

# **FM 211: Master of Suspense: The Films of Alfred Hitchcock (Introduction to Film Studies)**

Seminar Leader: Matthias Hurst

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Office Hours: Tuesday, 13.30 – 15.00, or by appointment

Course Times: Monday, 14.00 – 15.30, Tuesday, 19.30 – 22.00 (film screening),  
Thursday, 14.00 – 15.30

## **Course Description**

“If Hitchcock [...] outranks the rest, it is because he is the most complete film-maker of all. He is not merely an expert at some specific aspect of cinema, but an all-round specialist who excels at every image, each shot and every scene. He masterminds the construction of the screenplay as well as the photography, the cutting and the soundtrack, has creative ideas on everything and can handle anything and is even expert at publicity!” (François Truffaut)

Alfred Hitchcock (1899-1980) is still one of the most renowned, most celebrated, most popular and most influential film directors of all times and his films have inspired a variety of reflections and interpretations sounding the desires, fears, and neurotic obsessions of modern humanity. Known as the “the master of suspense” he became identified with the crime and thriller genre, but his best films function on many levels. We will watch and discuss films like *Blackmail* (1929), *Rebecca* (1940), *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943), *Spellbound* (1945), *Rope* (1948), *Strangers on a Train* (1951), *Rear Window* (1954), *Vertigo* (1958), *Psycho* (1960), *The Birds* (1963) and *Frenzy* (1972). Attending to the techniques and psychological effects of Hitchcock’s work, this course not only seeks to grasp the uniqueness and significance of his contribution to the history of cinema, but to introduce the central concepts, approaches, and topics of film studies as a field.

Foundational Module: Approaching Arts Through Theory

## Requirements

No prerequisites.

Attendance is mandatory for all seminars and film screenings. Students are expected to come to seminars and film screenings punctually and prepared, to participate actively in the class discussions and to do all the course assignments on time.

**\* Please, do not use laptops, cell phones, smart phones or similar electronic devices during seminars and screenings!**

## Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the highest standards of academic integrity and expects students to adhere to these standards at all times. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

I expect everybody to do their own work and to write their own papers, including correct MLA citation. **Plagiarism or the use of AI are no options**; they are an absolute no-no. Anybody who cheats will fail that particular assignment and may, depending on the severity of the case, fail the class.

## Accommodations

Bard College Berlin is committed to inclusion and providing equal access to all students; we uphold and maintain all aspects of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and Section 3 of the German Disability Equality Act of April 27, 2002 (Federal Law Gazette I p. 1468). If you have a disability, or think you may have a disability, please contact the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, Atticus Kleen, ([accommodations@berlin.bard.edu](mailto:accommodations@berlin.bard.edu)) to request an official accommodation.

Requests for accommodations should be made as early as possible to ensure adequate time for coordination and planning. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and may require advance notice to implement.

If you have already been approved for accommodations with the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, please arrange to meet with me outside of class so that we can develop an implementation plan.

Students may face extenuating circumstances related to various personal or external factors, which impact their academic performance. While these circumstances often do not fall within the legal framework of Disability Accommodations, Bard College Berlin is committed to supporting students experiencing such circumstances. A student needing a short extension or a replacement assignment because of an extenuating circumstance is encouraged to make arrangements directly with instructors if possible. If further support is needed, please visit the [Bard College Berlin Accessibility page](#). Questions about this process can be directed to James Harker (j.harker@berlin.bard.edu) or Maria Anderson-Long (m.andersonlong@berlin.bard.edu).

### **Attendance**

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, two absences from twice-per-week courses or the equivalent (e.g. one absence from a once-per-week course) should not affect the participation grade or require documentation.

More than two absences will affect the grade for the course.

Absences are registered in all classes, and lateness is registered as absence.

Students should notify the instructor if they are unable to attend class.

Please, do not use laptops, cell phones, smart phones or similar electronic devices during seminars and screenings! When you are in class, you need to be there (and not leashed to or distracted by electronic devices). Please turn your phones off before class.

Bard College Berlin may not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

### **Assignments / Assessment**

Two screening reports (1000 words each), due in week 2 (deadline for screening report # 1: Thursday, September 11, 2025, 1:45 pm), and week 7 (deadline for screening report # 2: Thursday, October 16, 2025, 1:45 pm). The topics of the screening reports will be announced before the film screenings.

Final essay (3000 words), due in week 15, Thursday, December 18, 2025, midnight

\* **Please note: Graduating students** – Final essay due in week 14, Monday, December 8, 2025, midnight.

The topic of the final essay will be a film analysis/interpretation, based on one of the films screened or discussed throughout the semester.

### **Policy on Late Submission of Papers**

Essays that are up to 24 hours late can be downgraded up to one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where a professor agrees to accept a late assignment, it should be submitted by the new deadline agreed upon by both parties. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss essay assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours.

Students receive end-of-semester grades for their seminar work. Students are entitled to make an appointment with an instructor to discuss seminar participation, or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

### **Grade Breakdown**

Participation:	33 %
Screening Reports:	33 %
Final Essay:	34 %

If one of these components is graded F, the final course grade cannot be higher than C-.

If two components are graded F, the final grade will be F (i.e. the whole class will be failed).

## **Schedule**

(The selection of films might change)

### **WEEK 1**

Introduction: Alfred Hitchcock and his films

What is cinema? Film as a cultural and 'anthropological' phenomenon (1)

No film screening in Week 1!

(Suggested) Reading:

André Bazin. "The Ontology of the Photographic Image." In: André Bazin. *What Is Cinema?* Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1971, pp. 9-16.

Walter Benjamin. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." In: Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (eds.). *Film Theory and Criticism. Introductory Readings*. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 731-751.

Searle Kochberg. "Cinema as Institution." In: Jill Neldes (ed.). *An Introduction to Film Studies*. Third edition. London/New York: Routledge, 2003, pp. 3-50.

Siegfried Kracauer. *Theory of Film. The Redemption of Physical Reality*. [1960] Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1997.

Marshall McLuhan. *Understanding Media. The Extensions of Man*. Cambridge, MA/London: MIT Press, 1994.

Hugo Münsterberg. "The Photoplay. A Psychological Study." [1916] Excerpt in: Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (eds.). *Film Theory and Criticism. Introductory Readings*. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 401-407.

Erwin Panofsky. "Style and Medium in the Motion Pictures." [1934/1947] In: Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (eds.). *Film Theory and Criticism. Introductory Readings*. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 279-292.

### **WEEK 2**

Film as a cultural and artistic phenomenon (2)

*Rear Window* (1954)

### **WEEK 3**

#### Basic Model of Film Analysis – Story and Discourse

Historical development and structural analysis: The means and elements of filmic storytelling (1)

Primitive Mode of Representation (PMR), Cinema of Attractions

(Suggested) Reading:

David Bordwell. *Narration in the Fiction Film*. London/New York: Routledge, 1990.

Larry A. Brown. *How Films Tell Stories. The Narratology of Cinema*. Nashville: Creative Arts Press, 2016.

Noël Burch. "A Primitive Mode of Representation?" In: Thomas Elsaesser (ed.). *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*. London: BFI 1990, pp. 220-227.

Thomas Elsaesser and Warren Buckland. *Studying Contemporary American Film. A Guide to Movie Analysis*. London: Arnold Publishers, 2002.

Tom Gunning. "The Cinema of Attractions. Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde." [1986] In: Thomas Elsaesser (ed.). *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*. London: BFI 1990, pp. 56-62.

James Monaco. *How To Read a Film. Movies, Media, Multimedia*. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Allan Rowe and Paul Wells. "Film Form and Narrative." In: Jill Neldes (ed.). *An Introduction to Film Studies*. Third edition. London/New York: Routledge, 2003, pp. 53-90.

Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell. *Film History. An Introduction*. Second edition. New York: McGraw-Hill (Higher Education), 2003.

*Blackmail* (1929)

### **WEEK 4**

Historical development and structural analysis: The means and elements of filmic storytelling (2)

Mise-en-scène and montage, Institutional Mode of Representation (IMR), Découpage classique/Continuity editing (Cinema of Narrative Integration)

(Suggested) Reading:

André Bazin. "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema". In: André Bazin. *What Is Cinema?* Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1971, pp. 23-40.

David Bordwell. "Classical Hollywood Cinema: Narrational Principles and Procedures." In: Philip Rosen (ed.). *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology. A Film Theory Reader*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986, pp. 17-34.

Larry A. Brown. *How Films Tell Stories. The Narratology of Cinema*. Nashville: Creative Arts Press, 2016.

*Rebecca* (1940)

## **WEEK 5**

Historical development and structural analysis: The means and elements of filmic storytelling (3)

Descriptive Montage, Montage of Attractions, Intellectual Montage

(Suggested) Reading:

David Bordwell. *The Cinema of Eisenstein*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993.

Ian Christie and Richard Taylor (eds.). *Eisenstein Rediscovered*. London/New York: Routledge, 1993.

Eisenstein, Sergei. *Writings, 1922-1934. Selected Works, Vol. 1*. Edited by Richard Taylor. London/New York: I. B. Tauris, 2010.

Mark Joyce. "The Soviet Montage Cinema of the 1920s." In: Jill Neldes (ed.). *An Introduction to Film Studies*. Third edition. London/New York: Routledge, 2003, pp. 389-420.

Al LaValley and Barry P. Scherr (eds.). *Eisenstein at 100. A Reconsideration*. New Brunswick/New Jersey/London: Rutgers University Press, 2001.

Anne Nesbet. *Savage Junctions. Sergei Eisenstein and the Shape of Thinking*. London/New York: I. B. Tauris, 2003.

*Shadow of a Doubt* (1943)

## **WEEK 6**

Film semiotics: Signs and codes; denotation and connotation of signs (1)

(Suggested) Reading:

John Gibbs. *Mise-en-Scène. Film Style and Interpretation*. London/New York: Wallflower Press 2003.

Christian Metz. *Film Language. A Semiotics of the Cinema*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.

*Spellbound* (1945)

### **WEEK 7**

Denotation and connotation of signs (2); paradigmatic and syntagmatic connotations

*Notorious* (1946)

**Fall Break:** Monday, October 20 – Friday, October 26, 2025

### **WEEK 8**

Approaches to Film – Different methods and modes of film interpretation (1)

*Rope* (1948)

### **WEEK 9**

Approaches to Film – Different modes of film interpretation (2)

*Strangers on a Train* (1951)

### **WEEK 10**

Approaches to Film – Different modes of film interpretation (3)

*Vertigo* (1958)



**WEEK 11**

Approaches to Film – Different modes of film interpretation (4)

*North By Northwest* (1959)

**WEEK 12**

Approaches to Film – Different modes of film interpretation (5)

*Psycho* (1960)

**WEEK 13**

Approaches to Film – Different modes of film interpretation (6)

*The Birds* (1963)

**WEEK 14**

Approaches to Film – Different modes of film interpretation (7)

*Frenzy* (1972)

**WEEK 15**

December 15 – December 19, 2025: Completion week

**Literature**

Allen, Richard, and Murray Smith (eds.). *Film Theory and Philosophy*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

- Allen, Richard, and S. Ishii-Gonzales (eds.). *Alfred Hitchcock. Centenary Essays*. London: bfi British Film Institute, 2006.
- Altman, Rick. *Film/Genre*. London: British Film Institute, 2004.
- Baggett, David, and William A. Drumin (eds.). *Hitchcock and Philosophy: Dial M for Metaphysics*. Chicago/La Salle: Open Court, 2007.
- Baudry, Jean-Louis. "The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in the Cinema." In: Philip Rosen (ed.). *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology. A Film Theory Reader*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986, pp. 299-318.
- Bazin, André. *What is Cinema?* Vol. I & II. Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1971.
- Bazin, André. "The Ontology of the Photographic Image." In: André Bazin. *What Is Cinema?* Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1971, pp. 9-16.
- Bazin, André. "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema". In: André Bazin. *What Is Cinema?* Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1971, pp. 23-40.
- Bellour, Raymond. *The Analysis of Film*. Edited by Constance Penley. Bloomington / Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001.
- Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." In: Leo Braudy / Marshall Cohen (eds.). *Film Theory and Criticism. Introductory Readings*. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 731-751.
- Blandford, Steve, Barry K. Grant and Jim Hillier. *The Film Studies Dictionary*. London/New York: Arnold, Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Bordwell, David. "Classical Hollywood Cinema: Narrational Principles and Procedures." In: Philip Rosen (ed.). *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology. A Film Theory Reader*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986, pp. 17-34.
- Bordwell, David. *Narration in the Fiction Film*. London/New York: Routledge, 1990.
- Braudy, Leo, and Marshall Cohen (eds.). *Film Theory and Criticism. Introductory Readings*. Seventh Edition. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Burch, Noël. "A Primitive Mode of Representation?" In: Thomas Elsaesser (ed.). *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*. London: BFI 1990, pp. 220-227.
- Caughie, John (ed.). *Theories of Authorship. A Reader*. London/New York: British Film Institute/Routledge, 2001.
- Condon, Paul, and Jim Sangster: *The Complete Hitchcock*. London: Virgin Publishing Ltd., 2001.

- Deutelbaum, Marshall, and Leland Poague (eds.). *A Hitchcock Reader*. Second Edition. Chichester/Malden/Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.
- Elsaesser, Thomas, and Warren Buckland: *Studying Contemporary American Film. A Guide to Movie Analysis*. London: Arnold Publishers, 2002.
- Frampton, Daniel. *Filmosophy*. London: Wallflower Press, 2006.
- Gibbs, John. *Mise-en-Scène. Film Style and Interpretation*. London/New York: Wallflower Press 2003.
- Gunning, Tom. "The Cinema of Attractions. Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde." [1986] In: Thomas Elsaesser (ed.). *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*. London: BFI 1990, pp. 56-62.
- Hayward, Susan. *Cinema Studies. The Key Concepts*. Third Edition. London/New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Hill, John, and Pamela Church Gibson (eds.). *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Hillier, Jim (ed.). *Cahiers du cinéma 1: The 1950s. Neo-realism, Hollywood, The New Wave*. London: British Film Institute/Routledge, 1985.
- Kracauer, Siegfried. *Theory of Film. The Redemption of Physical Reality*. Princeton (NJ): Princeton University Press, 1997.
- Leitch, Thomas, and Leland Poague (eds.). *A Companion to Alfred Hitchcock*. Chichester/Malden/Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014.
- Litch, Mary M. *Philosophy Through Film*. New York/London: Routledge, 2002.
- Makkai, Katalin (ed.). *Vertigo*. London/New York: Routledge, 2013.
- McGilligan, Patrick: *Alfred Hitchcock: A Life in Darkness and Light*. New York: Harper Collins, 2003.
- McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media. The Extensions of Man*. Cambridge, MA/London: MIT Press, 1994.
- Metz, Christian. *Film Language. A Semiotics of the Cinema*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.
- Monaco, James. *How To Read a Film. Movies, Media, Multimedia*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." In Philip Rosen (ed.). *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology. A Film Theory Reader*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986, pp. 198-209.
- Münsterberg, Hugo. "The Photoplay. A Psychological Study." [1916] Excerpt in: Leo Braudy / Marshall Cohen (eds.). *Film Theory and Criticism. Introductory Readings*. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 401-407.

- Neale, Stephen. *Genre and Hollywood*. London/New York: Routledge 2000.
- Nelmes, Jill (ed.). *An Introduction to Film Studies*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. London/New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Nowell-Smith, Geoffrey (ed.). *The Oxford History of World Cinema*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Panofsky, Erwin. "Style and Medium in the Motion Pictures." [1934/1947] In: Leo Braudy / Marshall Cohen (eds.). *Film Theory and Criticism. Introductory Readings*. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 279-292.
- Porter, Burton F. *Philosophy Through Fiction and Film*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Education/Prentice Hall, 2004.
- Read, Rupert, and Jerry Goodenough (eds.). *Film as Philosophy. Essays in Cinema after Wittgenstein and Cavell*. Houndmills Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- Rosen, Philip (ed.). *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology. A Film Theory Reader*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.
- Smith, Murray, and Thomas E. Wartenberg (eds.). *Thinking Through Cinema. Film as Philosophy*. Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2006.
- Sterritt, David. *The Films of Alfred Hitchcock*. Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- Thompson, Kristin, and David Bordwell. *Film History. An Introduction*. Second edition. New York: McGraw-Hill (Higher Education), 2003.
- Truffaut, François (with Helen G. Scott): *Hitchcock*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984.
- Wartenberg, Thomas E., and Angela Curran (eds.). *The Philosophy of Film. Introductory Text and Readings*. Oxford/Malden: Blackwell, 2005.
- Wood, Robin. *Hitchcock's Films Revisited*. Revised Edition. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002.
- Žižek, Slavoj (ed.). *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Lacan (But Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock)*. London/New York: Verso, 2010.

## **Essay Deadlines**

Screening report # 1: Thursday, September 11, 2025, 1:45 pm (week 2)

Screening report # 2: Thursday, October 16, 2025, 1:45 pm (week 7).

Final essay: Thursday, December 18, 2025, midnight (week 15)

\* Please note: Graduating students – Final essay due in week 14, Monday, December 8, 2025, midnight.