

Redefining American Film Genres

Lecturer: Priv.-Doz. Dr. Stefan L. Brandt, Gastprofessor

Room and time: AR / AR-B 2014/15, Tuesday, 16-18

Course type and number: Vorlesung (1032300030)

Modules: Bachelor LCMS/LKM M 3.1: Literatur- und kulturgeschichtlicher Überblick; Master LCM/LKM M 2.1: Epochen der Literatur-, Kultur- und Mediengeschichte; LA GYM M 1.3: Literatur- und kulturgeschichtlicher Überblick II; Master Internationale Kulturhistorische Studien EM 7.

First session: October 12, 2010

Course description: One of the reasons for the unprecedented success of U.S. popular culture can be found in the lasting attraction of Hollywood cinema. This lecture series will deal with the fascination the 'dream factory' has exerted upon mass audiences from the beginnings of modern entertainment culture. Our examples will include early short films, slapstick films as well as film noir (*Double Indemnity*), monumental cinema (*The Birth of a Nation*), science fiction (*Alien*), action thrillers (*Falling Down*), war movies (*Full Metal Jacket*), animation films (*Ratatouille*), and contemporary blockbusters (*Avatar*). 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. Themes to be discussed include ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and class.

Grading: In order to receive a 'Schein' for this course, you have to participate regularly, have watched the *main films* and pass the final exam in class ('Abschlussklausur'). B.A. students need to write a 45 min. exam (consisting of one part), M.A. students a 90 min. exam (consisting of two parts). To earn 5 CP you also need to write an introduction to one film genre of 3 pages (B.A.) / 4 pages (M.A.) (to be made accessible to the other students). To earn 7 CP you have to write a paper on one film genre with a close reading of 5 pages (B.A.) / 8 pages (M.A.) (to be made accessible to the class).

Deadline for Final Papers: Friday, March 31 (Thursday), 2011. Note: There is no (!) extension of this deadline.

Syllabus

- 12 October Redefining American Film Genres – An Introduction**
Basic texts (recommended):
S. Hayward, "Genre" (*Key Concepts in Film Studies* (1996) (online).
Barry Keith Grant et al, "Genre" (definition) (2001) (online).
- 19 October National Epics**
Main film (required):
The Birth of a Nation (dir. D.W. Griffith, 1915)
Alternative films (optional):
Battleship Potemkin (dir. Sergej Eisenstein, 1925)
Gone with the Wind (dir. Victor Fleming, 1939)
The Grapes of Wrath (dir. John Ford, 1940)
- 26 October Slapstick and Screwball Comedy**
Main film (required):
Bringing up Baby (dir. Howard Hawks, 1938)
Alternative films (optional):
Safety Last (prod. Hal Roach, 1923)
Gold Rush (dir. Charlie Chaplin, 1925)
What's Up, Doc? (dir. Peter Bogdanovich, 1972)
- 02 November Art Films & Independent Cinema**
Main film (required):
Citizen Kane (dir. Orson Welles, 1940)
Alternative films (optional):
Kino-Glaz (Kino-Eye) (dir. Dziga Vertov, 1924)
Meshes of the Afternoon (dir. Maya Deren & A. Hackenschmied, 1943)
A Woman under the Influence (dir. John Cassavetes, 1974)

- 09 November Gangster Films & Film Noir**
 Main film (required):
Double Indemnity (dir. Billy Wilder, 1944)
 Alternative films (optional):
The Lady in the Lake (dir. Robert Montgomery, 1947)
Kiss Me Deadly (dir. Robert Aldrich, 1955)
Sin City (dir. Frank Miller & Robert Rodriguez, 2005)
- 16 November The Western**
 Main film (required):
The Searchers (dir. John Ford, 1956)
 Alternative films (optional):
The Great Train Robbery (dir. Edwin S. Porter, 1903)
Stagecoach (dir. John Ford, 1939)
High Noon (dir. Fred Zinnemann, 1952)
- 23 November The Musical I**
 Main film (required):
Singin' in the Rain (dir. Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen, 1952)
 Alternative films (optional):
Footlight Parade (dir. Lloyd Bacon, 1933)
Top Hat (dir. Mark Sandrich, 1935)
Cabaret (dir. Bob Fosse, 1972)
- 30 November The Musical II**
 Guest lecture by Neil Sinyard (University of Hull, UK)
 “Gloomy Musicals’: Films that Subvert the Musical Genre”
- 07 December Thrillers and Horror Films**
 Main film (required):
Psycho (dir. Alfred Hitchcock, 1960)
 Alternative films (optional):
Frankenstein (dir. James Whale, 1931)
The Spiral Staircase (dir. Robert Siodmak, 1946)
The Silence of the Lambs (dir. Jonathan Demme, 1991)
- 14 December Science Fiction**
 Main film (required):
Alien (dir. Ridley Scott, 1979)
 Alternative films (optional):
The Thing from Another World (dir. Christian Nyby, 1951)
Invasion of the Body Snatchers (dir. Don Siegel, 1956)
Independence Day (dir. Roland Emmerich, 1996)
- 21 December War Movies**
 Main film (required):
Full Metal Jacket (dir. Stanley Kubrick, 1986)
 Alternative 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)
- 11 January Action Films**
 Main film (required):
Falling Down (dir. Joel Schumacher, 1993)
 Alternative films (optional):
Die Hard (dir. John McTiernan, 1988)
True Lies (dir. James Cameron, 1994)
Enemy of the State (dir. Tony Scott, 1998)
- 18 January Animation**
 Main film (required):
Ratatouille (prod. Disney-Pixar, 2007)
 Alternative films (optional):
Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (prod. Walt Disney, 1937)
Shrek (prod. DreamWorks Animation, 2001)
Finding Nemo (prod. Pixar Animation Studios, 2003)
- 25 January Final Exam**
- 01 February Wrap-Up**