Dietrich College of Humanities and Social Sciences

Film and Media Studies Minor

Spring 2017 Course Descriptions

David Shumway, Faculty Advisor
shumway@cmu.edu
Baker Hall 245J

Jeff Hinkelman, Faculty Co-Advisor
jh51@andrew.cmu.edu

Jen Loughran, Coordinator of Curriculum & Undergraduate Programs
jackson1@andrew.cmu.edu
Baker Hall 259

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Information is subject to change
15-365  Experimental Animation
Cross listed:  60-422
Instructors:  Jim Duesing and Jessica Hodgins
Meetings:   8:30 a.m. to 11:20 a.m.
Units:  12
Prerequisite:  15213 Introduction to Computer Systems or 60-110 Electronic Media Studio: Introduction to the Moving Image

This class will explore animation from the student's perspective with a sense of investigation toward both form and content. Topics in the class will include non-linear narrative, visual music, puppet and non-traditional materials, manipulation of motion and performance capture data, immersive environments.

16-374   IDeATe: Art of Robotic Special Effects
Cross listed:  60-428
Instructors:  Garth Zeglin and Suzie Silver
Meetings:  TR 9:30 a.m. to 10:20 a.m.
Units:  12
Prerequisite:  None

Inspired by the early “trick” films of George Melies, this project-oriented course brings together robotics and film production technique to infuse cinema with the wonder of live magic. Students will learn the basics of film production using animatronics, camera motion control, and compositing. The projects apply these techniques to create innovative physical effects for short films, all the way from concept to post-production. The course emphasizes real-time practical effects to explore the immediacy and interactivity of improvisation and rehearsal.

The robotics topics include animatronic rapid prototyping and programming human-robot collaborative performance. The course includes a brief overview of the history of special effects and robotics to set the work in context.

60-125   Introduction to 3D Animation
Instructor:  Spencer Diaz
Meetings:  MWF 1:30 p.m. to 2:50 p.m.
Units:  12
Prerequisite:  62-150 Introduction to Media Synthesis and Analysis or 15-104 Introduction to Computing for Creative Practice

Introduction to 3D Animation is designed for students interested in exploring the exciting and increasingly popular world of computer animation. Using Autodesk Maya, this course will cover each concept of the animation production pipeline through a series of class demos, production assignments, and guest lectures from industry professionals. Some topics will include modeling, rigging, layout/camera work, character animation, lighting, and rendering. This course will also delve into motion capture technology for 3D animation, making use of CMU’s Vicon and Optitrack motion capture systems. Students with little or no prior animation experience are encouraged to sign up for the course.
Performance capture is used in applications as varied as special effects in movies, animation, sports training, physical rehabilitation, and human-robot/human-computer interaction. This course will survey state-of-the-art techniques and emerging ideas, in the industry and in academia, to capture, model, and render human performances. The course will be a mix between lectures and discussion of recent progress in human motion capture and analysis. The course evaluation will be project-based, in which students will capture their own body and face motion, and build projects around the data they collect individually and as a group. We will cover: 1. Capture Techniques: We will describe and use various systems including motion capture, video-based capture, depth sensors, scanners, and eye-gaze trackers; 2. Modeling and Representation: We will cover classic and contemporary representations of face and body pose and motion, including statistical and physics-based techniques; 3. Rendering Applications: As new rendering paradigms emerge, new applications continue to develop. We will study recent progress in animation, synthesis, classification, and rehabilitation on new forms of displays. Please note that there may be usage/materials fees associated with this course.

This course is an introduction to the history, technology, aesthetics and ideology of film. The main focus will be on the narrative fiction film, but we will also discuss documentaries, avant-garde work and animation. At the same time, we will be attentive to the ways in which our conceptual understanding of film has impacted the development of successive waves of visual media. The central organizing principle is historical, but there are a number of recurring thematic concerns. These include an examination of the basic principles and terminology of filmmaking, the development of film technology, the definition of film as both art and business, the history of film as an object of critical and cultural study, and the importance of film as the precursor of newer formats. The course has four key goals. First, to provide students with a solid grounding in the key issues and concepts of film studies. Second, to expand their ability to knowledgeably critique individual cinematic works and the relationship of those works to the larger culture. Third to provide students with experience in expressing those critiques in verbal, written and visual forms. Lastly, to provide them with an understanding of the central role of film history and film studies in the development of newer media.

It is not so difficult to learn the format or even to master the style of the screenplay—the challenge lies in writing image-driven stories with believable dialogue, vivid characters, and a coherent, well-structured plot. To that end, students will view short and feature-length films, paying special attention to such fundamentals as character development and story structure. Students will read screenplays to see how scripts provide the blueprints for the final product, and write
analytical papers. To gain experience and confidence, students will work on a number of exercises that will lead them toward producing a polished short screenplay by the end of the semester.

76-352  Listening Spaces  
Instructor: Rich Purcell and Rich Randall  
Meetings: TR 3:00 p.m. to 4:20 p.m.  
Units: 9  
Prerequisite: 76-101 Interpretation & Argument

The proliferation of portable as well as computerized audio technologies has radically changed the way the human beings listen, consume, and produce music and sound. With the emergence of "cloud" storage services like Dropbox, Amazon, and Google you can effortlessly store and share music files anonymously or with friends. Services like Facebook, Pandora, Spotify, Last.fm, Amazon, and iTunes use finely tuned algorithms to make musical recommendations and in the process further personalize your experience as a consumer of music. All of these services, many of which are virtual, have come to mediate our intensely personal and communal experiences with music. The Listening Spaces seminar seeks to understand the overwhelming impact these mediating technologies have had on our social, political and personal interactions with music. Foundational readings will include Jonathan Sterne's MP3: The History of a Format, Alexander Galloway's Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture, Trebor Scholz's Digital Labor: The Internet as Playground and Factory. The seminar will be focused around developing and completing critical projects that cross technological and humanistic boundaries.

76-374  IDeATe - Dietrich College Cuban Interactive Documentary Project  
Instructor: Ralph Vituccio  
Meetings: TR 3:00 p.m. to 4:20 p.m.  
Units: 9  
Prerequisites: 76-101 Interpretation & Argument

In this project-based course students will create a computer-based interactive documentary about contemporary Cuban society, which will be filmed in Cuba during the Spring break week of 2017. The class will explore different styles and techniques of storytelling with the flexibility of form offered by the computer through the practice of digression, multiple points of view, disruptions of time and of storyline, etc. Students will work within interdisciplinary teams in the creative areas of English and creative writing, video production, interactive media, data visualization and programming. Students will be encouraged to think about digital interactive media not just in terms of technology but also considering broader issues such as verbal and visual language, design, information architecture, communication and community.

76-438  The Wire: Crime, Realism, and Long-Form TV  
Instructor: David Shumway  
Meetings: W 6:30 p.m. to 9:20 p.m.  
Units: 9  
Prerequisite: 76-101 Interpretation & Argument

The HBO series The Wire (2002-2008) has been called the greatest TV show ever. Part of the first wave of “quality television” series by which HBO changed the way people conceived of the artistic possibilities of the medium, the Wire differed from its contemporaries like The Sopranos and Six Feet Under in its realism and its smaller audience. Unlike most other shows on television, The Wire addressed the racism, poverty, the failures of the criminal justice system, and other social problems head on. It was able to do this in part because it had enough time to develop complex story
threads. This moment of TV history produced what I am calling “long-form” TV, in which narrative continuity was stretched over multiple seasons. TV in this form resembles 19th century novels that were first released serially in magazines and newspapers. In both cases, audiences waited expectantly for new episodes, since they could not be “binge-watched.” The Wire was rooted in producer/writers David Simon and Ed Burns’ experiences in Baltimore, where the former had been a crime reporter and the latter a police detective. Simon has said that he made the series in order to tell truths about the city he could not tell in the newspapers.

This course will consider the wire in the context of realist fiction of the 19th century, twentieth-century crime fiction, earlier TV crime series, and other long-form TV, including Mad Men. We will try to explore The Wire’s realism, its continuing appeal, and its impact. We will probably watch 3 seasons of The Wire.

79-341 The Cold War in Documents and Film
Instructor: Naum Kats
Meetings: MW 3:00 p.m. to 4:20 p.m.
Units: 9
Prerequisite: None

This course is based on use of historical documents and films to study problems that reshaped the world during and after the Cold War. We will examine how documentary and feature films depicted the most important events of the Cold War, such as the Korean War, the construction of the Berlin Wall, the Cuban missile crisis, and others. In addition to films, sources will include documents, lectures and readings.

82-215 Arab Culture through Film and Literature
Instructor: Nevine Abraham
Meetings: MWF 11:30 a.m. to 12:20 p.m.
Units: 9
Prerequisite: None

We will focus on the processes of self-definition by Arab men and women in the Middle East and North Africa with relation to national and religious identities, social stratification, sexuality, and gender roles. Students will learn about the social, economic, and political contexts of the films and literary works discussed. This course fosters a better understanding of Arab societies and the hybrid identities that negotiate their presence and space within. Students will engage in a video-conference dialogue with students at the American University in Cairo, Egypt, attend an Arab film during CMU’s International Film Festival, and interview native speakers of different Arab countries to further their learning of Arab culture. This course is taught in English.

82-362 Italian Language and Culture II
Instructor: Jan Vairo
Meetings: MWF 10:30 a.m. to 11:20 a.m.
Units: 9
Prerequisite: 82-262 Intermediate Italian II

This course traces the development of Italian film from the 1900’s silent films to the 21st Century. We will follow a trajectory beginning with the epic tradition of Pastrones Cabiria (1914) and the Fascist Regime’s ‘powerful weapon’ of Cinematography. We continue with neorealist films of post-war Italy, the commedia all’italiana (Italian style comedy), the humor of Paolo Virzì, the intellectual and artistic concerns of Nanni Moretti, and conclude with the corruption
scandals of “Mani Pulite” and Sorrentino’s, Il Divo. Students continue to build their skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing Italian while developing their appreciation of the impact of Italian Film as a cultural and artistic force. The course places emphasis on the historical and cultural situations presented in the films, to help students broaden their background of the history, customs, and geographical representations of Italy. The class will be conducted in Italian.

82-252  Korean Cinema in Transnational Perspective: The Evolution of East Asian Film Genres
Instructor:  Seung-hwan Shin
Meetings:  T 6:30 p.m. to 8:50 p.m.
R 6:30 p.m. to 7:50 p.m.
Units:  9
Prerequisite:  None

This course aims to provide a meaningful platform to explore sociocultural developments in East Asia (China, Japan, and Korea), one of the most vibrant regions today in the world, through their cinematic traditions. The main focus of this course is on genre films. Popular genres have often been dismissed to be formulaic and commercially oriented, which has hampered our perceptions around the complex ways in which genre cinema has engaged with historical changes. Breaking away from the conventional view, this course reads genre films as an important venue to inquire into sociocultural formations. More specifically, this course takes genre cinema to be a contact zone where a variety of narrative and formal orientations intersect, compete, and negotiate with one another: nationalism and transnationalism, convention and innovation, the traditional and the modern, official memory and counter history, realism and imagination, and so on. This course, in other words, pivots around the ambition to enrich our understanding of the convoluted ways in which popular East Asian film genres have evolved in conjunction with recent social and cultural changes in the region. This course is taught in English.

82-456   Southern Cone Dictatorships in Movies (1984-2016)
Instructor:  Mariana Achugar
Meetings:  TR 1:30 p.m. to 2:50 p.m.
Units:  9
Prerequisite:  82-345 Introduction to Hispanic Literary and Cultural Studies

This course explores the Southern Cone dictatorships during the period of the Cold War through their representation in films. The military-civilian dictatorships of the 1970s in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay were a period of State terrorism. This violent period resulted in thousands of disappeared people, political prisoners and exiles. These experiences have had a lasting impact in the new democracies. There is still a debate over how to address violations of human rights and how to make sense of the past, so that these events don’t happen again. There has been a rich production of movies focusing on this historical period that serves as a document of how the struggles over how to come to terms with a traumatic past have been dealt with by different countries. These films also provide a glimpse of how popular culture serves as a vehicle to construct a social memory of recent history. Through films new generations that did not experience these traumatic events learns about what happened and what it means for particular social actors. We will analyze films from Argentina, Chile and Uruguay in order to better understand how these countries have dealt with a contested past. The course will provide students with historical background, theoretical frameworks and analytic tools to approach these cultural productions as documents and discourses about the recent dictatorships. This course is taught in Spanish.
82-278   Japanese Film and Literature: The Art of Storytelling  
Instructor:  Yoshihiro Yasuhara  
Meetings:  MWF 1:30 p.m. to 2:20 p.m.  
Units:   9  
Prerequisite:   None

This course explores how the art of storytelling is in tandem with the vicissitudes of the human condition as illustrated in Japan's variety of fictions, non-fictions, and films in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Analyses of each storytelling not only reveal the cultural dynamics behind Japanese modernity, but also invite students to find new insights into Japanese culture and their ways of perceiving our globalized world. What kind of cultural exchanges took place between modern Japan and the West? How are Japan's traditional values transformed in the face of modern technicalization and industrialization, compared to the modernization of other countries? And, in turn, what kind of impact has modern Japanese culture had on today's world? Tackling these questions among others, the course also extends to such issues as the legacy of traditional Japanese culture, the modern Emperor system, World War II experiences, emerging voices of minorities, and popular culture (e.g., anime and subculture). This course is taught in English. Prerequisite: None

82-428   History of German Film  
Instructor:  Stephen Brockmann  
Meetings:  TR 3:00 p.m. to 4:20 p.m.  
Units:   9  
Prerequisite:   None

This course is a chronological introduction to one of the world's greatest cinema traditions: German cinema. It moves from the silent cinema of the 1910s to the Weimar Republic, when German cinema represented Hollywood's greatest challenger in the international cinema world. It then addresses the cinema of Hitler's so-called "Third Reich," when German cinema dominated European movie theaters, and moves on to the cinema of divided Germany from 1949-1989, when cinema in the socialist east and cinema in the capitalist west developed in very different ways. In the final week of the semester, the course will address German cinema in the post-unification period, which has experienced a revival in popularity and interest. The two historical foci of the semester will be the Weimar Republic, the classic era of German cinema, and the era of the so-called "New German Cinema" of the 1970s and 1980s, when major German directors developed radical new approaches to cinema and critiques of Hollywood. Among the great directors focused on in the course of the semester will be Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau, Fritz Lang, Leni Riefenstahl, Wolfgang Staudte, Werner Herzog, Wim Wenders, and Rainer Werner Fassbinder. No knowledge of the German language is required for this course. Most of the films will be in German with English subtitles. Students will be required to attend class, including all film screenings, to actively participate in discussion, to write a term paper on a topic related to German cinema history, and to take two midterm examinations. Taught in English.