

ENG 6932. Film and Video Production: "Originality and Adaptation in Film" (Spring 2023)

Professor: Trevor Mowchun

Class (TUR 2322): Wednesday, Periods 9 - 11 (4:05 PM - 7:05 PM)

Screening (ROLFS 115): Monday, Periods E1 - E3 (7:20 PM - 10:10 PM); projectionist: Natalia Sanabria

Office hours (TUR 4336): Tuesday 5-6pm, or by appointment.

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Office phone number: 352-294-2839

Film and Media Studies Production Lab: TUR 4303

Technician: Chance Freytag

Email: freytagc@ufl.edu

Chance's lab hours:

- Monday Period 5
- Tuesday Periods 6-8
- Wednesday Periods 5-8
- Thursday Periods 7-8

* Visit Chance during his lab hours asap for a brief camera and sound recorder workshop, after which you can check-out this equipment and practice at home.

* Chance will also issue you a key to one of the editing suites.

* You will need at least one SD memory card (minimum 16GB) for camera and sound recording.

* A full equipment inventory will be available on Canvas. Chance can provide one-on-one instruction on any piece of equipment that interests you.

Originality and Adaptation in Film

It is no secret that some of the most compelling and enduring films throughout history are adaptations. What this means is that the coveted heights of film art are often reached through the embrace of *other art forms* (predominantly literature)—an embrace of what we might call the “non-cinematic.” We will attempt to untangle this apparently paradoxical phenomenon in a number of ways: by exploring some general theories of artistic originality that grapple with the highly subjective and often indescribable mysteries of “the creative process”; by identifying the concept of adaptation as a mode of creativity that is specific to the pursuit of originality in film, arguably more instrumental than for any other artform; by considering some methods of film adaptation so as to help pave the way for the development of our own ideas concerning the complex interrelation between originality and adaptation in film. Throughout these investigations we will continually ask ourselves if and how “the spirit” of a literary (and, in some cases, non-literary) text can be adapted such that its *ideal form* is found in film.

The proposition—that adaptation is the most vital path to originality in film—will be put to the test using these two methodologies: “case studies” and “filmmaking.” *Case studies*: The

second half of the course will feature comparative studies of film adaptations and their source text(s). We will track the transformative journey of a film from literary source to script (in some cases) to screen. Adaptation methods of particular interest to us are as follows: faithful vs. transgressive adaptation, modernization, piecemeal adaptation, multiple source adaptation, and interdisciplinary adaptation. Short and feature-length films will be screened to exemplify both the possibilities *and* pitfalls of cinematic adaptation. Films with no ostensible ties to outside source material (i.e., films which are, or claim to be, “totally original”) will also be considered for the sake of comparison. *Filmmaking*: Students will embark upon their own process of cinematic adaptation by choosing a yet un-adapted literary work—ideally a short story, prose piece or poem (novellas may also be suggested)—and composing a filmable screenplay based on it, one that remains true to the “spirit” of the source, or betrays it, or transforms it, or perhaps some sublime alchemy of all three acts of creation. The source material will become *raw material* to be molded into something new—something that surpasses the original in some way and rethinks it for the present age. One or perhaps all of these projects will then be made into a short/medium-length film, inviting students to experience the various phases or “internal adaptations” of the filmmaking process beyond screenwriting.

Required Books:

*Available in the bookstore or online

- *The Act of Creation*, Arthur Koestler
- *Barry Lyndon*, by William Thackeray
- *The Birth of Tragedy*, by Friedrich Nietzsche
- *Envy*, by Yury Olesha
- *The Forged Coupon*, by Leo Tolstoy
- *I’m Thinking of Ending Things*, by Iain Reid
- *Late Fame*, by Arthur Schnitzler
- *Pan*, by Knut Hamsun
- *Thomas the Obscure*, by Maurice Blanchot
- *The Walk*, by Robert Walser

*Essays, book chapters, and short stories will be available via course reserves (ARES).

Filmmaking manual: The clearest and most comprehensive digital filmmaking manual that I’m aware of is *The Filmmaker’s Handbook: A Comprehensive Guide for the Digital Age*, by Steven Ascher and Edward Pincus, 5th edition (Plume 2019). I recommend that you read this book at your own pace throughout the semester or use it as a reference while working on your film projects.

On screenwriting: In lieu of a screenwriting manual, most of which hew too closely to industry standards, I recommend that you study two types of scripts, both by author and screenwriter James Agee: *The Night of the Hunter* (produced in 1955) and *The House* (unproduced). Both will be available on course reserves (ARES).

Film screenings: Films will be screened on Monday E1-E3 in Rolfs 115. Here you will have the rare opportunity to watch these films on a big screen with your fellow peers. Attendance is highly recommended. If you miss a screening then you will have to watch the films on your own, not all of which are readily available online.

Filmmaking workshops: Some class time will be set aside for introducing students to the department's film equipment. However, since we will be immersing ourselves in the assigned texts and films each week, you are also encouraged to meet with Chance during his lab hours for more in-depth instruction.

*Course materials are subject to change.

PART 1: ORIGINALITY

Week 1 (Jan. 11): Introduction

*No screening on Monday, Jan. 9

Week 2 (Jan. 16, 18)

*No class on Jan.16—Martin Luther King Day

- Reading: James Agee, "Plans for Work," in *The Collected Short Prose of James Agee*
- Reading: Edward Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (Chapter 1)
- Reading: Said, *On Late Style: Music and Literature Against the Grain* (Chapter 1)
- Film: *Andrei Rublev* (Andrei Tarkovsky, 1966) *Watch the film on your own (available for free on Youtube)

Week 3 (Jan. 23, 25)

- Reading: Alexander Mackendrick, "Slogans for the Screenwriter's Wall" and "A Technique for Having Ideas," in *On Filmmaking: An Introduction to the Craft of the Director*
- Reading: James Agee, "The House," in *The Collected Short Prose of James Agee* (short script)
- Reading: Arthur Koestler, *The Act of Creation* (Book 1, Part 1: The Jester)
- Film: *The Man in the White Suit* (Mackendrick, 1951)

Week 4 (Jan. 30, Feb. 1)

- Reading: Mackendrick, "Density and Subplots in Sweet Smell of Success," in *On Filmmaking*
- Reading: Koestler, *The Act of Creation* (Book 1, Part 2: The Sage)
- Short film: *Drink Some Darkness* (Trevor Mowchun, 2020)
- Feature film: *World to Come* (Daniel Eskin & Trevor Mowchun, 2015)

Week 5 (Feb. 6, 8)

- Reading: Koestler, *The Act of Creation* (Book 1, Part 3: The Artist)
- Film: *Inland Empire* (David Lynch, 2006)

Week 6 (Feb. 13, 15)

- Reading: Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*
- Film: *Amadeus* (Milos Forman, 1984)

Week 7 (Feb. 20, 22)

- Reading: Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Circles"
- Reading: Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism* (Chapters 1 and 6)
- Reading: Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chapters 6 and 7)
- Film: *The Master* (Paul Thomas Anderson, 2012)

PART 2: ADAPTATION

Week 8 (Feb. 27, Mar. 1): Short Stories Into Short Films

- Short story: "The Fall of the House of Usher" (Edgar Allan Poe, 1839) > Short feature: *The Fall of the House of Usher* (Jean Epstein, 1928) > Short film: *The Fall of the House of Usher* (Jan Svankmajer, 1980)
- Short story: "The Overcoat" (Nikolai Gogol, 1842) > Short film: *The Bespoke Overcoat* (Jack Clayton, 1956) *Based on the play of the same name by Wolf Mankowitz (1953)
- Short story: "The Dream of a Ridiculous Man" (Fyodor Dostoevsky, 1877) > Short animation: *The Dream of a Ridiculous Man* (Aleksandr Petrov, 1992)
- Short story: "A Country Doctor" (Franz Kafka, 1918) > Short animation: *A Country Doctor* (Kōji Yamamura, 2007)

Week 9 (Mar. 6, 8): Novel 1

- Novel: *I'm Thinking of Ending Things* (Iain Reid, 2016) > Film: *I'm Thinking of Ending Things* (Charlie Kaufman, 2020)

SPRING BREAK

Week 10 (Mar. 20, 22): Novel 2

- Novel: *Barry Lyndon* (William Thackeray, 1844) > Film: *Barry Lyndon* (Stanley Kubrick, 1975)

Week 11 (Mar. 27, 29): Adaptation Proposal: Two Novellas and Some Cinematic Inspiration

- Novella: *Envy* (Yury Olesha, 1927) + *Late Fame* (Arthur Schnitzler, posthumously published in 2014)
- Film: *About Schmidt* (Alexander Payne, 2002)

Week 12 (Apr. 3, 5): Piecemeal Adaptations

- Play: *Beat Generation* (Jack Kerouac, 1957) *Third Act of the text > Short film: *Pull My Daisey* (Robert Frank and Alfred Leslie, 1959)

- Novella: *The Forged Coupon* (Tolstoy, 1911) *Part 1 of the text > Feature film: *L'argent* (Robert Bresson, 1983) **Also read: André Bazin, "Le Journal d'un cure de campagne and the Stylistics of Robert Bresson" in *What is Cinema?*

Week 13 (Apr. 10, 12): Multiple Source Adaptation and the Failure of Adaptation

- Novel: *Pan: From Lieutenant Thomas Glahn's Papers* (Knut Hamsun, 1894) + Short story: "The Venus of Ille" (Prosper Mérimée, 1837) > Feature film: *Twilight of the Ice Nymphs* (Guy Maddin, written by George Toles, 1997) *Read: Toles, "From Archangel to Mandragora in Your Own Backyard: Collaborating with Guy Maddin," in *A House Made of Light: Essays on the Art of Film*

Week 14 (Apr. 17, 19): Adapting Theater, Painting, Photography, and Philosophy

- Theater: *Macbeth* (Shakespeare) > Film: *Macbeth* (Béla Tarr, 1982)
- Painting: *Guernica* (Resnais, 1950) + *Night Gallery* (first segment of pilot episode, Boris Sagal, 1969)
- Photography: *Very Nice, Very Nice* (Arthur Lipsett, 1961)
- Philosophy: Novella: *Thomas the Obscure* (Maurice Blanchot, 1976) > Short video art: *Incidence of Catastrophe* (Gary Hill, 1988)

Week 15 (Apr. 24, 26): Child Consciousness and Mental Illness

- Short story: "Silent Snow, Secret Snow" (Conrad Aiken, 1934) > Short film: *Silent Snow, Secret Snow* (Gene R. Kearney, 1966)
- Short story: "The Rocking-Horse Winner" (D.H. Lawrence, 1926) > Feature film: *The Rocking-Horse Winner* (Anthony Pelissier, 1949) *Script available in *From Fiction to Film: D.H. Lawrence's "The Rocking-Horse Winner"* > Short film: *The Rocking-Horse Winner* (Michael Almereyda, 1997)
- Prose piece: "The Walk" (Robert Walser, 1917) > Excerpt from found footage film, *All This Can Happen* (Siobhan Davies and writer David Hinton, 2012)

COURSEWORK

*Submit all work via Canvas or WeTransfer (for films)

Film Adaptation Exercises (30%)

1. Propose a method for adapting the short story "The Beggarwoman of Locarno" (Heinrich von Kleist, 1808), which has yet to be made into a film as far as I'm aware. Text will be available on course reserves (ARES). 1-2 pages. **Due: Monday Jan. 30 by 5pm (15%)**
2. Adapt a monologue into a film script. Suggested texts: "Not-I" (Samuel Beckett, 1972), "The Job Application" (Robert Walser, 1914), "So! I've Got You" (Walser, 1917). Texts will be available on course reserves (ARES). **Due: Monday Feb. 20 by 5pm (15%)**

The Workshop (60%)

1. Select a short story/prose piece/poem/novella for adaptation and annotate it with ideas/questions/problems (handwritten or digital annotation).
2. Brief rationale for your choice (i.e., why is this source worth adapting?) (1-2 pages).
3. Propose a method of cinematic adaptation (approach to story, structure, character, themes, film form, feasibility, etc.) (2-3 pages).
4. Write the script (maximum 20 pages in screenplay format, maximum 15 pages in prose format).

***Adaptation prospectus is due Monday March 20 by 5pm**

5. Script revision.
6. Film project (I suggest working in groups of 2 or 3).

***Final film is due Friday May 5 by midnight (upload your MP4 or MOV file to Canvas or WeTransfer)**

Participation (10%)

Grade Scale

A 4.0 93-100%	C 2.0 73-76%
A- 3.67 90-92%	C- 1.67 70-72%
B+ 3.33 87-89%	D+ 1.33 67-69%
B 3.0 83-86%	D 1.0 63-66%
B- 2.67 80-82%	D- 0.67 60-62%
C+ 2.33 77-79%	E 0.00 0-59%

Policies and Services

- You must complete all assignments to receive credit for this course.
- All coursework can be submitted electronically via Canvas unless otherwise stated. Word and PDF files are acceptable.
- Written work should be 1.5 or double-spaced with standard-sized margins.
- No late submissions unless an extension has been previously agreed upon.
- I will respond to emails from Monday to Friday, usually within a day or two, though please be patient when waiting for a response. While email communication may seem indispensable nowadays, you may prefer to come meet with me during office hours (in-person or via Zoom) to discuss the course material.
- Regular attendance is essential. Communication with the instructor is crucial to avoid misunderstandings 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>
- I respectfully ask all students to refrain from using cell phones and internet browsing during class and screenings.
- Please do not record any class lecture or discussion without permission from me.

- Academic Honesty and Definition of Plagiarism. Plagiarism violates the Student Honor Code and requires reporting to the Dean of Students. All students must abide by the Student Honor Code:

<https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/>

- Students with disabilities who are requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, <https://drc.dso.ufl.edu/>).

- For information on UF Grading policies:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/grades-grading-policies/>

- For counseling or urgent help you may call the on-campus Counseling and Wellness Center at 352-392-1575, or contact them online: <https://counseling.ufl.edu/services/individual/>

- UF's policy on Harassment: UF provides an educational and working environment that is free from sex discrimination and sexual harassment for its students, staff, and faculty:

<https://hr.ufl.edu/forms-policies/policies-managers/sexual-harassment/>