Film Directors: Joss Whedon
ENGFLM 1470 // summer session I // TuTh 12-3:50

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This class takes up the question of authorship in relation to moving images. We'll look at the work of Joss Whedon (film director, screenwriter, TV showrunner) to think through how an individual can shape cinematic meaning: how do Whedon's particular preoccupations surface across his body of work, from Shakespeare adaptation (*Much Ado About Nothing*) to vampiric drama (*Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Angel*)? We'll explore how Whedon builds transmedia worlds, expansive universes that stretch out across many different media forms and objects. These universes invite participation, so we'll look as well at the ways viewers inhabit and reshape Whedon's creations toward their own ends. As part of the class, students will go to see The *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (directed by Whedon) in theaters.

Required Texts
- Burkhead, Cynthia and Lavery, David. *Joss Whedon: Conversations*. Jackson, MI: UP of Mississippi, 2011.
- Whedon, Joss. *The Long Way Home.* New York: Dark Horse, 2007.

All other readings are available online or posted on CourseWeb. Please print them and bring them to class with you.

Assignments & Grading
Grading breaks down as follows:
30% Final Project
20% Midterm
20% Participation (class and blog)
20% Group Project
10% Presentation

There are three main assignments for this class: a midterm paper, a group project, and a final paper/project. I'll give more detailed descriptions as they come up, but to sketch some general outlines:

For the **midterm paper** (4-5 pages), you'll investigate one commercially produced extension of the Buffyverse or Marvel cinematic universe – a spinoff series, film, comic book, game, website, etc. Your media object of choice does not have to be authored by Whedon, but you should consider its relation to him and the characters and/or narratives he created.

The **group project** asks you to try your hand at authoring within one of Whedon's story worlds. This might take a variety of forms: writing dialogue from a "missing scene," recutting video from a film or episode to convey different meaning, sketching out your own comic book sequence. This class does not expect technical or production expertise, so imagination is more important than execution here.

The **final assignment** will be either a paper (8-10 pages) or a creative project. It can (and ideally will) develop out of work done for the midterm or group project.

Each student will also give a short presentation (10-15 minutes) on a topic related to the class, and complete 4 blog posts in preparation for the larger projects.

The 'R' Rating
Some of the assigned media is rated 'R' or unrated: there is violence, language, and sexuality that could be considered objectionable. If a film makes you uncomfortable, you're free to leave the room, but be aware that "mature content" will often become part of our discussions.

Website
Course information, links to online readings, and other resources are available at the class website: http://www.klcameron.com/whedon. This is also where you will post blogs. You'll need to register as a user: since the site is public, be sure to pick a username that is not your real name or Pitt id. Readings that aren't publicly available will be posted to CourseWeb – they're marked on the syllabus with "CW."

Attendance
Because this is a seminar, discussion is central to the work of the course. Come to class on time, prepared to take part in conversation. While you should try to attend every class, **you're permitted one absence. A second will affect your grade, and a third is grounds for failure**. That said, I understand that life doesn't always respect class schedules: come talk to me **before you miss class** if you expect to have a problem with this policy. You're responsible for finding out about and making up any work you miss.

You'll be considered late to class if you arrive more than five minutes after the start of the class period. Three late arrivals count as one absence.

Late/Missing Work
As this is a condensed class, you'll be turning in assignments every week. **If you submit something late, your grade on it drops by a full letter.** You also won't get feedback on that assignment.

Plagiarism
Cite your sources, even when paraphrasing. MLA style is the default for this class – ask if you're unsure how to cite properly. **All instances of plagiarism will result in no credit for the assignment and a report to the Dean.**

The Writing Center

Located in 317-B Student Center, 4024 O'Hara St., the Writing Center is an excellent resource for working on your writing with an experienced consultant. Although you should not expect consultants to correct your papers for you, they can assist you in learning to organize, edit, and revise your essays. Their services are free, but you should call ahead (412-624-6556) or make an appointment online at www.english.pitt.edu/writingcenter/

Other Services

If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both me (your instructor) and the Office of Disability Resources and Services (DRS), 140 William Pitt Union, 412-648-7890, drsrecep@pitt.edu, 412-228-5347 for P3 ASL users, as early as possible in the term. DRS will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course.

Pitt offers free personal and academic counseling at the University Counseling Center (412-648-7930). Specialized counseling services are available to victims of sexual assault; you can contact the sexual assault services coordinator via the main UCC phone line during weekday business hours or at 412-648-7856 (after 5 pm, Monday-Friday or on weekends). In a crisis situation, university police can also connect you with an on-call counselor affiliated with the UCC.

Schedule (subject to revision)

I. Transmedia Worlds

Week 1

5/12: Introduction
read: "Introduction," vii-xii JW:C
screen: *The Avengers* (2012)

5/14: Buffy, Film to Television
read: Jenkins, "Transmedia Storytelling 101"
         Early, "Staking Her Claim," 1-6
screen: *Buffy,* "Graduation Day" (parts 1&2)

Blog 1: due 5PM Sunday, May 17

Week 2

5/19: From Buffy to Angel
read: Robinson, "The Onion AV Club Interview 2001," 23-33 JW:C
         Robinson, "The Onion AV Club Interview 2007," 143-161 JW:C
screen: *Angel,* "City of"; *Buffy,* "Hush"

5/21: Canon Comics
read: Whedon, *The Long Way Home*
screen: *Buffy*, "Chosen"

Midterm Paper: due 5PM Sunday, May 24

II. Fandom

Week 3

5/26: No Class – Avengers: Age of Ultron field trip

Blog 2: due midnight Tuesday, May 26

5/28: Firefly & the Fan Campaign
read: Scott, "The Trouble with Transmediation," 30-34
screen: *Firefly*, "Serenity"

Blog 3: due 5PM Sunday, May 31

Week 4

6/2: Fan Productions
read: Barton, "Can't Stop the Sequel," 9-21 CW
         fan fiction
screen: fan films

6/4: Dr. Horrible and Word of Mouth
read: Leaver, "Joss Whedon, Dr. Horrible, and the Future of Web Media", 1-26
screen: *Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog* (2008)

Group Project: due 5PM Sunday, June 7

III. Degrees of Authorship

Week 5

6/9: Adaptation
read*:*   Johnson and Gray, "The Problem of Media Authorship," 1-6 CW
            "Yay, Geometry: An Interview with Joss Whedon"
screen*: Much Ado About Nothing* (2012)

6/11: Screenwriting
read*:*   O'Hehir, "Interview: Joss Whedon on his two big movies"
screen*: The Cabin in the Woods* (2012)

Blog 4: due 5PM Sunday, June 14

Week 6

6/16: "Special Thanks To"
read*:*   Hadas, "Authorship and Authenticity in the Transmedia Brand: The Case of
            Marvel's Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D," 7-17
screen*: Marvel's Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*, "Pilot"

6/18: TBA

Final Paper/Project: due 5PM Sunday, June 21