The Politics of the “Seventies” Film

The ten years from 1967 to 1976 were an extraordinary time both in the history of American politics and in the history of American film. In the same period that the country was rocked by the Vietnam War, the feminist and civil rights movements, Watergate and economic crisis, the end of Hollywood censorship along with demographic and economic change in the industry ushered in what many call “the last golden age” of American film. In this class we study both film theory and political history to examine these remarkable films and the political context in which they were forged. The goal of the course is to take seriously both the films and their politics.

We will screen one film a week, Tuesday evenings at 7:30. Attendance is required. Screenings will be in Goldwin-Smith, Hollis E. Cornell Auditorium. In fact, students are encouraged to see each film twice – once on their own and once at the screening. For films that you will write essays about, multiple viewing will be essential, especially for some crucial passages. All of the videos (DVDs) have been placed on three-hour reserve in Uris library. They are also all readily available for purchase from on-line outlets; many stream on-line as well.

There are five principal requirements for the course:
- An in class exam, Monday February 29 (15%)
- A short essay, due Monday March 14 (20%)
- An in class exam, Monday May 2 (25%)
- A long paper, due Monday, May 16 (30%)
- Section attendance/class participation (10%)

A note on the requirements: the short essay (8-10 pages/about 2,000-plus words), will involve a political reading of one of our screened films. The long essay (about 16-20 pages, but no less than 5,000 and no more than 7,000 words) will be devoted to the close analysis of a different film from the period. You will be given a list of “seventies” films and choose one of them. Each paper will briefly discuss the background of the film’s production, place the film in the context of the careers of the principal players, address the film’s commercial and critical reception, and, most importantly, present and support a political reading of the film. (More instructions for each paper will be provided.)

The in-class exams will emphasize material covered in the lectures and readings. Students are also required to attend discussion sections over the course of the semester. Active and thoughtful participation in class and section accounts for 10% of the final grade; films will also be discussed in class most Wednesdays. It is therefore wise to complete each week’s required readings before class on Wednesday.

NOTE that this is an electronics free class – no laptops, no phones, no anything – in lecture, in section, or at the film screenings.

Each student in this course is expected to abide by the Cornell University Code of Academic Integrity: “Absolute integrity is expected of every Cornell student in all academic undertakings.” Students unfamiliar with or uncertain about specific attributes of the code should review it on-line at: http://newstudentprograms.cornell.edu/dos/cms/nsp/Initiatives/upload/AcademicIntegrityPamphlet.pdf
The readings for the course are primarily from the books listed below. They are available for purchase at the Campus store and are also on 3-hour reserve in Uris library. Additional readings will be posted on the class blackboard site (marked [BB] below).

-Cook, *Lost Illusions: American Cinema in the Shadow of Watergate and Vietnam*
-Hoberman, *The Dream Life: Movies, Media and the Mythology of the Sixties*
-Monaco, Paul, *The Sixties* (History of the American Cinema)
-Reeves, *President Nixon: Alone in the White House*
-Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture/Society/Politics*
-Stuart, Jan, *The Nashville Chronicles*

Also at the campus store and Uris reserve (mostly recommended and supplementary reading):
-Kirshner, *Hollywood’s Last Golden Age*
-Monaco, James, *How to Read a Film* (4th ed. 2009)

### Course Outline

**Week 1: Introduction and Course Overview** (Wednesday, January 27)

**Required Readings:**
- Phillip Lopate, “Anticipation of La Notte: The ‘Heroic’ Age of Moviegoing,” in his *Totally, Tenderly, Tragically*, pp. 3-25. [BB]

**Recommended Reading:**
- James Monaco, *How To Read a Film*, pp. 24-73, 170-249.

**Week 2: Talkin Bout My Generation** (February 1 – February 3)

**Required Readings:**
- Lester Friedman, *Bonnie and Clyde* (BFI Modern Classics, 2000) [BB]

**Recommended Reading:**
- Paul Schrader, “Canon Fodder,” *Film Comment*, 2006, pp. 33-49. [BB]
Film (Tuesday, February 2):
The Graduate (1967)

Week 3: Hard Times in New York Town (February 8 – February 10)

Required Readings:
Vincent Cannato, The Ungovernable City: John Lindsay and His Struggle to Save New York (2001), pp. 443-53, 466-78, 525-38. [BB]
Monaco, The Sixties, pp. 56-66.

Recommended Reading:

Film (Tuesday, February 9):
Midnight Cowboy (1969)

Weeks 4-5: Tin Soldiers and Nixon's Coming (Weds, Feb 17, Feb 22 – Feb 24)

Required Readings:

Recommended Reading:
Monaco, How to Read a Film, pp. 252-317.

Film (Tuesday, February 23):
Medium Cool (1969)

Weeks 6: No Direction Home (February 29 – March 2)

Required Readings:
Cook, Lost Illusions, pp. 67-157.
James Monaco, American Film Now (1979), pp. 81-137. [BB]

Recommended Reading:
Monaco, How to Read a Film, pp. 434-477.

In Class Exam Monday, February 29

Film (Tuesday, March 1):
Five Easy Pieces (1970)
Week 7: I Used to Care . . . Realism, Revisionism, and Cynicism (March 7 – March 9)

Required Reading:

Recommended Reading:
Cook, *Lost Illusions*, pp. 159-257.

**Film** (Tuesday, March 6):
*Nashville* (1975)

Week 8: Find Out What it Means to Me (March 14 – March 16)

Required Readings:

Recommended Reading:

**Film** (Tuesday, March 15):
*Klute* (1971)

*First Essay Due in Class, Monday, March 14.*

Week 9: Privacy, Paranoia, Isolation and Despair (March 21 – March 23)

Required Readings:

Recommended Reading:
Mark Feeney, *Nixon at the Movies* (Chicago, 2004), pp. 297-325. [BB]

**Film** (Tuesday, March 22):
*The Conversation* (1974)
Final Confirmation of Film Choice for Long Paper Due in Class, Wednesday, March 23

Week 10: Decline and Fall (April 4 – April 6)

Required Readings:
Edward Berkowitz, Something Happened: A Political and Cultural Overview of the Seventies (Columbia, 2006), pp. 53-83. [BB]
Natasha Zaretsky, No Direction Home (2007), pp. 71-105. [BB]
William Graebner, “A Nation in Existential Despair,” in Bailey and Farber, America in the 70s (Kansas, 2004), pp. 157-75. [BB]
Schulman, The Seventies, pp. 23-77.

Film (Tuesday, April 5):
Night Moves (1975)

Week 11: Businessmen Drink My Wine (April 11 – April 13)

Required Readings:
Beth Bailey, “She Can Bring Home the Bacon: Negotiating Gender in the 70s,” in America in the 70s, pp. 107-25. [BB]
Peter Carroll, It Seemed Like Nothing Happened (2000), pp. 161-84. [BB]

Film (Tuesday, April 12, HEC Auditorium):
Network (1975)

Week 12: Who Do You Love? (April 18 – April 20)

Required Readings:
Nick Bromell, Tomorrow Never Knows (Chicago, 2000), pp. 15-35. [BB]
Barney Hoskyns, Hotel California (2006), pp. 217-44. [BB]

Recommended Reading:
Cook, Lost Illusions, pp. 25-65.

Film (Tuesday, April 19, HEC Auditorium):
Shampoo (1975)

Week 13: Mean Streets (April 25 – April 27)

Required Reading:
Amy Taubin, *Taxi Driver* (BFI Film Classics, 2000). [BB]
David Thompson/Ian Christie (eds) *Scorsese on Scorsese*, pp. 38-67. [BB]

**Film** (Tuesday, April 26):

*Taxi Driver* (1976)

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**Week 14: A Cinema of Despair** (May 2 – May 4)

**Required Reading:**

**Recommended Reading:**

**In Class Exam Monday, May 2**

**Film** (Tuesday, April 29):

*Chinatown* (1974)

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**Week 15: Bringing it all Back Home** (May 9 – May 11)

**Required Readings:**
- Peter Cowie, *Annie Hall*, (BFI Film Classics, 1996). [BB]
- Pauline Kael, “Why are Movies So Bad? Or, the Numbers,” *The New Yorker*, June 23, 1980. [BB]

**Recommended Reading:**
- Jonathan Kirshner, “When Critics Mattered: Kael, Ebert, and 70s Film,” *Boston Review* 37:2 (March/April 2012), pp. 59-64. [BB]

**Film** (Tuesday, May 10):

*Annie Hall* (1977)

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**Final Papers Due Monday, May 16**