Film 484: Film Directors/Woody Allen

“You got to remember that Woody Allen is a writer…. It can be argued that he is America’s greatest writer.”

—Jonathan Schwartz, WNYC

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Class Meeting: Tuesday & Thursday, 9:40 - 12
Office Hours: Wednesday & Friday, 10 – 11; and by appointment

Library Films & Texts on Reserve:

Each of the films is on two-hour reserve at the Mansfield Library's front desk. Also on reserve are the following books:


Plan:

Woody Allen began his career as a gag writer; moved to doing stand-up comedy; then began writing film scripts, short fiction and plays. His first work as a director came in 1966, with What's Up, Tiger Lily? His next efforts in directing—including Take the Money and Run (1969), Bananas (1971), Everything You Wanted to Know About Sex (1972), Sleeper (1973) and Love and Death (1975)—carried forward his work as a comedian in the tradition of Charlie Chaplin and Groucho Marx. In 1977 came Annie Hall, a film that Graham McCann has spoken of as “a watershed,” for the reason that with this film Allen introduces an intellectual, emotional and narrative complexity that had shown itself less crucial in his earlier films, with the possible exception of Play It Again, Sam, a Harold Ross directed film based upon Allen’s Broadway play of the same name, and starring Allen, Tony Roberts and Diane Keaton, the three of whom would be reunited in Annie Hall. "What happens in Annie Hall," writes the critic Nancy Pogel, "is that we experience, more than in earlier Allen films, a feeling for the burden of history, the sophisticated self-consciousness, and the accompanying anxiety that contemporary people carry into their
search of love, integrity, and meaning.” Or as McGann again writes, “Dubbed ‘a nervous romance,’ Allen’s comedy captured many of the preoccupations and problems of lovers in the 1970s, a period in which the lessons of the women’s movement and psychoanalysis were slowly taking effect in popular culture.” It is a film wherein Allen also begins to make his mark not only as a critic of contemporary society but also as a moralist, and though his standing this way would, in time, come up for serious question, his films, after Annie Hall have, in fact, demonstrated a keen interest in the Socratic, or ethical, question of how are we to live our lives? This hasn’t meant a disavowal of the purposes of comedy, for comedy (like its opposite, tragedy) may well be thought of as intertwined with our understanding of the good, or ethical, life. (Cf. the French New-Wave director Eric Rohmer: “I think you only have a comic sense if you have a tragic sense too; all scenes from tragedy could play as comedy.”) But it is true that Allen’s relation to comedy begins to shift at this point in his career, becoming more integrated with narrative, itself so wrapped up with matters of ethical understandings and desire. And it is with this film, Annie Hall, that we will begin our study of Allen’s films, focusing on his directorial work as social critic and moralist over the span of the next thirty-five plus years, taking us to up to later films, like Match Point (2005) and Vicky Cristina Barcelona (2008); the first a homage to Theodore Dreiser’s novel An American Tragedy and the second to Francois Truffaut’s film Jules and Jim; and ending with three of his most recent films: Midnight in Paris (2011), Blue Jasmine (2013) and Irrational Man (2015). The later films will also offer us an opportunity to talk more about the part that homage has played in Allen’s work.

Tentative Schedule:

9/1 Introduction & viewing of Annie Hall (1977)
9/3 Annie Hall (discussion)
9/8 Manhattan (1979); viewing & discussion
9/10 Manhattan, discussion
9/15 A Midsummer Night’s Sex Comedy (1982); viewing & discussion
9/17 A Midsummer Night’s Sex Comedy, discussion
9/22 Zelig (1983); viewing & discussion
9/24 Zelig, discussion
9/29 Hannah and Her Sisters (1986); viewing & discussion
10/1 Hannah and Her Sisters, discussion
10/6 Radio Days (1987); viewing and discussion
10/8 Radio Days, discussion
10/13 Crimes and Misdemeanors (1989); viewing & discussion
10/15 Crimes and Misdemeanors, discussion
10/20 Husbands and Wives (1992); viewing & discussion
10/22 Husbands and Wives, discussion
10/27 Midterm Examination
10/29 Sweet and Lowdown (1999); viewing & discussion
11/3 Sweet and Lowdown, discussion
11/5 Match Point (2005); viewing & discussion
11/10 Match Point, discussion
11/12 Vicky Cristina Barcelona (2007); viewing & discussion
11/17  Vicky Cristina Barcelona, discussion
11/19  Midnight in Paris (2011); viewing & discussion
11/24  Midnight in Paris (2011), discussion
11/26  Thanksgiving: no class
12/1   Blue Jasmine (2013); viewing & discussion
12/3   Blue Jasmine, discussion
12/8   Irrational Man (2015); viewing & discussion
12/10  Irrational Man, discussion
12/15  Final Examination: Tuesday, 10:10 – 12:10

Requirements:

Participation in class discussions is expected and attendance is mandatory. Your grade will be based upon the following: a midterm exam (25% each), a final examination (25%), a term paper (30%), and attendance and participation (20%). Regarding attendance, you are permitted two absences without penalty; each subsequent absence will result in a subtraction of five points from the twenty points allocated to the participation and attendance portion of your grade (e.g., 20% to 15% for the third absence, 15% to 10% for the fourth). Late arrivals are frowned upon, and if you need, for some good reason, to leave class early, you are required to notify me ahead of time; otherwise, an early departure will count as an absence from class.

University Policy on Academic Honesty:

All students must practice academic honesty. Academic misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and/or a disciplinary sanction by the University.

All students need to be familiar with the Student Conduct Code. The Code is available for review online.

University Plagiarism Warning:

“Plagiarism is the representing of another’s work as one’s own. It is a particularly intolerable offense in the academic community and is strictly forbidden. Students who plagiarize may fail the course and may be remanded to Academic Court for possible suspension or expulsion. (See Student Code section of the University catalogue.)

“Students must always be very careful to acknowledge any kind of borrowing that is included in their work. This means not only borrowed wording but also ideas. Acknowledgment of whatever is not one’s own original work is the proper and honest use of sources. Failure to acknowledge whatever is not one’s own original work is plagiarism.”