

Hitchcock and the 20th Century

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"**Hitchcock and the 20th Century**" is an intensive introduction to the media of the Master of Suspense, as well as a discussion on how films can serve as historic artifacts of the time of their creation. During the semester, we will analyze some of Hitchcock's most controversial work and relate it to the large-scale historical movements that surrounded their production.

Concept of This Course:

As we learn about film theory, we will be able to understand how Hitchcock's distinct cinematic language evolved to fit a wide array of historic contexts.

The films on this syllabus were meticulously selected to fulfill three goals:

- Each film strongly represents the historical period it was created in, and contains many allusions to cultural ideologies, fears, and sentiments.
- Each film showcases a unique cinematic technique that contributes to its continued relevance.
- Each film (according to the instructor) is also legitimately entertaining and thematically interesting.

Course Structure:

The course will meet once a week. Each class will involve a discussion of the historical period surrounding the film as well as a particular cinematic technique utilized by Hitchcock. The discussion and lecture will last roughly one hour, and will be followed by a screening of the film.

Homework:

Every week, a historic news article will be emailed to all students taking the course. These readings will be incredibly short (under 3 minutes reading time) and vital for in-class discussion. Articles marked "further reading" are all relevant, but are not required for the class.

After watching the week's film, students will be asked to write a 3-5 sentence response *that links the cinematic technique used to the historic concepts discussed*. For example, a response to "The Lodger" could relate the historic theme of European urbanization to the cinematic theme of German expressionism:

"Hitchcock's choice of stylized sets and garish costume designs turn the streets of postwar London into a nightmarish fairy tale. German expressionist films, such as Lang's "Metropolis," have a clear artistic influence on "The Lodger," which imposes a sense of Germanic horror on a quintessentially British story. This artistic direction emphasizes a fear of urbanization and reminds the viewer about the terrors of the British cityscape."

These responses can be delivered via handwritten notes, an email response, or a short discussion with the instructor. Responses are due before the following class.

Attendance Policy: Students are allowed two missed classes without previous consent of the instructor. Any more will result in a grade of “NP.”

Class Environment: The goal of the course is to make students engaged watchers of film, so maintaining a casual and fun environment is crucial. Food and tea will be served at every class meeting, and *students are encouraged to meticulously question, and politely interrupt the instructor in order to reduce academic jargon and ensure clarity of subject material.* The academic world is filled with conflated language, poor writing, and questionable theses— *this course intends to demystify these and promote a sincere comprehension of cinema theory.*

Content Warnings: This course will involve screenings and discussions that will involve explicit sexism, racism, genocide, self-mutilation, and transphobia, among many others. Please notify the instructor if you believe any content could be triggering before the relevant lecture or screening.

Course Outline:

Week 1: Mise-en-Scène and Urbanized Horror

Reading Due: “Another Whitechapel Murder” *London Times* 1888

Historical concepts: post-WWI Europe, urbanization in England, the Industrial Revolution

Film concepts: mise-en-scène, Germanic expressionism

Watch: “[The Lodger: A Story of the London Fog](#)” (1927)

Week 2: Diegetic Exoticism and the Vanishing Lady

Reading Due: “A Brief History of the Orient Express” *Smithsonian Archives* 2007

Historical concepts: Great Depression, pre-WWII nationalism, localized identities, train travel

Film concepts: diegesis, mimesis, modernism

Watch: “[The Lady Vanishes](#)” (1938)

Week 3: Propaganda in the Quadrant

Due: Murrow, Edward R. “The London Blitz” *BBC Radio* 1940 (Audio Recording)

Historical concepts: American vs. British journalism, fascism, propaganda, Atlantic Charter

Film concepts: quadrant system, nonet system

Watch: “[Foreign Correspondent](#)” (1940)

Further Reading: “Lost in America” from Paul Duncan’s *Alfred Hitchcock*, “The Quadrant System” (video) by YouTube user “everyframeapainting.”

Week 4: The Lifeboat in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction

Due: “British Liner Athenia Torpedoed, Sunk: 1,400 Passengers Aboard” *New York Times* 1939

Historical concepts: WWII, Nazism, NATO, American race relations, postwar capitalist identities

Film concepts: auteurism, mechanical reproducibility

Watch: “[Lifeboat](#)” (1944)

Further Reading: “Lifeboat” from *Hitchcock* by Francois Truffaut

Week 5: The Dream Factory

Due: “Dreams--Fantasies or Revelations?” *New York Times* 1946

Historical concepts: Freudian psychoanalysis, Nuremberg Trials, Manhattan Project

Film concepts: oneirism, abstract expressionism

Watch: “Spellbound” (1945)

Week 6: A User’s Guide to the Anthropocene

Due: “After Effects of the Bomb” *New York Times* 1946

Historical concepts: the Atomic Age, America as a global superpower, suburbanization

Film concepts: McGuffin, post-classical narrative

Watch: “Notorious” (1946)

Further Reading: “A User’s Guide to Hitchcock’s Signature Systems” from *Hitchcock’s Cryptonymies, Volume 1: Secret Agents* by Tom Cohen

Fall Break

Week 7: New American Pop

Due: “The Leopold and Loeb case” *Chicago Tribune* 2015

Historical concepts: academia and philosophy in postwar America, homosexuality, sexual taboos

Film concepts: continuity editing, panorama

Watch: “Rope” (1948)

Further Reading: “Reconstructing Homosexuality: Hitchcock and the Homoerotics of Spectatorial Pleasure” by Robert J. Corber from *In the Name of National Security: Hitchcock, Homophobia, and the Political Construction of Gender in Postwar America* (available on Ebrary)

Week 8: On the Axial Line

Due: “Atom Spy Couple Sentenced to Die; Aide Gets 30 Years” *New York Times* 1951

Historical concepts: the Red Scare, 1950s patriarchal identity

Film concepts: camera techniques—chirality (180 degree rule), axial cut (30 degree rule)

Watch: “Strangers on a Train” (1951)

Further Reading: “Breaking Free” from Paul Duncan’s *Alfred Hitchcock*

Week 9: Kuleshov in Korea

Due: “Red Korean Forces Invade South” *San Antonio Sunday Light* 1950

Historical concepts: Korean War, revitalization of American cities, photojournalism, feminism

Film concepts: editing and sequencing—Kuleshov Effect, montage theory

Watch: “Rear Window” (1954)

Further Reading: “The Villain in Hitchcock” by William Rothman, from *The “I” of the camera: essays in Film Criticism, History and Aesthetics*

Week 10: New Media, White Picket Fences, and Nuclear Families

Due: “I’ve Got A Secret: Philo T. Farnsworth” *NBC* 1957 (Television Program)

Historical concepts: television, domesticity, nuclear families, the Disney Effect

Film concepts: McLuhan’s Hot and Cool Media, escapism

Watch: “Alfred Hitchcock Presents” (1955-1962)

Further Reading: “Appendix I: TV Episodes” from *Hitchcock's Motifs* by Michael Walker (available on Ebrary)

Week 11: Hitchcock and Falsa Cor

Due: “Red Scare Stirs Mississippi Legislature” *New York Times* 1950

Historical concepts: communism, neo-imperialism, globalization

Film concepts: color mechanics: analogous, triaxial, and complimentary coloring

Watch: “The Man Who Knew Too Much” (1956)

Further Reading: “Color Design” from *Hitchcock’s Romantic Irony* by Richard Allen (available on Ebrary)

Week 12: The World is Flat

Due: “Soviet Fires Satellite into Space” *New York Times* 1957

Historical concepts: CIA, space age, agriculture, business, global trade

Film concepts: verisimilitude, sound design

Watch: “North By Northwest” (1959)

Week 13: A Dose of Hyperreality

Due: “Ed Gein Found Guilty of Murder in Plainfield” *The Capital Times* 1957

Historical concepts: Up for debate! This will be the subject of our final lecture.

Film concepts: hyperreality

Watch: “Psycho” (1960)

Further Reading: “Psycho Recycled” from *After Hitchcock: Influence, Imitation, and Intertextuality* by David Palmer Boyd and R. Burton (available on Ebrary as a digital file)

All overdue work must be submitted by the beginning of finals period to receive a passing grade.