



АНГЛ 369: History of the American Film Industry

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New Economic School / Higher School of Economics Joint BAE Program

[Совместный бакалавриат Российской экономической школы и Высшей школы экономики]

Meets: Mondays, 12:10 – 13:30 in 5312 & Thursdays, 13:40 – 15:00 in 5406

[по понедельникам 12:10 – 13:30 и по четвергам 13:40 – 15:00]

Campus: HSE, metro Shabolovskaia [Вышка, м. Шаболовская]

Building 5, Room 312 (Mondays) and 406 (Thursdays)

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Description

From the moment of its genesis American cinema was conceived as a predominantly commercial endeavor. Since then, the American film industry's mercantile origins, entrepreneurial core, and rise to global prominence have contributed to its image as a cabal of dream peddlers. This stereotype is as problematic as any other, yet both its inaccuracies and its kernels of truth raise some compelling questions. For example, does Hollywood, as the American film industry is often called, produce its greatest works in spite of its motives and methods or because of them? Certainly most Hollywood film products lack significant philosophical, aesthetic, and perhaps even entertainment value, but do these multitudes of inferior movies enable the masterpieces by serving as the industry's staple products? What allows Hollywood, given its enormity, to maintain a cohesive, signature style? If the industry really consists of symbiotic, perhaps even wholly interdependent entities, how do those entities interact and what degree of responsibility does any one of them share for the qualities of a given film product?

This course will explore potential answers to such questions through a study of pivotal stages in the history of the American film industry and how it evolved into its current form. These stages will include, for example, the origins of cinema, the rise of the feature film, the studio system, the star system, the genre system, etc. Assigned readings will serve to provide historical context for the evolution of the industry and methods for interpreting film. We will watch and discuss films ranging from the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 21st, such as *Birth of a Nation*, *The Aviator*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Barton Fink*, *The Godfather*, and others.

Goals

We will consider a series of key films in their historical context in order to:

- Acquire knowledge of the history of the American film industry and how it has evolved
- Cultivate familiarity with established strategies for marketing films: the studio system, the star system, the genre system, etc.
- Attain the vocabulary necessary to discuss the formal and thematic aspects of film and the movie industry
- Develop sophisticated approaches to interpreting film
- Come to a better understanding of Hollywood as a dynamic, symbiotic network

Policies

Attendance

Attendance will be recorded at every class meeting. After missing two classes, your final grade in the course shall be lowered as follows:

<u>Number of absences</u>	<u>Final grade penalty</u>
3.....	1 point
4.....	2 points
5.....	3 points
6.....	5 points
7.....	8 points

Make-up Policy

As per institution guidelines, students who fail the course will be given the opportunity to make up for their performance during the semester. Therefore, students who receive a failing grade in the course may have their final grade raised to the lowest possible passing grade if they accomplish both of the following tasks:

1. Satisfactorily complete every assignment that was not submitted or received a failing grade during the semester.
2. Pass a comprehensive exam on all the material covered during class sessions throughout the semester.

Participation

“Participation” means thoughtful, intelligent verbal commentary during class discussions, a demonstrated ability to respond to fellow students, preparing adequately for class by reading the assigned texts and watching the assigned films ahead of time, completing homework assignments, and performing well on quizzes. Participation counts for 10% of your final grade.

- **Readings & Films:** The schedule in this syllabus indicates the days on which readings and films will be addressed in class. You should have read the assigned texts and watched the assigned films prior to the day under which they are listed in the schedule.
- **Homework & Quizzes:** Throughout the semester you will be given homework assignments. They will range from the challenge of developing good research questions to the tasks of finding reliable data about the film industry or a given film, writing a brief commentary on a film, or analyzing and transcribing scenes. These assignments will serve to help generate discussion topics and to provide material you can use for graded projects, particularly your research papers. Every time I give a homework assignment I will expect a minimum of five students to complete it. In the event that I do not receive five homework assignments by 19:00 on the evening before the next class meeting, I will give a quiz on the assigned materials. Regularly

completing homework assignments will have a positive impact on your participation score. Your performance on quizzes will affect your participation grade.

- **Leading Discussions:** Each student will be expected to generate discussion questions and lead a class discussion at least once. This exercise will not be graded, but it will affect your participation score.
- **Punctuality:** You are expected to arrive at class on time. Habitual tardiness will result in a lower class participation grade.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the act of presenting another's words or ideas as your own. It is a serious academic offense, and it will result in disciplinary action that could include failing an assignment, failing the course, or expulsion. I will happily answer any questions you have about what constitutes plagiarism and how to properly attribute others in your work.

Electronics

Cell phones are strictly forbidden in class. Tablets and computers may be used only under special circumstances when class exercises require them, but they may be used for those exercises and nothing else. You will be marked absent each time you are caught violating this policy.

Assignments

Film Reviews

Each student will be required to review two of the films assigned in this course. Reviews should be approximately 800 words long. They will be due 24 hours in advance of the class meeting for which discussion of the film is scheduled. Reviews submitted late will not be accepted. Each review counts toward 10% of your final grade.

Podcasts

Throughout the course of the semester, every student must produce a podcast. Doing so will involve three stages:

- 1) Planning the podcast and writing the script—at this stage it will be necessary to choose a form for the podcast (e.g., it could be an interview with another student, in which one partner plays the role of a radio-show host and the other plays the role of a film critic being interviewed about his current research project; or it could be a joint-review of a film framed as a discussion between two critics (see, for example, Siskel & Ebert: <<http://www.siskelandebert.org>>), etc.);

- 2) Rehearsing and revising the script;
- 3) Recording and editing the podcast.

The central theme of the podcast must be one of the films, genres, or filmmakers assigned for the course. At the beginning of the semester we will determine who is responsible for doing podcasts for which films. The due dates for podcasts about a given film will be determined by when we discuss the topic in question. Students will be required to submit the written script one week prior to the day the podcast is due. The podcast will count for 30% of the final grade.

Panel Presentation

Each student will be required to give an in-class presentation on the topic of his or her research paper. The presentation will be given as part of a panel, and it will be scheduled in consultation with me. It should last 10 minutes. After all panelists have presented, there will be a 10-minute question and answer session with the rest of the class. The presentation will count for 10% of your final grade.

Research Paper

Your last assignment in this course will be an 8 to 12-page research paper on a topic you develop in consultation with me. You are encouraged to begin working on the paper well in advance of its due date, and you may consult me as often as you wish throughout the various stages of its development. The paper will count for 30% of your final grade.

Format: Your essays must be typed or word-processed. All citations and references, including films, should appear in a “Works Cited” list and adhere to the MLA guidelines (see: <<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/05/>>). Please use a 12-point “Times” or “Times New Roman” font and 2.5 cm margins on all sides. Your paper should be double-spaced. Your name, my name, the course number, and the date should appear in a heading at the beginning of the paper. The essay must be submitted electronically in one of the following formats: MS Word (.doc or .docx), Portable Document Format (.pdf), OpenOffice (.odt), or Rich Text Format (.rtf). If you use a Mac, do not save your document as a “Pages” file.

Grades

Grading Scale

All assignments and the final course grade will follow a 10-point scale, wherein 10 indicates the highest possible score and 1 the lowest:

- | | |
|----|---|
| 10 | Impeccable work that exceeds the highest standards for excellence |
| 9 | Excellent |
| 8 | Near excellence |

7	Very good
6	Good
5	Highly satisfactory
4	Satisfactory
3	Unsatisfactory
2	Very unsatisfactory
1	Failure

Final Grades

Your final grade will be calculated as follows:

- **Participation:** 10%
- **Panel Presentation:** 10%
- **2 Film Reviews:** 20%
- **Podcast:** 30%
- **Research Paper:** 30%

Readings & Films

The “Bibliography” in this syllabus lists the assigned and recommended readings for this course, most of which will be provided for you. There is, however, one book that you must purchase or access through the library: John Belton’s *American Cinema / American Culture*, 4th ed. We will consult it regularly throughout the semester. Timothy Corrigan’s *A Short Guide to Writing about Film*, 8th ed., although not required, provides a glossary of useful terms and several helpful suggestions concerning approaches to analyzing and writing about film. It is available in the library. I recommend that you consult it when working on your assignments. The required films for this course are listed in the “Filmography.” Some of the assigned films are in the public domain and can be located on the internet. When this is the case, a link will be provided. The other films are available online for purchase or rental; they are not expensive. You may also access the library’s copies.

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Filmography

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- 2001: A Space Odyssey*, dir. Stanley Kubrick (MGM, 1968). [Available on *iTunes*.]
- African Queen*, dir. John Huston (United Artists, 1951). [Available on *iTunes*.]

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- Philadelphia Story, The*, dir. George Cukor (MGM, 1940). [Available on *iTunes*.]
- Psycho*, dir. Alfred Hitchcock (Paramount Pictures, 1960). [Available on *Google Play* and *iTunes*.]
- Santa's Slay*, dir. David Steiman (Media 8 Entertainment, 2005). [Available on *iTunes*.]
- Seven Year Itch, The*, dir. Billy Wilder (Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, 1955). [Available on *iTunes*.]
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- Stagecoach*, dir. John Ford (United Artists, 1939). [Available on *iTunes*.]
- Taxi Driver*, dir. Martin Scorsese (). [Available on *Google Play* and *iTunes*.]
- True Grit*, dir. Henry Hathaway (Paramount Pictures, 1969). [Available on *iTunes*.]
- Vertigo*, dir. Alfred Hitchcock (Paramount Pictures, 1958). [Available on *Google Play* and *iTunes*.]
- Wizard of Oz, The*, dir. Victor Fleming (MGM, 1939). [Available on *Google Play* and *iTunes*.]

Schedule

I. The Birth of the Industry & the Rise of the “Feature Film”

Week 01

01. Monday / January 20, 2014

Topic: Introduction

02. Thursday / January 23, 2014

Topic: From Photography to the Nickelodeon

Readings: Belton, *American Cinema*, ch. 1 “The Emergence of Cinema as an Institution” (1 – 13)
Loughney, “1898-1899: Movies and Entrepreneurs”
Thompson & Bordwell, *Film History*, ch. 1 “The Invention and Early Years of the Cinema, 1880’s – 1904” (11 – 32)

Films: *The Great Train Robbery*, dir. Edwin S. Porter (Edison Manufacturing Company, 1904)

Week 02

03. Monday / January 27, 2014

Topic: The “Feature Film” Phenomenon

Readings: Belton, *American Cinema*, ch. 3 “Classical Hollywood Cinema: Style” (44 – 63)
Brody, “The Worst Thing about ‘Birth of a Nation’ Is How Good It Is”
LoBrutto, chapters 5 “Editing—Russian Montage” (26 – 33) and 24 “Parallel Storytelling” (164 – 70)
Mark, “Review: ‘The Birth of a Nation’”
Thompson & Bordwell, *Film History*, ch. 2: “The Struggle for the Expanding American Film Industry” (37 – 50)

Film: *The Birth of a Nation*, dir. D.W. Griffith (David W. Griffith Corporation, 1915)

II. The Studio System

04. Thursday / January 30, 2014

Topic: The Advent of Sound & the Rise of the “Studio System”

Readings: Belton, *American Cinema*, ch. 4 “The Studio System” (64 – 86)
“How the Vitaphone Enters In”
Silverman, “Rev. of *The Jazz Singer*”

Film: *The Jazz Singer*, dir. Alan Crosland (Warner Brothers, 1927)

Week 03

05. Monday / February 03, 2014

- Topic: A Similar Strategy with Color?
Readings: Griffin, *What Dreams Are Made Of*, ch. 6 “Judy Garland and Mickey Rooney: Babes and Beyond” (120 – 41)
Film: *The Wizard of Oz*, dir. Victor Fleming (MGM, 1939)

06. Thursday / February 06, 2014

- Topic: Political Satire and the Studio System
Readings: Baum, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*
Film: *The Wizard of Oz*, dir. Victor Fleming (MGM, 1939)

Week 04

07. Monday / February 10, 2014

- Topic: Irving Thalberg & the Role of the Producer
Reading: Schatz, “The Genius of the System”
Thompson & Bordwell, *Film History*, ch. 10 “The Hollywood Studio System 1930 – 1945” (214 – 38)
Film: *Grand Hotel*, dir. Edmund Goulding (MGM, 1932)

08. Thursday / February 13, 2014

- Topic: Analyzing *Grand Hotel*
Readings: Hall, “A Pictorial Version of Vicki Baum’s Stage Work”
Film: *Grand Hotel*, dir. Edmund Goulding (MGM, 1932)

Week 05

09. Monday / February 17, 2014

- Topic: A Posthumous Portrait of the Studio System
Readings: Levine, *The Coen Brothers*, ch. 6 “The Wallpaper Movie: *Barton Fink*” (81 – 102)
Travers, “Rev. of *Barton Fink*”
Film: *Barton Fink*, dir. Joel and Ethan Coen (Twentieth Century Fox, 1991)

10. Thursday / February 20, 2014

- Topic: Art under Commercial Despotism
Readings: Shugan, “Antibusiness Films & Folk Marketing”
Film: *Barton Fink*, dir. Joel and Ethan Coen (Twentieth Century Fox, 1991)

Week 06

11. Monday / February 24, 2014

- Topic: *Citizen Kane* & the Notion of “Auteur Cinema”
- Readings: Bazin, “On the *politique des auteurs*”
Belton, *American Cinema*, ch. 2 “Classical Hollywood Cinema: Narration” (21 – 43)
Crowther, “Rev. of *Citizen Kane*”
- Film: *Citizen Kane*, dir. Orson Welles (RKO Radio Pictures, 1941)

12. Thursday / February 27, 2014

- Topic: Dissecting *Citizen Kane*
- Readings: Knapp, ““Throw That Junk!’ The Art of the Movie in *Citizen Kane*”
- Film: *Citizen Kane*, dir. Orson Welles (RKO Radio Pictures, 1941)

III. The Star & Genre Systems

Week 07

13. Monday / March 03, 2014

- Topic: The Beginning of the End for the Studio System: Katharine Hepburn Survives “Box Office Poison”
- Readings: Belton, *American Cinema*, ch. 5 “The Star System” (87 – 122)
Golden, “Rev. of *The Philadelphia Story*”
- Film: *The Philadelphia Story*, dir. George Cukor (MGM, 1940)

14. Thursday / March 06, 2014

- Topic: The Paramount Case, Howard Hughes, & the Decline of the Studio System
- Readings: French, “Howard’s Trend (Rev. of *The Aviator*)”
Thompson & Bordwell, *Film History*, ch. 15 “American Cinema in the Postwar Era, 1945 – 1960” (325 – 51)
- Film: *The Aviator*, dir. Martin Scorsese (Miramax, 2004)

Week 08

CLASSES SUSPENDED MONDAY, MARCH 10TH FOR INTERNATIONAL WOMEN’S DAY

15. Thursday / March 13, 2014

- Topic: *African Queen*
Readings: Bazin, "The Death of Humphrey Bogart"
Brill, *John Huston's Filmmaking*, ch. 3 "Hustonian Themes in an Atypical Genre: *The African Queen* (1951)" (49 – 72)
Film: *African Queen*, dir. John Huston (United Artists, 1951)

Week 09

16. Monday / March 17, 2014

- Topic: Hard-Boiled Detective Fiction on the Screen
Readings: Hammett, *The Maltese Falcon*

17. Thursday / March 20, 2014

- Topic: Classic Film Noir
Readings: Belton, *American Cinema*, ch. 10 "Film Noir: Somewhere in the Night" (221 – 42)
Schrader, "Notes on Film Noir"
Film: *The Maltese Falcon*, dir. John Huston (Warner Brothers, 1941)

CLASSES SUSPENDED FOR CONSULTATION WEEK, MARCH 24TH – 30TH

Week 10

18. Monday / March 31, 2014

- Topic: Marilyn Monroe
Readings: McDonald, *The Star System*, "Introduction: Looking at Stars" (1 – 4) and ch. 1 "Stardom as a System" (5 – 14)
Film: *The Seven Year Itch*, dir. Billy Wilder (Twentieth Century Fox, 1955)

19. Thursday / April 03, 2014

- Topic: The "Greatest American Comedy?"
Readings: Belton, *American Cinema*, ch. 8 "American Comedy" (163 – 94) "Review: 'Some Like It Hot'"
Film: *Some Like It Hot*, dir. Billy Wilder (United Artists, 1959)

Week 11

20. Monday / April 07, 2014

- Topic: The Definitive “Western”
Readings: Belton, *American Cinema*, ch. 11 “The Making of the West” (243 – 71)
Film: *Stagecoach*, dir. John Ford (United Artists, 1939)

21. Thursday / April 10, 2014

- Topic: John Wayne & the End of an Era
Readings: Jameson, “Dinosaurs in the Age of the Cinemobile”
Film: *True Grit*, dir. Henry Hathaway (Paramount, 1969)

Week 12

22. Monday / April 14, 2014

- Topic: The American Gangster Film
Readings: Gillet, *Movie Greats*, ch. 13 “*The Godfather* (US, 1972): Keeping It in the Family” (117 – 26)
Leitch, *Crime Films*, ch. 5 “*The Godfather* and the Gangster Film” (103 – 25)
Film: *The Godfather*, dir. Francis Ford Coppola (Paramount Pictures, 1972)

23. Thursday / April 17, 2014

- Topic: *The Godfather: Part II*
Readings: Jess-Cooke, *Film Sequels*, “Introduction: The Age of the Sequel: Beyond the Profit Principle” (1 – 14) and ch. 1 “Before and After the Blockbuster: A Brief History of the Film Sequel” (15 – 51)
Film: *The Godfather II*, dir. Francis Ford Coppola (Paramount Pictures, 1972)

Week 13

24. Monday / April 21, 2014

- Topic: Blaxploitation
Readings: “Review: ‘Foxy Brown’”
Waddell, *Jack Hill*, ch. 5 “The Blaxploitation Years” (114 – 43)
Film: *Foxy Brown*, dir. Jack Hill (American International Pictures, 1974)

IV. Direct-to-Video Production

25. Thursday / April 24, 2014

- Topic: Direct-to-DVD: The Perfect Venue for Low-Budget Comedy Horror?
Readings: Thompson & Bordwell, *Film History*, ch. 27 “American Cinema and the Entertainment Economy: The 1980s and After” (679 – 704)
Film: *Santa’s Slay*, dir. David Steiman (Media 8 Entertainment, 2005)

Week 14

26. Monday / April 28, 2014

- Topic: The Direct-to-DVD Disaster Film
Readings: Belton, *American Cinema*, ch. 14 “Hollywood in the Age of Television” (322 – 40)
Film: *40 Days and Nights*, dir. Peter Geiger (The Asylum, 2012)

CLASSES SUSPENDED FOR SPRING BREAK, MAY 1ST – 9TH

V. Auteur Cinema

Week 15

27. Monday / May 12, 2014

- Topic: Alfred Hitchcock
Readings: Belton, *American Cinema*, ch. 16 “The Film School Generation” (364 – 86)
Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, ch. 12 (235 – 57)
Film: *Vertigo*, dir. Alfred Hitchcock (Paramount Pictures, 1958)

28. Thursday / May 15, 2014

- Topic: Hitchcock’s Horror Classic
Readings: Nickel, “Horror and the Idea of Everyday Life: On Skeptical Threats in *Psycho* and *The Birds*”
Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, ch. 13 (258 – 83)
Film: *Psycho*, dir. Alfred Hitchcock (Paramount Pictures, 1960)

Week 16

29. Monday / May 19, 2014

Topic: Stanley Kubrick

Readings: Abrams, "Nietzsche's Overman as a Posthuman Starchild in *2001: A Space Odyssey*
Belton, *American Cinema*, ch. 12 "Horror and Science Fiction" (272 – 98)

Film: *2001: A Space Odyssey*, dir. Stanley Kubrick (MGM, 1968)

30. Thursday / May 22, 2014

Topic: Stanley Kubrick

Readings: Belton, *American Cinema*, ch. 9 "War and Cinema" (195 – 220)
Conard, "Chaos, Order, and Morality: Nietzsche's Influence on *Full Metal Jacket*"

Film: *Full Metal Jacket*, dir. Stanley Kubrick (Warner Brothers, 1987)

Week 17

31. Monday / May 26, 2014

Topic: Martin Scorsese

Readings: Ebert, *Scorsese by Ebert*, ch. 6 "Masterpieces: *Taxi Driver*" (272 – 77)

Film: *Taxi Driver*

32. Thursday / May 29, 2014

Topic: Scorsese & the Quasi-Historical Gangster Film

Readings: Dargis, "Scorsese's Hall of Mirrors, Littered with Bloody Deceit"
Travers, "Rev. of *The Departed*."

Film: *The Departed*, dir. Martin Scorsese (Warner Brothers, 2006)