

Boğaziçi University
Fall 2017

FA 49M – Cinematic Argument

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Course Description:

A preliminary attempt to unveil the formal dynamics of cinematic works of art, this seminar follows an essay-like structure. In order to understand *the* cinematic argument, various types of arguments employed in enclosed film forms are studied. Deriving from its [Western] literature, it could be argued that scholarship concerning cinema has dealt extensively with how artistic indulgence can be construed and in fact formulated before the work, even before the work of artistic production itself. However, there seems to be a shortcoming of comprehension regarding consciousness proper to films, especially when, be it as audience or critic, we ask what the films themselves *argue*.

The aforementioned essay-like structure thus begins with reading in a roundabout way, how we have come to understand the cinematic and the non-cinematic, and linking this categorization with the argumentative structures of cinema in general. It could be observed that the primary motivation of such a distinction approaches, as its limit, the exhaustion of filmic meaning and attaining a total -scientific- authority over film sense.

As such, we take up four levels of analyses concerning non-hierarchical argumentative structures. The *thematic arguments* are the most conspicuous aspects of the works at hand and they are arguably the most criticized; and what any audience perceives as argument at first encounter. The study of *generic arguments* provides us with a more historical sense of how we can situate films within genres and how a genre itself can be prioritized when we are dealing with films which resist unfolding by mere reading of the thematic (i.e. plot, narration etc.). On a more sophisticated level, the analysis of *aesthetic arguments* allows us to take the necessary steps to further understand the inner workings of film techniques that are founded on substantial accumulation of thematic and generic background. In other words, the aesthetics in question is articulated within and in reference to the former two levels of argument. To repeat, however, these levels do not constitute a hierarchy. Finally, a filmic fourth level can be observed in the analysis of *methodic arguments* where overwhelming resistance against semantic methodologies reveals itself.

The seminar will be concluded, in a way, as the supplementary readings accumulate a general taste of reading across the whole body of works that we study. More importantly, the desire to cut through and even disintegrate the world of meaning integral to the analysis of a film will be allowed an unreserved space of practice.

Prerequisites:

This is an advanced course that urges every one of us to read and observe in depth. Students who are willing to attend this course should have a sufficient background in film studies or social sciences. The candidates ought to have either completed the three basic courses of the film certificate track (*Film Analysis, History of Cinema, Film Theory*) or attended one of the courses from the seminar series that include *Subversive Cinema, Violence of the Image* and *Diegesis in Film*. Otherwise the lectures, discussions and responsibilities will prove to be inaccessible. The students should also be familiar with academic paper-writing.

Grading:

60% Attendance and Participation (a maximum of 3 lectures are allowed to be missed with valid excuses)

20% Midterm Paper - A 6 to 10 page essay (double-spaced Times New Roman 12pts) on a topic that will be announced.

20% Final Paper – An 6 to 10 page essay (double-spaced Times New Roman 12pts) on a topic that will be announced.

SCHEDULE

Introduction

Week 1: Cinematic Ground

1. Earth (1930) Alexander Dovzhenko, USSR
2. Kes (1969) Ken Loach, UK

Readings: None.

Week 2: Non-Cinematic Ground

3. Hypothesis of a Stolen Painting (1979) Raoul Ruiz, France
4. Passion (1982) Jean-Luc Godard, France

Readings:

“The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility”. From *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*. Walter Benjamin. Translated by Edmund Jephcott and Harry Zohn, Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008 (19-55).

Part I: Thematic Argument

Week 2: Politicality

5. Ecstasy of the Angels (1972) Koji Wakamatsu, Japan
6. Interrogation (1989) Ryszard Bugajski, Poland

Readings:

“Çıkılmayan”. From *Bütün Öyküleri*. Yusuf Atılgan, İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2008 (64-69).

Week 4: Ethicality

7. Ballad of a Soldier (1959) Grigory Chukhrai, USSR
8. My Night at Maud's (1969) Eric Rohmer, France

Readings: None.

Part II: Generic Argument

Week 5: Absence of Drama

9. Il bell'Antonio (1960) Mauro Bolognini, Italy
10. L'Eclisse (1962) Michelangelo Antonioni, Italy

Readings:

“Kör Alan”; “Kent Mitleri ve İdeolojiler”; “Kent Formu”. From *Kentsel Devrim*. Henri Lefebvre. Translated by Selim Sezer, İstanbul: Sel Yayıncılık, 2013 (27-46; 99-128)

Week 6: Melodrama

11. Gaslight (1944) George Cukor, USA
12. Martha (1974) Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Germany

Readings:

None.

Week 7: Film-Noir

13. Maltese Falcon (1941) John Huston, USA
14. Sympathy for Lady Vengeance (2005) Park Chan-Wook, South Korea

Readings:

“The Origin of the Work of Art”. from *Basic Writings*. Martin Heidegger. Translated by Albert Hofstadter, New York: Harper Collins, 1993 (139-212).

Part III: Aesthetic Argument

Week 8: Perspective

15. Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai (1999) Jim Jarmusch, USA
16. Zatoichi (2003) Takeshi Kitano, Japan

Readings:

None.

Week 9: Identification

17. That Obscure Object of Desire (1977) Luis Bunuel, Spain
18. Lost Highway (1997) David Lynch, USA

Readings:

“Batı'nın Cinsiyeti”. From *Benden Önce Bir Başkası*. Nurdan Gürbilek. İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2012 (167-195).

Part IV: Methodic Argument

Week 10: Excess

19. Teorema (1968) Pier Paolo Pasolini, Italy
20. The Things of Life (1970) Claude Sautet, France

Readings:

“Film, Medium of a Disintegrating World”. From *Cinema and Experience*. Miriam Bratu Hansen, London: University of California Press, 2012 (3-39).

Week 11: The Strange

21. El Haimoune (1984) Nacer Khemir, Tunisia
22. Dogtooth (2009) Yorgos Lanthimos, Greece

Readings:

“Impart-ability: Language as Medium”. From *Benjamin's -abilities*. Samuel Weber, London: Harvard University Press, 2008 (31-52).

Week 12: The Evil

23. The Devils (1971) Ken Russell, UK
24. A Touch of Sin (2013) Jia Zhangke, China

Readings:

"Discussion on Sin". From *The Unfinished System of Non-Knowledge*. Georges Bataille. Translated by Michelle Kendall and Stuart Kendall, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001 (26-74).

Summary

Week 13:

25. Earrings of Madame De... (1953) Max Ophüls, France
26. Rosetta (1999) Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne, Belgium

Readings:

TBA.