“Materials are indifferent; but the use we make of them is not.”
—Epictetus

Course Description
A man smiles, a shot is fired, he frowns. No: A man frowns, a shot is fired, then he smiles. The sequence tells all. In class, we will draw from this insight, fundamental to film theory, to construct compelling written narratives. In particular, we will explore the ways we make choices not only about what to describe but also about how to arrange those descriptions, and how in making these choices, we begin (whether we intend it or not) to make an argument.

Goals
You will learn to think of a written story as a functional object, the utility of which is determined by the elegance of its construction. Together we will take apart and reassemble film sequences and magazine articles, and you will set about assembling and reassembling written works of your own. The two major projects will be: To report and write a short article based on a conventional structure and a longer feature, the structure of which will be your own invention. Ultimately, you will come to recognize the narrative techniques that inform all of the arts (indeed all of life) and draw on those techniques to make your own work more persuasive and beautiful.

POLICIES

Grading
Eighty percent of your grade will be based on your written work (as described below). The remainder will be based on classroom participation. Part of your classroom participation grade will be based on your completion of in-class writing exercises and quizzes. Please note that classroom participation, including prompt attendance, is worth the equivalent of three full letter grades—it is a key to success in the class.

Plagiarism
Students who plagiarize on a given assignment will receive an F on that assignment and be reported to the associate dean, per the NYU Statement on Academic Integrity.

Late Papers
Meeting a deadline is important. Being clear about why you can’t meet a deadline is even more important. Unless you make a reasonable request for an extension, late papers will be penalized.
MAJOR ASSIGNMENTS

1. Museum Outline
To better understand the linear nature of narrative you will literally walk through one. To do so, you will select a museum exhibit (or other suitable space), visit it and take notes, then write an outline of the space that presents it as a narrative experience. (Worth 10 percent of grade.)

2. Short Article
Like songs or poems, magazine articles can take on a variety of preexisting narrative forms. Some of these forms are simple and some are complex. This assignment has two parts. First, you will select a specific magazine form from a specific magazine—a review, a profile, an editorial, etc.— and determine the structure that defines that form. Second, you will write a story that recapitulates that structure and thereby emulates the form. (Worth 20 percent of grade.)

3. Long Article
The long-form exercise will invert the priority of the short-form exercise. Rather than find a form and shape the facts to it, students will find the facts and then determine the most compelling means by which to arrange them. This assignment has five parts. 1. Write a pitch. 2. Gather and inventory facts. 3. Create an outline based on the inventory. 4. Write a draft based on the outline. 5. Revise the draft. (Worth 50 percent of grade.)

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<th>MUSEUM OUTLINE</th>
<th>SHORT ARTICLE</th>
<th>LONG ARTICLE</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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Points are cumulative.

SELECTED READINGS AND VIEWINGS


Strike. Dir. Sergei Eisenstein. Goskino/Proletkult, 1925. Film.
The Sunbeam. Dir. D.W. Griffith. Biograph, 1912. Film
THE MONTAGE IS THE MESSAGE

A tentative outline, subject to change at any moment

I.

1. WHY MONTAGE? (JANUARY 31)
Turtles all the way down. Moral implications of narrative. The structure of this class.

2. SOMETHING FROM NOTHING (February 7)
The whiteness of the page. Eisenstein meets Coppola. The memory palace.
Strike. Dir. Sergei Eisenstein. Goskino/Proletkult, 1925. Film.

3. MOVING THROUGH SPACE (February 14)
What is a cut? Montage vs. mise en scène. The bomb under the table.
Museum outline, first draft due (5 points)

II.

4. BORROWED FORMS (February 21)
Music as metaphor. Cut time. What is a rubric?
Museum outline, final draft due (5 points)

5. DOES IT STAND UP? (February 28)
Story workshop. Montage as machine. Will it start?
The Sunbeam. Dir. D.W. Griffith. Biograph, 1912. Film
Short article, generic outline due (5 points)

6. THEFT! (March 7)
Parts and plagiarism. Can structure be stolen? When an editor re-writes, who is the author?
Short article, real outline due (5 points)

(Continued . . .)
III.

7. LONGER TRIPS (March 14)
**Short article, final draft due (10 points)**

8. GATHERING MATERIALS (March 28)
Inventory as a form of meditation. Ideas as scenes. Scenes as ideas.
**Long article, pitch due (10 points)**

9. MAINTAINING INTEREST (April 4)
An outline is a list of lists. Directionality and entasis. Trap doors. The beat.
**Long article, inventory due (10 points)**

10. WORKSHOP (April 11)
*Readings to be announced*
**Long article, outline due (10 points)**

11. WORKSHOP (April 18)
*Readings to be announced*

12. WORKSHOP (April 25)
*Readings to be announced*
**Long article, rough draft due (10 points)**

13. WORKSHOP (May 2)
*Readings to be announced*

14. MAKE IT TRUE (May 9)
The power of montage. Hitler’s cat. Selection or censorship?
**Long article, final draft due (10 points)**
Fourteen Stories

1. Tell a story about the most interesting thing that happened since you came to New York.

2. Tell a story with a punch line. Doesn’t have to be funny. The point is we know it’s done without you having to say so.

3. Tell a story (with a definite ending) that starts in one place and ends in another.

Tell a story in three parts.

Tell a story with a punch line. Doesn’t have to be funny. The point is we know it’s done without you having to say so.

Tell a story from the perspective of some other person.

Tell a story that takes place in at least two locations.

Tell a story that involve at least two different people who never see each other in the story.