

Topics in Film History: American Cinema of the 1950s

FMST 416/4 2017

Thursdays 13:15- 17:15 FB 250

Instructor: Catherine Russell FB 319

Tel: 514 848-2424 ex. 4798

katie.russell@concordia.ca

www.catherinerussell.ca

Office hours Wednesday 14:00-16:00. Please contact gpa.cinema@concordia.ca to make an appointment for Wednesday afternoon. If you have a class at that time, please let me know and we can find another time during the week to meet.

Course Description: Hollywood in the 1950s was an industry in decline, even while it produced some of the strongest films of its history. With the rise of independent productions, the competition of TV, and major shifts in the social fabric, American cinema was dramatically changed during this decade. In this course we will examine the social and cultural climate of the HUAC trials and the Cold War, the civil rights movement, suburbanism and popular Freudianism. We will focus on three key genres of the decade: the family melodrama, the Western, and film noir in order to examine how the changing social formation was negotiated ideologically and aesthetically through narrative cinema. Students will do individual and group research projects to explore the different ways that Hollywood responded to the social and political fears of the period. The course will also examine the ways that the social role of Hollywood also changed in postwar America. The objective of the course is to think about the relationship between cinema and American culture and the different methods of understanding that relationship.

Required Texts

- All articles are available on line through the course reserves service at the Concordia Library.
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Syllabus

1. January 12 The Production of Nostalgia

Some Came Running (Vincente Minnelli, 1958) 137 mins.

- Dana Polan, "Introduction," *Power and Paranoia: History, Narrative, and the American Cinema, 1940-1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 1-20.

2. Jan 19 Hollywood Expressionism

Johnny Guitar (Nicholas Ray 1955) 110 mins.

- Brian Neve, "Hollywood and Politics in the 1940s and 1950s," in *The Classical Hollywood Reader*, Steve Neale ed. (New York: Routledge, 2012), 389-398.
- selections from the *Hollywood Quarterly*: Jay e. Gordon "There's Really No Business Like Show Business;" Jean Hersholt et. al., "There's Still No Business Like It," Harva Kaaren Sprager, "Hollywood's Foreign Correspondents," in *Hollywood Quarterly: Film Culture in Postwar America, 1945-1957*, eds. Eric Smoodin and Ann Martin (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), 283-307.

3. Jan 26 Masculinity and Auteurism

In a Lonely Place (Nicholas Ray, 1950) 94 mins.

- Steve Cohan, "Tough Guys Make the Best Psychopaths," in *Masked Men: Masculinity and Movies in the Fifties*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 79-121.
- Dossier on Nicholas Ray, *Cahiers du Cinéma The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New Wave* Jim Hillier ed. (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1985), 104-124

4. Feb. 2 After the Studio System

Sweet Smell of Success (Alexander MacKendrick, 1957) 96 mins

- Denise Mann, "When Talent Becomes Management: The Making of Sweet Smell of Success," in *Hollywood Independents: The Postwar Talent Takeover*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008, 193-217.
- Janet Staiger, "Individualism Versus Collectivism: The Shift to Independent Production in the US Film Industry," in *The Classical Hollywood Reader*, Steve Neale ed. (New York: Routledge, 2012), 331-342.

5. Feb. 9 The Challenge for Women

The Bigamist (Ida Lupino, 1953) 80 mins.

- Wheeler Winston Dixon, "Visions from the Margins," in *Lost in the Fifties: Recovering Phantom Hollywood*, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005, 134-158.
- Annette Kuhn, "Introduction: Intestinal Fortitude," *Queen of the 'B's: Ida Lupino Behind the Camera*, Westport Con: Greenwood Press, 1-12.

Student group presentation#1 on Fifties science fiction

6. Feb. 16 The Noir City

Kiss me Deadly (Aldrich, 1955) 106 mins.

- Michael Rogin, "Kiss Me Deadly: Communism, Motherhood, and Cold War Movies," *Representations*, No. 6 (Spring, 1984), pp. 1-36
- Edward Dimendberg, "Walking Cures," in *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2004), 119-165.

7. March 2 Tabloid Culture

Pickup on South St. (Sam Fuller, 1953) 80 mins.

- Warren Susman with Edward Griffin, "Did Success Spoil the United States? Dual Representations in Postwar America" in *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of Cold War*, Lary May ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 19-37.
- James Naremore, "Low is High: Budgets and Critical Discrimination," in *More than night: Film Noir in its Contexts*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 140-156.

Student group presentation #2 on female stars in the fifties

8. March 9 Representations of the American South

Baby Doll (Elia Kazan, 1956) 114 mins.

- R. Barton Palmer and William Robert Ray, "Bending the Code III: Baby Doll," in *Hollywood's Tennessee: The Williams Films and Postwar America*," 123-149.
- "New Waves, Specialist Audiences and Adult Films," plus extract: Eric Schaefer, 'The End of Classical Exploitation' in *Film Histories: An Introduction and Reader*,

Paul Grainge, Mark Jancovich and Sharon Monteith eds. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), pp. 371-391.

Student group presentation #3: Civil rights and race movies

9. March 16 The Rise of Television

The Girl Can't Help it (Frank Tashlin, 1956) 99 mins.

- W.T. Lhamon Jr., "Material Differences," in *Deliberate Speed: The Origins of a cultural Style in the American 1950s*, (Cambridge Mass, Harvard University Press, 1990), 1-30.
- David James, "Introduction," *Rock 'n' Film: Cinema's Dance with Popular Music*, (New York: Oxford, 2016), 1-22

Student group presentation #4: 1950s television

10. March 23 The Postwar Western

The Man from Laramie (Anthony Mann, 1955) 104 mins.

- John Belton, "Glorious Technicolour, Breathtaking Cinemascope and Stereophonic Sound," in *The Classical Hollywood Reader*, Steve Neale ed. (New York: Routledge, 2012), 355-369.
- Mary Lea Bandy and Kevin L. Stoehr, "The Postwar Psychological Western (1946–1956): My Darling Clementine to Juba," in *Ride, Boldly Ride : The Evolution of the American Western*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 156-184.

11. March 30 The Method and the Cure

The Three Faces of Eve (Nunnally Johnson, 1957) 91 mins.

- Janet Walker, "Couching Resistance: Women, Film and Postwar Psychoanalytic Psychiatry," in *Psychoanalysis and Cinema*, Ann Kaplan ed., New York: Routledge, 1990), 143-162.
- James Naremore, "Marlon Brando in *On the Waterfront* (1954)," in *Acting in the Cinema*, Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1988, 193-212.

Student group presentation #5: social problem films

12. April 6 Melodrama and the Women's Film

There's Always Tomorrow (Douglas Sirk, 1956) 84 mins.

- "Spectacles and the Independents" plus extract: Barbara Klinger, "Tastemaking: Reviews, Popular Canons, and Sopa Operas" in *Film Histories*, 340-370.
- "Postwar Challenges: National Regeneration, HUAC Investigations, Divestiture and Declining Audiences, plus extract: Jackie Stacey "With Stars in their Eyes: Female Spectatorship and the Paradoxes of Consumption," *Film Histories* 289-304.

13. April 13 Beyond Race Movies

Odds Against Tomorrow (Robert Wise, 1959), 96 mins.

- Arthur Knight, "1959: Movies and the Racial Divide" in *American Cinema of the 1950s*, 222-243.
- W.T. Lhamon Jr., "Deliberate Speed," in *Deliberate Speed*, 31-66.

Assignments

Grade Breakdown

Attendance and participation 15%

Moodle responses: 15%

Group presentation: 20%

Paper proposal: 10%

Final Paper: 40%

Attendance and Participation

Students are expected to attend every class and to contribute to the class discussion of the readings and the films. It is important to be prepared. It is a good idea to get into the habit of taking notes during the screenings, and write down your ideas about the film immediately afterwards so that you can share them with the class the following week. If you have questions about the assigned readings, please bring them in for discussion as well. Please try not to dominate discussions, but listen to your classmates and give everyone a chance to participate.

Moodle responses to assigned readings

Each week students must post a response to the assigned readings. Please choose to respond to either one of the two articles, although everyone is expected to read both of them each week. Responses should be approximately 300 words long and should do one or more of the following things, with a *minimum amount of quotation*:

- summarize the author's main argument
- pose a question raised by the article
- make a comment or critique of the article
- answer a question posted on the forum by the instructor

Each student must post a minimum of 9 posts over the course of the semester. The deadline for posting is Wednesday at 10 am the day before the class. These will be assessed for clarity, originality, and contribution to the discussion. I will give you midterm assessments individually to let you know how you are doing.

Group Presentations on Fifties Film culture

- Each group will work together to produce a group presentation on the assigned topic. The presentations must include one or two film clips and original research (i.e. documents such as film criticism, newspaper reviews, other literature). A complete bibliography and filmography must be made available to the class in the form of either a handout or a power point presentation. The presentation should be 45 minutes long, followed by a 15-minute question period.
- The group should decide to use one or two case studies to make their case, as these are rather general topics. Other strategies would be to compile lists of relevant titles or people, together with some historical analysis and contextualization of the issue.
- The group is NOT responsible for the assigned readings and screenings for the week, although you MUST make reference to one or more of the assigned readings and screenings on the syllabus. In other words, please make connections to issues we have covered in class.
- The group should plan to have a meeting with me before the presentation, ideally during my office hours, but it could also be by appointment.
- A good presentation demonstrates that the group has worked together and thought about the issue, and has some insight into its historical context. I would like to assign the group all the same grade, but I reserve the right to assess the work of individuals differently if necessary.

Topics

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| 1. Fifties science fiction | Feb. 2 |
| 2. Female stars of the fifties | Feb. 9 |
| 3. Civil rights and race movies | March 9 |
| 4. 1950s television | March 16 |
| 5. Social problem films | March 30 |

Paper Proposal

Due March 9 (or earlier)

Please submit a 500 word abstract for your proposed paper that includes the following information:

- Your research question
- What resources you will consult
- Your methodology (e.g. close analysis, historical contextualization, theoretical inquiry, star studies, genre theory, etc.)
- Originality and importance of project

The proposal should be accompanied by a preliminary bibliography and filmography.

Final Paper

Due Thursday April 20, 5 pm.

Approx. 4,000 words or 16 double-spaced pages

This can be on a topic of your choice, taking up an issue related to 1950s American film culture. Students are welcome and encouraged to write about film style and aesthetics, but should also make connections between stylistic and aesthetic issues and the historical and cultural context of the 1950s. A good paper should identify the topic as narrowly as possible, and develop a question that will guide the research.

Students are encouraged to incorporate any of the assigned readings and you should consult the bibliographies associated with the class for further research. Papers on the distribution and reception of film in the fifties are encouraged, as well as papers on TV and radio culture of the era. In these cases also, it is best to focus on a single city, company or text. Students are encouraged to discuss their topic with me either before or after the submitting the paper proposal, or both.

Please note: Proposals and papers must be handed in as hard copies to me personally, or left in the drop box at the Cinema Department. All work should be double spaced with page numbers. All citations should be correctly formatted in either Chicago or MLA style. Students may write in English or French.

Books on Three Day Reserve

Anderson, Christopher. *Hollywood TV : The Studio System in the Fifties*. 1st ed. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994.

Biskind, Peter. *Seeing is Believing :How Hollywood Taught Us to Stop Worrying and Love the Fifties*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1983.

Bandy, Mary Lea and Kevin L.Stoehr, *Ride, Boldly Ride : The Evolution of the American Western*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

- Boddy, William. *Fifties Television :The Industry and its Critics*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990.
- Booker, M. Keith. *Monsters, Mushroom Clouds, and the Cold Wa : American Science Fiction and the Roots of Postmodernism, 1946-1964*. Vol. 95. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001.
- Byars, Jackie. *All that Hollywood Allows :Re-Reading Gender in 1950s Melodrama*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991.
- Ceplair, Larry, and Steven Englund. *The Inquisition in Hollywood: Politics in the Film Community, 1930-1960*. 1 -- ed. Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1980.
- Cohan, Steven. *Masked Men: Masculinity and the Movies in the Fifties*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997.
- Dimendberg, Edward. *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004.
- Dixon, Wheeler W. *Lost in the Fifties :Recovering Phantom Hollywood*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005.
- Doherty, Thomas Patrick, and Thomas Patrick Doherty. *Teenagers and Teenpics :The Juvenilization of American Movies in the 1950s*. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988.
- Doherty, Thomas Patrick. *Cold War, Cool Medium :Television, McCarthyism, and American Culture*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003.
- Grainge, Paul, Mark Jancovich and Sharon Monteith. *Film Histories: An Introduction and Reader*, eds. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007.
- Hillier, Jim. *Cahiers du Cinéma, the 1950s : Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New Wave*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985.
- Kaplan, E. Ann. *Psychoanalysis & Cinema*. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- Klinger, Barbara. *Melodrama and Meaning :History, Culture, and the Films of Douglas Sirk*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994.
- Krutnik, Frank, ed. *"Un-American" Hollywood :Politics and Film in the Blacklist Era*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2007.
- Kuhn, Annette. *Queen of the 'B's :Ida Lupino Behind the Camera*. Vol. 49. Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1995.

Landy, Marcia. *Imitations of Life :A Reader on Film & Television Melodrama*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991.

Leibman, Nina C. *Living Room Lectures :The Fifties Family in Film and Television*. 1st ed. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995.

Lev, Peter. *Transforming the Screen, 1950-1959*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2003.

Lhamon, W. T. *Deliberate Speed :The Origins of a Cultural Style in the American 1950s*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990.

Mann, Denise. *Hollywood Independents : The Postwar Talent Takeover*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008.

May, Lary. *Recasting America :Culture and Politics in the Age of Cold War*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989.

Naremore, James. *More than Night :Film Noir in its Contexts*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.

Navasky, Victor S. *Naming Names*. New York: Viking Press, 1980.

Neale, Steve ed. *The Classical Hollywood Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2012.

Pomerance, Murray. *American Cinema of the 1950s :Themes and Variations*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2005.

Ranciere, Jacques. *Film Fables Jacques Ranciere ; Translated by Emiliano Battista*. Oxford; New York: Berg, 2006.

Roffman, Peter, and Jim Purdy. *The Hollywood Social Problem Film :Madness, Despair, and Politics from the Depression to the Fifties*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981.

Shaw, Tony. *Hollywood's Cold War*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007.

Sikov, Ed. *Laughing Hysterically :American Screen Comedy of the 1950s*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.

Sobchack, Vivian Carol. *The Limits of Infinity :The American Science Fiction Film, 1950-75*. South Brunswicks, N.J.: A. S. Barnes, 1980.

Sprengler, Christine. *Screening Nostalgia :Populuxe Props and Technicolor Aesthetics in Contemporary American Film*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2009.

Online resource:

- *The Wiley-Blackwell History of American Film*. Electronic resource available through the Concordia Library. Contains a series of good essays on American cinema that can help fill in contextual details for the material covered in class.
- Media History Digital Library <http://mediahistoryproject.org/>

Recommended Extra Screenings

- 1950 Sunset Blvd (Wilder)
Winchester 73 (Mann)
- 1951 A Place in the Sun (Stevens)
Streetcar named Desire (Kazan)
An American in Paris (Minnelli)
- 1952 Rancho Notorious (Lang)
- 1953 From here to Eternity (Zinnemann)
The Naked Spur (Mann)
I Confess (Hitchcock)
The Wild One (Benedek)
The Big Heat (Lang)
Gentlemen Prefer Blonds (Hawks)
- 1954 River of no Return (Preminger)
Johnny Guitar (Ray)
- 1955 The Big Knife (Aldrich)
The Seven Year Itch (Wilder)
Blackboard Jungle (Brooks)
Rebel without a Cause (Ray)
The Man with the Golden Arm (Preminger)
- 1956 Bigger than Life (Ray)
The Searchers (Ford)
Written on the Wind (Sirk)
- 1957 Forty Guns (Fuller)
- 1958 Man of the West (Mann)
Touch of Evil (Welles)
- 1959 Rio Bravo (Hawks)
North by Northwest (Hitchcock)
Imitation of Life (Sirk)

List of Services available to students:

- **Concordia Counselling and Development offers career services, psychological services, student learning services, etc.**
<http://cdev.concordia.ca/>

- **The Concordia Library Citation and Style Guides:**
<http://library.concordia.ca/help/howto/citations.html>
- **Advocacy and Support Services**
<http://supportservices.concordia.ca/>
- **Student Transition Centre**
<http://stc.concordia.ca/>
- **New Student Program**
<http://newstudent.concordia.ca/>
- **Access Centre for Students with Disabilities**
<http://supportservices.concordia.ca/disabilities/>
- **Student Success Centre**
<http://studentsuccess.concordia.ca/>
- **The Academic Integrity Website**
<http://provost.concordia.ca/academicintegrity/>
- **Financial Aid & Awards**
<http://web2.concordia.ca/financialaid/>
- **Health Services**
<http://www-health.concordia.ca/>