Andrée Lafontaine

Statement of Teaching Philosophy

A background in Political Thought has no doubt played an important role in my seeing films as social products above all else. I strongly believe that each viewer has an ethical responsibility to assess movies critically and take part in the discourse surrounding them. By extension, I see it as *my* responsibility to foster critical thinking in my students.

To that effect, I encourage students to take part in the city's cultural life, namely, by working or attending film festivals and screening and writing for blogs as film reviewers. Writing for cultural blogs has also proven an excellent way to encourage both students' writing but also their networking skills and résumé-building.

My teaching philosophy reflects my commitment to critical thinking as well as my interest in social epistemology. I want students to experience the act of "constructing" and sharing knowledge. Even though they are dealing with difficult texts, I strive to give individual students the opportunity to become "experts" on certain important texts and concepts in the field so that they can then become resources for other students who may be experiencing difficulty. This allows them to assert themselves and play a valuable role within the academic community that is the classroom.

By confronting various films and texts addressing similar issues, my goal is to emphasize the "situatedness" of various discourses so that students can subsequently see how the knowledge they produce is at once both nourished and limited by this situatedness. Maurice Merleau-Ponty's later writings draw attention to the fact that *situated* knowledge means that it will never be possible for anyone to get the "full picture". To adopt a point of view is to accept—at least momentarily—to abandon all others. I try to promote this understanding by exposing students to complementary and conflicting texts so that, although they may not agree with a particular position, they understand the internal logic propelling it.

To promote collegial conversations among students and tap into their interests, I start each class with a short 5-10 minute conversation, where I ask students about noteworthy films they have seen in the past week. This simple technique has proven surprisingly effective in fostering lively class participation and it is also good training ground for students to test different ways of talking about films and structuring convincing arguments. I also insist, however, that students use proper cinematic vocabulary when describing filmic elements. Repetition of technical vocabulary, by both instructor and students, makes it easier for them to internalize its use.

To conclude, my pedagogical strategies are dedicated to teaching the principles of social epistemology and critical thinking in a dynamic environment to empower students to take part in rewarding discursive engagements with film in and outside of class.