- Screenings:** *Speed* (Jan de Bont, USA, 1994)
 The Paper (Ron Howard, USA, 1994)
- Week 6:** **Monday:** *Unforgiven*
 Wednesday: Clint Eastwood's Critique of Masculinity (Mark Ellsworth)
- Screenings:** *Unforgiven* (Clint Eastwood, USA, 1992)
 A Perfect World (Clint Eastwood, USA, 1993)

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- Week 7:** **Monday:** Why *Thelma and Louise* Matter(s)
 Thursday: Female Authorship: Sofia Coppola (Allison Maplesden)
- Screenings:** *Thelma and Louise* (Ridley Scott, USA, 1991)

FILM 234/334 COURSE OUTLINE

Marie Antoinette (Sofia Coppola, USA, 2006)

- Week 8:** **Monday:** Romantic Comedy
 Wednesday: Low Comedy
Screenings: *Sleepless in Seattle* (Nora Ephron, USA, 1993)
 Ace Ventura: Pet Detective (Tom Shadyac, USA, 1994)
- Week 9:** **Monday:** Crime Stories 1: Neo-noir
 Wednesday: Crime Stories 2: The Heist Film
Screenings: *Lost Highway* (David Lynch, USA/France, 1997)
 Reservoir Dogs (Quentin Tarantino, USA, 1992)
- Week 10:** **Monday:** The “Smart” Film
 Wednesday: Stephen Soderbergh
Screenings: *Fight Club* (David Fincher, USA, 1999)
 Ocean’s Twelve (Stephen Soderbergh, USA, 2004)
- Week 11:** **Monday:** Serial Killer Films and Genre
 Wednesday: Body/Text in Serial Killer Films
Screenings: *Manhunter* (Michael Mann, USA, 1986) **TBC**
 Se7en (David Fincher, USA, 1995)
- Week 12:** **Monday:** Film Screening
 Wednesday: Back to the Future?
Screenings: *There Will Be Blood* (Paul Thomas Anderson, USA, 2007)
 Bringing out the Dead (Martin Scorsese, USA, 1999)

FILM 234/334 National Cinema B Weekly Reading List

The following materials have been placed on Electronic Closed Reserve. You are expected to have read the assigned readings for each week. You are also strongly encouraged to read the recommended articles as well. The articles that must be read and summarised for Assignment Two are asterisked.

Week 1: March 2-8

Assigned

Dixon, Wheeler Winston. “Twenty-Five Reasons Why It’s All Over.” *The End of Cinema As We Know It: American Film in the Nineties*. Ed. Jon Lewis. London: Pluto Press, 2002. 356-366.

Week 2: March 9-15

Assigned

Buckland, Warren. *Directed by Steven Spielberg: Poetics of the Blockbuster*. New York: Continuum, 2006. [Chapter 1: Origins of the Contemporary Hollywood Blockbuster.]

Balides, Constance. “Jurassic Post-Fordism: Tall Tales of Economics in the Theme Park.” *Screen* 41.2 (Summer 2000): 139-160.

Recommended

Buckland, Warren. "A Close Encounter with Raiders of the Lost Ark: Notes on Narrative Aspects of the New Blockbuster." *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*. Eds. Steve Neale and Murray Smith. London and New York: Routledge, 1998. 166-177.

Week 3: March 16-22

Assigned

King, Geoff. *Spectacular Narratives: Hollywood in the Age of the Blockbuster*. London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2000. 28-39.

Pierson, Michele. "CGI Effects in Hollywood Science-Fiction Cinema 1989-1995: The Wonder Years." *Screen* 40.2 (Summer 1999): 158-176.

Recommended

Bukatman, Scott. "The Artificial Infinite: On Special Effects and the Sublime." *Alien Zone II: The Spaces of Science Fiction Cinema*. Ed. Annette Kuhn. London and New York: Verso, 1999. 249-274. [This is difficult. Concentrate on pp. 253-261]

Week 4: March 23-30

Assigned

Burgoyne, Robert. *Film Nation: Hollywood Looks at U.S. History*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, pp. 104-119.

Constable, Catherine. "Baudrillard Reloaded: Interrelating Philosophy and Film via *The Matrix Trilogy*." *Screen* 47.2 (Summer 2006): 233-249. ** [Challenging but important]

Recommended

Prince, Stephen. "True Lies: Perceptual Realism, Digital Images and Film Theory." *The Film Cultures Reader*. Ed. Graeme Turner. 115-128.

Wang, Jennifer Hyland. "'A Struggle for Competing Stories': Race, Gender, and Political Memory in *Forrest Gump*." *Cinema Journal* 39.3 (Spring 2000): 92-115.

Week 5: March 31-April 5

Assigned

King, Geoff. *New Hollywood Cinema: An Introduction*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002. 178-193.

Bordwell, David. *The Way Hollywood Tells It: Story and Style in Modern Movies*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006. 104-114.

Bordwell, David. "Intensified Continuity." *Film Quarterly* 55.3 (2002): 16-28. **

Week 6: April 6-12

Assigned

Beard, William. "*Unforgiven* and the Uncertainties of the Heroic." *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 3.2 (1994) : 41-62.

Dowell, Pat. "*Unforgiven*." *Cineaste* 19.1-2 (1992) : 72-73.

Beard, William. *Persistence of Double Vision: Essays on Clint Eastwood*. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2000. 91-104.

Week 7: April 27-May 3

Assigned

Dowell, Pat. "Should We Go Along for the Ride? A Critical Symposium on *Thelma and Louise*." *Cineaste* 18.4 (1991): 28-36.

Willis, Sharon. "Hardware and Hardbodies, What Do Women Want?: A Reading of *Thelma and Louise*." *Film Theory Goes to the Movies*. Eds. Jim Collins, Hilary Radner and Ava Preacher Collins. 120-128.

Cook, Pam and Hannah McGill. "Portrait of a Lady: Sophia Coppola." *Sight and Sound* 16.11 (November 2006): 36-40, 68-69.

Lee, Nathan. "Pretty Vacant." *Film Comment* 42.5 (September-October 2006): 24-26.

San Filippo, Maria. "*Lost in Translation*." *Cineaste* 29.1 (Winter 2003): 26-28.

Week 8: May 4-10

Assigned

Krutnik, Frank. "Conforming Passions? Contemporary Romantic Comedy." *Genre and Contemporary Hollywood*. Ed. Steven Neale. London: BFI, 2002. 130-147. **

Bonila, Paul C. "Is there More to Hollywood Lowbrow than Meets the Eye?" *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 22.1 (2005): 17-24.

Recommended

Garrett, Roberta. *Postmodern Chick Flicks: The Return of the Woman's Film*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. 92-125.

Week 9: May 11-17

Assigned

Neale, Steve. "Film Noir." *Genre and Hollywood*. London and New York: Routledge, 2000. 151-177. **

Telotte, J.P. "Fatal Capers: Strategy and Enigma in Film Noir." *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 22.4 (Winter 1996): 163-170.

Taubin, Amy. "The Men's Room." *Sight and Sound* 2.8 (December 1992): 2-4.

Recommended

Gormley, Paul. *The New-Brutality Film: Race and Affect in Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*. Portland, Oregon: Intellect Books, 2005. 137-158.

Week 10: May 18-24

Assigned

Sconce, Jeffrey. "Irony, Nihilism and the New American 'Smart' Film." *Screen* 43.4 (Winter 2002): 349-369. **

Dillon, Steven. *The Solaris Effect: Art and Artifice in Contemporary American Film*. Austin, Tx: University of Texas Press, 2006. 21-44.

Week 11 May 25-31

Assigned

Thomas, Allan James. "The Word Made Flesh: Viscerality and Textuality in David Fincher's *Seven*." *Metro* 109 (1997): 32-34.

Seltzer, Mark. "Serial Killers (II): The Pathological Public Sphere." *Critical Inquiry* 22 (Autumn 1995): 122-149.

Week 12 June 1-6

Assigned

James, Nick. "Black Gold." *Sight and Sound* 18.2 (February 2008): 30-34.

Jones, Kent. "Triumph of the Will." *Film Comment* 44.1 (January-February 2008): 24-27.