

CMST 3013: Topics in Film (Animated Cinema)

Department of Communication Studies | College of Humanities and Social Sciences



Spring 2019 | Section 1 | MWF 1:30 – 2:20 PM & W 6:00 – 8:50 PM | Coates 202 & 103

Instructor: **Greg Langner**
Email: **glangn1@lsu.edu**

Office: **Coates 321**
Office hours: **MWF 12:30 – 1:15 PM**

Required Materials:

Readings and reading “alternatives” will be distributed through Moodle.

Tentative film list: *Akira*, *Big Hero 6*, *The Iron Giant*, *Persepolis*, *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, *Giovanni's Island*, *A Cat in Paris*, *Lilo and Stitch*, *Kubo and the Two Strings*, *TBD* (1980's animation), *Watership Down*, *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse*.

Please note that some of the films we watch for this class contain graphic content, as well as sensitive topics. You should research the synopses and trailers for each film before every screening.

Course Overview and Outcomes:

This course will broadly survey multiple histories of cartoon animation across cultures, and more specifically interrogate the approximately century-old history of animated cinema. We will then proceed to develop approaches for critically analyzing animated cinema through the contextual lenses of gender, sexuality, ability, race, social class, politics, and economics. By viewing animated films as both unique works of art, and as rhetorical texts functioning to persuade, we will assess the nuanced ways in which cartoon animation continually alternates between cultural conformity and cultural subversion. Lastly, by recognizing a wide range of form in animated cinema — from multiple styles of 2D animation, to classic and contemporary claymation, to the evolution of 3D animation — we will construct an understanding of animated cinema as a distinct and culturally-significant instrument of aesthetic communication.

As a result of this course, students should be able to:

1. Develop a readily-accessible overview knowledge of the history of animated cinema.
2. Critically analyze the cultural significance of animated texts through a variety of lenses.
3. Apply a richly developed understanding of animated cinema to the analysis and production of more “conventional” film texts.
 - a. In other words, students should understand how the techniques used in animation inherently translate to live-action film, and how they can be deliberately manipulated to enhance the overall effectiveness of cinema as a craft.
4. Explain and rationalize both sides of the argument on whether animated cinema qualifies as a *genre*.

Communication Studies and Film:

Study after study demonstrates the top skill valued across virtually every professional industry is the ability to effectively communicate, closely followed by the ability to think critically and creatively.

Film classes are often taught *as* Communication classes because, first and foremost, film production is a complex *communication intensive* process requiring the careful crafting and delivery of messages between the dozens of unique roles played in the filmmaking process — screenwriters, directors, cinematographers, producers, performers, and well beyond. Further, films themselves are culturally significant communicative entities that require careful attention to the positions and appetites of their audiences.

Consequently, Communication Studies as an academic and professional discipline is uniquely equipped to prepare students with skills and knowledge necessary to progress towards careers in filmmaking.

COURSE POLICIES

SPECIAL NEEDS ACCOMMODATION

If you have a disability that may have some impact on your work in this class and for which you may require accommodations, please see a Coordinator with [LSU Disability Services](#) (124 Johnston Hall) so that such accommodations can be arranged. After you receive the accommodation letters, please meet with me to discuss the provisions of those accommodations during the first two weeks of class.

ATTENDANCE & LATE WORK

If you are absent, you will not be allowed to turn in assignments that were due or to make up any quizzes, exams, presentations, or projects. The only possible exception is if you have a documented, excused absence. Notify the instructor in advance if you know you are going to miss class, and the reason for your absence.

Failing to attend class on your own assigned presentation days, without an excused absence *and* prior notification given to the instructor, will result in a severe penalty to your overall grade. If you fail to deliver any of your required presentations, you will be unable to receive a passing grade in the class.

Because CMST 3013 is a 4-unit course (instead of the usual 3), you are required to attend weekly labs (film screenings), every Wednesday from 6:00 PM – 8:50 PM.

CLASSROOM RESPECT

Do not talk over others. Give your full attention during class discussions, lectures, workshops, and screenings. Arrive to class *on time*. Regularly communicate with your instructor as needed. If you are late (don't be), *do not ever enter the classroom during another student's presentation*.

PLAGIARISM & ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Plagiarism will not be tolerated. If you plagiarize even a portion of any assignment, exam, etc., you will receive an automatic 'F' in the class.

TECH & EMAIL

Do not have your phone out during class (seriously); keep your phone on silent or vibrate. If you use your phone during another student's performance, you will automatically lose 10% of your grade on that same performance. Laptops and tablets are not permitted in this class unless otherwise confirmed by the instructor.

Always use your campus email when emailing the instructor; always state your first and last name, and the title and section number of the class in the *subject line* of the email. When the instructor replies to your questions via email, always respond to confirm (this is a good habit in most professional settings).

EXTRA CREDIT

Extra credit *may* be offered at some point, but there are no guarantees for any extra credit opportunities.

ASSIGNMENTS & GRADES

DAILY PARTICIPATION & SCREENING RESPONSES

30% of your total grade. You will never receive credit for simply showing up to class. Earning a Participation grade means *actively* and *consistently* engaging in class discussions, lectures, and activities, and with a demonstrated understanding of the material.

MIDTERM EXAM

10% of your total grade. Your midterm will assess your understanding of animated cinema and your ability to *apply* what you learn from the readings (and reading alternatives), rather than to simply regurgitate terminologies and film narratives.

FILM ANALYSIS PAPER

20% of your total grade. Any time this semester (*after* Week 2 and *before* Spring Break), you will submit an approximately 6-page critical analysis of a film we have watched for class. I expect these to be thoughtful, insightful, and carefully written (in MLA or APA). For the sake of clarity/readability, divide your paper into sections and subsections.

The **Introduction** must first (1) introduce and richly describe the narrative and style of the film. Next, (2) introduce the thesis (core argument) of your analysis. At the end of the Introduction, (3) preview the Body of the paper, and then (4) introduce the theoretical and contextual lenses you have used for your analysis.

The **Body** is the analysis itself, framed through two key lenses — one *theoretical*, and one *contextual*. (1) Introduce and explain a single theory (discussed in class) that will help to clarify your analysis; rationalize why you have chosen this theory. Next, (2) introduce and rationalize your chosen contextual lens (gender, sexuality, ability, race, social class, politics, economics, etc.). As you (3) proceed to detail your critical analysis, retain a focus on how your insights connect with and are made meaningful through your chosen theoretical and contextual lenses.

The **Conclusion** is a simple summary of your analysis, and a reinforcement of your original thesis.

FILM RECOMMENDATION PRESENTATION

20% of your total grade. You will give a 4 – 6 minute presentation that advocates for your fellow students to watch an animated film we have not viewed in class. Rationalize your recommendation by making clear connections between the film, the concepts we discuss, and the outcome objectives for the class (top of syllabus). You must include a short clip (45 seconds-ish), screenshots, and you must perform at least one quote of dialogue from the film.

SHORT ANIMATION PROJECT

20% of your total grade. In a group assigned by your instructor (me, Greg), you will produce a short animated film (2 – 5 minutes). You will be graded according to how well your film engages the audience, how well it demonstrates a clear understanding of cinematic communication, and how well you work with your group.

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|-----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|--------------|
| A+ (97% – 100%) | B+ (87% – 89%) | C+ (77% – 79%) | D+ (67% – 69%) | F (0% – 59%) |
| A (93% – 96%) | B (83% – 86%) | C (73% – 76%) | D (63% – 66%) | |
| A- (90% – 92%) | B- (80% – 82%) | C- (70% – 72%) | D- (60% – 62%) | |

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

| Week | Day | Class Agenda | Material(s) Due |
|--------------------------------|----------|--|---------------------------------------|
| 1 | W 1/9 | Introductions & Syllabus Review | |
| | F 1/11 | Screening Response: <i>Akira</i> | Readings/Viewings on Moodle |
| 2 | M 1/14 | Animation History | Readings/Viewings on Moodle |
| | W 1/16 | Cinematic Craft | Readings/Viewings on Moodle |
| | F 1/18 | Screening Responses: <i>Big Hero 6</i> | |
| 3 | M 1/21 | NO CLASS: MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. DAY | |
| | W 1/23 | Narrative in Animation/Film Groups to be assigned | Readings/Viewings on Moodle |
| | F 1/25 | Screening Responses: <i>The Iron Giant</i> | |
| 4 | M 1/28 | Cartoons as Sociocultural Texts (part 1) | Readings/Viewings on Moodle |
| | W 1/30 | Cartoons as Sociocultural Texts (part 2) | Readings/Viewings on Moodle |
| | F 2/1 | Screening Responses: <i>Persepolis</i> | |
| 5 | M 2/4 | Theoretical Lens: Uncertainty Reduction Theory | Readings/Viewings on Moodle |
| | W 2/6 | Theoretical Lens: Social Penetration Theory | Readings/Viewings on Moodle |
| | F 2/8 | Screening Responses: <i>Who Framed Roger Rabbit</i> | |
| 6 | M 2/11 | Theoretical Lens: Ideological Criticism | Readings/Viewings on Moodle |
| | W 2/13 | Theoretical Lens: Rhetorical Situation Group check-in | Readings/Viewings on Moodle |
| | F 2/15 | NO CLASS: INSTRUCTOR AT CONFERENCE | |
| 7 | M 2/18 | Screening Responses: <i>Giovanni's Island</i> | |
| | W 2/20 | Theoretical Lens: Dramatism | Readings/Viewings on Moodle |
| | F 2/22 | Screening Responses: <i>A Cat in Paris</i> | |
| 8 | M 2/25 | Theoretical Lens: Haunting | Readings/Viewings on Moodle |
| | W 2/27 | Theoretical Lens: Disidentification | Readings/Viewings on Moodle |
| | F 3/1 | Midterm Exam | Readings/Viewings on Moodle |
| 9 | M 3/4 | Screening Responses: <i>Lilo and Stitch</i> | |
| | W 3/6 | Film Recommendation Presentations | |
| | F 3/8 | Film Recommendation Presentations | |
| 10 | M 3/11 | Film Recommendation Presentations | |
| | W 3/13 | Film Recommendation Presentations | |
| | F 3/15 | Animation & Music | Readings/Viewings on Moodle |
| 11 | M 3/18 | Screening Responses: <i>Kubo and the Two Strings</i> | |
| | W 3/20 | Cartoons Coming Alive | Readings/Viewings on Moodle |
| | F 3/22 | Screening Response: <i>TBD</i> | Readings/Viewings on Moodle |
| 12 | M 3/25 | In-Class Group Work | |
| | W 3/27 | The Uncanny Valley | Readings/Viewings on Moodle |
| | F 3/29 | Screening Response: <i>Watership Down</i> | |
| 13 | M 4/1 | In-Class Group Work | |
| | W 4/3 | NO CLASS: INSTRUCTOR AT CONFERENCE | |
| | F 4/5 | | |
| 14 | M 4/8 | In-Class Group Work & Progress Demonstrations | Portion of Short Animation Due |
| | W 4/10 | Cartoons and/as Genre | Readings/Viewings on Moodle |
| | F 4/12 | Screening Responses: <i>Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse</i> | All Film Analysis Papers Due |
| SPRING BREAK! (be safe) | | | |
| 15 | M 4/22 | In-Class Screening of Group Projects | Short Animation Projects Due |
| | W 4/24 | TBD | Readings/Viewings on Moodle |
| | F 4/26 | TBD | |
| Final | Sat. 5/4 | 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM | |