

FA 349 – FILM THEORY

Instructor: Şahan Yatarkalkmaz

Course Description:

The theoretical approaches regarding cinema have paralleled the history of cinematic inventions in the early stages and matured into a discipline of its own in the recent decades. Our task therefore, is two-fold. On the one hand, there's the duty of covering a concise review of critical traditions, mainly the tensions between formalist and realist theories; on the other, there's the challenge of making sense of the second phase of film theory where the specific takes over the core of film criticism from the all-encompassing grand theories.

As with all theories regarding a specific form of art, there are the early debates that focus on the arthood of the medium of cinema as well as what the artist should do with it. As each of the axes of the film market, the artistic approaches and technological advancements converged on certain standards, the questions central to film theory evolved the works of the scholars into more politically charged endeavours. Therefore, the aim of this introductory course is not only to match theoreticians with theories but to also historically and geographically situate how these approaches came to be what they are.

The method to be utilized is rather cautious albeit a conservative one. We will work on about twenty major names as representatives of certain perspectives and try to investigate their conflicts as well as their most prominent ideas and terminologies, neologisms etc. The caution at hand becomes important as we will evaluate their opinions as distinct from the supposed camps they belong to. As such, sometimes two opposing tendencies will be put forth as in agreement on a certain idea - as is the evaluation of the concept of the filmic subject matter by formalist Béla Balázs and realist Siegfried Kracauer.

We will try to support our knowledge on paper by attending screenings of major works of cinema. These screenings will prove useful as the theories we study become applicable. The idea is to first digest these works as noumenical and then approach them with the tools we gather from theory.

Lastly, there's the attempt to remind ourselves of the ignored or underrated texts within the discipline, where our goal will be to reveal the shortcomings of film theories up to now and even paradoxes of contemporary theories that seem to be in fashion. This course defines film theory as the philology of film languages and it is a project to bring about a plural vision of theory that corresponds to the plurality of cinema as art.

Prerequisites:

This is an advanced introductory course that requires no previous experience in film studies although prior knowledge of prominent films and/or terminology will prove useful. It is to your advantage to be at ease with tough philosophical texts and be familiar with art and literature criticism, although this is precisely the course to attain such ease and familiarity regarding cinema.

Grading:

40% Attendance and Participation

30% Midterm Exam

30% Final Exam

SCHEDULE

Week 1: Introduction

Rudolph Arnheim, Hugo Munsterberg. The initial ideas and a review of aesthetic traditions.

Week 2: Poetics of Formalist Theory

Sergei Eisenstein. How agitation and drama converge on idealism.

Selections from:

-Film form : Essays in film theory; edited and translated by Jay Leyda. San Diego : Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1977.

-The film sense; tr. and ed. by Jay Leyda. New York : Harcourt, Brace, 1947.

Week 3: Analytics of Formalist Theory

Béla Balázs. Understanding the "Filmic Matter".

Selections from:

-Theory of the Film, tr. by Edith Bone. London: Denis Dobson Ltd, 1952.

Week 4: Analytics of Realist Theory

Siegfried Kracauer. Drama, photography and the cinematic.

Selections from:

-From Caligari to Hitler: A psychological history of the German film; edited and introduced by Leonardo Quaresima. Princeton, N.J. : Princeton University Press, 2004.

-Theory of film : the redemption of physical reality; with an introduction by Miriam Bratu Hansen. Princeton, N.J. :Princeton University Press, c1997.

Week 5: Objective Reality

André Bazin. Mise-en-Scène and an image of the world without the intervention of man.

Selections from:

- What is cinema?; foreword by Jean Renoir; new foreword by Dudley Andrew; essays selected and translated by Hugh Gray. Berkeley : University of California Press, c2005.

Week 6: Semiotics of Film

Christian Metz. Significations and meaning beyond the grand theories. The Second Phase of Theory.

Selections from:

- Film language : A semiotics of the cinema / Translated by Michael Taylor. New York : Oxford University Press, 1974.

Week 7: Deciphering the Gaze

Laura Mulvey, Maya Deren, Miriam Hansen. Challenging the dominants and analyzing spectatorship.

Selections from:

- Visual and other pleasures. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire [England] ; New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

- Film theory and criticism : Introductory readings / edited by Leo Braudy, Marshall Cohen. New York : Oxford University Press, 2004.

Week 8: An Ontology of Cinema I

Walter Benjamin, Gilles Deleuze. Movement-image; art in the age of mechanical reproducibility.

Selections from:

- Cinema I, Cinema II translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam. Minneapolis : University of Minnesota, c1986-c1989.

Week 9: An Ontology of Cinema II

Gilles Deleuze. Time-image and cinema beyond cinema.

Selections from:

- Cinema I, Cinema II translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam. Minneapolis : University of Minnesota, c1986-c1989.

Week 10: Transcendental Style in Film

Paul Schrader. On Ozu, Dreyer, Bresson.

Selections from:

- Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer. Berkeley : University of California Press, 1972

Week 11: Cognitive and Analytic Approaches

Bordwell and Carroll. "The cognitive perversion".

Selections from:

- Post-theory: Reconstructing film studies / edited by David Bordwell and Noël Carroll. Madison : University of Wisconsin Press, 1996.

Week 12: Third Cinema Aesthetics

Raul Ruiz, Teshome H. Gabriel, Trinh T. Minh-ha.

Selections from:

- Poetics of Cinema I; tr. by Brian Holmes and Poetics of Cinema II; tr. by Carlos Morreo. Paris: Dis Voir, 2007.
- Questions of third cinema / edited by Jim Pines and Paul Willemen. London : BFI Pub., 1989.

Week 13: Conclusion

Kristin Thompson, Jeffrey Sconce, Linda Williams. Cinematic excess, the ignored cinema and the canon.

Selections from:

- Film theory and criticism : Introductory readings / edited by Leo Braudy, Marshall Cohen. New York : Oxford University Press, 2004.