

"What is the robbery of a bank compared to the founding of a bank?" -Bertolt Brecht

FILM 390/490-501 ADVANCED TOPICS IN CINEMA: THE HEIST FILM

DePaul University | Winter Quarter 2021

Thursdays | 1:30PM - 4:45PM | REMOTE

Instructor: Eric Marsh | marsh@cdm.depaul.edu

Office Hours: Fridays, 8AM-2PM, by email appointment only

Course Description - This course explores cinematic robbery. Focusing on the heist (or 'caper') film, the class will trace the history and trajectory of this unique and flexible genre from its origins in film noir and gangster films of classic Hollywood to its explosive emergence in the post-WWII era in Europe and beyond. Students will examine the narrative and stylistic conventions of the heist film, its evolving relationship with audiences over time through revision and variation, as well as its function as social commentary. Additionally, students will create their own projects and explore the heist as allegory for the filmmaking process: an imaginative and creative collaboration involving ideas and vision, planning and preparation, action and execution, and, ultimately, the production of an artistic or poetic work.

Textbook - All readings will be provided by the instructor and posted to D2L.

The Heist Film: Stealing With Style by Daryl Lee (2014)

The Best Laid Plans: Interrogating the Heist Film ed. by Jim Leach (2017)

American Film Genres by Stuart Kaminsky (1973)

A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre by Rick Altman (1984)

+ various supplemental readings will be assigned for group projects

Required Text – All readings will be provided by the instructor on [D2L](#).

Course Management System - All course materials will be available to you on [D2L](#).

Remote Learning - Class discussions will be held every week via [ZOOM](#) during the in-class meeting time. I will post a link to the video chat every week on the D2L homepage 5-10 minutes before the scheduled start.

DISCORD - In an effort to foster community for our class, I have created a discord channel for us: [FILM390 SAFEHOUSE](#). This space is for whatever you want. There are two channels: 1) Hangouts, which is for chatting about anything, class, movies, whatever, jokes, gifs, memes, etc 2) Q&A for anything questions you have (serious, or, not?) for me related to the course or cinema in general.

BASIS FOR EVALUATION

CREW PROJECTS 60%
FINAL PROJECT 20%
ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION 20%
TOTAL 100%

A = 100 – 94, A- = 93 – 90, B+ = 89 – 88, B = 87 – 83, B- = 82 – 80, C+ = 79 – 78, C = 77 – 73,
C- = 72 – 70, D+ = 69 – 68, D = 67 – 63, D- = 62 – 60, F = 59 – 0.

CLASS SCHEDULE & COURSE OUTLINE

WEEK 1	1/7	INTRODUCTION & ORIGINS
WEEK 2	1/14	DEFINING THE HEIST FILM
WEEK 3	1/21	THE ART OF FAILURE
WEEK 4	1/28	THE NOIR HEIST & ITS SATIRE
WEEK 5	2/4	CONCLUSIONS: THE HEIST FILM IN THE 1950s
WEEK 6	2/11	HIGH & LOW: THE HEIST ADAPTS ITS MESSAGE
WEEK 7	2/18	MELVILLE & MINIMALISM
WEEK 8	2/25	MANN & MASCULINITY
WEEK 9	3/4	HOLLYWOOD AND THE BLACK STICKUP
WEEK 10	3/11	FIN DE SIÈCLE: DEATH AND REBIRTH
FINALS	3/18	THE 21st CENTURY HEIST (11:30AM-1:45PM)

Content & Schedule Changes – The course schedule is subject to change depending on class progress, time constraints, and material availability. The overall workload, however, will not change. Make sure you pace yourself accordingly. You will be notified of any changes in the syllabus in a timely fashion.

Screenings - All films assigned for the course will be made available to stream on D2L.

Here is the (subject-to-change) list of what we will be watching:

The Asphalt Jungle, 1950, Huston, USA, 112 min
The Lavender Hill Mob, 1951, Chrichton, UK, 81 min
Du rififi chez les hommes, 1955, Dassin, France, 115 min
The Killing, 1956, Kubrick, USA, 85 min
Bob le Flambeur, 1956, Melville, France, 102 min
Endless Desire, 1958, Imamura, Japan, 101 min
Big Deal on Madonna Street, 1958, Monicelli, Italy, 111 min
Assault on the Pay Train, 1962, Farias, Brazil, 102 min
How To Steal a Million, 1966, Wyler, USA, 123 min
Le Cercle Rouge, 1970, Melville, France, 140 min
Thief, 1981, Mann, USA, 123 min
Heat, 1995, Mann, USA, 170 min
Dead Presidents, 1995, d. Hughes Bros, USA, 119 min
Set it Off, 1996, d. Gray, USA, 123 mins
Ocean's 11, 2001, Soderbergh, USA, 117 min

Assignment Breakdown & Due Dates

All projects in this course will be done collaboratively, in groups, aka CREWS. CREWS will be randomly assigned for each group project. Each crew will receive INSTRUCTIONS from me (aka things to read, watch, research) and work together to formulate both a paper and presentation detailing and synthesizing their ideas and findings.

GROUP PROJECT #1: THE HEIST IN THE 1950s (20%)

Crews will research and present on a wide variety of heist films from the 1950s.
Due Week 5

GROUP PROJECT #2: THE HEIST ADAPTS ITS MESSAGE (20%)

Crews will research and present on a wide variety of heist films from the 1960s and 1970s.
Due Week 7 & 8

GROUP PROJECT #3: DEATH AND REBIRTH (20%)

Crews will research and present on the state of the heist film in the 1980s and 1990s.
Due Week 9 & 10

FINAL PROJECT (20%)

Students will have the opportunity to form their own crews - or work alone - and create a project inspired by our journey through the heist genre. This may be a film, research paper, video essay, etc; Process and methodology will be up to the students.

Due 3/18

Course Policies - In addition to the DePaul University course policies (see student handbook), the following policies apply to this course:

Weekly Updates – After each class meeting I will post an update on D2L detailing the immediate class “business”: assignments, readings, screenings, etc, anything that you need to *do* before the next class meeting. You may also keep track of this on the D2L content page. If you want to keep up with the course you *must* read these updates or use the checklist method on D2L and make sure you’re on track. No excuses.

Attendance - Attendance is mandatory. However: given the extraordinary circumstances of our current situation I understand that this may not always be possible, for a variety of reasons, which is why all of the ZOOM meetings will be recorded and posted to D2L. If you are not able to attend any of our meetings please reach out to me via email and let me know ahead of time. Every situation will be handled according to individual circumstances and the instructor’s discretion. NOTE: Even though we are virtual this quarter, class time is most productive when everyone arrives promptly and comes prepared to discuss that week’s topics (i.e. readings, films, etc).

Group Evaluations - For group projects, each team member is required to turn in a written evaluation of their experience. If all evaluations are uniformly positive, all group members will share the grades evenly. If evaluations are negative, the grades of the group members will vary (and not in a good way). In other words: don’t double cross your crew.

Class Discussion - Student participation in class discussions will be measured in two ways. First, students are highly encouraged to ask questions and offer comments relevant to the day’s topic. Participation allows the instructor to “hear” the student’s voice when grading papers. Secondly, students will be called upon by the instructor to offer comments related to the films and reading assignments. Students must keep up with the readings and films to participate in class discussion. If you come to class without having watched the films, you will be marked absent.

Attitude - A professional and academic attitude is expected throughout this course. Measurable examples of non-academic or unprofessional attitude include but are not limited to: talking to others when the instructor is speaking, mocking another’s opinion, cell phones ringing, emailing, texting or using the internet whether on a phone or computer. If any issues arise, a student may be asked to leave the classroom. The professor will work with the Dean of Students Office to navigate such issues.

Civil Discourse - DePaul University is a community that thrives on open discourse that challenges students, both intellectually and personally, to be Socially Responsible Leaders. It is the expectation that all dialogue in this course is civil and respectful of the dignity of each student. Any instances of disrespect or hostility can jeopardize a student’s ability to be successful in the course. The professor will partner with the Dean of Students Office to assist in managing such issues.

Reading Assignments - Reading assignments are *mandatory*. Lectures may introduce additional material not available in the readings, and the readings may explore concepts not mentioned in class. All readings will be provided on D2L.

Grading - Grades and/or written feedback will be given for each assignment. In order to be accepted for grading, assignments must be turned in on time. *Late work will receive zero points for grading.* Failure to turn in even one assignment has a significant impact on your grade.

All Undergraduate Students - You may opt to change the grading basis for any or all of your courses to a PASS/D/FAIL. A grade of Pass (P) will indicate that the student's work met expectations for a grade of at least C-. Work that would merit a grade of D+ or D in the traditional grading basis would still earn a D+ or D. Work that does not merit a passing grade will earn a Fail (F). The PASS/D/FAIL grading option may apply to any graduation requirement, including courses in the major, minor, liberal studies program or open electives.

Academic Policies - All students are required to manage their class schedules each term in accordance with the deadlines for enrolling and withdrawing as indicated in the University Academic Calendar. Information on enrollment, withdrawal, grading and incompletes can be found [here](#)

Online Course Evaluations - Evaluations are a way for students to provide valuable feedback regarding their instructor and the course. Detailed feedback will enable the instructor to continuously tailor teaching methods and course content to meet the learning goals of the course and the academic needs of the students. They are a requirement of the course and are key to continue to provide you with the highest quality of teaching. The evaluations are anonymous; the instructor and administration do not track who entered what responses. A program is used to check if the student completed the evaluations, but the evaluation is completely separate from the student's identity. Since 100% participation is our goal, students are sent periodic reminders over three weeks. Students do not receive reminders once they complete the evaluation. Students complete the evaluation online in CampusConnect.

Academic Integrity - Plagiarism is dishonest behavior and therefore violates collegiality as well as University policy. Any cases of plagiarism will automatically receive a zero and be reported to departmental and University officials for disciplinary action. You should familiarize yourself with behavior that constitutes plagiarism by reviewing the University's policy regarding academic dishonesty at:
<http://academicintegrity.depaul.edu/Resources/Students/index.html>

Special Needs - Students who feel they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the instructor privately to discuss their specific needs. All discussions will remain confidential. To ensure that you receive the most appropriate accommodation based on your needs, contact the instructor as early as possible in the

quarter (preferably within the first week of class), and make sure that you have contacted the Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) at: csd@depaul.edu.

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