History of the American Film, 1977-Present

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In this course, we will explore the vast and complex arena of American cinema since 1977. While one of our core objectives will be to develop a nuanced understanding of the evolution of cinematic practices during this period, we will diverge from a “linear” model of historicity and organize our encounters with films and critical theory, for the most part, thematically. We will ask: what problems do these films address, amplify or claim to resolve? How do particular narrative and visual modes advance particular ideologies? How can spectacular stories both entertain and destabilize our sense of truth? We are interested in the “productive frictions” that draw films together within broader cultural, political, technological, and economic frames—even if these films were produced decades apart. Thus, our discussions and analyses will invariably acknowledge the cultural conditions within which particular films emerged, but we must also consider our own situatedness as creatives, scholars, and just plain movie lovers. While we acknowledge a cinematic “canon” as it has been conceived for decades, we also understand that canon is itself a construction that is scaffolded by systems of power. By examining works that are less often acknowledged in film survey courses, we exercise our unique opportunity as students at SCA to reimage and, in fact, re-engineer conventional models and metrics that are often applied in the determination of cinematic “value.”