

## **MCS 353: Adaptation**

Prof. Blair Davis

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Office Hours: Tuesdays, 3:30 – 5 pm

### Description:

This course looks at adaptation as a cross-media phenomenon, which we will trace back to the origins of the film medium in the late nineteenth century. The desire to experience familiar stories and characters in different media forms transcends generations. Film critic Margaret Farrand Thorp wrote in 1939 of the “widespread human eagerness to experience the same story in as many media as possible.” This impulse has only grown in recent years with the increasingly vital role of franchises in an era of media convergence, whereby narratives become replayed, extended and/or intertwined across films, television programs, video games, comic books and other forms.

The course will begin with the traditional adaptive process of turning novels into film, the theoretical concerns surrounding fidelity and medium-specificity, and the critical debates to do with adaptation and authenticity. We will look at the classical era of Hollywood in the 1930s through 1950s, using Alfred Hitchcock’s adaptation of Robert Bloch novel *Psycho* in the 1960 film as a case study. This is followed by comparisons of the *Scott Pilgrim* and *Watchmen* graphic novels to their film versions. The more problematic process of adapting such properties as board games, toy lines and video games is explored in later weeks, as are the implications for the adaptive process created by the prolific nature of digital special effects.

We will go beyond narrative and aesthetic analysis in many weeks to consider the industrial implications of adaptations, as well as what media theory can offer us in studying how and why texts are adapted from one medium to another.

This course is cross-listed as both a graduate and undergraduate course.

### Learning Objectives:

Examine the different approaches to studying adaptations (narrative, aesthetic, industrial and media theory perspectives)

Situate particular adaptations within various historical and industrial contexts of media production

Analyze the adaptive strategies used by artists, producers, etc. to bring various texts one from medium to another

### Readings:

Robert Bloch, *Psycho* (Overlook Press)

Brian Lee O'Malley, *Scott Pilgrim*, Vol. 1 (Oni Press)

Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons, *Watchmen* (DC Comics)

Other readings will be made available via D2L

### Assignments:

1.) Professionalism: 10% - *includes such things as attendance/being on-time, having done the readings, engagement with class activities, etc. Also includes creating two discussion questions for class each week based on the readings. Questions must be submitted to the appropriate discussion forum on D2L before 9 am each day we have class, in order to give me enough time to correlate and compare.*

2.) Participation: 10% - *includes contribution to class discussions. Participation is calculated as follows:*

*A - Consistent contributions, averaging multiple significant contributions per class session.*

*B - Frequent contributions averaging one contribution per class session.*

*C - Occasional contributions, averaging one significant contribution for every two to three class sessions.*

*D - Infrequent contributions, averaging one significant contribution for every three to four class sessions.*

*F - No significant contributions (the student rarely, if ever, contributes throughout the entire course).*

3.) Short Assignment: 20% - *Students will complete a short analysis comparing a film to its source material*

- 4.) Final Project Outline: 15% (5% for a verbal pitch of the project, 10% for a detailed outline of the project with an annotated bibliography)
- 5.) Final Project: 30% - Students will create a proposal for a new adaptation of an existing media property (one that does not already exist, be it a film, novel, television show, video game, etc.), using course theory in support of the adaptive choices.
- 6.) Presentation: 15% - Students will briefly present an overview of their paper/project, its methods and conclusions.

### **Grade Scale**

93-100 A, 90-92 A-, 88-89 B+, 83-87 B, 80-82 B-, 78-79 C+, 73-77 C, 70-72 C-, 60-69 D, 0-59 F

### **SYLLABUS POLICY**

#### **NOTE TAKING**

Taking notes during the lecture/discussion periods and the weekly screening/lab sessions is a key part of succeeding in this course. You should write down more than just the key points listed in my Powerpoint slides and also add your own thoughts, questions and observations. The same is true during screenings of clips and films - you will probably not remember everything about them later unless you take notes as you watch. While taking notes in the dark while trying to watch the screen may seem difficult at first, it is a key skill for film students to learn and gets easier with practice.

#### **CELLPHONES**

With the exception of scheduled breaks, the use of cellphones not permitted in class, including screenings. Please turn off your cell phones prior to the start of class unless you have the permission of the instructor. Cellphone use of any kind in class will negatively affect your Professionalism grade.

## **PREPARATION & READING STRATEGIES**

Please complete all readings assigned for a given week prior to the start of class, so that you will already have a context for understanding the course material before we discuss it. I recommend taking notes while you read, such as key ideas and concepts, as well as making a list of questions regarding aspects of the material that are unclear to you or that you find interesting, challenging or enlightening. Note that completing the readings prior to each class is part of your professionalism grade. If it becomes clear to me during class that you haven't done the readings you will lose part of that grade.

## **ATTENDANCE**

Class attendance is required. Promptness is expected as a general rule. If you are consistently late to class your grade will be negatively affected. Attending class means arriving on time and staying until class is finished. Arriving late to class or leaving class early will negatively affect your Professionalism grade, and two such instances will count as one absence. Changes in work schedules, personal celebrations (e.g., birthdays, etc.), assignments due in other classes, car problems/transit congestion, etc. are NOT considered to be legitimate reasons for being late/missing class/missing deadlines, etc. Please allow extra time in your travel schedule to accommodate things like transit delays, traffic, etc.

If you miss a class, even due to illness, I am not able to give you the lecture notes, so please make arrangements with someone in the class to get their notes from them.

You are allowed one unexcused absence in this class, and two absences total if at least one of those is excused (e.g., you have documentation about a medical illness/emergency, legal issue/civic responsibility, or due to an official DePaul function). Further absences will result in the following actions:

2 absences                      Professionalism marks lowered by two letter grade (i.e., A- => B)

3 absences                      Professionalism marks lowered by three letter grades (i.e., A- => B-)

***Students who miss more than three days of class will receive a zero on their Professionalism grade.***

## **MAKE-UP EXAMS, TESTS, QUIZZES, ETC.**

There will be NO makeup tests, exams, presentations, quizzes or other class activities. If you miss a class activity you will receive zero marks. Exceptions may be made at the instructor's discretion for legitimate and unforeseen *documented* medical reasons or extenuating circumstances such as a death in the family or official DePaul function. In such a case, it is the responsibility of the student to inform the instructor immediately and make arrangements to provide any required documentation (I.e. a doctor's note, death certificate, etc.). Exceptions cannot be made if the student does not submit such documentation within a reasonable time frame.

Note that alternative arrangements for scheduled final exams will NOT be made for anything other than unforeseen *documented* medical reasons or extenuating circumstances such as a death in the family. Travel plans such as vacations, family functions, or the need to book a less expensive travel ticket are not legitimate excuses and will not be accommodated. If you are unable to write an exam during the scheduled time you should choose another course that better fits your schedule.

### **ASSIGNMENT REQUIREMENTS/DEADLINE**

Assignments must be handed in on time, at the start of the class in which they are due. Assignments handed in after the start of class will be considered late. Late penalties will be applied at the instructor's discretion to any assignments handed in late. ***You will lose one letter grade per day late on the assignment.***

***Assignments that are more than one week late will NOT be accepted and you will receive a zero.***

Please allow yourself sufficient time to complete the last-minute details and to arrive in class on time: late assignments due to computer and printing problems and transportation troubles will unfortunately not be exempt from receiving a late penalty.

### **ACCOMODATION FOR DISABILITIES**

Students who feel they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately to discuss their specific needs. All discussion will remain confidential. To ensure that you receive the most reasonable accommodation based on your needs, contact me as early as possible in the quarter (preferably within the first week or two of the course – note that accommodations cannot be made retroactively once assignments, exams etc. have already been completed) and be sure to contact the following office for support and additional services:

Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD)

#370, Student Center, LPC, [773.325.1677](tel:773.325.1677)

## **RESPECTFUL BEHAVIOR**

Please respect the contributions of others in the classroom and/or online by not using insulting/inflammatory or discriminatory rhetoric. Class space (both in person and online) is intended to be a safe space for personal reflection and growth, so it is essential that the opinions of others be treated respectfully even if you do not agree with them. Students must therefore engage in respectful and professional in-class and online conduct (which also includes the use of proper grammar when replying online - I.e. please avoid excessive use of abbreviations, emoticons, etc. – full sentences should be used.)

When the instructor or another student is addressing the class, everyone else in the room is expected to listen attentively and to refrain from engaging in conversations or any other activities that constitute distractions. Students who do not abide by this guideline will not be permitted to continue with the course.

## **E-MAIL**

I often send e-mail announcements to the class. You need to (1) make sure your preferred email address in Campus Connect is the address you check regularly so messages do not bounce back and (2) make sure my email address will pass through your spam filter. Please be aware that to avoid DePaul's spam filters, it is recommended that you send me messages using a DePaul email account, as messages sent through Hotmail, Yahoo and other such accounts regularly get quarantined.

I typically respond to emails within 24 hours, Monday to Friday. I do my best to respond to emails on the weekend, but this time is reserved first and foremost for my family, so cannot guarantee an immediate response. If you have not heard from me within this timeframe, you should assume that your email has not reached me and resend.

## **ONLINE EVALUATIONS**

One of your responsibilities in this course is to complete an online teaching evaluation for this class. This course will be available for you to review during the 9th and 10th week of the quarter. Close to that time, you will receive a notification to this effect via email.

As instructors, we really appreciate learning what we are doing well in the classroom and where we can continue to improve. Your feedback really makes a difference.

## **DEPAUL UNIVERSITY ACADEMIC INTEGRITY POLICY**

DePaul University is a learning community that fosters the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas within a context that emphasizes a sense of responsibility for oneself, for others and for society at large. Violations of academic integrity, in any of their forms, are, therefore, detrimental to the values of DePaul, to the students' own development as responsible members of society, and to the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas. Violations include but are not limited to the following categories: cheating; plagiarism; fabrication; falsification or sabotage of research data; destruction or misuse of the university's academic resources; alteration or falsification of academic records; and academic misconduct. Conduct that is punishable under the Academic Integrity Policy could result in additional disciplinary actions by other university officials and possible civil or criminal prosecution. Please refer to your Student Handbook or visit <http://studentaffairs.depaul.edu/homehandbook.html> for further details.

The DePaul Student Handbook defines plagiarism as follows: "Plagiarism includes but is not limited to the following: (a) The direct copying of any source, such as written and verbal material, computer files, audio disks, video programs or musical scores, whether published or unpublished, in whole or in part, without proper acknowledgement that it is someone else's. (b) Copying of any source in whole or in part with only minor changes in wording or syntax even with acknowledgement. (c) Submitting as one's own work a report, examination paper, computer file, lab report or other assignment which has been prepared by someone else. This includes research papers purchased from any other person or agency. (d) The paraphrasing of another's work or ideas without proper acknowledgement." If you are unsure of how to cite a source, please ask!

Violations of DePaul's Academic Integrity Policy will be reported to the Academic Integrity Board. Violation will result in severe penalty, up to and including failure of the assignment/exam or the entire course, at the instructor's discretion.

## **CITATION STYLE**

Students must cite in their papers according to the Chicago Manual of Style, which is the primary citation style in the field of media studies. The use of other citation styles are not permitted. See the following website for specific examples of how to cite your sources using Chicago Style:

[http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools\\_citationguide.html](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html)

## **POLICY ON INCOMPLETE (IN) GRADES**

Undergraduate and graduate students have two quarters to complete an incomplete. At the end of the second quarter (excluding summer) following the term in which the incomplete grade was assigned, remaining incompletes will automatically convert to "F" grades. In the case of the Law School incompletes must be completed by the end of the semester following the one in which the incomplete was assigned. Ordinarily no incomplete grade may be completed after the grace period has expired. Instructors may not change incomplete grades after the end of the grace period without the permission of a college-based Exceptions Committee. This policy applies to undergraduate, graduate and professional programs. NOTE: In the case of a student who has applied for graduation and who has been approved for an Incomplete in his or her final term, the incomplete must be resolved within the four-week grace period before final degree certification.

## **ASSISTANCE WITH WRITING**

For help with organizing your ideas, grammar, citing sources, and avoiding plagiarism, I encourage you to consult DePaul's Center for Writing-Based Learning. The center offers both on-campus and online tutoring. See <http://condor.depaul.edu/~writing/>

## **COURSE SCHEDULE**

### Week 1 – Introduction

Clips from: *Apocalypse Now* (1979); *Frankenstein* (1931); *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* (1994)

### Week 2 – Adaptation Theory

Readings: Thomas Leitch, *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents* (Chapter Six: "Exceptional Fidelity"); Arthur C. Clarke, "2001: A Space Odyssey" (excerpt)

Clips from: *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968)

### Week 3 – Classical Hollywood



Readings: Timothy Corrigan, “Pens, Pulp, and the Crisis of the Word, 1940-1960”; Robert Bloch, *Psycho*

Screening: *Psycho* (1960)

#### Week 4 - Comics Across Media

Reading: Will Brooker, “Batman: One Life, Many Faces;” Scott Bukatman, “Why I Hate Superhero Movies;”

Clips from: *Superman* (1940 radio show); *Superman* (1940 cartoon); *Superman* (1948 serial); *Adventures of Superman* (1953 TV series); *Superman* (1978); *Man of Steel* (2013)

#### Week 5: Comic Books - Page to Screen

Reading: Brian Lee O’Malley, *Scott Pilgrim*, Vol. 1 (Oni Press); Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons, *Watchmen* (DC Comics)

Clips from: *Scott Pilgrim Vs. The World* (2010); *Watchmen* (2009)

\*\*\*Short Assignment Due

#### Week 6 – Board Games, Toys and Other ‘Properties’

Reading: Henry Jenkins, “Game Design as Narrative Architecture;”

Clips from: *Clue* (1985); *Battleship* (2012); *Transformers* (2007); *G.I. Joe: Retaliation* (2013); *The Lego Movie* (2014)

#### Week 7 – Video Games

Reading: Trevor Ellington, “Too Many Cooks: Media Convergence and Self-Defeating Adaptations,” *The Video Game Theory Reader Vol. 2*.

Clips from: *Super Mario Brothers* (1993); *Mortal Kombat* (1995); *Tomb Raider* (2001); *Doom* (2005); various video games based on films

#### Week 8 - Individual meetings

Students will meet with me one-on-one to 'pitch' their final project

\*\*\*Final presentation outline due

Week 9 – Modern Hollywood, Digital Cinema and Adaptation

Reading: Kristin Thompson, "Fantasy, Franchises and Frodo Baggins: The Lord of the Rings and Modern Hollywood."

Clips from: *The Lord of the Rings: Return of the King* (2003); *Gatsby* (2013)

\*\*\*Final presentations part 1

Week 10 - Conclusions

\*\*\*Final presentations part 2 / Final Paper due