

## **PSY/COM 250: The Psychology/Rhetoric of Film (Spring, 2021)**

Dr. Stephen Dine Young

Classroom: SC136

Class Times: M, T, W, Th, F – 8:30-12:30

Office: Science Center 156

Office Hours: M,T,W, Th, F – immediately after class & by appointment

Phone: 866-7319

e-mail: youngst@hanover.edu

### **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 *Sharknado*).

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 and books. These materials are listed with the class schedule and will be available on Moodle.

### **Class Attendance & Participation**

Classroom participation will be absolutely essential. Since the format will be largely discussion based, your contribution will have a large impact on how much you and the other students learn. 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

For every unexcused absence (either film or discussion/lecture), you will have 5 additional points subtracted from your final grade.

### **Daily Journal**

You will keep a journal that captures your reflections about important aspects of the class—movies, readings, class discussions, & projects. The intention of these journals is to provide you an opportunity 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 100 points.

### **Class Projects**

You will be required to do 3 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. Each project will be worth 100 points. 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**

#### **May 3**

Topic: Introduction to course

Reading: None

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

#### **May 4**

Topic: Psychologists in the movies

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

Film: Class choice (children's movie)

#### **May 5**

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 6**

Topic: Interpretation, over-interpretation and insanity

Reading: Bordwell, *Making Meaning*

Film: *Room 237* (Ascher, 2012)

#### **May 7**

Topic: Feminist interpretations; Stylistic interpretations

Reading: Bordwell, cont.; Flitterman-Lewis, "Point-of-view in *Notorious*"

Film: *Notorious* (Hitchcock, 1946)

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

#### **May 10**

Topic: Auteurs

Reading: Dine Young, Ch. 4

Film: *Psycho* (Hitchcock, 1960)

#### **May 11**

Topic: Analyzing Woody Allen

Reading: Freud, "Creative writers and day-dreaming"; Corliss, "Scenes from a Break-Up"

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

**May 12**

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 13**

Topic: Analyzing 'Film-Maker X'

Reading: None

Film: Class choice (auteur film)

**May 14 (Project #1 due)**

Topic: Profiling the audience

Reading: Dine Young, Ch. 5

Film: Class choice (mega-popular film)

**WEEK 3--THE AUDIENCE RESPONDS****May 17**

Topic: Comprehension in film

Reading: Dine Young, Ch. 6

Film: *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*

**May 18**

Topic: Emotion and film

Reading: Dine Young, Ch. 6

Film: Clips from emotionally arousing movies

**May 19**

Topic: Viewer enjoyment of film

Reading: Dine Young, Ch. 7

Film: *Thelma & Louise* (Scott, 1991)

**May 20**

Topic: Viewer reflection (cont.)

Reading: Radway, "Readers and their Romances"

Film: Class choice (romantic comedy)

**May 21**

Topic: The extremes effects of film

Reading: Dine Young, Ch. 8 (pp. 131-139); Bozzuto, "Cinematic neurosis following *The Exorcist*"

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

**WEEK 4--SELF AS VIEWER****May 24 (Project #2 due)**

Topic: The subtle effects of film

Reading: Dine Young, Ch. 8 (pp. 139-149); Bandura, Ross & Ross, "The imitation of film-mediated aggressive models"

Film: Film clips of violence in film

**May 25**

Topic: Movies as equipment for living

Reading: Dine Young, Ch. 9 & Ch. 10

Film: *Northern Exposure*, "Rosebud" episode

**May 26 (Journal due by 5)**

Topic: Movies as equipment for living, cont.

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

**May 27 (Project #3 due at noon)**

Topic: Wrap up

Reading: None

Film: Class choice (meaningful film)

### 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*.

**Statement on Self-Care**

Your academic success in this course and throughout your college career depends heavily on your personal health and wellbeing. Stress is a common part of the college experience, and it often can be compounded by unexpected life changes outside the classroom. Your other professors and I strongly encourage you to take care of yourself throughout the term, before the demands of midterms and finals reach their peak. Please feel free to talk with me about any difficulty you may be having that may impact your performance in this course as soon as it occurs and before it becomes unmanageable. Please also know that there are a number of other support services on campus that stand ready to assist you. I strongly encourage you to contact them if you need them. You can make appointments with Health Services by calling x-6102. Appointments for Counseling Services can be made online at any time through MyHanover.

**Gladish Center for Teaching and Learning**

Katy Lowe Schneiver  
866-6840 or [lowe@hanover.edu](mailto:lowe@hanover.edu)

**Counseling Services**

Catherine LeSaux  
866-7399 or [lesaux@hanover.edu](mailto:lesaux@hanover.edu)

Sara Crafton  
866-7074 or [crafton@hanover.edu](mailto:crafton@hanover.edu)

**Health Services**

Christy Ownbey  
866-6101 or [ownbey@hanover.edu](mailto:ownbey@hanover.edu)

**Chaplain's Office**

Reverend Catherine Knott  
866-7087 or [knott@hanover.edu](mailto:knott@hanover.edu)

**Career Center**

Margaret Krantz, Director  
866-7126 or [krantzm@hanover.edu](mailto:krantzm@hanover.edu)