FM 201 The Hitchcock Files: An Introduction to Film Studies

Seminar Leader: Matthias Hurst  
Course Times: Tuesday, 15.15 – 16.45 / Tuesday, 19.30: Film Screening / Thursday, 15.15 – 16.45  
Email: m.hurst@berlin.bard.edu  
Office Hours: Wednesday, 10.00 – 12.00

Course Description

“If Hitchcock […] outranks the rest, it is because he is the most complete film-maker of all. He is not merely an expert at some specific aspect of cinema, but an all-round specialist who excels at every image, each shot and every scene. He masterminds the construction of the screenplay as well as the photography, the cutting and the soundtrack, has creative ideas on everything and can handle anything and is even expert at publicity!” (François Truffaut)  
Alfred Hitchcock (1899-1980) is still one of the most renowned, most celebrated, most popular and most influential film directors of all times. Known as “the master of suspense” he became identified with the crime and thriller genre, but his best films certainly work on many levels. Stylish and technically polished, with intriguing and suspenseful storylines, with impressive visuals and sophisticated dialogue, Hitchcock’s films have an immediate appeal to the audience. But beyond that the films also explore more subtle topics that have inspired a variety of reflections and interpretations sounding the human condition and especially the desires, fears and neurotic obsessions of modern humanity.  
This course is an introduction to Film Studies and we will discuss selected films by Hitchcock to get an insight into the basic concepts of film aesthetics and cinematic language. Central topics are modes and styles of filmic presentation, film analysis and different approaches to film interpretation. The course consists of both seminars and film screenings.

Requirements

No prerequisites. Attendance is mandatory for all seminars and film screenings. Students are expected to come to seminars and film screenings punctually and prepared and to participate actively in the class discussions.  
* Please, do not use cell phones, smart phones or similar electronic devices during seminars and screenings!

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory for all seminars and film screenings. Absences will significantly affect the grade for the course. Absences are registered in all classes, and lateness is registered as absence. Students should notify the instructor if they are unable to attend class. Please see the Student Handbook for college policies on absences due to serious illness or other important cause.

Assessment/Assignments
In-class writing assignments, two screening reports (1000 words each), a quiz (week 14), and a final essay (3000-3500 words) – due in week 15/completion week (deadline: Monday, December 12, midnight); the topic of this final essay will be a film interpretation based on one of the films of the course.

**Policy on Late Submission of Papers**
All assignments and written work must be submitted electronically and on time. Essays that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where an instructor agrees to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline and cannot receive a grade of higher than C. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment.

**Grade Breakdown**
- Participation: 25 %
- Screening reports: 25 %
- Quiz: 25 %
- Final essay: 25 %

If one of these components is graded F, the final course grade cannot be higher than C.

**Schedule**

**WEEK 1**
Introduction: Alfred Hitchcock
What is cinema? Film as a cultural and ‘anthropological’ phenomenon

**WEEK 2**
*Real life vs. reel life*
*Rear Window* (1954)
*No seminar on Thursday, Sep 8, 2016!*

**WEEK 3**
Different styles of filmic presentation, different styles of film language, mise-en-scène and montage (film narration from the late 19th century to the postmodern age), part I

**WEEK 4**
Different styles of filmic presentation, different styles of film language, mise-en-scène and montage
(film narration from the late 19th century to the postmodern age), part II

Blackmail (1929)

WEEK 5
Film semiotics: Signs and codes; denotation and connotation of signs; paradigmatic and syntagmatic connotations

WEEK 6
Film analysis: Basic model
Structural analysis
Psycho (1960)

WEEK 7
Biographical interpretation; auteur theory, cinéma des auteurs
Shadow of a Doubt (1943)

Fall Break: Monday, October 17 – Friday, October 21

WEEK 8
Film as reference to (history of) literature, adaptations of literature
Rebecca (1940)

WEEK 9
Sociological/socio-historical interpretation; film as manifestation of society or of societal/cultural/historical issues
Saboteur (1942)

WEEK 10
Film as part of genre tradition
North By Northwest (1959)

WEEK 11
Film as reference to (history of) cinema

*Dressed To Kill* (1980, Brian de Palma)

**WEEK 12**

Psychoanalytical interpretation; film as dream

*The Birds* (1963)

**WEEK 13**

Psychoanalytical interpretation – Feminist film theory

*Vertigo* (1958)

**WEEK 14**

Conceptional approach; film as philosophy – Quiz

*Rope* (1948)

**WEEK 15**

Completion week

**Literature**


Books are available in library.

**Essay Deadlines**

Final essay due Monday, December 12, 2016, midnight