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English Major

Smoke In Your Eyes: The symbolic evolution of the cigarette

Faculty Advisor: Professor Peter Gaffney

The symbolic connotations of the cigarette have greatly evolved over the course of the 20th century, and continue to do so in the beginning of the 21st century. The fields of sociology and film and other cultural studies allow us to explore this evolution by giving us the tools with which to analyze the shifts that the cigarette has undergone as a cultural phenomenon. In this seminar, we will explore the constant dialogue that takes place between social patterns relating to smoking that transcribe into cinematic scenes, and film motifs focused on the cigarette that are then adopted by society. In addition, we will look at how changing attitudes over time have impacted people's perceptions about smoking: from smoking as a rite of passage to smoking as profane.

I wish to lead the discussion in multiple directions that include the way cigarettes have been advertised through the decades, the appeal behind the cigarette for different groups of consumers, the role of cigarettes in social movements (the Women's Liberation Movement in particular), the use of the cigarette for character identification in film (from the male rebel to the femme fatale), and the cigarette as a means of bringing people together either through the seductive encounter – Do you have a light? – or through its social quality similar to food and coffee.

Most importantly, I would like to encourage the group to approach cultural phenomena, such as this one, critically. Is there an inherent contradiction between today's ostracism of smokers and the contemporaneous nostalgic portrayal of smoking as glamorous in *Mad Men*? Could there ever be another object that overshadows the cigarette as the ultimate cultural symbol?

I am personally fascinated by all that revolves around a habit as widespread as that of cigarette smoking, and I believe that people with a wide range of interests would also find this topic worth exploring. For example, although I do not envision delving deeply into regulatory considerations, policy choices that have been made at the political level are both a cause and a result of the shift in perceptions about cigarettes; this should interest political science students. Also, people studying psychology would likely find appealing the analysis of the way in which film and advertising play with self-image and desire in connection with the cigarette. We will touch upon the health aspects by examining advertising campaigns showing the risks of smoking, which are becoming more medically oriented and graphic; for this reason, natural science majors would be able to make a valuable contribution to the seminar. Additionally, history students should find this topic engaging because we will be following the evolution of the cigarette as a symbol in changing historical contexts.

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Prospective Syllabus (seminar applicants are strongly encouraged to suggest their own texts for inclusion in the final syllabus)

Smoke as rite of passage:

- Selection from Smoking in Adolescence: Images and Identities by Barbara Lloyd, Kevin Lucas, Janet Holland, Sheena McGrellis, and Sean Arnold.
- “Juvenile smoking and the ‘feverish anxiety to become a man’” from Smoking in British Popular Culture 1800-2000 by Matthew Hilton
- Scene from “Now and Then” by Lesli Linka Glatter (1995)
- Scene from “Stand By Me” by Rob Reiner (1986)
- Selection from Forever Young: The ‘Teen-Aging’ of Modern Culture by Marcel Danesi

Smoke as symbol of masculinity:

- Selection from The Marlboro Man: American Icon Series by Mark Crispin Miller
- “Man and his cigarette: masculinity and the mass market” from Smoking in British Popular Culture 1800-2000 by Matthew Hilton
- Scene from “Rebel Without a Cause” by Nicholas Ray (1955)
- Scene from “Casablanca” by Michael Curtiz (1942)
- Scene from “A Bout de Souffle” by Jean-Luc Godard (1960)
- Selection from The Cigarette Century: The Rise, Fall, and Deadly Persistence of the Product that Defined America by Allan M. Brandt

Smoke as symbol of femininity:

- “The Century of the Self” by Adam Curtis for the BBC (2002)
- “Consuming the unrespectable: smoking and femininity” from Smoking in British Popular Culture 1800-2000 by Matthew Hilton
- Scene from “Detour” by Edgar G. Ulmer (1945)
- Scene from “Grease” by Randal Kleiser (1978)
- Scene from “North by Northwest” by Alfred Hitchcock (1959)
- “Torches of Freedom: Themes of Women’s Liberation in American Cigarette Advertising” by Steve Craig (1999)

Smoke as ultimate symbol:

- Selection from Cigarettes Are Sublime by Richard Klein
- Scene from “Coffee and Cigarettes” by Jim Jarmusch (2004)
- “Mad Men” Episode 1 Season 1 (2007)
- Selection from The Cigarette Century: The Rise, Fall, and Deadly Persistence of the Product that Defined America by Allan M. Brandt
- Selection from Of cigarettes, high heels, and other interesting things: An introduction to semiotics by Marcel Danesi

Smoke as profane:

- “The presentation of medical knowledge in the media” and other selections from Smoking in British Popular Culture 1800-2000 by Matthew Hilton
- Selection from Smoking: Who has the right? by Jeffrey A. Schaler and Magda E. Schaler
- Selection from The Cigarette Century: The Rise, Fall, and Deadly Persistence of the Product that Defined America by Allan M. Brandt
- “1950s Vintage Cigarette, Tobacco & Smoking Films: Effects of Cigarettes, Nicotine & Tobacco Industry Advertising”
- Scene from “Thank You For Smoking” by Jason Reitman (2005)
- “In Defense of Smokers”, article by Luiz a. Castro-Santos
- “Smoking Clean”, article by Joel Best and Jun Ayukawa

Potential Speaker:

Someone working for Leo Burnett’s advertising company (where Professor Gaffney has previously worked).