

# CNTV-530 - Cinematic Ethics

Spring 2021 - 1 unit

Wednesday, 7 pm - 8:50 pm (Los Angeles time)

Richard Lemarchand: Section 17845D

## Instructor & Student Assistant:

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Office Hours:                      by appointment, Tuesdays, 2pm to 6pm (LA time)

## Learning Objectives

The hardest part of ethical conundrums, in life and in the cinematic arts, is that we are often neck-deep in them before we realize it.

My goal in this class is to give you the tools to:

- **Recognize** you are in an ethically fraught situation in your working life.
- **Understand the problem.** To think your way through the thicket of conflicts and obligations that make a thorny ethical dilemma.
- **Gather information you need**, if there is time.
- **Develop a broad range of possible actions** that may answer the problem.
- **Make a choice and take action.** This comes with the understanding that *taking no action is an action*, and is often the least responsible action we can take.
- **Learn how to continue learning** to make better ethical choices.

The course includes exploring your own ethical and moral influences. Our goal isn't to learn one right answer for every problem (that would be impossible). The goal is to get good at figuring out what is the most ethically appropriate action is for you, in this moment, and for the larger media-making and consuming society. Our society and industry is comprised of these choices. Only together can we make it a more just and compassionate place.

## Course Description

This is an introductory course in the ethical questions professionals encounter in the field of cinematic arts (including animation, writing, interactive media, and games). Ethical questions are those in which we ask, "What's the right thing to do?" The cinematic arts, unlike professions of law or medicine, for example, have no specific code of conduct. So this course does not aim to instruct you how to adhere to standards. Instead it seeks to develop your capacity to recognize ethical questions and deepen your ability to engage and address those questions consciously, fully and effectively.

## Approach

The core of the course is a discussion of actual, not hypothetical, cases drawn from the experience of professionals in the cinematic arts. Most weeks the instructor will welcome an industry guest with expertise in the topic under consideration. That guest will present a true story from their professional lives.

We'll explore the different dimensions of these dilemmas and you'll be asked to decide how best to act. The idea is that by rehearsing different sorts of questions deliberately, and in detail, you'll be better equipped to handle decisions that, in your professional life, you'll often have to make in the blink of an eye.

Along with our guests, our class will include working in breakout rooms with your peers to respond to our weekly case studies. You will be asked to write two short essays as your homework assignments. As well as occasional readings and viewings of documentary films prior to class that contribute to your broader knowledge of both ethics and common industry practices. In this way, you'll sharpen your sense of the unique ethical decisions you may face in your media-making career, and practice how to determine your response to these challenges.

## Weekly Schedule of Topics & Assignments

### *Syllabus is Subject to Revision*

#### Week 1

Jan. 20

**Beginnings: What will you choose to work on?**

**How will you decide?**

**In what way does that relate to cinematic ethics?**

Guest:

No Guest

Assignment: Read: *"How Blind is Hollywood to Ethics?"* (1990 LA Times Article)

## **Week 2**

**Jan. 27**      **Decisions media makers face. What is an ethical question?  
What are our values based on?  
Do our choices depend upon the role that we play?**

In Class: Values Exercise. Introduction to role morality.

Guest: No guest this week

Assignment: Read *Ethics: a general introduction* (approx. 3000 words)  
[http://www.bbc.co.uk/ethics/introduction/intro\\_1.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/ethics/introduction/intro_1.shtml)

## **Week 3**

**Feb. 3**      **An Overview of Ethical Thought**

An introduction to the ethical frameworks and the case study approach used by the class; in-class examination of first case study, *The Suffering Sound Designer*.

Guest: No guest this week

Assignment: Entire Class: Read Case Study #1: Management Melange  
Group A: Write a response to the case study (max 500 words)  
(Due: upload to class Blackboard by 8pm, Tuesday, 2/9)

## **Week 4**

**Feb. 10**      **Relationships and distance from material.  
Questions about ownership and telling someone else's story.**

Guest: TBD

Assignment: Viewing of *The Social Dilemma*

**Week 5****Feb. 17      The Ethics of Technology, Media and Online Community**

Assignment: Entire Class: Read Case Study #2: Credit Crisis  
Group B: Write a response to the case study (max 500 words)  
*(Due: upload to class Blackboard by 8pm, Tuesday, 2/23)*

Guest:        TBD

**Week 6****Feb. 24      Partnerships. Questions about collaboration and the nature of professional relationships.**

Guest:        TBD

Assignment: Entire Class: Read Case Study #3: Intoxicated Ingenue  
Group C: Write a response to the case study (max 500 words)  
*(Due: upload to class Blackboard by 8pm, Tuesday, 3/2)*

**Week 7****March 3      Distinctly Cinematic Relationships: Director & Actor. Questions about working with actors, eliciting a performance.**

Guest:        TBD

Assignment: No assignment this week.

**Week 8****March 10     Distinctly Cinematic Relationships: Comedy. Exploring the boundaries of what's funny.**

Guest:        TBD

Assignment: All: Read Case Study #4: Stoned Subject  
Group D: Write a response to the case study (max 500 words)  
*(Due: upload to class Blackboard by 8pm, Tuesday, 3/9)*

Assignments: Entire Class: Read: *"How Close is Too Close?"*  
& *"Money Changes Everything"* by Professor Lisa Leeman

## **Week 9**

**March 17 True Stories. Ethical questions that arise in documentary films and animation, and games.**

Guest: TBD

Assignment: Entire Class: Watch: [\*Who Needs Sleep?\*](#)

Assignment: Entire Class: Read Case Study #5: Overtime Odyssey  
Group A: Write a response to the case study (max 500 words)  
(Due: upload to class Blackboard by 8pm, Tuesday, 3/16)  
Viewing/Reading TBA

## **Week 10**

**March 24 Partnerships. Questions about collaboration and the nature of professional relationships.**

Guest: TBD

Assignment: Entire Class: Read Case Study #6: Diversity Dilemma  
Group B: Write a response to the case study (max 500 words)  
(Due: upload to class Blackboard by 8pm, Tuesday, 3/30)

Assignment: Entire Class: Watch *Disclosure* (Netflix, 2020)

## **Week 11**

**March 31 Representing: Who to depict and how in scripted film, television, games, & interactive. Questions of race, ethnicity, class, gender, orientation, ability – and what you owe to who you represent in your work.**

**Questions about promoting inclusion in front of and behind the camera.**

Guest: TBD

Assignment: Entire Class: Read Case Study #7: Production Pickle  
Group C: Write a response to the case study (max 500 words)  
(Due: upload to class Blackboard by 8pm, Tuesday, 4/13)

Readings: *Dan Harmon's Apology*: Slate  
*Dan Harmon's Apology*: Vox  
Be prepared for a Pop-Quiz on this Reading!

**Week 12**

**Apr. 7** **NO CLASS – USC Wellness Day**

**Week 13**

**April 14** **Work. Questions about gender, harassment, and power.**

Guest: TBD

Reading: Systemic Problems Worksheet.

Assignment: Entire Class: Read Case Study #8: Violent Video Game  
Group D: Write a response to the case study (max 500 words)  
(Due: upload to class Blackboard by 8pm, Tuesday, 4/20)

**Week 14**

**April 21** **Choice. Questions about the material you choose to work on.**

Guest: TBD

**Week 15**

**April 28** **Semester Wrap Up. Q&A about the Final Exam. Course Evaluations.**

Guest: No guest this week.

Exercise: Revisit values exercise from start of the semester

Breakout

Groups: Addressing Systemic Ethical Questions in Filmmaking  
Learning Experience Evaluations

**UNIVERSITY STUDY DAYS – NO CLASSES MAY 1-4**

**May 5**      **7-9pm (Los Angeles time) FINAL EXAM**  
**In-class two-hour exam (essay questions).**  
**This time is assigned by the university, it cannot be**  
**changed! Attendance is required.**  
**Do not make travel plans that conflict.**

**Required Reading and Viewing**

All required reading and viewing (listed below) *will be made available on the Blackboard* for the class, in the section called ***Readings/Resources***.

These will include links to places to watch videos, listen to podcasts, and to read articles on the internet. Some of the readings will also exist fully on the Blackboard, as .pdfs.

The Required Reading, Viewing, Listening is:

Watch:      [Who Needs Sleep?](#) – (Vimeo, YouTube)

*Disclosure* (Netflix, 2020)

Read:      *"How Blind is Hollywood to Ethics?"* (1990 LA Times Article)

*BBC Ethics: a general introduction* (approx. 3000 words)

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/ethics/introduction/intro\\_1.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/ethics/introduction/intro_1.shtml)

*Role Morality: From Ethics Unwrapped*

*Three Ethical Frameworks: A Chart*

*"How Close is Too Close?" & "Money Changes Everything"* by Professor Lisa Leeman

*Why Hank Azaria Won't Play Apu on the Simpsons Anymore – The New York Times*

[Inside the Fight for Marsha P. Johnson's Legacy](#)

*Dan Harmon's Apology: Slate*

*Dan Harmon's Apology: Vox*

*Hollywood Disability and Inclusion Toolkit*

*Time's Up Hollywood – Audition Guidelines*

*Pay Up Hollywood - [Variety](#)*

*Listen: Scriptnotes Podcast Ep. 422 – John August, Craig Mazin*

## **Grading**

This is a letter-grade course. University guidelines clarify that a grade of B or above is required for a graduate student to receive credit for a class.

Direct engagement with ethical questions, and a conscious open discussion of those questions, is a fundamental methodological goal of the course. For this reason, you're expected to participate in and make a thoughtful contribution to each week's discussion.

Preparation for the discussion – in the form of 500 word responses on two assigned case studies and review of assigned films and reading – is a requirement. Written responses must be uploaded to the CNTV-530 class Blackboard site **by 8pm Tuesdays (Los Angeles time)**, the day prior to each class meeting. Written responses will be evaluated on the basis of a full engagement with the question posed by each case study and an articulate appreciation of the breadth of issues.

This class uses a "check mark" grading system:

- ✓+ You made a consideration of the stakeholders, obligations, and conflicts in the case. You listed the prudential, legal, and ethical considerations that you see. You chose a well thought out, clear course of action. You considered *at least* one other course of action, and said why you've decided against going in those directions.
- ✓(+ ) You chose a clear course of action, and considered at least one other course of action. You used some, but not all of the other core concepts discussed in class.
- ✓ You chose a clear course of action, but didn't explore alternate courses of action & explain why they didn't choose those options; or didn't utilize the core concepts discussed in class.
- ✓(-) You didn't choose a clear course of action, but offered notably fine distinctions or discussion of concepts.
- ✓- You didn't choose a clear course of action.

Check Mark Grade	Corresponding Letter Grade	Corresponding %age grade
√+	A	96
√(+)	A-	93
√	B+	90
√(-)	B	87
√-	B-	83

A final two-hour exam makes up the remainder of your grade. The exam will present a fresh case study – a specific and real problem - and ask you to discuss the ethical issues involved and decide on a course of action. The exam will be evaluated not on the basis of arriving at a single correct answer, but on a broad, thoughtful appreciation of the dimensions of the ethical question and how well you support a particular course of action.

### **Class Grading:**

- 15% Participation in class discussions (includes familiarity & reference to assigned readings, viewings)
- 45% Fulfillment of the two case study responses (20% for 1<sup>st</sup> one, 25% for 2<sup>nd</sup> one)
- 40% Final Exam

### **Attendance Policy:**

You cannot participate in the class if you are not present in class. Students are expected to be on time and prepared for each class.

Punctual attendance at all classes is mandatory. Students arriving more than five minutes late to three classes, more than ten minutes late to a single class, or leaving early, will be marked as having an unexcused absence from class, unless prior permission has been obtained from the instructor.

Two unexcused absences will result in a student's grade being lowered by one full letter (i.e. A becomes B). A third unexcused absence will result in a student's grade being lowered by one, additional full letter (i.e. A becomes C). A student's grade will be lowered by one full letter for each additional absence.

If a student misses class due to an emergency, the student must email the professor and SA prior to class or contact the Production Office at 213-740-3317.

### **Missing an Assignment Deadline:**

Written responses to case studies must be uploaded to the CNTV-530 Ethics class Blackboard site before 8pm Tuesday nights (see due dates in class schedule above).

The only acceptable excuses for missing an assignment deadline are personal illness or a family emergency. Production schedules are NOT an acceptable reason to turn in work late. Students must inform the instructor **before the assignment due date** and present verifiable evidence in order for a deadline extension to be granted. Graded assignments will typically be returned within two weeks after submission.

### **Late Work:**

Each day or part of a day that an assignment is turned in late will result in the assignment grade being lowered a full grade.

Up to 24 hours late: a  $\checkmark+$  becomes a  $\checkmark(+)$ , a  $\checkmark(+)$  becomes a  $\checkmark$ , etc.

Up to 48 hours late: a  $\checkmark+$  becomes a  $\checkmark$ , a  $\checkmark(+)$  becomes a  $\checkmark(-)$ , etc.

Up to 72 hours late: a  $\checkmark+$  becomes a  $\checkmark(-)$ , a  $\checkmark(+)$  becomes a  $\checkmark-$ , etc.

More than 72 hours late: an automatic  $\checkmark-$

If you receive two  $\checkmark-$  grades in this class you are in danger of failing the class, and should speak to the instructor about your situation.

### **Social Media Use in Class**

Social media use, including text messaging, Internet messaging and email, is not permitted in class unless explicitly permitted by the instructor. A 0.5% grade reduction will result from each occurrence of a student being found using social media in class.

### **Video and Audio Recording in Class**

Video and audio recording during class meetings is not permitted, except by prior arrangement with the instructor and the class members.

## **Asynchronous Learning**

Class sessions may be Zoom recorded and made available for asynchronous viewing until the end of the grading period in early May. If a recording is being made it will be acknowledged openly in class. Note: There may be occasions when a guest will request that all or part of a class not be recorded, so the guest will feel comfortable sharing an experience that they don't wish to be recorded. If that is the case, no recording will be made.

Students enrolled in this course from outside the U.S. Pacific Time Zone will still be expected to participate in real time assuming that the official class time falls between 7am and 10pm in their time zones. Wherever possible faculty will be understanding and make accommodations to ease the inconvenience of asynchronous learning.

Students from outside the U.S. Pacific Time Zone for whom the class falls between the hours of 10pm and 7am may still be required to complete certain components of the course synchronously. These components will be announced at the beginning of the semester and students with concerns about meeting these requirements should discuss them with their faculty at that time.

## **Note for Students with Disabilities**

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to us as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301, and is open 8:30am - 5:00pm Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

## **Learning Experience Evaluations**

Learning Experience Evaluations will be conducted on Wednesday, April 28<sup>th</sup>, 2021. This will be your opportunity to provide feedback about your learning experience in the class. This feedback helps the instructor determine whether students are having the intended learning experiences for the class. It is important to remember that the learning process is collaborative and requires significant effort from the instructor, individual students, and the class as a whole. Students should provide a thoughtful assessment of their experience, as well as of their own effort, with comments focused on specific aspects of

instruction or the course. Comments on personal characteristics of the instructor are not appropriate and will not be considered. For this feedback to be as comprehensive as possible, all students should complete the evaluation.

### **Diversity and Inclusion**

Diversity and Inclusion are foundational to the SCA community. We are committed to fostering a welcoming and supportive environment where students of all identities and backgrounds can flourish. The classroom should be a space for open discussion of ideas and self-expression; however, SCA will not tolerate verbal or written abuse, threats, harassment, intimidation or violence against person or property. If students are concerned about these matters in the classroom setting they are encouraged to contact their SCA Diversity and Inclusion Liaison, <http://cinema.usc.edu/about/diversity.cfm>; e-mail [diversity@cinema.usc.edu](mailto:diversity@cinema.usc.edu). You can also report discrimination based on a protected class here <https://equity.usc.edu/harassment-or-discrimination/>

### **Disruptive Student Behavior:**

Behavior that persistently or grossly interferes with classroom activities is considered disruptive behavior and may be subject to disciplinary action. Such behavior inhibits other students' ability to learn and an instructor's ability to teach. A student responsible for disruptive behavior may be required to leave class pending discussion and resolution of the problem and may be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs for disciplinary action.

### **Writing and Time Management**

Writing and time management are essential skills to master for filmmakers, animators, interactive media makers and game designers.

These USC Resources available to everyone seeking to improve their writing and time management skills:

#### **The USC Dornsife Writing Center**

[Useful materials to make you a better writer](#)

## **The USC Kortschak Center for Learning and Creativity**

[Tools for Time Management, Organization, Goal-Setting, Self-Care, Note-taking, and Test-taking.](#)

### **Covid Safety Compliance Understanding and Agreement**

Due to concerns regarding the spread of COVID-19 in California and around the world, USC and the School of Cinematic Arts (SCA) have taken a strong stance regarding the need for safe and mindful behaviors among all members of the SCA community. Medical authorities agree that even the young and healthy are capable, if infected, of becoming ill, or of being non-symptomatic, unconscious vectors of the disease's spread.

The health and wellbeing of all community members has to be our paramount concern as we return to learning and collaborating together. We understand that attentiveness to the concerns of all SCA community members – students, staff and faculty, including those with underlying health conditions -- is simply an extension of the key principle of creative collaboration that has guided our school for decades. We're all in this pandemic together and need to behave accordingly.

All of SCA's production work, whether "Virtual" or "in-person, will be governed by rules laid out in each course syllabus. Compliance with these regulations will be monitored by faculty in conjunction with SCA designated Covid Monitors. The rules follow the guidelines in SCA-Covid Production Protocols, which follows SAG/DGA and other industry protocols, and are being interpreted by a SAG-certified SCA Covid Advisor.

Students indicate their agreement to abide by these regulations by enrolling in the USC School of Cinematic Arts programs in Spring semester 2021.

### **Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems**

#### **Academic Conduct:**

Plagiarism – presenting someone else's ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Part B, Section 11, "Behavior Violating University Standards"

[policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b](https://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b). Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, [policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct](https://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct).

**Stressful Times:**

These are stressful times, and Graduate School in and of itself is stressful. I encourage you to take care of yourself and your fellow students. USC provides opportunities for Mindful Meditation <http://mindful.usc.edu> and USC has a number of mental health counseling resources which are available at <https://studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling/>

**Support Systems:**

*Student Health Counseling Services - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call*

[engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling](https://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling)

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

*Student Health Leave Coordinator – 213-821-4710*

Located in the USC Support and Advocacy office, the Health Leave Coordinator processes requests for health leaves of absence and advocates for students taking such leaves when needed. <https://policy.usc.edu/student-health-leave-absence/>

*National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call*

[suicidepreventionlifeline.org](https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

*Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-4900 – 24/7 on call*

[engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp](https://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp)

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

*Office of Equity and Diversity (OED) | Title IX - (213) 740-5086*

[equity.usc.edu](https://equity.usc.edu), [titleix.usc.edu](https://titleix.usc.edu)

Information about how to get help or help a survivor of harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants. The university prohibits discrimination or harassment based on the following protected characteristics: race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, physical disability, medical

condition, mental disability, marital status, pregnancy, veteran status, genetic information, and any other characteristic which may be specified in applicable laws and governmental regulations.

*Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298*  
[usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care-report](https://usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care-report)

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions for appropriate investigation and response.

*The Office of Disability Services and Programs - (213) 740-0776*  
[dsp.usc.edu](https://dsp.usc.edu)

Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

*USC Campus Support & Intervention - (213) 821-4710*  
[campussupport.usc.edu](https://campussupport.usc.edu)

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

*Diversity at USC - (213) 740-2101*  
[diversity.usc.edu](https://diversity.usc.edu)

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

*USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call*  
[dps.usc.edu](https://dps.usc.edu), [emergency.usc.edu](https://emergency.usc.edu)

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

*USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-120 – 24/7 on call*  
[dps.usc.edu](https://dps.usc.edu)

Non-emergency assistance or information.

*Office of the Ombuds - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)*

[ombuds.usc.edu](http://ombuds.usc.edu)

A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

## **Instructor Biography**

### **Richard Lemarchand**

Richard Lemarchand is a game designer, an educator, a writer, a public speaker and a consultant, and works as an Associate Professor in the USC Games program.

Between 2004 and 2012, Richard was a Lead Game Designer at Naughty Dog in Santa Monica, California. He led the design of all three PlayStation 3 games in the *Uncharted* series including *Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception*, and *Uncharted 2: Among Thieves*, winner of ten AIAS Interactive Achievement Awards, five Game Developers Choice Awards, four BAFTAs and over 200 Game of the Year awards.

Richard also worked on *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune*, *Jak 3* and *Jak X: Combat Racing* for Naughty Dog, and helped to create the successful game series *Gex*, *Pandemonium* and *Soul Reaver* at Crystal Dynamics in the San Francisco Bay Area. He got his game industry start at MicroProse in the UK, where he co-founded the company's console game division. Richard has made storytelling action games the focus of his career, and he is interested in the way that gameplay, aesthetics, and narrative work together to hold a player's attention and facilitate the expression of their agency.

A passionate advocate of indie and experimental games, Richard has been involved with the IndieCade International Festival of Independent Games since 2008 and was the co-chair of the IndieCade Conference in 2010, 2012 and 2015. He regularly speaks in public on the subjects of game design, development, production, philosophy and culture. From 2009 to 2019 he curated and MCed the GDC Microtalks, a design track session celebrating games and play with short talks by diverse speakers. He is a former faculty member of the GDC Experimental Gameplay Sessions.

Richard now teaches game design, development and production in the USC Games program, and is working on a series of experimental game design research projects as part of the USC Game Innovation Lab. His game *The Meadow*, a virtual reality art installation game co-created with Martzi Campos, was selected as a finalist in the 2015 IndieCade International Festival of Independent Games. His latest game, *Phenomenology*, a VR art game, was selected for exhibition at IndieCade 2018. He is the author of *A Playful*

*Production Process, for Game Designers (and Everyone)*, due to be published by the MIT Press in September 2021.

Richard grew up in a small town in rural England, dreaming of ancient civilizations and outer space. Perhaps as a result, he has a degree in Physics and Philosophy from Oxford University.