

AMERICAN CINEMA OF THE 1950s

ARTHI 2588-001 (1193)

Fall 2012

Tuesday, 6:00 PM to 9:30 PM, Gene Siskel Film Center, 164 N. State Street, Second Floor

Meets September 4 through December 11, with no class December 4

Instructor: Fred Camper, fcamper@saic.edu (available for individual meetings by appointment)

Teaching Assistant: Joshua Demaree, jdemaree@saic.edu (available for individual meetings by appointment)

GENERAL DESCRIPTION AND COURSE OBJECTIVES

This course has two primary goals. The first is to explore the culture of 1950s America through cinema and through other sources. After the decade-long Great Depression of the 1930s, four years of world war, and several years of postwar fears that the Depression would return, the U.S. entered the 1950s as the world's most powerful nation by far. Growing wealth stimulated the rise of modern consumer culture and the movement to the suburbs, yet Americans remained insecure in their new-found affluence and were haunted by fears of nuclear war. After having entered the workplace during the labor shortages of World War II, women largely returned to traditional roles, and minorities were only beginning to challenge the discrimination they had long suffered. This was all reflected in 1950s American films, sometimes via absences, yet despite U.S. power, filmmakers not only celebrated by also expressed disillusionment with consumerism, popular culture, the "American Dream," and even the American family.

In terms of visual style, Hollywood filmmaking entered a uniquely rich period. The new medium of television was seen by the studios as something to compete with visually, rather than emulate, whereas in subsequent decades the style of most films was calculated to accommodate TV showings. As a result, the styles of 1950s Hollywood films can be especially complex and particularly cinematic, coming at the end of a half century of development.

Film is often understood as a hybrid art, or as a form of picture book storytelling. Many films do function that way, but in my view a great film uses cinematic techniques from composition to camera movement to lighting to editing to create a particular vision, commenting on our world or creating alternatives, making meaning by rendering cinematic space in new ways. The second goal of the course is to illuminate how such films function as cinema, through detailed analysis including excerpts, the hope being that each student will perceive films more deeply by the course's conclusion.

By the semester's end each student should have a better sense of the issues informing the 1950s, a better sense of how to research and think about connections between film and society, and a deepened perception of how the greatest films function as art by using the tools of cinema in the ways analogous to a painter's uses of painting's materials, paint and support.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

There are six course requirements:

1. Read all emails from the instructor with care.
2. Attend all classes. A late arrival or early departure will count as an absence. The films will start very soon after 6 PM, and the opening minute or two of a film can be crucial. All the films are being shown in their original format, which except for the final week is 35mm film. Digital viewing, which profoundly alters the look and feel of the image, is not an adequate substitute.

Attendance is defined as requiring attentiveness during class and attentiveness toward the films during screenings. One of my goals in teaching film is to try to foster a deeper approach to viewing films than is common today. Viewing films attentively requires that you focus your attention continuously on all the details of sound and image. This obviously requires that you look at the theater screen, and not at other "screens." Therefore, during the screenings, no cell phones, smart phones, texting devices, pad-type computer

devices, portable gaming devices, laptops, or other devices with illuminated screens may be open at any time. If you open such a device, you will be marked absent for the entire class. I apologize for this. I hate being a policeman, but as a film viewer I hate even more the distractions of lights flicking on and off in a theater during a film, and I know that I am not the only film viewer who feels this way. A film is first of all visual, and a great film depends on, among other things, the ways in which it establishes its own rhythms.

You can use a portable device to take notes during the lecture, including when I show excerpts from films.

School policy is that more than two absences will result in no credit for the course. One or two absences may also result in no credit if the papers you submit are only marginally passing. An average grade of C is required to receive credit, so that if, for example, all three of your papers are Cs, even a single absence will result in no credit.

3. There are two required texts: *The Fifties: Transforming the Screen, 1950-1959 (History of the American Cinema)*, by Peter Lev, and *The 1950s (American Popular Culture Through History)*, by William H. Young and Nancy K. Young. It is recommended that you read all of *The Fifties: Transforming the Screen*, but you can omit chapters 6, 7, 8, 11, and 12. Note that these are on specific types of cinema, such as the science fiction film, and you should read them if interested, and must read the appropriate chapter if writing on a film in this area. All of *The 1950s (American Popular Culture Through History)* is required. They should be available in the bookstore by the time class begins.

4. Three papers are required. All must be submitted digitally, by email to both me and Joshua Demaree, the teaching assistant. Do not submit print copies. The first paper can either be on a film in the course screening list (even if it has not yet been shown in class) or on a film taken from a list of 1950s films by directors on the screening list that appears near the end of this syllabus. It can include research, but the core of your paper should be based on your viewing of the film more than once. Discuss one or more stylistic elements of the film, such as composition, camera movement, editing, lighting, use of sound, and suggest possible meanings they might have. You can focus on a single scene, or even a single moment or stylistic device if you have enough to say about it. You may, for example, talk about the use of camera movement throughout a film, or about a single camera movement in all its ramifications, though stylistic devices in the best films tend to gain meaning by comparison with other related devices in the film. You must give specific examples, citing scenes and shots, and offer interpretations. Acting can be included as a stylistic element, as can the use of sound and elements of the script, but they are notoriously over-emphasized in film discussions, and not usually discussed with any precision, so you must focus primarily on visual elements. I will try to provide many examples of this sort of style-and-theme discussion in my lectures; do not, however, repeat examples from my lectures, unless you have a disagreement that you can back up with arguments and evidence. If you rely at all on examples from published sources, you must cite the sources, but be sure to add your own original observations. This paper should be 800 to 1200 words. Due Wednesday, October 3 at 11:59 PM.

5. The second paper will be a brief response to the two required texts. Length is 800 to 1200 words, and you must write at least 200 words in response to each text. Your response may take several forms. Among them: you may choose one specific point made in a text (or more than one), analyze its meaning and implications, and explain why it interested you; you may argue with one or more of the points made in the text. In all cases, you should back up your arguments with specifics. You can also respond to the whole of one or both of the books, but the core of your paper should be responses to specific sections or points made in each. Due Wednesday, November 21 at 11:59 PM.

6. For the third paper, you will choose a text from or about the U.S. in the 1950s (this could be a novel, a poem, a play, a history or sociology book, or a part of one of those) and discuss one or more ideas from it in relation to a film. I would encourage you to choose a film from the list of films provided for the first paper, but there is at the end of the syllabus a list of additional films for the third paper that you may also choose from. For your text, the supplementary reading list in the syllabus offers some suggestions, but you can also choose from other 1950s texts not mentioned in this syllabus. Ideally your text or texts should be both written

in the 1950s and about the 1950s, but you may choose a text written later that is about the 1950s. It would be best not to choose something from one of the two required texts, but if you do, you must not repeat points discussed in your second paper. The film you choose must be made by a different director than the director of the film you chose for your first paper. As in the first paper, you must include discussion of the film's cinematic elements, and not simply the narrative. If you choose a film shown in class, do not repeat points made in the lecture. You should show how the film uses film style in combination with its narrative or subject matter to create meanings, and then connect those meanings to the idea or ideas you chose from the readings, either by comparison or contrast. In other words, a film can be shown to embody an idea from the readings, or to contradict it, or some mixture of both. The connections don't have to be directly between film style and your chosen text; instead, you can show how the style of a film supports its theme or aspects of its narrative, and then also show how the theme or narrative is connected to the reading. Connecting a text directly to film style can be difficult, but you're encouraged to try to do so if you think you can. This paper should be 1500 to 2500 words. Due Tuesday, December 4 at 11:59 PM.

This is a challenging assignment that requires you to read widely, and probably to see a number of films before choosing one. Start thinking about it now, and start working on it early, no later than the due date of your first paper. This assignment is best started in a library, and so don't rely too much on the Web, but many of the recommended films and a few of the books do have Wikipedia pages that might help in selecting things to see and read.

PLAGIARISM

You must read and follow the School's rules about plagiarism at <http://www.saic.edu/webspaces/portal/library/plagiarism.pdf>

I care about the courses I teach, and see teaching as a way of sharing deep enthusiasms. This I find it personally disheartening to discover a paper that I am trying to read seriously has been copied from someone else's work, either in wording or in substance. Plagiarism may result in no credit for the paper, or for the entire course, and will be reported to the School.

GRADING

In general, **I will not give incompletes in this course.** Exceptions to the no incompletes policy will be made only in special circumstances. You must submit your papers on time unless you have something as serious as a medical reason that requires an extension. Your papers must be written in reasonably clear English, and fulfill the terms of the assignment, to receive credit. You will lose points for poor writing. All papers will receive letter grades between A+ and F. We will then average your grades on the three papers, with the last paper counted double. Each absence will reduce your grade by one-half unit; in other words, an average paper grade of C becomes no credit with only one absence; an average paper grade of C+ will be C, and just barely passing, with two absences. As per School policy, more than two absences will result in your receiving no credit for the entire course unless you have excellent reasons for the absences and arrange some make-up work with the instructor. If you find yourself with an absence you feel was unavoidable, please contact me immediately.

School policy states: "SAIC policy states that students are expected to attend all classes regularly and on time. Any necessary absences should be explained to the instructor....Students who are ill or expect to have an extended absence should notify the Office of Health Services; notification will then be sent to all faculty informing them of the students' absence. Students officially enrolled in a course will be given credit only if they have responded adequately to the standards and requirements set by the instructor."

SCREENING LIST:

September 4: *Touch of Evil* (Orson Welles, 1958)
September 11: *The Searchers* (John Ford, 1956)
September 18: *Kiss Me Deadly* (Robert Aldrich, 1955)
September 25: *Vertigo* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958)

October 2: *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (Howard Hawks, 1953)
October 9: *The Girl Can't Help It* (Frank Tashlin, 1956)
October 16: *Fixed Bayonets* (Samuel Fuller, 1951)
October 23: *Nightfall* (Jacques Tourneur, 1957)
October 30: *Rebel Without a Cause* (Nicholas Ray, 1955)
November 6: *Bigger Than Life* (Nicholas Ray, 1956)
November 13: *Some Came Running* (Vincente Minnelli, 1958)
November 20: *All That Heaven Allows* (Douglas Sirk, 1955)
November 27: *Written on the Wind* (Douglas Sirk, 1956)
December 11: *Glimpse of the Garden* (Marie Menken, 1957); *The Very Eye of Night* (Maya Deren, 1959);
Anticipation of the Night (Stan Brakhage, 1958); *The End* (Christopher Maclaine, 1953)

Please note that all the films will also be screened at the Film Center on the Friday or Saturday prior to the Tuesday class. It is strongly recommended that you see the films twice if you can. As a class member you will be admitted free to these advance screenings. The current Film Center schedule will always be at <http://www.siskelfilmcenter.org/content/calendar>

ADDITIONAL FILM VIEWING

It is my belief that the best way of understanding a filmmaker's work is to see multiple films, some more than once, and if possible on film. Aside from the Film Center, there are also other excellent venues showing films on film in Chicago. As theaters and studios rapidly convert to digital, it is becoming harder and harder to show prints of films; if you wish to see films as originally intended, now is the time. Some venues will surely be showing American films of the 1950s during the semester. There are links to these venues at <http://www.fredcamper.com/FilmsonFilmChicago.html>

When viewing digital copies, beware of streaming videos and downloads, even from reputable companies, which are often of poor quality and even in the wrong aspect ratios. DVDs tend to be more reliable, but of course some can be bad too.

RECOMMENDED SUPPLEMENTARY READING

Keep in mind that these are only suggestions. Feel free to choose other relevant texts for your third paper.

Texts about the 1950s

The Fifties by David Halberstam

America in the Fifties by Andrew J. Dunbar

Deliberate Speed by W. T. Lhamon, Jr.

The Status Seekers by Vance Packard

The Organization Man by William H. Whyte

The Post-Utopian Imagination: American Culture in the Long 1950s by M. Keith Booker

Fifties Homestyle: Popular Ornament of the USA by Mark Burns and Louis DiBonis

As Seen on TV: The Visual Culture of Everyday Life in the 1950s by Karal Ann Marling

Fiftiestyle: Home Decoration and Furnishing from the 1950s by Lesley Hoskins

White Collar: The American Middle Classes by C. Wright Mills

The Lonely Crowd by David Riesman

The Authoritarian Personality by Theodor Adorno

Another Part of the Fifties by Paul A. Carter

Beyond the Gray Flannel Suit: Books from the 1950s that Made American Culture by David Castronovo

The Fifties Spiritual Marketplace: American Religion in a Decade of Conflict by Robert S. Ellwood

Art and Culture by Clement Greenberg

Something from the Oven: Reinventing Dinner in 1950s America by Laura Shapiro

The Comics Code Authority by the Comics Magazines Association of America

Fiction and Plays of the 1950s

The Zoo Story by Edward Albee
I, Robot by Isaac Asimov
The Adventures of Augie March by Saul Bellow
Fahrenheit 451 by Ray Bradbury
The Ticket That Exploded by William S. Burroughs
Naked Lunch by William S. Burroughs
Breakfast at Tiffany's by Truman Capote
Invisible Man by Ralph Ellison
In the Heart of the Heart of the Country & Other Stories by William H. Gass
The Quiet American by Graham Greene
A Raisin in the Sun by Lorraine Hansberry
On the Road by Jack Kerouac
Death of a Salesman by Arthur Miller
The Crucible by Arthur Miller
Lolita by Vladimir Nabokov
A Good Man Is Hard to Find by Flannery O'Connor (specifically *The Life You Save May Be Your Own*)
Long Day's Journey into Night by Eugene O'Neill
The Catcher in the Rye by J.D. Salinger
How the Grinch Stole Christmas by Dr. Seuss
Kiss Me Deadly by Mickey Spillane
East of Eden by John Steinbeck
Cat on a Hot Tin Roof by Tennessee Williams
The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit by Sloan Wilson

Poetry of the 1950s

Howl and Other Poems by Allen Ginsberg
Patterson by William Carlos Williams
The Collected Later Poems by William Carlos Williams

Other Texts From the 1950s

The Sea Around Us by Rachel Carson

Film Books: General

Film Art: An Introduction by David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson (useful especially if you don't have much of background in film)
The American Cinema by Andrew Sarris (a polemical book that argues for many of the greatest directors in short capsules)
Movies and Methods: An Anthology edited by Bill Nichols (see especially *Some Visual Motifs of Film Noir*)
Visual and Other Pleasures by Laura Mulvey (includes the hugely influential 1975 feminist essay, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*)
American Cinema of the 1950s (Screen Decades: American Culture/American Cinema) by Murray Pomerance

Film Books on or by the Filmmakers

For many of the directors represented in the course, there are many more books, including books in the Flaxman Library, than I list here. The books below are just suggestions. You may also find useful material online, but double check it for reliability. If you are writing on a director not included in the screening list for the third paper, search for materials on that director too. You may also find director interviews and articles on directors in film periodicals, and in books that are collections of film essays.

Robert Aldrich

Robert Aldrich edited by Richard Combs
Films and Career of Robert Aldrich by Edwin T. Arnold and Eugene L. Miller

Stan Brakhage

Essential Brakhage: Selected Writings on Filmmaking by Stan Brakhage; edited with a foreword by Bruce R. McPherson.

Visionary Film by P. Adams Sitney

John Ford

The John Ford Movie Mystery by Andrew Sarris

John Ford by Joseph McBride and Michael Wilmington

Western Films of John Ford by J. A. Place

Searchers: Essays and Reflections on John Ford's Classic Western edited by Arthur M. Eckstein and Peter Lehman

Samuel Fuller

Samuel Fuller by Phil Hardy

Samuel Fuller by Nicholas Garnham

Howard Hawks

Howard Hawks: The Grey Fox of Hollywood by Todd McCarthy

Howard Hawks by Robin Wood

Howard Hawks, Frank Borzage, Edgar G. Ulmer by John Belton

Hawks on Hawks edited by Joseph McBride

Alfred Hitchcock

Hitchcock's Films by Robin Wood

Strange case of Alfred Hitchcock: or, The Plain Man's Hitchcock by Raymond Durnat

Hitchcock by François Truffaut; with the collaboration of Helen G. Scott

Films of Alfred Hitchcock by David Sterritt

Women Who Knew Too Much: Hitchcock and Feminist Theory by Tania Modleski

Hitchcock at Work by Bill Krohn

Christopher Maclaine

Film at Wit's End: Eight Avant-Garde Filmmakers by Stan Brakhage

Vincente Minnelli

Films of Vincente Minnelli by James Naremore

Hundred or More Hidden Things: The Life and Films of Vincente Minnelli by Mark Griffin

I Remember It Well by Vincente Minnelli

Nicholas Ray

Nicholas Ray: An American Journey by Bernard Eisenschitz

I Was Interrupted: Nicholas Ray on Making Movies by Nicholas Ray and Susan Ray

Rebel Without a Cause: Approaches to a Maverick Masterwork edited by J. David Slocum

Douglas Sirk

Sirk on Sirk; Interviews With Jon Halliday

Imitation of Life edited by Lucy Fischer

Douglas Sirk edited by Laura Mulvey and Jon Halliday

Frank Tashlin

Frank Tashlin edited by Claire Johnston and Paul Willemen

Jacques Tourneur

Jacques Tourneur: The Cinema of Nightfall by Chris Fujiwara
Jacques Tourneur edited by Claire Johnston and Paul Willemen

Orson Welles
Orson Welles by Joseph McBride
This is Orson Welles by Orson Welles and Peter Bogdanovich
Orson Welles: A Critical View by André Bazin
Magic World of Orson Welles by James Naremore

FILMS TO CHOOSE FROM FOR THE FIRST PAPER

Since the first paper is to be on a 1950s film by director being shown in the course, I have listed these by director. You can also write on a film being shown in the course, even if it has not been shown yet. Films accompanied by an * are especially recommended. The * does not mean I prefer these films to others; just that they might be especially useful for the assignment.

Directed by Robert Aldrich:

World for Ransom
Apache
The Big Knife
**Attack*
Autumn Leaves
**Ten Seconds to Hell*

Directed by Stan Brakhage:

A paper on one or more of Brakhage's 1950s films besides *Anticipation of the Night* is probably fine, but write to me first.

Directed by John Ford:

Wagon Master
Rio Grande
The Quiet Man
**The Sun Shines Bright*
The Long Gray Line
**The Last Hurrah*

Directed by Samuel Fuller:

The Steel Helmet
Park Row
**Pickup on South Street*
China Gate
**Verboten!*
**The Crimson Kimono*

Directed by Howard Hawks:

The Thing From Another World
**Monkey Business*
**Rio Bravo*

Directed by Alfred Hitchcock:

Strangers on a Train
I Confess
Dial M for Murder

**Rear Window*
The Man Who Knew Too Much (1956 version)
**The Wrong Man*
**North by Northwest*

Directed by Christopher Maclaine:

All his films are short, but a paper that discusses some of the other three, which are *The Man Who Invented Gold*, *Scotch Hop*, and *Beat*, either including *The End* or not as you like, would be fine.

Directed by Vincente Minnelli:

**Father of the Bride*
An American in Paris
The Band Wagon
The Bad and the Beautiful
Brigadoon
**The Cobweb*
**Tea and Sympathy*
Gigi

Directed by Nicholas Ray:

In a Lonely Place
**On Dangerous Ground*
**Johnny Guitar*
Run for Cover
The True Story of Jesse James
Party Girl

Directed by Douglas Sirk:

The First Legion
Weekend With Father
**All I Desire*
**Magnificent Obsession*
**There's Always Tomorrow*
**The Tarnished Angels*
A Time to Love and a Time to Die
**Imitation of Life*

Directed by Frank Tashlin:

**Artists and Models*
**Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?*
The Geisha Boy

Directed by Jacques Tourneur:

Stars in My Crown
**Night of the Demon* (aka *Curse of the Demon*)
The Fearmakers

Directed by Orson Welles:

Othello
**Mr. Arkadin*

(These two Welles films are not, strictly speaking, "American" productions, but they display some of Welles's "American" qualities, and he has no other "American" 1950s films besides *Touch of Evil*.)

ADDITIONAL FILMS TO CHOOSE FROM FOR THE THIRD PAPER

You can write on any of the films in the above list for the first paper (but you cannot write any films by the director you chose for the first paper in the third), or on any film from the list below.

A few notes on these films: There are some sci-fi films (an important genre of the fifties not covered in the course); two Elvis movies (Elvis being an iconic 1950s figure), the two other films with James Dean besides *Rebel Without a Cause*; other films with Marilyn Monroe (we are showing *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*); a film about fashion (*Funny Face*); a number of films with important social themes (*On the Waterfront*, *Ace in the Hole*, *Sweet Smell of Success*, and others), some of which (such as *Johnny Guitar*) include veiled references to McCarthyism; one film that arguably takes Senator McCarthy's side (*My Son John*); a number of "noirs"; one big-budget historical epic (*Ben-Hur*), of which there were many in the fifties; several independent films made outside the Hollywood system, which look very different as well (*Glen or Glenda*, *Shadows*, *Salt of the Earth*, and one documentary, *On the Bowery*). There is also (be forewarned!) a consciously sexist ultra low-budget exploitation film with partial nudity (*The Immoral Mr. Teas*). If there is a type of film you feel is excluded and that you want to study, write to me.

It Came from Outer Space (Jack Arnold, 1953)
Creature from the Black Lagoon (Jack Arnold, 1954)
High School Confidential (Jack Arnold, 1958)
The Wild One (László Benedek, 1953)
Salt of the Earth (Herbert J. Biberman, 1954)
Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (Richard Brooks, 1958)
Shadows (John Cassavetes, 1959)
The Marrying Kind (George Cukor, 1952)
A Star is Born (George Cukor, 1954)
King Creole (Michael Curtiz, 1958)
The Ten Commandments (Cecil B. DeMille, 1956)
Singin' In the Rain (Gene Kelley & Stanley Donen, 1952)
Funny Face (Stanley Donen, 1957)
Alice in Wonderland (Clyde Geronimi & Wilfred Jackson & Hamilton Luske)
The Asphalt Jungle (John Huston, 1950)
The African Queen (John Huston, 1951)
A Streetcar Named Desire (Elia Kazan, 1951)
On the Waterfront (Elia Kazan, 1954)
East of Eden (Elia Kazan, 1955)
A Face in the Crowd (Elia Kazan, 1957)
The Giant Gila Monster (Ray Kellogg, 1959)
The Big Heat (Fritz Lang, 1953)
The Night of the Hunter (Charles Laughton, 1955)
Gun Crazy (Joseph H. Lewis, 1950)
The Bigamist (Ida Lupino, 1953)
The Big Combo (Joseph H. Lewis, 1955)
Sweet Smell of Success (Alexander Mackendrick, 1957)
All About Eve (Joseph L. Mankiewicz, 1950)
The Quiet American (Joseph L. Mankiewicz, 1958)
Marty (Delbert Mann, 1955)
My Son John (Leo McCarey, 1952)
An Affair to Remember (Leo McCarey, 1957)
The Immoral Mr. Teas (Russ Meyer, 1959)
The Fly (Kurt Neumann, 1958)
Angel Face (Otto Preminger, 1952)
Carmen Jones (Otto Preminger, 1954)

River of No Return (Otto Preminger, 1954)
Anatomy of a Murder (Otto Preminger, 1959)
Thunder Road (Arthur Ripley, 1958)
On the Bowery (Lionel Rogosin, 1956)
Invasion of the Body Snatchers (Don Siegel, 1956)
A Place in the Sun (George Stevens, 1951)
Giant (George Stevens, 1956)
Jailhouse Rock (Richard Thorpe, 1957)
Forbidden Planet (Fred M. Wilcox, 1956)
Sunset Blvd. (Billy Wilder, 1950)
Ace in the Hole (Billy Wilder, 1951)
The Seven Year Itch (Billy Wilder, 1955)
Some Like It Hot (Billy Wilder, 1958)
The Day the Earth Stood Still (Robert Wise, 1951)
Glen or Glenda? (Ed Wood, 1953)
The Big Country (William Wyler, 1958)
Ben-Hur (William Wyler, 1959)
The Blob (Irvin Yeaworth, 1958)
High Noon (Fred Zinnemann, 1952)
From Here to Eternity (Fred Zinnemann, 1953)