

WHERE DREAMS COME TRUE

WALT DISNEY and American Cultural Identity

Room and time: Seminar Room (Attems-gasse 25, Top Floor), Wednesday, 3:15 - 4:45 p.m.

First session: October 11, 2017 · **Course number:** 512.313

Lecturer: Univ.-Prof. Dr. Stefan Brandt · **Office hours:** Thursdays, 4-6 p.m. · **Email:** stefan.brandt@uni-graz.at

Description: The name 'Disney' is commonly employed to identify the 'shallow' and 'popular' aspects of the American way of life. It stands for an idealistic – perhaps even escapist – approach to culture that accentuates traditional values and embellishes the romantic dimensions of human (and oftentimes animal) relationships. Since the 1990s, the term 'Disneyfication' has been used by scholars to describe the transformation of society into a giant spectacle, consisting of theme parks and superficial entertainment. The spectrum of Disney films (and productions associated with or financed by Disney) is much wider than many movie-goers suspect; it includes animated cartoons (e.g., *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, 1937; *Fantasia*, 1940; *Mulan*, 1998; *Ratatouille*, 2007; *Up*, 2009; *Frozen*, 2013; and *Inside Out*, 2015), sci-fi flicks (*Tron*, 1982), musicals (*Mary Poppins*, 1964), as well as documentaries (*The Living Desert*, 1951) and even avant-garde films (*The Straight Story*, 1999). While looking at some crucial Disney productions, we will also examine archetypal characters such as Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck with regard to their development on screen/television, discuss crucial topics in Disney movies (e.g., race, class, gender, and nation) as well as scrutinize the phenomenon of 'Disneyland.'

Teaching and Learning Method: This is an interactive course. Participation in group discussions as well as contributions to the discussion forum on the Moodle course site will be part of the final grade. Each meeting will be held by 'experts' who organize the session by means of questions, games, illustrations, video clips, and group work. The most relevant facts will be conveyed in a short information block (or, alternatively, a fact file). Experts upload their questions 6 days in advance!

Materials: All printed texts will be made available on Moodle. Please watch the films online or in our **Media Archive!**

Aims: The course will familiarize participants with the key features (composition, background, effect) of Disney productions.

Assessment: **A.) regular attendance** (no more than two absences!) and **active in-class participation**, as well as **nine entries** in the discussion forum (1/3); **B.) presentation** as part of an expert session plus **3-page handout** and **online questions** (1/3); **C.) research proposal** (2 pages) and **final paper** (10 pages) (1/3). You need to pass each section to pass the course.

Deadline for Final Papers (including declaration of honesty): Thursday, February 15, 2018. *There is no (!) extension of this deadline.* Please **indicate** on a **post-it** attached to your final paper if you would like to get **detailed feedback!**

Syllabus

- 11 October** **Where Dreams Come True – The World of Disney**
Basic text:
Steven Watts, "Walt Disney: Art and Politics in the American Century" (1995). [Moodle]
- 18 October** **The Empire of the Mouse? 'Mickey' as the All-American Hero**
Main examples (viewing required):
Steamboat Willie (1928) & *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* (from: *Fantasia*, 1940).
Additional text (optional):
Ralph S. Izard, "Walt Disney: Master of Laughter and Learning" (1967). [Moodle]
Keywords: All-American, Anthropomorphism, Earlier Talkies, Highbrow, Laughter, Mickey, Transformation.
- 25 October** **The Birth of the American Fairytale**
Main example (viewing required):
Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937).
Additional text (optional):
Tracey Mollet, "Walt Disney and the Birth of the American Fairy Tale" (2013). [Moodle]
Keywords: Animated Feature, Color, Fairytale, Fantasy, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Snow White*.
- 8 November** **Modernity, Crisis, and Alternative Families in Disney**
Main example (viewing required):
Dumbo (1941)
Additional text (optional):
Litsa Renée Tanner et al., "Images of Couples and Families in Disney" (2013). [Moodle]
Keywords: *Alice in Wonderland* (1951), Bullying, *Dumbo*, Family, *Lilo & Stitch*, Outsiders, *Ratatouille*, *Up*.

15 November Ecology and Environmentalism – Disney’s ‘Green Dream’
Main example (viewing required):
Bambi (1942).
Additional text (optional):
David Ingram, “Discourses of Nature and Environmentalism” (2000). [Moodle]
Keywords: *Bambi*, Children’s Fiction, Family, Green Studies, Hunting, *The Lion King*, Mortality.

22 November Political Disney – Donald Duck the Choleric Knight
Main examples (viewing required):
Saludos Amigos (1942) & *The Fuehrer’s Face* (1943).
Additional text (optional):
Dale Adams, “Hollywood and FDR’s Good Neighbor Policy” (2007). [Moodle]
Keywords: Donald Duck, (Anti-)Fascism, Latin America, Stereotyping, World War II.

SPECIAL EVENT: LECTURE PIA WIEGMINK, “BIRDS OF A FEATHER?” 27 NOV. - 3:15 P.M.

29 November ‘Reel Life’ – Disney’s Documentaries and the Construction of Nature
Main example (viewing required):
The Living Desert (1953)
Additional text (optional):
Scott MacDonald, “Up Close and Political: Ideology in the Nature Film” (2006). [Moodle]
Keywords: Authenticity, Documentary Genre, *The Living Desert*, Nature, Staging, *The Vanishing Prairie*.

**DUE DATE
RESEARCH PROPOSAL**

6 December ‘Imagineered’ Historical Places: Disneyland and the American Frontier
Main text (reading required):
Karal Ann Marling, “Disneyland” (2017). [Moodle]
Additional text (optional):
Richard Francaviglia, “History after Disney” (1995). [Moodle]
Keywords: *Cars*, Disneyland, Frontier, Imagineering, Route 66, Theme Parks, West.

13 December Disneyland as ‘Dismaland’: Commerce, Reification, and Protest
Main example (viewing required):
What Would Jesus Buy? (dir. Rob VanAlkemade, 2007) [Watch online]
Additional text:
Anjali Nath, “Banksy’s Installation in Disneyland” (2013). [Moodle]
Keywords: Alienation, Banksy, Commercialism, Dismaland, Reification.

10 January Orientalism and Racial Stereotyping
Main example (viewing required):
Pocahontas (1995).
Additional text:
Kiyomi Kutsuzawa, “Disney’s *Pocahontas*” (2000). [Moodle]
Keywords: *Aladdin*, History, Orientalism, *Pocahontas*, Racial Stereotyping.

17 January Princesses and Tomboys – The (Re)Construction of Gender in Disney
Main examples (viewing required):
The Little Mermaid (1989) & *Mulan* (1998).
Additional texts:
Deborah Ross, “Disney and the Female Imagination” (2004). [Moodle]
Lisa Brocklebank, “Disney’s ‘Mulan’ – The ‘True’ Deconstructed Heroine” (2000). [Moodle]
Keywords: ‘Disney Princess,’ Empowerment, *Frozen*, Gender, *The Little Mermaid*, *Mulan*, Tomboy.

24 January Going Primitive – Speciesism in Disney’s Man-Animal Films
Main example (viewing required):
The Jungle Book (1967).
Additional text:
E. Byrne & M. McQuillan, “Walt Disney’s Ape-Man: Race, Writing, Humanism” (2004). [Moodle]
Keywords: Ape-Man, Anthropomorphism, *Brother Bear*, *Jungle Book*, Primitive/Civilized,’ Race, Speciesism, *Tarzan*.

BRING TWO BOOKS

31 February Post-Race Disney? Political Correctness and Ethnic Polyphony in Disney’s Recent Productions
Main example (viewing required):
The Princess and the Frog (2009).
Additional text:
Neal A. Lester, “Disney’s *The Princess and the Frog*” (2010). [Moodle]
Keywords: African American Princess, Inclusion, Post-Race, *Song of the South*, Whitewashing.

DUE DATE FINAL PAPER: THURSDAY, 15 FEBRUARY 2018