

How to Read a Film

(taught Summer 2012, UCSD, Department of Communication COCU 125, class size: 14)

Description:

We will watch films, study different ways people have ‘read’ those films over the past ~60 years, and learn how to analyze/interpret films ourselves. The first part of the course covers more formal approaches, and the second covers more cultural approaches. This course is designed to give students a broader understanding of how films have been differently interpreted over 20th and early 21st centuries, and to push them toward analyzing cultural texts critically.

Requirements:

- *Reading + Viewing* : There’s a lot of it and there’s only 5 weeks, so stay on top of it!
- *Writing* : (2) shorter essays and (1) final essay
- *Formula*: Attendance and Participation (~25%), Three Essays (~25% each)

Required Materials:

- Richard Barsam and Dave Monahan. *Looking at Movies: An Introduction to Film*. 3rd ed. W. Norton and Company, 2009.
- Marita Sturken. *Thelma & Louise*.
 - all other readings are available through the library e-reserves
- Netflix subscription - most films are available through the library, but you might prefer to view the films at home through Netflix or a similar digital delivery mechanism.

Syllabus:

Class 1 - Form

- READING:
 - Barsam and Monahan. *Looking at Movies*. Chapters 4 (114-155), and 5 (155-206).

Class 2 - Form (part 2)

- READING:
 - Barsam and Monahan. *Looking at Movies*. Chapters 6 (207-268), 8 (320-366), and 9 (368-409).

Class 3 - Film History/Hollywood and Continuity

- READING:
 - Barsam and Monahan - “Film History” in *Looking at Movies*: 412-457.
 - (extra - more in-depth if you’re interested) James Monaco. “The Shape of Film History” in *How to Read a Film*: pp. 252-431.
- VIEW:
 - *The Maltese Falcon* (John Huston, USA, 1941)
 - *Chronicle of a Disappearance* (Elia Suleiman, Israel/Palestine, 1996)

Class 4 - Genre

- READING:

- Rick Altman - “A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre”
- Barsam and Monahan - “Types of Movies” in *Looking at Movies*: pp. 60-111.
- VIEW: (Westerns and Musicals)
 - *Seven Samurai* (Akira Kurosawa, Japan, 1956) and
 - *Magnificent Seven* (John Sturges, USA, 1960)

Assignment #1 DUE - Formal Analysis (2 pages) - Choose a television opening credits sequence and analyze it. You may choose any TV show, so I suggest you pick one that you are familiar with. How does the intro frame the show?

Class 5 - Translation and Repetition

- READING:
 - Forrest and Koos - “Reviewing Remakes: An Introduction” in *Dead Ringers*
- VIEW:
 - *Shall we ダンス?* (Masayuki Suo, Japan, 1996)
 - *Shall we Dance* (Peter Chelsom, USA, 2004)

Class 6 - Feminist (gender)

- READING:
 - Marita Sturken - *Thelma & Louise*
 - (extra) Laura Mulvey - “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”
- VIEW:
 - *Thelma & Louise* (Ridley Scott, USA, 1991)

Class 7 - Ideology

- READING:
 - Frederic Jameson - “Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture”
 - Laikwan Pang - “The Artist versus the Creative Worker” in *Creativity and its Discontents*: pp. 49-53.
 - Toby Miller - “Television Food” in *Cultural Citizenship*: pp. 112-143.
- VIEW:
 - *The Devil Wears Prada* (David Frankel, USA, 2006)
 - *Jaws* (Steven Spielberg, USA, 1975)

Class 8 - National Cinemas

- READING:
 - Ackbar Abbas - “The New Hong Kong Cinema and the Déjà Disparu” in *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance*: pp. 16-47.
 - Arjun Appadurai. “Disjunction and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy.” *Public Culture* 2.1 (1990): pp. 1-24.
- VIEW:
 - *Chungking Express* (Wong Kar Wai, Hong Kong, 1994)

Assignment #2 DUE - Use an ideological lens to analyze one Hollywood blockbuster from 2011 or 2012 — particular focus might be repetition, gender, politics, or economics (2-3 pages).

Class 9 - Global Cinema

- READING:
 - Toby Miller et al. - “Co-producing Hollywood” in *Global Hollywood 2*: pp. 173-212.
- VIEW:
 - *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (Ang Lee, Taiwan/Hong Kong/USA/China, 2000)

Class 10 - Digital Film and Machinima

- READING:
 - D. N. Rodowick - *Virtual Life of Film* Chapters 2, 3, 23 (3-9; 9-24; 181-190)
 - Henry Lowood. High-Performance Play: The Making of Machinima.” in *Video Games and Art*: pp. 59-76.
 - Eddo Stern. “Massively Multiplayer Machinima Mikusuto” in *Journal of Visual Culture* volume 10, number 1 (April 2011) <http://vcu.sagepub.com/content/10/1.toc> (selections)
- VIEW:
 - Rooster Teeth. “Red vs. Blue” - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9BAM9fgV-ts&feature=bf_prev&list=EL35_UYT59_MY
 - Eddo Stern. “Sheik Attack” - <http://vimeo.com/15715408>

Assignment #3 DUE - Answer one of the following (5-7 pages): a) Argue why the digital form matters for understanding *one* of the following films/shorts. Alternately, you may argue why the digital form does not matter. b) While we often judge films individually in terms of national traits, films are increasingly made as international and regional co-productions where different national bases each have an important effect on the final product. Take one of the following co-produced films, show where and how it can be seen as nationally based, where and how it can be seen as co-produced, and finally why this dichotomy matters for the film.