

## 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, Wednesday evenings at 7:00. **Attendance is required. Screenings will be in the auditorium in McGuinn Hall (Room 121).** Note that for films that you will write essays about, multiple viewings will be essential, especially for some crucial passages. All of the videos are also 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 quiz**, Tuesday October 3 (15%)
- An in class **essay**, Thursday October 12 (20%)
- An **in class test**, Tuesday December 5 (25%)
- A **long paper**, due Friday, December 8\* (30%)
- Class participation (10%)

A note on the requirements: the in class essay will involve, among other things, 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 these assignments will be provided.)

The in-class quizzes will emphasize material covered in the lectures and readings. Generally, we will discuss each week’s film in class Thursdays; it is therefore wise to complete each week’s required readings before class on Thursday.

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

**Regarding Academic Integrity:** University policy is clear: “*Students have a responsibility to maintain high standards of academic integrity in their own work, and thereby to maintain the integrity of their degree. It is their responsibility to be familiar with, and understand, the University policy on academic integrity.*” Be sure you have carefully read and understood fully the academic code:

<http://www.bc.edu/content/bc/offices/stserv/academic/integrity.html>

**Disability Services:** If you are a student with a documented disability seeking reasonable accommodations in this course, please contact Kathleen Duggan, (617) 552-8093, [dugganka@bc.edu](mailto:dugganka@bc.edu), at the Connors Family Learning Center regarding learning disabilities and ADHD, or [disabsrv@bc.edu](mailto:disabsrv@bc.edu), (617) 552-3470, in the Disability Services Office regarding all other types of disabilities, including temporary disabilities. **Advance notice and appropriate documentation are required for accommodations.**

The following books are available for purchase at Campus store. Most of the readings will be accessible through the course Canvas site, but some may only be available in hard-copy reserve. *Follow the syllabus to keep track of each week's readings.*

- Cook, *Lost Illusions: American Cinema in the Shadow of Watergate and Vietnam*
- Eaton, *Chinatown* (1997)
- Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (Rev ed. 1993)
- Hoberman, *The Dream Life: Movies, Media and the Mythology of the Sixties*
- Kirshner/Lewis (eds.) *When the Movies Mattered*
- Reeves, *President Nixon: Alone in the White House*
- Stuart, *The Nashville Chronicles*
- Taubin, *Taxi Driver* (2012).

Also available at the campus store (mostly recommended and supplementary reading):

- Biskind, *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls: How the Sex-Drugs-and-Rock 'n' Roll Generation Saved Hollywood*
- Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape* (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, 2016)
- Kirshner, *Hollywood's Last Golden Age*
- Monaco, James, *How to Read a Film* (4<sup>th</sup> ed. 2009)
- Monaco, Paul, *The Sixties* (History of the American Cinema)
- Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture/Society/Politics*

## Course Outline

### Introduction and Course Overview (August 29 – August 31)

#### Required Readings:

- Phillip Lopate, "Anticipation of *La Notte*: The 'Heroic' Age of Moviegoing," in his *Totally, Tenderly, Tragically*, pp. 3-25.
- David Thomson, "The Decade When The Movies Mattered," reprinted in Elsaesser, *The Last Great American Picture Show*, pp. 73-82.
- Jonathan Kirshner, "When Critics Mattered: Kael, Ebert, and 70s Film," *Boston Review* 37:2 (March/April 2012), pp. 59-64.
- Susan Sontag, "The Decay of Cinema," *New York Times*, Feb 25, 1996.
- Martin Scorsese, "I Said Marvel Movies Aren't Cinema: Let Me Explain," *New York Times*, November 4, 2019.

#### Recommended Reading:

- David Cook, *Lost Illusions*, pp. 1-23.
- Chris Wiegand, *French New Wave* (2001), pp. 7-20.
- James Monaco, *How To Read a Film*, pp. 24-73, 170-249.

Talkin Bout My Generation (September 5 – September 7)

Required Readings:

Lester Friedman (ed.), *Arthur Penn's Bonnie and Clyde*, pp. 11-41.  
Kirshner/Lewis, *When the Movies Mattered*, pp. 1-12; 177-88.  
Terry Anderson, *The Movement and the Sixties*, pp. 87-120.

Recommended Reading:

Paul Schrader, "Canon Fodder," *Film Comment*, 2006, pp. 33-49.  
Paul Monaco, *The Sixties*, pp. 168-92.  
Biskind, *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls*, pp. 13-80.

**Film** (Wednesday September 6):

*The Graduate* (1967)

Hard Times in New York Town (September 12 – September 14)

Required Readings:

Vincent Cannato, *The Ungovernable City: John Lindsay and His Struggle to Save New York*, pp. 443-53, 466-78, 525-31.  
Heather Hendershot, "City of Losers, Losing City: Pacino, New York, and New Hollywood Cinema," in *When the Movies Mattered*, 86-100.  
Bruce Schulman, *The Seventies*, pp. 1-20.  
Monaco, *The Sixties*, pp. 56-66.

Recommended Reading:

Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties*, pp. 195-221, 242-60.  
James Sanders, *Celluloid Skyline: New York and the Movies*, pp. 366-98.

**Film** (Wednesday September 13):

*Midnight Cowboy* (1969)

Tin Soldiers and Nixon's Coming (September 19 – September 21)

Required Readings:

Joseph Palermo, *In His Own Right: The Political Odyssey of Senator Robert F. Kennedy*, pp. 161-87.  
Gitlin, *The Sixties*, pp. 305-340.  
J. Hoberman, *The Dream Life*, pp. 186-213, 258-77.

Recommended Reading:

Renata Adler, "Fracas at the Cannes Film Festival," *New York Times*, 5/8/1968.  
Monaco, *How to Read a Film*, pp. 252-317.

**Film** (Wednesday, September 20):

*Medium Cool* (1969)

Find Out What it Means to Me (September 26 – September 28)

Required Readings:

Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* (2000), pp. 63-93.

Molly Haskell, "The Mad Housewife of the Neo-Woman's Film: The Age of Ambivalence Revisited," *When the Movies Mattered*, pp. 18-35.

David Denby, "Men without Women," *Harpers*, 1973.

Jonathan Kirshner, "Town Bloody Hall," *Cineaste* (winter 2020).

Recommended Reading:

Cook, *Lost Illusions*, pp. 259-97.

Gitlin, *The Sixties*, pp. 362-76.

Molly Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape*, pp. vii-xxvi, 323-371.

**Film** (Wednesday, September 27):

*Five Easy Pieces* (1970)

How Does it Feel? (October 3 – October 5)

Required Readings:

Cook, *Lost Illusions*, pp. 67-147.

Recommended Reading:

Monaco, *How to Read a Film*, pp. 434-477.

James Monaco, *American Film Now* (1979), pp. 81-137.

**-In Class Quiz, Tuesday, October 3.**

**Film** (Wednesday, October 4):

*Klute* (1971)

I'll Be Your Mirror (October 11 – October 12)

Required Readings:

Andreas Killen, *1973 Nervous Breakdown*, pp. 1-11; 195-207; 261-73.

George Kouvaros, "John Cassavetes's *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie*," in *When the Movies Mattered*, pp. 130-48.

Robert E. Kapsis (ed.) *Nichols and May: Interviews*, pp. vii-xxiv, 239-42.

Recommended Reading:

Schulman, *The Seventies*, pp. 23-77.

Kapsis (ed.) *Nichols and May: Interviews*, pp. 86-96, 197-214, 223-238.

**-In Class Essay Thursday October 12**

**Film** (Wednesday, October 11): *Mikey and Nicky* (1976)

Privacy, Paranoia, Isolation and Despair (October 17 – October 19)

Required Readings:

Hoberman, *The Dream Life*, pp. 315-333.

Richard Reeves, *President Nixon: Alone in the White House*, pp. 329-39, 458-64, 501-6, 575-609.

Stanley Kutter, *Abuse of Power: The New Nixon Tapes*, pp. xiii-xxii, 3-6, 247-59.

Recommended Reading:

Mark Feeney, *Nixon at the Movies*, pp. 297-325.

Jonathan Kirshner, "Who Knew it Could Get Worse? When Nixon Haunted the New Hollywood," *Cineaste* (spring 2018), pp. 30-35.

David Thomson, "The Parallax View: Why Trust Anyone?" in *When the Movies Mattered*, pp. 101-14.

**Film** (Wednesday, October 16):

*The Conversation* (1974)

I Used to Care . . . Realism, Revisionism, and Cynicism (October 24 – October 26)

Required Reading:

Jan Stuart, *The Nashville Chronicles: The Making of Robert Altman's Masterpiece*, pp. 128-56, 206-32, 257-72.

David Sterritt, "Robert Altman: Documentaries, Dreamscapes, and Dialogic Cinema," in *When the Movies Mattered*, pp. 69-85.

Recommended Reading:

David Thompson, *Altman on Altman*, pp. 44-94.

Cook, *Lost Illusions*, pp. 159-257.

Stephen Prince, *Savage Cinema: Sam Peckinpah and the Rise of Ultraviolent Movies*, pp. 1-41.

**Film** (Wednesday, October 25):

*Nashville* (1975)

*Final Confirmation of Film Choice for Long Paper Due in Class, Thursday, October 26*

Businessmen Drink My Wine (October 31 – November 2)

Required Readings:

Edward Berkowitz, *Something Happened: A Political and Cultural Overview of the Seventies*, pp. 53-70.

Peter Carroll, *It Seemed Like Nothing Happened*, pp. 161-84.

Beth Bailey, "She Can Bring Home the Bacon: Negotiating Gender in the 70s," in *America in the 70s*, pp. 107-25.

Joanna E. Rapf, "Sidney Lumet and the Politics of the Left,"

Literature/Film Quarterly, 31:2 (2003), pp. 148-155.

Recommended Reading:

Schulman, *The Seventies*, pp. 121-143.

Richard Blake, *Street Smart: The New York of Lumet, Allen, Scorsese and Lee*, pp. 39-98.

**Film** (Wednesday, November 1):

**Network** (1976)

Who Do You Love? (November 7 – November 9)

Required Readings:

Charles Kaiser, *1968 in America* (1988), pp. 190-214.

Nick Bromell, *Tomorrow Never Knows* (2000), pp. 15-35.

Nick Hornby, "Pop Quiz," *The New Yorker*, September 4, 2001.

Barney Hoskyns, *Hotel California* (2006), pp. 217-44.

Recommended Reading:

Cook, *Lost Illusions*, pp. 25-65.

Schulman, *The Seventies*, pp. 102-120, 144-192.

**Film** (Wednesday, November 8):

**Shampoo** (1975)

Mean Streets (November 14 – November 16)

Required Reading:

Amy Taubin, *Taxi Driver* (BFI Film Classics, 2012).

Recommended Reading:

David Thompson/Ian Christie (eds.) *Scorsese on Scorsese*, pp. 38-67.

Kevin Jackson (ed.) *Schrader on Schrader* (2004), pp. 108-40.

J. Hoberman "The Spirit of '76: Travis, Rocky and Jimmy Carter," in *When the Movies Mattered*, pp. 149-63.

**Film** (Wednesday, November 15):

**Taxi Driver** (1976)

"These Go to Eleven" – Beyond the New Hollywood (November 21)

Required Reading:

Tom Charity, *John Cassavetes: Lifeworks* (2001), pp. ix-xiii, 75-93.

Bernice Reynaud, "For Wanda," in Elsaesser, *The Last Great American Picture Show*, pp. 223-26; 229-42.

Douglas Crimp, "Our Kind of Movie": *The Films of Andy Warhol*, pp. 99-109, 137-45.

A.S. Hamrah, "The Story of a Three Day Pass," *4Columns*, May 7, 2021.  
Phillip Lopate, "What 'Golden Age'? A Dissenting View," in *When the Movies Mattered*, pp. 164-175.

Recommended Reading:

Dave Saunders, *Direct Cinema: Observational Documentary and the Politics of the Sixties*, pp. 57-142.

Patricia Bosworth, "Mailer's Movie Madness," *Vanity Fair*, February 12, 2008.

A Cinema of Despair (November 28 – November 30)

Required Reading:

Michael Eaton, *Chinatown*, (BFI Film Classics, 1997).

Recommended Reading:

"Interview with Robert Towne," in Joel Engel (ed.) *Screenwriters on Screenwriting* (1995), pp. 197-223.

Robert Pippin, "Cinematic Tone in Polanski's *Chinatown*: Can 'Life' Itself Be 'False'?" in *When the Movies Mattered*, pp. 115-129.

Dana Polan, "Chinatown: Politics as Perspective, Perspective as Politics," in Orr/Ostrowska, *Cinema of Roman Polanski*, pp. 108-20.

**Film** (Wednesday, November 29):

*Chinatown* (1974)

Where Did our Love Go? (December 5 – December 7)

Required Reading:

Peter Cowie, *Annie Hall*, (BFI Film Classics, 1996).

Recommended Reading:

Pauline Kael, "On the Future of the Movies," *The New Yorker*, August 5, 1974.

Pauline Kael, "Why are Movies So Bad?" *The New Yorker*, June 23, 1980.

Dade Hayes and Jonathan Bing, *Open Wide: How Hollywood Box Office Became a National Obsession* (2004), pp. 1-15.

**-In Class Test, Tuesday, December 5**

**Film** (Wednesday, December 6):

*Annie Hall* (1977)

**Final Papers Due Friday, December 8\***