

PSY/COM 250: The Psychology/Rhetoric of Film (Spring, 2012)

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Classroom: 107 Science Center
Class Times: M, T, W, Th, F -- 9-1
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Course Description & Goals

Movies can be approached by psychologically-minded investigators from a number of different directions. From one direction, film is a representational medium that is capable of symbolizing an enormous range of human actions using such cinematic/narrative devices as character, plot, theme, editing, camera movement, etc. These represented actions are analyzable from a variety of psychological perspectives.

Approached from another direction, motion pictures are technical, rhetorical and artistic objects created by groups of individuals working collaboratively within particular social and historical contexts. These film-makers can be thought of as having identifiable “psychological characteristics” (e.g., conscious beliefs and attitudes, behavioral predispositions, unconscious complexes, etc.) that shape the nature of their work.

Finally, a critical observer can make the assumption that there are psychological mechanisms operating within audience members as they watch films. These mechanisms can be understood at different levels: perceptual (e.g., the perception of motion), behavioral (e.g., the impact of violent films on behavior) and cognitive (e.g., the complex meaning making process that occurs while watching any movie, from *Citizen Kane* to *Mall Cop*).

The primary goal of this course will be to engage students in viewing narrative fiction film from each of these three directions. Through the use of representative movies, critical commentaries and empirical studies, students will come to be familiar each orientation. Hopefully, students will learn to see movies as “psychologically alive”--creations of the mind that are capable of representing the full range of human concerns through cognitive and symbolic processes occurring within viewers.

In order to accomplish the goals of this course, an interdisciplinary approach will be used; we will draw relevant work from psychology, film studies, literary criticism and mass communication. There will some opportunities to compare and contrast film with other narrative and visual media such as television, theater, literature, etc.

Reading Materials

The primary text for this course is:

Dine Young, S. (2012). *Psychology at the Movies*. Oxford/Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

In addition, there will be a variety of articles, chapters, and excerpts from magazines, journals and books. These materials are listed with the class schedule and will be reserved at the

library.

Class Attendance & Participation

Classroom participation will be absolutely essential. Since the format will be primarily discussion based, your contribution will have a large impact on how much you and the other students learn. Therefore, for every unexcused absence after the first (either film or discussion/lecture), you will have 5 points subtracted from your final grade.

In addition, your classroom participation will be worth 100 points and will be assigned a grade as follows:

Outstanding	95+ points
Excellent	90 points
Very Good	85 points
Good	80 points
Average	75 points
Below Average	70 or below points

Weekly Journal

Each week you will turn in a journal that captures your reflections about important aspects of the class—movies, readings, class discussions, & projects. The intention of these journals is for you to demonstrate your engagement in the material—your questions, your emotional reactions, your speculations, your insights, your criticisms, etc. This journal is worth a total of 75 points.

Class Projects

You will be required to do 4 projects. These projects are designed to parallel the topic of the course that week. The projects will involve applying the readings, doing library research, watching additional movies, doing interviews, etc. Each project will be discussed in detail the week it is due. The first project will be in class and will be worth 50 points. The second project will be worth 75 points. The last two projects will be worth 100 points each. Late projects will be deducted 10% for every class day they are late.

Exams

There are no exams. Have a nice spring.

Grading

(Total of 500 points)

450-500	A
400-449	B
350-399	C
300-349	D
299 & Below	F

Class Schedule & Readings (Psychology/Rhetoric of Film)

WEEK 1—INTERPRETION AND RHETORIC IN FILM

April 30

Topic: Introduction to course; Psychologists in the movies

Reading: Dine Young, Ch. 1 & Ch. 3

Film: *Good Will Hunting* (Van Sant, 1997) or *The Sixth Sense* (Shyamalan, 1999)

May 1

Topic: None

Reading: None

Film: *Toy Story* (Lasseter; 1995) or *The Wizard of Oz* (Fleming, 1939)

May 2

Topic: Freudian & other “deep” interpretations of movies

Reading: Dine Young, Ch. 2; Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment* (pp. 3-19; 159-183)

Film: *The Shining* (Kubrick, 1980)

May 3

Topic: Feminist interpretations; stylistic interpretations

Reading: Flitterman-Lewis, “Point-of-view in *Notorious*”

Film: *Notorious* (Hitchcock, 1946)

May 4

Topic: The process of interpretation

Reading: Bordwell, *Making Meaning* (pp. 1-18, 36, 40-42, 145)

Film: Mystery film & In-class Project #1

WEEK 2--FROM THE MINDS OF THE FILM-MAKERS

May 7

Topic: *Psycho* & the process of interpretation

Reading: Bordwell, *Making Meaning* (pp. 224-248)

Film: *Psycho* (Hitchcock, 1960)

May 8

Topic: None

Reading: None

Film: Class choice (deep film)

May 9

Topic: Auteurs; Analyzing Woody Allen

Reading: Dine Young, Ch. 4; Freud, "Creative writers and day-dreaming"; Corliss, "Scenes from a Break-Up"

Film: *Husbands and Wives* (Allen, 1992)

May 10

Topic: Analyzing Alfred Hitchcock

Reading: Spoto, *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock* (pp. 263-299) & Spoto, *The Dark Side of Genius* (pp. 384-402)

Film: *Vertigo* (Hitchcock, 1959)

May 11

Topic: Analyzing Film-Maker ???

Reading: None

Film: Class choice

WEEK 3--THE AUDIENCE RESPONDS**May 14** (Project #2 due)

Topic: Profiling the audience

Reading: Dine Young, Ch. 5

Film: Class choice (mega-popular film)

May 15

Topic: None

Reading: None

Film: *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*

May 16

Topic: Comprehension & emotion of film

Reading: Dine Young, Ch. 6

Film: Clips from emotionally arousing movies

May 17

Topic: Viewer enjoyment of film

Reading: Dine Young, Ch. 7

Film: Class choice (romantic comedy)

May 18

Topic: Viewer reflection (cont.)

Reading: Radway, "Readers and their Romances"

Film: *Taxi Driver* (Scorcese, 1976) or *The Exorcist* (Friedkin, 1973)

WEEK 4--SELF AS VIEWER

May 21 (Project #3 Due)

Topic: The effects of film

Reading: Dine Young, Ch. 8; Bozzuto, "Cinematic neurosis following *The Exorcist*"; Bandura, Ross & Ross, "The imitation of film-mediated aggressive models"

Film: Film clips of violence in film

May 22

Topic: None

Reading: None

Film: *The Hustler* (Rosen, 1961) or *Star Wars* (Lucas, 1977)

May 23

Topic: Movies as equipment for living

Reading: Dine Young, Ch. 9 & Ch. 10; Burke, "Literature as equipment for living"; Dine Young, "Movies as equipment for living"; McAdams, *Stories We Live By* (pp. 11-35); McMillan, "The Wizard of Oz"; Hesley & Hesley, *Rent Two Films* (pp. 3-25)

Film: *Northern Exposure*, "Rosebud" episode

May 24

Topic: Movies as equipment for living (cont.)

Reading: None

Film: Class choice (meaningful film)

May 25 (Project #4 due at noon)

No class

Psychology of Film--Reading List

- Bandura, A., Ross & Ross, D. Imitation of Film-Mediated Aggressive Models. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 66 (1), 3-11.
- Bettleheim, B. (1976). *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairytales*. Knopf, Inc.
- Bordwell, D. (1989). *Making Meaning; Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema*. Harvard University Press.
- Bozzuto, J.C. (1975). Cinematic Neurosis Following "The Exorcist." *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 161 (1), 43-48.
- Burke, K. (1967). Literature as equipment for living. In *The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action*.
- Corliss, R. (1992, August 31). Scenes from a break-up. *Time*, 54-58
- Dine Young, S. (2000). Movies as Equipment for Living. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 17 (4), 447-46.
- Freud, Sigmund. Creative Writers and Day Dreaming. In Peter Gay (Ed). *The Freud Reader* (pp. 436-443). New York: W.W. Norton.
- Flitterman-Lewis, S. (1951). To See and Not to Be: Female Subjectivity and the Law in Hitchcock's Notorious. *Literature and Psychology* (pp. 1-15).
- Hesley, J.W. & Hesley, J.G. (1998). *Rent Two Films and Let's Talk in the Morning: Using Popular Movies in Psychotherapy*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- McAdams, D.P. (1993). *The Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self* (pp. 11-37). New York: Guilford Press.
- McMillan, T. (1991). The Wizard of Oz. In David Rosenberg (Ed.) *The Movie That Changed My Life* (pp.253-265). New York: Penguin.
- Radway, J. (2001). Readers and their romances. In J.L. Machor and P. Goldstein (Eds.) *Reception study: From literary theory to cultural studies*. New York: Routledge.
- Spoto, D. (1992). Excerpts from *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock*. & *The Darkside of Genius*.