

SOC 372

The Sociology of Film

Course Instructor:

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Text and Resources:

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Course Overview

Welcome to Sociology 372. In this course, we will cover a series of topics that are essential to understanding films and the film industry from a sociological perspective.

Films are an important aspect of national culture. Americans view films, either in theaters or on television, on a regular basis. Indeed, Americans have been watching films for over a century. Hollywood films are generally “narrative” films. They tell stories using images, words, and music. First and foremost, these films seek to entertain their audiences. Sometimes the stories they tell also contain a “message.” That message can be as simple as the idea that good usually triumphs over evil.

Of course, films don’t always succeed in achieving these objectives. There are boring films as well as films that are devoid of any deep meaning. But Hollywood is also capable of making films that not only entertain audiences but also change them in some small way. In this way, films can be very powerful. They can make us laugh or make us cry. They can also force us to think about the world around us. Moreover, films are able to exert this power in ways that most of us don’t really understand.

If we don’t always understand why films affect us in certain ways, most of us also don’t understand how films are made. Films don’t magically appear from nowhere. In fact, most films that Americans and others around the world see come from one particular place: “Hollywood.” The term refers to the film industry that established itself in a small area in Southern California over a century ago.

In many respects, the film industry is an industry like any other. Most of the films that come out of Hollywood are produced and distributed by large corporations. These corporations are driven by the profit motive. They make films in order to make money. These corporations are important because it costs tens of millions to produce and distribute the average Hollywood film. Moreover, it is impossible to produce a major film without the financial support of a large media corporation.

However, in addition to being “products” produced by large corporations in the pursuit of profits, films are also often “art.” In the final analysis, films are made by creative artists not corporate executives. These creative artists, including writers, actors, and directors, are typically more interested in the merits of a film as an artistic project than they are in its merits as a financial investment. After all, their reputations depend on the quality of the films they produce.

The Sociology of Film examines the content of films and how this content is shaped by the structure of the film industry. In short, it seeks to understand the influence of “Hollywood” on the content of “Hollywood” films. In so doing, it examines the inevitable tension between art and economics within the film industry.

Course Goals

This course covers a series of topics related to the film production and film content. It examines the types of stories that films tell and the way those stories are told using various film techniques. It also examines the structure the film industry and how it influences the content of films. Finally, it examines the division of creative labor within the film industry and how creative artists influence the content of these same films. In the final analysis, this course seeks to understand how films can be both a commodity and an art.

The specific topics covered in this course include:

- The Sociology of Film
 - Technology of Film
 - Cinematic Technique: Montage
 - Cinematic Technique: Mis-en-scene
 - Organization of the Film Industry
 - Division of Creative Labor
 - Film Narrative
 - Film and Ideology
 - Film Censorship
 - Film Economics
 - Film as Art
 - The Future of Film
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Course Work

Readings and Films

There will be two required books for this course. Both books are available in either new or used paperback editions from Amazon and other online retailers. They are not available in electronic form.

- Robert L. CARRINGER, *The Making of Citizen Kane*. Revised Edition. University of California Press. Paperback. ISBN: 0520205677
- Graeme TURNER, *Film as Social Practice*. Fourth Edition. Routledge: Paperback. ISBN: 0415375142

If you purchase a used copy of either book, be sure that it is the correct edition.

In addition to these two required books, students will be required to read a total of five journal articles and book chapters. Copies of these supplemental readings will be available online through the WSU Libraries eJournals database or through eReserves.

Finally, every student will be required to view four films during the semester. Two of these films will be films viewed in common by all of the students in the course. These films will be discussed at length in the Discussion Groups. They are:

- *Citizen Kane* (1941)
- *Blade Runner* (1981) [Not the Director's Cut version]

You will be required to take a short film quiz on each of these films. These films are available in most video rental stores. Alternatively, you can rent them online through Amazon, Netflix, or Blockbuster.

In addition, every student will also be required to view two other films in order to complete the two assigned papers. These films can be chosen from a list of [The Best Classic American Films](#) (first paper) and [The Best Modern American Films](#) (second paper) provided by the instructor. Once again, many of these films are available in video stores and most of them can be rented online. Most of these films can be rented for less than \$4.00 apiece.

Discussion:

At the beginning of the semester, every student will be assigned to a Discussion Group. There will be roughly ten to fifteen students in each Discussion Group. Over the course of the semester, you will be expected to interact with the other members of your Discussion Group on a regular basis. These groups give you an opportunity to share your views and questions with other students. The goal is to discuss the given topic based on the context of the reading and lecture material.

The topics for each discussion are chosen by the instructor in order to help students gain a better understanding of the basic issues addressed in this course. You will find that you can often clarify your thoughts on an issue simply by discussing it with other students. To this end, you will be expected to participate in on-line discussions **eight times** during the semester, four times in the first eight weeks and four times in the last eight weeks.

Every time you make a satisfactory contribution to the on-line discussion you will receive 5 points, up to a maximum of **40 points** for the semester. To obtain these points, you may post an answer to the question posed by the instructor or post a comment on an answer posted by someone else. In any case, a satisfactory post is one that demonstrates that you understand the assigned material and have given the topic some thought. Every fourth week, I will post the number of points that each student has received for their participation in discussion.

Although I do not participate in the discussion groups, I do monitor them on a regular basis. The best discussions are those in which individuals treat one another with respect. This is especially true of on-line discussions between students. You may disagree with the response of another student, but you should never respond to them in a disrespectful or demeaning manner. Any student who willfully violates this rule will not be allowed make further discussion posts.

Assignments:

I will assign two papers during the semester. Each of these papers will be worth a maximum of 20 points. Each paper will require you to view a film of your choosing from a list of [The Best Classic American Films](#) (first paper) and [The Best Modern American Films](#) (second paper) provided by the instructor. These will be short papers, limited to no more than three double-spaced pages. I will not read or evaluate any material that exceeds this limit.

All assignments must be submitted to me through Blackboard as electronic documents. You may submit your paper, as an attachment, to the Assignment drop box as a Word document, a PDF document, or an RTF document.

Each assignment will be graded on a twenty-point scale. An excellent response will be worth **20 points**. A good response will be worth **18 points**. A satisfactory response will be worth **16 points**. A poor response will be worth **14 points**. An inadequate response will receive less than 14 points. In order to receive the maximum number of points, each assignment should:

- Be free of grammatical and spelling errors
- Draw on the textbook or the lecture notes
- Show that you thought about the assignment

I will not return these assignments to you, but I will provide you with a short explanation of any deficiencies in your response if you receive less than 16 points on an assignment.

Film Quizzes:

Many of the discussion topics will deal with the two films that all of the students in the course are expected to watch. These films are *Citizen Kane* and *Blade Runner*. In order to ensure that everyone participating in the discussions has actually seen these films, students are required to take a quiz on each film. The questions on these quizzes can be easily answered by anyone who has watched these films recently. See the Course Schedule for the open and close dates for these quizzes. These will be on-line quizzes administered using Blackboard. Each film quiz will consist of five multiple-choice questions worth two points each for a total of 10 points. You will have only seven minutes to answer all five questions.

Exams:

There will be two exams during the semester. See the course schedule for the open and close dates for these exams. These are on-line exams and will be administered using Blackboard. Exam 1 will cover Lessons 1 to 6, including the lectures and assigned readings for those lessons. Exam 2 will cover Lessons 7 to 12, including the lectures and assigned readings for those lessons.

Each exam will consist of 25 multiple-choice questions. Each question will be worth 2 points for a total of **50 points** on each exam. You will have only 35 minutes to answer all 25 questions on each exam. Blackboard will notify you when there are only ten minutes left for you to finish the exam.

WSU Online and Vancouver-campus students will not be required to take their exams under a proctor. Students on the Pullman campus, however, **will** be required to take face-to-face proctored exams, administered by a graduate student, on campus. They may go to the Sociology Department office (204 Wilson-Short Hall) anytime between 10:00 and 3:00 on the Friday of the week the exam is scheduled and ask to be given the exam. It will be administered to them by a graduate student. The proctored exams will be identical in content and format to the exams given to off-campus students through Blackboard. The scores on each exam will be posted on Blackboard one week after its completion.

I will “curve” the grades on each exam based on the highest score on that exam. For example, if the highest score on an exam is 66 points, then the lowest score for an A- would be 90 percent of the highest score (60 points). Similarly, the lowest score for a B- would be 80 percent of the highest score (52 points), the lowest score for a C- would be 70 percent of the highest score (46 points), and the lowest score for a D- would be 60 percent of the highest score (40 points).

Short practice exams will be made available the week before the regular exams. These on-line practice exams provide you with a few examples of the types of multiple-choice questions you will see on the

exams. You will not be graded on your performance on the practice exams, but you will be able to see the answers to the practice exam questions that you missed.

All of the multiple-choice questions on the exams will be based on the Study Questions posted with each lesson. If you can answer all of these questions, you will be able answer all of the questions on the exams. Consequently, you should keep the Study Questions in mind when reading the assigned readings and the lectures. You can use any notes you have prepared to answer these Study Questions during the exam.

Instructor Interaction

Students are at liberty to interact with me at any time through Blackboard. Questions of relevance to the entire class can be posted in Questions for the Instructor space. Other questions should be addressed to the me through the Blackboard Communicate space. I am automatically notified of any messages sent to me through Blackboard.

Late Work Policy

I will accept late submissions but only for partial credit. Students must notify me, by e-mail, of any late submissions. I will attempt, whenever possible, to accommodate students with illnesses or family emergencies, but only if I am informed of the situation before the due date for that assignment or exam.

Grading

Course Work	Points	Percent of Final Grade
Discussion (8 @ 5 points)	40	20%
Assignments (2 @ 20 points)	40	20%
Film Quizzes (2 @ 10 points)	20	10%
Exams (2 @ 50 points)	100	50%
Total	200	100%

There will be no opportunities for extra-credit work in this course.
