

Film Studies 351: Major Directors  
Topic: Alfred Hitchcock  
Prof. Joan Dagle  
Fall 2009

## Course Description

This course will examine the films of Alfred Hitchcock, from the early British 1926 silent film The Lodger to the great American films such as Rear Window (1954), Vertigo (1958), and Psycho (1960) to the final films of his career such as the British film Frenzy (1972). Hitchcock (1899-1980) is one of the towering figures of 20<sup>th</sup> century cinematic history, and we will explore some of the reasons why his work remains powerful: his meticulous craftsmanship, his “auteurist” allure, the particular obsessions with which his films are preoccupied (guilt and innocence, sexuality and gender, death and voyeurism). We will also examine the extent to which the Hitchcock film/persona is an industry creation, the political and ideological implications of the American films, and the extent to which the Hitchcock film is a reflexive engagement with the medium. What, finally, are we to make of the often self-contradictory “master of suspense” whose most famous line about his work just might be: “My films are not slices of life. They’re slices of cake.”

Students should be prepared to do substantial reading and to screen additional films outside of class.

**Prerequisites:** English 116 or Communications 241 or permission of the instructor.

## Required Texts

Books are available at the Off-Campus Bookstore, 1017 Smith Street (861-6270). Please be sure to get the specific editions I have ordered.

Francois Truffaut, Hitchcock. Revised Edition. (Simon & Schuster)

Tania Modleski, The Women Who Knew Too Much. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. (Routledge)

Jonathan Freedman and Richard Millington, eds. Hitchcock’s America. (Oxford Univ Press)

Selected articles (to be distributed) \*

## Course Calendar

Tu Sept 1 Introduction: At the End (AFI Tribute, March 7, 1979)

Th Sept 3 The Lodger (1926)  
Leitch, from The Encyclopedia of Alfred Hitchcock

Tu Sept 8 Truffaut, Preface, Introduction, and chapters 1 & 2

Th Sept 10 Blackmail (1929)  
Truffaut, chapter 3

Tu Sept 15 Modleski, Introduction and chapter 1

Th Sept 17 The 39 Steps (1935) screening on your own:  
Truffaut, chapter 4 Murder! (1930)

Tu Sept 22 Modleski, chapter 2

Th Sept 24 Sabotage (1936)  
Truffaut, chapter 5

- Tu Sept 29 Transition to Hollywood  
Truffaut, chapter 6 screening: Rebecca (1940)
- Th Oct 1 Modleski, chapter 3
- Tu Oct 6 Shadow of a Doubt (1943)  
Truffaut, chapters 7 & 10 screening: Strangers on a Train (1951)
- Th Oct 8 Freedman and Millington, 3-14 (Introduction); 15-28 (Fried essay); 29-53 (Michie essay); 99-121 (Corber essay)
- Tu Oct 13 No class: Monday schedule
- Th Oct 15 Notorious (1946)  
Truffaut, chapters 8 & 9 screening: Rope (1948)
- Tu Oct 20 Modleski, chapter 4  
Freedman and Millington, 55-76 (Lawrence essay)
- Th Oct 22 Rear Window (1954)  
Truffaut, chapter 11
- Tu Oct 27 Modleski, chapter 5  
Freedman and Millington, 123-134 (Brand essay)
- Th Oct 29 Vertigo (1958)  
Truffaut, chapter 12: 235-249
- Tu Nov 3 Vertigo, continued
- Th Nov 5 Modleski, chapter 6  
Freedman and Millington, 77-98 (Freedman essay); 155-172 (Cohen essay)
- Tu Nov 10 North by Northwest (1959)  
Truffaut, chapter 12: 249-257
- Th Nov 12 North by Northwest, continued
- Tu Nov 17 Freedman and Millington, 135-154 (Millington essay)
- Th Nov 19 Psycho (1960)  
Truffaut, chapter 13
- Tu Nov 24 Essays TBA \*
- Th Nov 26 No class: Thanksgiving recess
- Tu Dec 1 The Birds (1963)  
Truffaut, chapters 14 & 15

Th Dec 3 Essay: TBA \*

Tu Dec 8 Frenzy (1972)  
Truffaut, chapter 16

screening: Family Plot (1976)

Th Dec 10 Modleski, chapter 7  
Freedman and Millington, 173-180 (Wood essay)

## Requirements

Reading assignments should be completed by the date listed on the syllabus. Readings in Truffaut's Hitchcock have been correlated with the chronology of Hitchcock's career and with specific screenings, but you should feel free to jump around in this book. Readings from Modleski, essays from the Freedman/Millington book, and other assigned essays are specific to a particular discussion session. You should read carefully and make notes as you read; I expect you to come to class ready to discuss the readings as well as the films.

In addition to the films that we will screen in class, you are required to see other Hitchcock films during the semester. I have included on the syllabus those that we will discuss in class. Please see these by the date listed. Copies of these as well as other Hitchcock films will be available on reserve in Adams Library. Many Hitchcock films are also available for rental or purchase.

Writing assignments will include two papers; occasional written responses to films and/or readings; and a final exam. The first paper will be a short textual analysis (4-5 pages) of one of Hitchcock's British films. The second paper will be a longer critical study of Hitchcock's work based on a topic of your choosing. Approx. weightings: papers 50%; exam 30-35%; class participation and responses 15-20%.

## Course Policies

Attendance is expected at all screenings. I also expect you to be prepared for, attend, and participate in all class discussions. If an unavoidable absence occurs, you are responsible for contacting me in order to receive assignments or handouts. More than three absences will lower your grade for the course. Students who fail to do the reading before class and who do not bring their books and/or handouts with them also risk losing credit toward final grades.

Do your best to avoid coming to class late or leaving early. Both are disruptive. And please do not leave the room during screenings or class discussions except for an emergency. If you must leave during a screening, do so quietly and do not walk up the center aisle.

Please turn off all cell phones and other electronic devices.

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Office hours: Tu 1-2; Wed 3-4; and by appointment