

Fall 2005  
Wed. 2-5pm  
THH 107

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### **HISTORY 498: THE CINEMATIC CENTURY**

**Description:** This is a seminar that narrates the history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century using film and mass culture as its organizing principle. It examines many of the usual problems of the 20<sup>th</sup> century such as the World Wars, the rise of fascism and communism, class conflict, racism, and struggles over gender roles through the prism of mass culture. Eric Hosbawm dubbed the century the “age of extremes” and organized its history around class and nation. We ask, what does the 20<sup>th</sup> century—its people and its history—look like when instead of focusing on national boundaries we use film, visual culture, and mass culture as ways of seeing and understanding contemporaneous life? How do you understand the history of the century when film and media are at the center of the story? We not interested in showing how big issues are “in” the movies but rather how the movies shape what the issues are and how we understand them: Do some topics we usually think of recede to the background? Are others more important? Does this focus make certain issues (propaganda) even more important? Our goal is not to simply repeat the historical issues we know about and add film, but rather to ask what are the ***big issues that emerge when you think about media and the world they have created.***

**Class Organization and Requirements:** This course meets once a week for 3 hours and is designed as an intensive reading seminar that exposes students to a wide range of critical scholarship in history, film, and visual culture. The course also provides a strong historiographical grounding for students interested in writing primary research papers for History 481: Producing Film Histories or any other senior level research seminar. We expect that everyone will have completed and thought about the week's reading before the seminar. Each student will be responsible for posting at least one question about the readings on Blackboard by 10pm on the Tuesday before the seminar meets. All students should come to class with at least two or three questions/issues you wish to raise. You don't need answers, just questions.

**Watching Visual Assignments:** Most weeks will have required readings and visual assignments. All videos and DVDs will be placed on Reserve at Leavey Library. We expect you to view them before class.

**Written Requirements and Grading:** Because of the heavy reading load, we are keeping written work to a minimum. You will be expected to write two five-page essays chosen from a list of suggested topics we will hand out. Due dates are Sept. 21 and Nov. 9. There will also be a take-home final. Final grades will be based upon the following combination: each five-page paper is worth 15% (30% total); take-home final is worth 30%; class participation is worth 40%. **Weekly attendance is mandatory.** We expect students to let us know in advance if they will miss a class. All work must be your own. Any violations of the academic integrity code such as plagiarism will not be tolerated. They will result in automatic failure and be remanded to the Dean's Office.

***Required Readings:***

Eric Hobsbawm, The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914-1991  
Vanessa Schwartz and Leo Charney, Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life  
Steven Ross, Working-Class Hollywood: Silent Film and Shaping of Class in America  
Edgar Morin, The Stars  
Paul McDonald, The Star System: Hollywood's Producer of Popular Identities  
Allan Langdale, ed., Hugo Munsterberg on Film  
Charles Maland, Chaplin and American Culture: The Evolution of a Star Image  
Victoria DeGrazia, Irresistible Empire: America's Advance Through the 20<sup>th</sup> Century  
Kirse Granat May, Golden State, Golden Youth: The California Image in Popular Culture 1955-1966  
Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man  
Thomas Friedman, The Lexus and the Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization

*Readings Packet* with articles will be available at the Bookstore

**Aug. 24: Introduction: Is Film History?**

How do you tell the history of a century? What do you know about the history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and how did you learn it? We will explore the concept of the “mind’s eye” (i.e. what pops into our visual brain when we hear a word or expression) and the power of the visual to shape the thought process and the way we think about the world. On hypothesis to explore: visual information matters most about the things we know the least.

**Aug 31: Narrating the Twentieth Century**

How do you tell the story of the century? What do people remember? What is the relationship between history and images of the past? How important is “truth”? Who knows what it is?

How do we contrast Hobsbawm’s written history with The Millennium’s visual history? What does each say? What are the key differences and similarities? Do they matter? What are the strengths and weaknesses of each? What is gained and/or lost if you read or watch?

**Read:** Eric Hobsbawm, The Age of Extremes: pages 1-224; Michael Wilson, “Visual Culture: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis” in Schwartz and Przyblyski, Nineteenth Century Visual Culture Reader [in course reading packet]

**Watch:** “CNN Millennium” Part 10: The Globe. As you watch, keep the aforementioned questions in mind.

**Coming Attractions:** Ross: “The Rise of Leisure”

## **Sept. 7: Dawn of a Century? 1895 not 1914**

The Cinematic Century begins in 1895 not 1900, because film begins in 1895. What does this new medium mean to society? Despite its uniqueness, film encapsulates so many qualities of 19<sup>th</sup> century culture. No one yet knows that film will become a worldwide industry and entertainment form. How is early film similar or dissimilar to other forms of popular entertainment? What differences are important? Why? What happens as society creates cinema and cinema creates a new social world?

**Read:** Vanessa Schwartz and Leo Charney, Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life, Introduction (1-12), Singer (72-99), Rappaport (130-55), Schwartz (297-319), Sandberg (320-61), Hansen (362-402).

**Watch:** Annie Oakley (1894); What Happened on Twenty-Third Street, NYC (1901); Three films from the Westinghouse Works series (1904), L'Arroseur Arroseur and Méliès

## **Sept. 14: Visual Ideology and the Emergence of the Film Industry**

The film industry proves essential to shaping the way we see the world in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. But how did the industry arise? What were the forces that shaped its development? Forget what you know about cinema today and approach this with a sense of historical contingency. The Hollywood studio system was not inevitable; it was the result of a very specific set of struggles among many key players inside and outside the emerging film industry. We always need to keep in mind that for those controlling studios movies were a business first and art form second.

Why does film portray the world in the way it does? One of the ways film shapes our vision is not just what we see on the screen but what we don't see. Why are we not allowed to see certain kinds of images or stories? Why does understanding the history of the movie industry matter? One hypothesis of this week's reading is that silent film shapes popular ideas about class that last most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century? Do you agree or disagree? Why? Why not?

**Read:** Steven Ross, Working-Class Hollywood

**Watch:** Ross website "Visualizing Ideology: Labor vs Capital in the Age of Silent Film"  
[www.usc.edu/dept/LAS/history/hist225g/](http://www.usc.edu/dept/LAS/history/hist225g/)

## **Sept. 21: Seeing and Shaping World War I**

This week offers another correction to Hobsbawm: culture is central to understanding 20<sup>th</sup> century. World War I is the first major war to be filmed. How does film transform the way in which people experience and understand the war? What do

people actually see? Can we talk about transnational images of war? How do we compare the immediacy of visual images of war to later written work and feature films? How do governments use film to “sell” war to their people?

**Read:** Pierre Sorlin, “War and Cinema: Interpreting the Relationship,” Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television, 14 (1994), 357-366 (posted on Blackboard); Paul Virilio, War and Cinema.

**Watch:** The Great War, introductory material and episodes 4 and 5.

**\*\*Essay #1 Due (hand in at class)**

### **Sept. 28: The Rise of Celebrity Culture**

Celebrity culture is far more complex than one might initially think. The most obvious aspect is the relationship between the rise of movie stars, the studio system, and fan culture. What is “star” culture? What role do studios and audiences play in the creation of “stars”? How do studios attempt to “brand” themselves and their stars? How has the cult of celebrity evolved? What impact has it had on American life?

A second and less obvious aspect of celebrity culture involves the relationship between celebrity and consumption. As movie czar Will Hays said in the 1920s, people learn about glamour, fashion, furniture, style, and aesthetics from watching films. How does the visual aspect of film affect consumption patterns in America and throughout the world?

**Read:** Edgar Morin, The Stars; Paul McDonald, The Star System: Hollywood’s Producer of Popular Identities

**Watch:** Either Singin’ In the Rain or How to Marry a Millionaire

**Possible Guest Speaker:** Liz Willis on Garbo and Glamour

### **Oct. 5: Charlie Chaplin: Celebrity and Visual Politics**

This week we examine a third aspect of stardom and celebrity culture: stars and politics. How do movie stars shape the ways in which we think about politics—and see politics in the mind’s eye? What are the varieties of ways celebrities do this on and off the screen? Charlie Chaplin, the first political movie star, is our focal point. Chaplin remained popular and political for decades, but his cinematic politics changed over the course of the century. How did he and other stars put their politics on the screen? What impact do they have on political life? What happens when stars get too political? Are there limits of permissible political behavior for stars?

**Read:** Charles Maland, Chaplin and American Culture: The Evolution of a Star Image

**Watch:** The Great Dictator

**Coming Attraction:** The Rise of the New Social Sciences and the Imperialism of the Psyche.

### **Oct. 12: Film as/and Collective Psychology**

**NB:** Tonight is the beginning of Yom Kippur. We will be dismissing class early. Anyone who cannot make class because they need to go home will be excused.

The new social science of “psychology” arose in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and changed our understanding of how the mind works—as did Freud’s invention of psychoanalysis and the inner workings of the conscious and unconscious mind. What is the relationship between film and the psyche? How do visual images affect us? How does film work on the mind? What is the psychology of the “mind’s eye”? Why are political authorities so afraid of the psychological impact of film?

**Read:** Allan Langdale, ed., Hugo Munsterberg on Film; De Grazia, Irresistible Empire, 226-283.

**Watch:** The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari

### **Oct. 19: Film and Propaganda: Reshaping the Minds of the Masses**

During the early years of film, authorities were often frightened by the idea that film would penetrate the psyche and audiences would imitate actions and ideas they saw on the screen off the screen. This was one reason for the rise of censorship and for frequent calls in U.S.—beginning in 1915—for federal oversight (i.e. censorship) of the film industry censorship (1915 the first). The FBI launched investigations of Communism in Hollywood as early as the 19teens and especially in the 1930s out of fear that American Reds insert their propaganda into films and create a generation of political zombies. But governments also instigated as well as reaction. In the 1930s, Germany, Russian, and American authorities realized they could use film on their own behalf to sway the masses. And they did. We will look at propaganda efforts in all three nations.

**Read:** Jurgen Habermas, “The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article (1964),” New German Critique, 1 (Autumn1974), 49-55 (download from Jstor); Susan Sontag, “Fascinating Fascism” (see link <http://www.anti-rev.org/textes/>)

**Watch:** Clips from: Wonderful Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl; Morning Sun go to website and explore: <http://www.morningsun.org/longbow/>

## **Oct. 26: The American Century?**

The US wins World War II but does it win the world? Is this truly, as Henry Luce declared, the American Century? What does it mean to talk about an “American” century? Two important visual trends of the late 1940s-early 1950s involved using cinema as a vehicle for fighting the Cold War (unsuccessful?) and using cinema as a way of creating new world communities (more successful?). Many critiques abroad have complained about the negative impacts of the Americanization of world culture? How powerful is Americanization? Has Americanization imposed itself on the world—or have various people selected certain aspects of American culture (especially film) and rejected others?

**Read:** Victoria DeGrazia, Irresistible Empire, 1-15, 284-376, 416-480; Vanessa Schwartz, Chapter on Cosmopolitan Film

**Watch:** Dr. No

## **Nov 2: No Seminar—Work on Essay**

Individual meetings with Professor Ross available.

## **Nov. 9: Revisioning Gender and Youth Culture**

The postwar era is considered by many scholars to be the birth of modern youth culture. How does film create, shape, and promote new understandings of youth culture in 1950s and 1960s—as well as the actions taken by youths? What is the significance of youth culture and its relationship to film and other forms of media? What does it mean to talk about a generation raised on film and TV rather than radio and film? How does “youth culture” differ from “adult culture”? How has California’s visual culture industries (and this includes Disneyland) reshaped the way people look at the world?

**Read:** Kirse Granat May, Golden State, Golden Youth; Karal Ann Marling, “Disneyland, 1955: Just Take the Santa Ana Freeway to the American Dream,” American Art, vol 5 (1/2 Winter/Spring 1991), 168-207 (download from J-Stor)

**Watch:** Hard Day’s Night

**\*\*Hand in Essay #2**

### **Nov. 16: Film and/as “Media”**

In 1964 Marshall McLuhan became an immediate international sensation when he wrote his famous phrase “the medium is the message.” This statement was followed by his explanation: “This is merely to say that the personal and social consequences of any medium—that is, of any extension of ourselves—result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology.” How has film come to supplant traditional media forms such as newspapers and radio? What implications does McLuhan’s work have for new media?

**Read:** Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media [Should we specify certain essays?]

**Watch:** Network

### **Nov 23: No Class- Revise Essays**

**NB: We could say for this week they should work on rewrites on their earlier essays. I think we should offer them the opportunity to do one rewrite. They could use Thanksgiving break to do that.**

### **Nov. 30: Whose Cinema, Whose World? The Impact of Globalization**

Is there such a thing as “Hollywood” anymore? Is an American film that is shot in a foreign country, features foreign-born stars, a foreign-born director, and is heavily financed by foreign investors still an “American” film? What makes a Hollywood film distinctly American? We will explore the rise of transnational cinema, the international audience, and the international blockbuster. What happens to cinematic images (and dialogue) when they go international?

**Read:** Thomas Friedman, Lexus and the Olive Tree

**Watch:** Kung Fu Hustle (2004) [original title Gung Fu]