

Writing about Animation

ENC 1145 - Section 7438

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Meetings: T 8-9 and TR 8. CBA 210

Office Hours: T 5pm and by appointment



Course Description:

The creation of a world from scratch provides an opportunity for great creative freedom; technologies of the moving image offer many different techniques through which to tell stories. Computer generated graphics, stop motion films, or 3d environments challenge our notions of fiction, of narration, and of the nature of cinema as a whole. This course proceeds from the observation that animation has a strong and particular creative and narrative potential and power to influence its audience through the creation of a collective imagery. How do the fictional worlds of animation work? Must animation function as an imitation of life or should it operate in its own terms, decoupled from reality? In this class we will study the basics of animation while engaging with such questions.

This course aims to provide students with writing and critical thinking skills while learning the foundations of the theory and practice of animation. Students will learn about audiovisual language, animation techniques, and unconventional storytelling while becoming better *writers*: we will, then, learn about animation by writing *about* animation. Our discussions will introduce basic film vocabulary and cinematic critical language, providing with a toolkit to approach film with an analytical active gaze. That being said, this course is centrally and importantly a writing class. If needed, we will incorporate occasional writing workshops to polish your writing style. This is a General Education course providing student learning outcomes listed in the Undergraduate Catalog.

Course Goals and Outcomes: By the end of the semester you should be able to...

- Analyze films critically, being aware of the power of cinematic language
- Appreciate (animated) film as a cultural product and form of knowledge rather than only entertainment
- Understand the creative production process of animated films
- Confront, accept, and enjoy “different” films, those that depart from conventions that you may now take for granted
- Apply critical concepts to your and your peers’ creative work
- Adapt your writing style to varied genres and audiences
- Read in an engaged way about unfamiliar topics
- Take effective notes of your readings regularly
- Debate, exchange complex ideas, and understand different points of view
- Understand your own experience as an spectator

Materials:

- Required: Wells, Paul. *Understanding Animation*. New York; London: Routledge, 1998.
- Recommended: Lanham, Richard A. *Revising Prose*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2000.

Assignments and Grading

Weekly Responses

200 points

Students will write weekly responses to the reading materials to be prepared for class discussion and to practice their writing skills. Students will follow a prompt, but will also be free to discuss any points they find engaging. Student will post these responses on a blog. 400 words approx.

“Animation is...”

200 points

This assignment is an essay in which students will define animation using and critiquing the definitions studied in class. You will create your own definition of animation and provide examples based on theoretical elements we have discussed. 1000 words approx.

Final Project

350 points

There are three different options for this project: an essay, a short film, or a script. You will choose one depending on your preferences and your learning process.

- The final paper is an essay in which you will argue about one or a few critical problems that emerge in animation. The essay can be based on one film, a genre, a style... but it has to contain an innovative argument. (2500 words approx.)
- The short film is an animated piece in which creatively you address some theoretical element studied in class. This assignment will be graded based on innovation, theoretical engagement, and application of concepts learnt in class. In addition, you will write a 500 word art statement explaining the goals of your piece. The length of the piece should be around 5 min long.
- The script can either be the plot of a short film or an important fragment of an imaginary feature film. You will write a story based on some of the narrative concepts studied in class. If your project is purely aesthetic, then the short film is a better option. The script should be at least 10 pages long, using the free screenwriting tool Celtx (celtx.com).

Participation and Homework

250 points

Students should be prepared to discuss the materials and actively participate in class activities. Absences, tardies, and lack of preparedness will lower your participation grade. Always bring the book to class. There might be unannounced reading quizzes to ensure you complete and understand the readings.

Grade Scale and Rubric:

A: You fulfilled the guidelines of the assignments properly, and your work shows originality and creativity. Your papers demonstrate that you took extra steps to compose your writing by integrating ideas studied in class. A range papers must be free of typos and grammatical errors. You read the assigned materials, write interesting and well-thought responses, and engage in productive class discussion.

B: You fulfilled the guidelines of the assignments. Your work has a few minor grammar or spelling errors, but is complete and well organized. Your papers incorporate critical concepts studied in class, but it is slightly ineffective due to formal errors or to weak arguments. You read the materials, write correct responses, and participate in class.

C: You fulfilled the guidelines of the assignments but your work needs significant revision. Your papers are logical in content, but your writing is wrong. You sometimes fail to read the materials, write basic responses, and you participate in class with superficial contributions.

D: You neglected basic requirements of the assignments and completed them at a poor quality level. Your papers need significant revision. The content is incomplete and the organization unclear. You do not address concepts studied in class in depth. You barely do the readings, your responses are very poor or inexistent, and you do not participate in class.

E: An E is usually reserved for people who do not do the work or do not come to class. However, students will earn an E if their work clearly shows little effort, if they do not communicate with the instructor about their work or absences, and if they don't read the materials.

A	93-100	B	83-86	C	73-76	D	63-66
A-	90-92	B-	80-82	C-	70-72	D-	60-62
B+	87-89	C+	77-79	D+	67-69	E	0-59

For information about UF grading policies, visit:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

Attendance Policy:

This is a participation-driven course. Missing class will affect your grade negatively and it will deprive your classmates of your contribution to discussion. If you are absent, it is your responsibility to remain informed and come to the next class prepared. **Six** missed periods will result on a failing grade. Justified absences only involve university-sponsored events, religious holidays, serious family emergencies, special curricular requirements, military obligation, court-imposed legal obligations (e.g., jury duty or subpoena), or severe weather conditions. These absences must be discussed with the instructor or they will not be justified. **Being tardy** or leaving early **twice** will count as an absence. **Communication** with the instructor is crucial to avoid grading and accommodation problems related to absences. These policies are consistent with the UF's attendance policies. For more information on these policies, please visit:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>

Late Work:

Late submissions will not be accepted, unless one of the justified causes for absence is involved. Late work cannot be made up for a lower grade.

Integrity and Diversity

Please keep in mind that UF students come from diverse cultural, economic, and ethnic backgrounds. Some of the texts and films we will discuss engage in controversial topics and opinions. Diverse student backgrounds combined with sometimes provocative texts require that you demonstrate respect for ideas that may differ from your own. Active learning requires students to honestly share their thoughts and respectfully engage with each other's opinions. Disrespectful behavior will not be tolerated.

Class behavior:

- The use of cell phones, computers, or other electronic gadgets is only allowed for note taking. Please silence your phones. Texting in class will count as an absence.
- According to UF policy, it is not allowed to eat in class. It is distracting and will make your classmates hungry!

Plagiarism and Academic Honesty: All students are required to abide by the UF Student Honor Code. Many times, students make mistakes in the way they quote or cite other work. Even those cases constitute a dishonest academic practice. Never copy paste without adding quotation marks and mentioning the name of the original author. In this course, one case of plagiarism on an assignment can involve failing that assignment. Should plagiarism occur again, the student will be reported to the Dean of Students Office and risks failing the course and other, more severe penalties. For more information about academic honesty, including definitions of plagiarism and unauthorized collaboration, see: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/honorcodes/honorcode.php>

Final Grade Appeals: Students may appeal a final grade by filling out a form available from Carla Blount, Department of English Program Assistant. Appeals may result in a higher, unchanged, or lower grade.

Statement of Composition (C) and Humanities (H) credit: This course can satisfy the General Education Requirement for Composition or Humanities.

Statement of Writing Requirement (WR): This course can provide 6000 words toward fulfillment of the UF requirement for writing.

Statement of Student Disability Services: The Disability Resource Center in the Dean of Students Office provides students and faculty with information and support regarding accommodations for students with disabilities in the classroom. For more information, see: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/>

Statement of Harassment: UF provides an educational and working environment that is free from sex discrimination and sexual harassment for its students, staff, and faculty. For more information, see: <http://hr.ufl.edu/manager-resources/policies-2/sexual-harassment/>

Course Evaluations: Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course. These evaluations are conducted online during the last weeks of the semester. Your instructor will give you time in class to fill the evaluations.

Course Schedule

Week 1: Introduction to Animation

	Class	Homework
T 1/6	Syllabus, introduction, expectations. First discussion: what do we know?	
R 1/8	What is animation?	Read: Paul Well's <i>Introduction</i>

Week 2: Narration, movement, and cinematic language

	Class	Homework
T 1/13	Film language Animation styles	Read: PW Chapter 2 Writing: Weekly response
R 1/15	Animation styles	

Week 3: Narration, movement, and cinematic language II

	Class	Homework
T 1/20	Narration devices	Watch online: <i>Sita Sings the Blues</i> Read: Excerpts from PW Chapter 3 Writing: Weekly response
R 1/22	Narration devices	

Week 4: Animation techniques and distribution platforms

	Class	Homework
T 1/27	Cinema of attractions Cartoons	Reading: <i>Animation Techniques</i> , by Koeningsmarck Writing: Weekly response
R 1/29	3D	

Week 5: Animation techniques and distribution platforms II

	Class	Homework
T 2/3	Motion capture Stop motion Experimental techniques	Watch: <i>Waking Life</i> Reading: <i>True Animation?</i> (ch. 1) <i>Cinema and the Spectator</i> (ch. 6) Writing: Weekly response
R 2/5	Access, distribution, and audience	

Week 6: History of animation

	Class	Homework
T 2/10	Pre-history of animation: Toys, flipbooks, magic lantern Screenings: The History of Animation	Definition Assignment Due Reading: PW pp. 11-21 (ch. 1) Second reading TBA NO READING RESPONSE DUE
R 2/12	Pre-history and beginnings of film	

Week 7: History of animation II

	Class	Homework
T 2/17	Golden era of cartoons Hollywood, the 60s and 70s	Reading: Excerpt from <i>The World History of Animation</i> by S. Cavalier Writing: Weekly response
R 2/19	80s-2000s	

Week 8: Princesses and frogs. Dominant discourses.

	Class	Homework
T 2/24	Disney. Realism, happy ever after, humor	Read: PW pp 21-28 and 223-242 Writing: Weekly response
TR 2/26	Disney Personification and animals	

Week 9: Spring Break, no class.**Week 10: Princesses and frogs. Dominant discourses II**

	Class	Homework
T 3/10	Disney: Parks and toys. Propaganda. Warner: Irreverence	Reading: <i>Walt Disney and the Propaganda Complex</i> , by Amanda Cunningham <i>From Disney to Warner Bros.: The Critical Shift</i> , by Timothy R. White Writing: Weekly response
R 3/12	Warner: Subversion and humor	

Week 11: Princesses and frogs. Dominant discourses III

	Class	Homework
T 3/17	Warner: Politics Pixar: The new age	Reading: Pixar TBA Writing: Weekly response
R 3/19	Pixar: New morals, new audience, new style	

Week 12: Anime

	Class	Homework
T 3/24	Japanese animation Visual culture, pop culture, history	Watch: <i>My Neighbor Totoro</i> Reading: TBA Writing: Weekly response
R 3/26	Japanese animation Styles and critical elements	Tentative topic for the final project due

Week 13: Anime II

	Class	Homework
T 3/31	Japanese animation	Reading: Susan Napier's Ch. 2: <i>Anime</i>

	The body in question	<i>and local/global identity</i> PW <i>The Body in Question</i> (Ch. 5) Writing: Weekly response
R 4/2	Japanese animation Global distribution	

Week 14: Alternative Animation

As the semester goes, we will review certain key issues in the history and practice of animation. During this week, we will return to those problems with a more critical and sophisticated eye. Experimental animation, social films, issues of representation... are some of these topics. Tentative subjects of our readings include: queer, gender and representation issues in Paul Well's book; issues of race in *Reading the Rabbit : Explorations in Warner Bros. Animation...*

Week 15: And now what? Conclusion

	Class	Homework
T 4/14	The old and the new Cinema of attractions Hyperrealism	Reading: Andrew Darley's <i>Visual Digital Culture</i> . Ch. 1 & Conclusion. Writing: Weekly response
R 4/16	The enjoyment of craft	

Week 16: Last week. Final Projects

	Class	Homework
T 4/21	Last day of class: Submissions Screening of the short films Evaluations	Final Project Due