

McDaniel College Budapest

COM 3338 – Film Analysis: Great Masters of European Film

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Availability: On Mondays 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 3.45 PM.) Otherwise, for making appointments let us use my email address!

Course description

This course offers an introduction into the key terms and fundamental approaches (the examination of narrative techniques, cinematographic-stylistic features) of film analysis. It provides an opportunity to get acquainted with some of the most important movements (schools) and some of the greatest masters of European film. 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. Students will get acquainted with three important national schools/movements of European silent film: German expressionism, Soviet montage and French surrealism. Each movement will be represented by one outstanding film example. Then we’ll move on to sound films and to some great European masters of the thirties, forties, fifties, sixties and seventies. Besides “solitary masters” like Bunuel, Fellini, Bergman and Antonioni, Italian neorealism and French new wave (and perhaps the new German cinema) will also be covered.

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, the relationship between story and plot, editing, metaphors and metonymies, diegetic and non-diegetic sound, the function of long takes etc.).

Course objectives

- 1) Familiarize students with a dozen of great European films and help them to discover and/or identify their narrative and stylistic peculiarities
- 4) 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.
- 2) Familiarize students with the basic theoretical vocabulary necessary for studying narrative films
- 4) To get students acquainted with some important historical schools and their peculiarities

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.
- 3) Students will be able to notice and articulate how peculiar editing and narrative means and methods create meaning in film.
- 4) Students will be able to identify
 - the salient stylistic and narrative peculiarities of the films they will have watched,
 - the salient stylistic and narrative peculiarities of some historical schools of European art film
- 5) Students will improve writing and argumentative skills on film related topics.

Required texts and materials

- David Bordwell – Kristin Thompson: Film Art – An Introduction, McGraw-Hill (as a reference book)
- Reading Packet, available in the office, containing hand-outs:
 - a) a Glossary of analytical terms, concepts
 - b) André Bazin: The Evolution of Film Language
 - c) short studies concerning the periods/schools of European film history covered
 - d) analyses of the films discussed in class – written by different specialists, critics

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 reflexions 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. The summary of the story of *The Last Laugh*; The Role of the Uniform in *The Last Laugh*; Gender Markers in *An Andalusian Dog*; The Function of Silence and Noises in *Blow Up* etc.). The topics of these shorter reflections can be, of course, determined by the writers of the short reflections themselves. (One reflection each term!)

3. Midterm test 25%

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.

Semester schedule/Topics covered

LIST OF FILMS/SCHEDULE– 2018/Spring

1. Expectations, requirements – some key concepts. Film and Theatre
2. *W. F. Murnau: The Last Laugh (Man)* – German expressionism, mise-en-scene, cinematographic image, low-key lighting, angle of framing, eye-line match. (Cause-effect relations, story-telling without words)
3. *L. Bunuel: An Andalusian Dog* – French surrealism; metaphor and metonymy 1., non -diegetic insert, motivic structure and narrative structure

4. **S. M. Eisenstein: *October*** – The relationship of shot to shot: editing, the Soviet montage, rhetorical narration, types of editing
5. **Fritz Lang: *M*** - story and plot; the function of (diegetic) sound, metaphor and metonymy 2.; some expressionistic features
6. **Vittorio De Sica: *Bicycle Thieves*** – Italian neorealism: peculiarities of characters, time, space and narration; the function of digressions
7. **F. Fellini: *La Strada*** – beyond neorealism, the journey - levels of meaning, Christian symbolism
8. Continuing the analysis of the film
9. **L. Bunuel: *Viridiana*** – the perfect Christian and the realities of life – Bunuel’s classicism; recurrent motifs and their meaning
10. **F. Truffaut: *Jules and Jim*** – the French new wave, the long take, the style of detachment
11. **Ingmar Bergman: *Persona*** – alienation, art, self, nothing – long takes and composition in depth in Bergman’s existentialist art
12. **M. Antonioni: *Blow-Up*** – a detective story or an essay in epistemology – the style of modernism
13. Continuing the analysis of the film viewed
14. **Final exam. Also the deadline for the papers.**