

Department of Psychology

Distinguished Lecturer Series



DR. JAMES CUTTING, Cornell University

TALK: Storytelling in Popular Movies and its Underlying Psychological Principles

ABSTRACT

Popular movies grab and hold our attention. One reason is that their stories are culturally important to us, but another is that general narrative formulae have been honed over millennia and that a derived but specific filmic form has been developed and perfected over the last century. The result is a highly effective format that allows rapid processing of complex narratives. Movies also transport us to new mental realms as we exercise theory-of-mind faculties, have our emotions stirred, all the while being entertained. But what are popular movies like? I present a corpus analysis to explore a psychological narratology of popular movies – the understanding of their structure and how it impacts us.

BIOGRAPHY

James E. Cutting is Susan Linn Sage professor of psychology at Cornell University, where he has taught since 1980. He received his PhD from Yale and his BA from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. In addition to his academic work he was a professional modern dancer, an amateur actor, and worked in industry at the one-time Atari Sunnyvale Research Laboratory. He is a Charter Fellow of the American Psychological Society, and a member of the College Art Association, Modern Language Association, American Society of Aesthetics, and the Society for the Cognitive Studies of the Moving Image. He is author of two books and over a hundred scientific articles. He was editor of *Psychological Science* (2003-2006) and the *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance* (1989-1993).

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