

CIMS 3203.401 THE ANIMATION OF DISNEY

DRAFT SYLLABUS

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ARTH 3873 | ENGL 0593 | FNAR 3184

Spring 2024 Monday 3:30 - 6:30pm

Fisher-Bennett Hall ---

Office hours: 209A Fisher-Bennett Hall, Mondays 1:00-2:00 by appointment or after class. Available other times by phone or on campus by appointment.

TA: Emma Marks

Available by appointment

Course Overview

No organization has exerted as much influence on popular culture and the art form of animation as The Walt Disney Company. For decades, Disney films were the standard by which all other animated films were measured. This course will examine the biography and philosophy of founder Walt Disney, as well as The Walt Disney Company's impact on animation art, storytelling and technology, the entertainment industry, and American popular culture. We will consider Disney's most influential early films, look at the 1960s when Disney's importance in popular culture began to erode, and analyze the films that led to the Disney Renaissance of the late 1980s/early 1990s. We will also assess the subsequent purchase of Pixar Animation Studios and the overall impact Pixar has had on Disney. The class will also look at recent trends and innovations, including live-action remakes and Disney+.

Screenings

There will be screenings during each class session. For your reference, links to the material we watch in class will be posted on a screening list on Canvas. A draft of the screening list for each class will be posted the weekend before class, but you are not required to screen these films before class. After class, a final screening list will be posted to reflect any revisions or additions to that list.

Topics, Readings

All readings will be posted on Canvas unless you see a link below the reading citation.

Readings on Canvas will be labeled with the author's name and page numbers.

The readings listed below the date/topic should be read in advance of that class.

I will also assign some additional readings toward the end of the semester.

Topics and Readings

January 22 Introduction to the course and to Walt Disney

January 29

***Steamboat Willie* and the shorts era**

Maureen Furniss, **A New History of Animation**, 59-61.

J.B. Kaufman, "Introduction," in **Oswald the Lucky Rabbit**, David A. Bossert, 10-11.

Christian Moran, **Great Big Beautiful Tomorrow**, 9-15.

L.H. Robbins, "Mickey Mouse Emerges as Economist," **The New York Times Magazine**, March 10, 1935.

Steven Watts, **The Magic Kingdom**, 42-59.

February 5 More shorts, more competition, and an animated feature

Maureen Furniss, **A New History of Animation**, 92-108.

Neal Gabler, **Walt Disney, The Triumph of the American Imagination**, 213-275.

Patricia Zohn, "Coloring the Kingdom," **Vanity Fair**, February 5, 2010.

<http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/2010/03/disney-animation-girls-201003>

February 12 The early 1940s features

Dewey Chambers, "'The Disney Touch' and the Wonderful World of Children's Literature," **Elementary English**, Vol. 43, No. 1 (January 1966), 50-52.

Mark Langer, "Regionalism in Disney Animation: Pink Elephants and *Dumbo*," **Film History**, Vol. 4, No. 4 (1990), 305-321.

Christian Moran, **Great Big Beautiful Tomorrow**, 25-33.

Kathryn Schultz, "*Bambi* is even bleaker than you thought," **The New Yorker**, January 24, 2022.

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2022/01/24/bambi-is-even-bleaker-than-you-thought>

February 19 The war, a strike, and trips down south

Julianne Burton-Carvajal, "'Surprise Package,': Looking Southward with Disney," in Eric Smoodin, **Disney Discourse**, 131-147.

EJ Dickson, "New 'You Must Remember This' Season Explores History of Racist Disney Cartoon," **Rolling Stone**, October 22, 2019.

M. Thomas Inge, "*Song of the South* and the Politics of Animation," in Kathy Merlock Jackson and Mark I. West, **Walt Disney, from Reader to Storyteller**, 62-79.

Tom Sito, **Drawing the Line**, 101-151.

Charles Solomon, "The Disney Studio at War," in Maureen Furniss, **Animation – Art and Industry**, 145-150.

Optional Reading:

"The Testimony of Walter E. Disney Before the House Committee on Un-American Activities," in Gerald Peary & Danny Peary, **The American Animated Cartoon**, 92-98.

Optional Listening:

Podcast: You Must Remember This, "*Song of the South*" episodes

February 26 Mid-century modern at Disney

Adam Abraham, UPA Jolly Frolics DVD Liner Notes.

Amid Amidi, **Cartoon Modern**, 148-150, 153, 155-6, 159, 161-2, 165-6.

John Canemaker, **The Art and Flair of Mary Blair**, vii-xiii.

Didier Ghez, **The Hidden Art of Disney's Mid-Century Era**, 12-20.

Susan Ohmer, "'That Rags to Riches Stuff': Disney's *Cinderella* and the Cultural Space of Animation," **Film History**, Vol. 5, No. 2 Animation (June 1993), 231-249.

SPRING BREAK March 4

March 11 Cultural shifts in the 1960s

Michael Barrier, **The Animated Man**, 270-278.

Matthew Jacobs, "Floyd Norman, Disney's First Black Animator, Reflects on the Studio's Past, Present and Future," **The Huffington Post**, August 26, 2016.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/floyd-norman-disney_us_57bf377ae4b04193420e22be

Richard Schickel, **The Disney Version**, 9-14, 339-364.

Steven Watts, **The Magic Kingdom**, 446-453.

March 18 **What Would Walt Do? And then the Katzenberg/Eisner era**

“The Art of *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*,” Sotheby’s Catalog, 1989.

Douglas Gomery, “Disney’s Business History: A Reinterpretation,” in Eric Smoodin, **Disney Discourse**, 71-86.

Richard Neupert, **John Lasseter**, 21-29.

Tom Sito, **Drawing the Line**, 285-317.

March 25 **The Disney Renaissance and another golden age**

Jason Bailey, “What Disney risked to make ‘*The Lion King*’ in 1994,” **The New York Times**, July 18, 2019.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/18/movies/disney-lion-king.html>

Maureen Furniss, **A New History of Animation**, 338-348.

Kim Masters, “The Epic Disney Blow-Up of 1994: Eisner, Katzenberg and Ovitz 20 Years Later,” **The Hollywood Reporter**, April 9, 2014.

<http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/features/epic-disney-blow-up-1994-694476>

April 1 **Pixar Ascending**
Assignment 4 due Wednesday, November 16

Maureen Furniss, **A New History of Animation**, 373-7.

Tom Kemper, **Toy Story, A Critical Reading**, 7-33.

David A. Price, **The Pixar Touch**, 86-116.

April 8 **Entering a new century**

Steve Daly, "The Man Who Drew Too Much" **Entertainment Weekly**, 39-44.

Maureen Furniss, **A New History of Animation**, 379-80.

Chris Pallant, **Demystifying Disney**, 111-125.

David A. Price, **The Pixar Touch**, 227-258.

Still to come: Reviews of *Strange World* (2022) and *Disenchanted* (2022)

April 15 **Digital Takes Over, Disney Buys Pixar**

Manohla Dargis, "Someday My Prince Will ... Uh, Make That a Manhattan Lawyer," **The New York Times**, November 21, 2007.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/21/movies/21ench.html>

Marc Gunther, "Has Eisner Lost the Disney Magic?," **FORTUNE**, January 7, 2002.

Laura M. Holson, "Has the Sky Stopped Falling at Disney?" **The New York Times**, September 18, 2005.

http://www.nytimes.com/2005/09/18/business/yourmoney/has-the-sky-stopped-falling-at-disney.html?_r=0

Angie Jones and Jamie Oliff, **Thinking Animation**, 18-28.

Ariane Lange, "Inside the Persistent Boys Club of Animation," **Buzzfeed News**, August 28, 2015.

<https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/arianelange/creative-work-in-connection-with-preparing-the-cartoons>

Peggy Orenstein, "What's Wrong with Cinderella?" **The New York Times Magazine**, December 24, 2006.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/24/magazine/whats-wrong-with-cinderella.html?searchResultPosition=4>

Josh Spiegel, **Yesterday is Forever**, 65-79.

April 22 **A Whole New Disney**

Blake Cole, "Brain Tease," **Penn Arts & Sciences Omnia**, July 9, 2015.

<https://omnia.sas.upenn.edu/story/brain-tease>

Bill Desowitz, "Immersed In Movies: Lauren MacMullan Goes Deeper into Mickey Mouse and 'Get A Horse!'" **Indiewire**, August 26, 2013.

<http://www.indiewire.com/2013/08/immersed-in-movies-lauren-macmullan-goes-deeper-into-mickey-mouse-and-get-a-horse-122686/>

Caitlin Roper, "Big Hero 6 Proves It: Pixar's Gurus have Brought the Magic Back to Disney Animation," **Wired**, October 21, 2014.

<http://www.wired.com/2014/10/big-hero-6/>

Josh Spiegel, **Yesterday is Forever**, pp. 79-85.

Optional Reading

Molly Petrilla, "Penn at Pixar," **The Pennsylvania Gazette**, September/October 2013.

http://www.upenn.edu/gazette/0913/feature1_1.html

April 29

Disney+

** Stand by for links to up-to-the-minute articles on Disney+

Brooks Barnes, "With *Turning Red*, a Big Red Panda Helps Break a Glass Ceiling," **The New York Times**, March 7, 2022.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/07/movies/turning-red-movie-interview-domee-shi.html>

Charles Bramesco, "The dead-eyed new *Lion King* painfully illustrates the difference between cinema and video games," **AV Club**, July 16, 2019.

<https://film.avclub.com/the-dead-eyed-new-lion-king-painfully-illustrates-the-d-1836338813>

Rebecca Keegan, "The Magic Maker: Jennifer Lee's Plan for Walt Disney Animation – and Finding the Next *Frozen*," **The Hollywood Reporter**, January 21, 2022.

<https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-features/jennifer-lee-interview-walt-disney-animation-frozen-encanto-1235076391/>

Rebecca Keegan, Carolyn Giardina, "John Lasseter's Second Act," **The Hollywood Reporter**, July 27, 2022.

<https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-features/john-lasseter-skydance-animation-luck-1235186710/>

Scott Mendelson, "Poor *Lightyear* Box Office Highlights Disney's Increasing Reliance on Marvel," **Forbes**, June 29, 2022.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/scottmendelson/2022/06/29/box-office-lightyear-failure-hints-at-a-disney-almost-dependant-on-star-wars-avatar-marvel/?sh=727df9fb673e>

David Sims, “*The Jungle Book* Points Toward a CGI Future,” **The Atlantic**, April 2016.
<https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2016/04/the-jungle-book-and-the-uncanny-valley/478767/>

Additional articles TBD

Assignments and Grading

There will be four assignments this semester. There will be no midterm or final exam. Attendance/Participation/Curiosity/Discussion together will be worth 15% of your grade.

Please submit your written assignments through Canvas by midnight on the day they are due. If you need additional time for an assignment, please contact me and we can work out a reasonable due date.

Written assignments should be double-spaced and should use a readable 12-point font. Bibliography citations aren’t included in the page count. Feel free to use the citation style you prefer.

Please do not use AI to write your papers, unless you are using it for Assignment 3/option 2. It generally writes a boring and often inaccurate paper.

Remember: Always have a solid thesis statement that captures the big idea of your paper.

Assignment 1 – due Thursday, February 1 (3 pages/10% of your grade)

Autobiographical essay

People in the animation industry – film directors, show creators, network executives, etc. – are often asked about the animated films and series that influenced them when they were young.

For this assignment, talk about the animated Disney films, television shows, and short films that you watched from the time you can remember. What were your favorite Disney movies and series? What animation influenced you (Disney and otherwise)? What sorts of material did you like, and what didn’t you like? Why are you interested in Disney animation? What do you hope to learn about in this course? And if you are hoping to work in animation, what or who inspired you to do that?

Assignment 2 – individual due dates (15% of your grade)

Oral presentation

I will share a document with the names of some individuals, shorts, and series from

Disney and Pixar that we'll be covering in class, along with the dates we'll be covering these topics. Please select a topic and add your name to a list that will be shared in class the second week of this course. Be prepared on the date you've selected to give a TED Talk-style talk, roughly 3-4 minutes long, in class, where you will introduce the class to this person, film, short, or series. You can use slides with visuals, although TED-style means no notes. Be prepared to answer questions and share your opinions on this topic.

Assignment 3 – due Thursday, March 21 (3-5 pages/20% of your grade)

History/Biography/Significance

Select one of these two topics:

Choose an animation director, producer, writer, designer, or other key individual in from Disney or Pixar animation and then place your chosen subject within their historical context. Who was the person and why are they of interest to us now? What did they do? What was their source of inspiration? What impact did their work have? How did world events, technology, other visual artists or shows influence this work? Did this person have any further or lasting influence? How did this person or their film(s) impact Disney or Pixar? What was the relationship between this person and their contemporaries? What led you to choose this person? Be sure to include your thoughts and opinions in this paper.

OR

Be part of my AI research experiment. Does AI understand animation history? Using AI, write this paper (assignment 3 above) and then give AI a grade. Your paper should include a history of all the prompts you used. After writing the paper, assess it – does it include all the key information relevant to this topic? Is it accurate? Give AI the grade you feel the paper deserves, explaining what it did right and what it didn't include. (The length of your paper should be 3-5 pages, and this doesn't include the AI paper. When you send this to me, put the AI paper first, label it as such, and then use the 3-5 pages to explain your prompts, your experience, and what you feel worked or didn't work, as well as any other observations about this process and the AI output.)

Please note: Your topics for assignments 2 and 3 should be different.

Assignment 4 – due between May 6 and May 14 (5-6 pages/40% of your grade)

This is the final paper of this course, and these topics will be explained in greater detail in class.

Select one of these topics:

- Write a book proposal for a book on an academic topic in Disney/Pixar animation – a book that you wish existed or that you would like to write. A format for this will be shared as we get closer to the end of the semester.
- Develop a feature film idea or television series idea for Disney, Pixar, or Disney+. We'll discuss in class what a proposal includes. Discuss why this idea would be a good fit for the intended company (studio, broadcaster, streaming service, etc.)
- Propose a documentary for Disney+ on a Disney- or Pixar-related topic. Discuss why this subject is important, as well as why it would be of interest to the Disney+ audience. I will share more on this topic in class.

- Select any film, series, or major event in Disney/Pixar animation that we didn't cover in depth and analyze the making of this film, considering its creative team and its importance in the history of animation. Remember to start with a thesis.
- Interview someone from Disney or Pixar to get a firsthand understanding of their work and their inspiration. I can work with you to contact this person, but please note that you'll need to start several weeks before the assignment is due to find someone to speak with. For the paper, discuss your conversation and your observations.
- Disney is no stranger to controversy. Throughout Disney's history, there have been issues relating to gender, race, depictions of LGBTQ+ characters, labor, controversial leaders and more. Select an issue you find particularly compelling, discuss how the company responded to it, and articulate your thoughts on the topic. (e.g. How should they have handled it differently?) Remember to start with a solid thesis statement that you will be proving. If you need help accessing any material, please let me know.
- If you have a topic in mind that doesn't fit into any of these categories, please let me know and we can consider it.
- If you have questions about your topic or need help shaping your idea, please feel free to discuss this with me for additional feedback and guidance.
- Please note: It will be necessary for you to determine your topic in advance of the night before it's due.

Class Policies

Attendance

Please sign the attendance list that will circulate at the beginning of class.

Absentee Policy

If you are not in class, you will be marked absent. Both attendance and participation make up a percentage of your grade, so it is important that you attend class and are here to participate in class discussions.

If you need to arrive in class late or leave early, please let me know. Also, if you need to miss class for an exam, a school-related conference, a religious holiday, or a family emergency, please let me know.

Breaks

During each class, we'll have a 10-minute break around 5:00.

Participation

Please participate in the discussion and please feel free to ask questions during the lectures. You'll get more out of the course if you participate, and it's part of your grade.

Food and Beverages

It's no problem to bring food or beverages to class. Please be discreet and make sure to dispose of containers properly.

Late Papers

It is in your best interest to turn in your papers on time. However, if you need extra time to complete a paper, please discuss this with me, and we will work together to determine an acceptable due date for you. If you are late without discussing this with me, your assignment will lose points.

A final grade reminder:

Incompletes are a privilege that students must request. If you request an incomplete, you must also provide a plan for turning in your assignments.

In person and not remote

This class is an in-person seminar. There will not be a Zoom link provided.

Policy Regarding Electronic Devices

Please consider how you spend your time in the classroom and focus on the class. After all, it's a course about television and cartoons. If I notice you on your phone regularly or if you seem busy online during class, this will be noted and reflected in your participation grade.

If you have any questions about these policies, please let me know.