

Film Theory (Classic)

Course Description

Film theory is the study of general patterns used to create and articulate film language. It differs from film history and film analysis. Film history is concerned with the study of major milestones in the progress of the filmmaking industry; and film analysis is the study of film against aesthetics, semiotics, socio-political aspects... etc.

Generally, film theory is divided into two main eras: Classic, and Contemporary film theory. Classic film theory started at the beginning of the twentieth century. Theorists were focused on the answers to the questions "Is cinema an art?" and "How is cinema different from other arts?" Contemporary theorists took over from the century's sixties, after the establishment of the film as a defined significant art. Their study was a deeper one on how film language works, and the ideologies behind filmmaking.

Our workshop focus will be on Classic film theory. We will study the two main waves defining film as an art: Formalists and Realists. Formalists are theorists who thought of film as an art that transfers reality, while Realists found film an art that represents it. Therefore, the question we will be able to answer after our course will be "How can we define Cinema?"



Detailed Outline

Week 1: Introduction

Participants will be introduced to film theory. They will get familiar with the course flow and learning method. They will read and watch the first assignment during the session, and then discuss both. The material is composed of the Lumiere brothers' movie and Maxim Gorky's article about it.

Week 2: formalism

Participants will discuss Rudolf Arnheim's ideas on Gestalt psychology and the Cinematic form emerging from art's limitations. The main concepts include framing and partial illusion.

Week 3: Photoplay

Participants will reflect on the psychological study of film through the writings of Hugo Munsterberg. They'll explore intellectual engagement developing depth and movement in cinematic images.

Week 4: Close-up

We will relate Bela Balazs and Jean Epstein's realization of film's capability of revelation, and how shots can express duration in a transcendent way. Participants will also be exposed to the ideas of Henri Bergson on time and duration through Gestalt psychology once again.

Week 5: Montage

This session is a recognition of the constructivism of film and cinema as a language. The participants will discuss editing and continuity for meaning through the works of Kuleshov and Eisenstein.

Week 6: Realism

Now we move to a new perspective after finishing the formalist course of classic film theory. This session is an introduction to realism and another perspective on the form of cinema. The discussion will be around Andre Bazin's ontology of the photographic image and the indexation of time through cinema.

Week 7: Physical reality

We will continue the discovery of realism through the works of Siegfried Kracauer. We will analyze his reflections on revelation and the un-staged among other aesthetics of realism.

Method

The course follows a social constructivist approach to learning. The instructor will guide participants in discussing and expressing their understanding of the weekly assigned reading and watch lists. Participants will collaborate and complement their understanding through questioning and elaborating. And by the two milestones in

the course, the end of formalism and the end of realism, they will be assigned essay writing to reflect on their learning.



Learning outcomes

- Understanding film theory allows viewers to find new levels of meaning within film
- Identify various aesthetic aspects of film theory.
- Identify, describe, and evaluate epistemological aspects of film theory.
- Analyze films to understand them and their place in society better.
- Film theory is valuable to everyone who enjoys film, but it also helps people who create films. Screenwriters, directors, producers, and other creatives can make more informed choices after learning the power of different film elements.

Watching list

Intro

- Lumiere brothers “the arrival of a train”

Chapter 1

- The testament of Dr. Mabuse- Fritz Lang
- The gold rush- Charlie Chaplin

Chapter 2

- Rashomon- Akira Kurosawa
- The lost weekend- Billy Wilder

Chapter 3

- Sabotage- Alfred Hitchcock
- The passion of Joan of Arc- Carl Theodor Dreyer

Chapter 4

- Le chien Andalous- Luis Bunuel
- Battleship Potemkin- Sergei Eisenstein

Milestone for Formalists

- Playtime- Jacques Tati
- The good, the bad, and the ugly- Sergio Leone
- Summer Interlude- Ingmar Bergman

Chapter 5

- The rules of the game- Jean Renoir
- Citizen Kane- Orson Welles

Chapter 6

- Umberto D.- Vittorio De Sica
- The Life of Oharu- Kenji Mizoguchi

Milestone for Realists

- How green was my valley- John Ford
- Pickpocket- Robert Bresson
- Tokyo Story- Yasujiro Ozu

Reading list

Intro

Maxim Gorky- Kingdom of Shadows

Chapter 1

Rudolf Arnheim - Film as Art: Film and Reality

Chapter 2

Hugo Munsterberg- The Photoplay:

- Depth and Movement.
- Attention.
- Memory and Imagination.
- The means of the Photoplay.

Chapter 3

Jean Epstein:

- On Certain Characteristics of Photogénie

- The Photogenic Element
- L'intelligence d'une machine
- Esprit de cinema

Bela Balazs: Visible Man, or the Culture of Film (1924)

Chapter 4

Sergei Eisenstein: A Dialectic Approach to Film Form

Lev Kuleshov: Montage as the foundation of Cinematography

Chapter 5

Andre Bazin: What is Cinema Vol_1

- The ontology of the photographic image
- The myth of total cinema
- The evolution of the language of cinema

Chapter 6

Siegfried Kracauer: Theory of film

- The Establishment of Physical Existence
- Inherent Affinities