

Course code and title: CIN 1101 Introduction to Film

Name of professor: László Arató

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Availability: On Tuesdays for 15 minutes before and 15 minutes after class I am available in room 220. (I.e. between 12.15 and 12.30 and after 15.45). Otherwise, for making appointments let us use my email address!

Course description

Based on watching some classic and some more recent award winning American, European and Asian films this course offers an introduction to the key terms and fundamental approaches (the examination of narrative techniques, cinematographic-stylistic features) of film analysis. It starts with the definition of film as a temporal-visual, later temporal audio-visual form of art. It goes on to examine some of the basic differences between theater and film, then shows how silent film developed its own autonomous language, how “moving pictures” are able to tell stories without words. Another starting point will be the illusion of reality as a fundamental peculiarity of film.

Each double class will start with viewing a film and will continue with the discussion and analysis of the film. Each discussion will focus on some particular approach and concept of film analysis (like mise-en-scene, framing, editing, composition in depth, the function of long takes, narration, the relationship between story and plot, diegetic and non-diegetic sound, etc.).

Course objectives

- 1) Familiarize students with the basic theoretical vocabulary necessary for studying narrative films.
- 2) Familiarize students with a dozen of great American, European (and sometimes Asian) films and help them to discover and/or identify their narrative and stylistic peculiarities, salient features.
- 3) Help students to realize the function these peculiarities play in the creation of meaning i.e. to show ways of interpretation and to encourage to discuss and revise these interpretations, eventually create their own interpretations.
- 4) To get students acquainted with some film theoreticians and some major themes of film theory.
- 5) In addition to the above objectives students are given the opportunity and help to produce shorter and longer written works reflecting, describing analyzing and interpreting certain aspects of the films they will have viewed (“Departmental Writing”).

Learning outcomes

- 1) Students will get acquainted with and be able to use a basic theoretical vocabulary that helps to describe and analyze films.
- 2) Students will gain knowledge
 - of the peculiarities of the original language of silent films,
 - of continuity editing and the alternatives of continuity editing,
 - of some ways a story can be turned into plot and how time is shaped in narrative films
- 3) Students will be able to notice and articulate how peculiar editing and narrative means and methods create meaning in film.
- 4) Students will gain familiarity with some of the basic themes of classical film theory.
- 5) Students will improve writing and argumentative skills on film related topics.

Required texts and materials

- 1) David Bordwell – Kristin Thompson: *Film Art – An Introduction*, McGraw-Hill (as a reference book)
- 2) Reading Packet containing handouts:
 - a) a Glossary of analytical terms, concepts
 - b) analyses of the films or certain aspects of the films discussed in class – written by different specialists, critics
 - c) Two out of the theoretical texts below:
 - Rudolf Arnheim: *Film as Art* (excerpts)
 - Sergei Eisenstein: *A Dialectic Approach to Film Form*
 - André Bazin: *The Evolution of Film Language*
 - Christian Metz on Film Semiotics – *Some Points in the Semiotics of the Cinema* from his *Film Language*
 - Gilles Deleuze: *Theses on Movement, Mobility, Montage and movement, The law of the Small form and Burlesque* from his book *Cinema The Movement Image*

Assignments & grading

1. Attendance and contribution to class discussions 15%

Class will be conducted in a discussion format, supplemented by mini-lectures explicating theoretical concepts and difficult readings. In-class (public and often “conducted”) viewing and discussion of films is the essential part of the course, thus everybody is expected to be present.

2. Written reflections on films in class and after class 15 %

Everybody is encouraged and expected to produce *two shorter written reflections* on a certain aspect of (two of the) films that will have been viewed during the term, or the questions raised during the in-class analyses of a film (e.g. Music and Sound Effects in *The Artist*, The Dog’s Role in *The Artist*, Chaplin’s Motion In *The Gold Rush*, The Machine in *Potemkin*, Acting Style in *The Maltese Falcon*, Types of Lies in *The Maltese Falcon*, Camera Movement in *Vertigo*, Intertextual Allusions in *Breathless*, The function of Color and Black and White in *Mirror*, Clues Connecting Plot Segments in *Pulp Fiction* etc.). The topics of these shorter reflections can be, of course, determined by the writers of the short reflections themselves.

3. Midterm test 20%

The test is made up of three parts. 1) Five definitions (some with examples) will be asked from the glossary. 2) There will be 3-4 brief essay questions – one paragraph each. 3) The analysis of one of the films discussed (1-1½ page). The list of sample questions (possible questions, concepts to be defined) will be provided two weeks before the in-class test.

4. Final test 20%

Similar to 1) and 2) of the midterm test, but 5 brief essays this time and no 3). Sample questions provided as above.

5. A paper of 5-7 pages (double spaced) 30%

The comparative analysis of two or more films from a certain point of view (e.g. the function of sound, the function of long takes, crime stories with surplus meaning). A list of recommended topics will be provided at least a month before the due date. The topics will cover films we shall have examined in class. Other topics/titles may be chosen as well and the comparison might cover films that have not been discussed together. In the latter case the instructor (me, L. A.) should be informed in advance. The paper must be typed;

style, spelling, grammar, structure do matter! Sources must be indicated – both printed and internet. (The outline and the draft should be discussed with the professor, unless the topic is based on one or more of the films that are viewed towards the end of the term.)

Honor code

You are expected to adhere completely to the McDaniel College academic honor code. Any violation will result in a zero for the given assignment or exam, and other possible sanctions. Your attention is drawn in particular to plagiarism. Copying and pasting text without proper citation and use will result in a zero for the assignment. (See website for the Honor Code!)

Course policies

The most important is that you watch those films and participate in the discussions: that is the “pre-requisite” of all the rest. More than two double classes mustn't be missed, as it is practically impossible to catch up. (In fact two absences are four absences in this case: two films and two analyses.) Do not be late—a tardy arrival will be counted as half an absence or an entire absence according to my judgment.

Late work: You'll have to hand in your paper on the day of the final test. No excuses will be accepted after this date. Late assignments will result in a full letter grade deduction per day, after three days delay there's no use handing in the paper.

Films to Be Watched – Fall 2018

1. Film as Moving Pictures without Speech – The Original Language of Film

a) Charlie Chaplin: *The Gold Rush* (1925) – silent comedies

2. Editing

a) Sergei Eisenstein: *Battleship Potemkin* – discontinuity editing

b) John Huston: *The Maltese Falcon* / *Casablanca* – continuity editing in a film noir

c) Jean-Luc Godard: *Breathless*

3. Narration

a) Alfred Hitchcock: *Vertigo* or *North by Northwest* or *Psycho* – story and plot 2. – suspense

b) Orson Welles: *Citizen Kane* – story and plot 3. – games with time 1: flashback and jigsaw puzzle

c) Alexander Tarkovsky: *The Mirror* – story and plot 4. – games with time 2: time as a sculpture, black and white, colour and time

d) Quentin Tarantino: *Pulp Fiction* – story and plot 5 – games with time 3: time as a serpent