

21L011 The Film Experience

Professor David Thorburn

Lecture 1 – Introduction

- I. What is Film?
 - Chemistry
 - Novelty
 - Manufactured object
 - Social formation
- II. Think Away iPods
 - The novelty of movement
 - Early films and early audiences
- III. The Fred Ott Principle
- IV. Three Phases of Media Evolution
 - Imitation
 - Technical Advance
 - Maturity
- V. "And there was Charlie" – Film as a cultural form

Reference: James Agee, *A Death in the Family* (1957)

Lecture 2 – Keaton

- I. The Fred Ott Principle, continued
 - The myth of technological determinism
 - A paradox: capitalism and the movies
- II. *The Great Train Robbery* (1903)
- III. *The Lonedale Operator* (1911)

Reference: Tom Gunning, "Systematizing the Electronic Message: Narrative Form, Gender and Modernity in 'The Lonedale Operator'." In *American Cinema's Transitional Era*, ed. Charlie Keil and Shelley Stamp. Univ. of California Press, 1994, pp. 15-50.
- IV. Buster Keaton
 - Acrobat / actor
 - Technician / director
 - Metaphysician / artist
- V. The multiplicity principle: entertainment vs. art
- VI. *The General* (1927)
 - "A culminating text"
 - Structure
 - The Keaton hero: steadfast, muddling
 - The Keaton universe: contingency

Lecture 3 – Chaplin 1

- I. Movies before Chaplin
- II. Enter Chaplin

- III. Chaplin's career
 - The multiplicity principle, continued
- IV. The Tramp as myth
- V. Chaplin's world – elemental themes

Lecture 4 – Chaplin 2

- I. Keaton vs. Chaplin
- II. Three passages
 - *Cops* (1922)
 - *The Gold Rush* (1925)
 - *City Lights* (1931)
- III. *Modern Times* (1936)
 - Context
 - A culminating film
 - The gamin
 - Sound
 - Structure
 - Chaplin's complexity

Lecture 5 – Film as a global and cultural form

- I. Film as a cultural form
 - Global vs. national cinema
 - American vs. European cinema
 - High culture vs. Hollywood
- II. Montage vs. mise en scène
- III. Eisenstein and *Potemkin* (1925)
 - Film as instruction
 - Film as moral fable

Lecture 6 – German film

- I. German film and Expressionism
 - Lotte Eisner, *The Haunted Screen* (1969)
 - *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Robert Weine, 1919)
 - *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1926)
- II. F.W. Murnau (1889–1931)
 - *Nosferatu* (1922)
 - *Sunrise* (1927)
 - *Tabu* (with Robert Flaherty, 1931)
- III. *The Last Laugh* (1924)
 - The unchained camera

- Themes
- Character: work and personal identity
- The ending: true or false

Lecture 7 – Hollywood in the Thirties

- I. An industry emerges
 - The Studio Era
 - "The golden age of Hollywood"
 - Stars and genres
- II. Strains of comedy
 - Anarchic
 - Worldly
- III. Screwball comedy

Lecture 8 – Capra and *It Happened One Night*

- I. Screwball heroine – Barbara Stanwyck in two clips:
 - *Ball of Fire* (1941)
 - *The Lady Eve* (1941)
- II. The cultural work of movies
 - Consensus narrative
- III. Frank Capra
 - Sentimental populist
 - Key films
- IV. *It Happened One Night*
 - Context: the Depression
 - The American Male
 - Romance across social class
 - "A marriage of true minds"

Lecture 9 – Hitchcock

- I. Movie house culture
 - Entertainment
 - Genre and license
 - Invention vs. convention
 - "The genius of the system"
- II. Alfred Hitchcock (1899–1980)
 - An anecdote
 - Hitchcock's career
 - Hitchcock the technician
 - Themes

III. The Double Man

Lecture 10 – *Shadow of a Doubt*

- I. Hitchcock's themes (continued)
 - The double
 - Comedy
 - Moral ambiguity
 - Film clip: *Strangers on a Train* (1951)
- II. *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943)
 - Context: WWII, Hitchcock in exile
 - Against Capra
 - The opening: behind any door or window...
 - An American town
 - An American family
 - Two Charlies: rhyming shots
 - Subplot: murder as diversion
 - The ending: ambiguity

Lecture 11 – The Musical

- I. Numbers
 - 1927–1947: 919 films (48 films each year)
 - 1949–1958: 23 films per year
 - 1959–1980: 7 films per year
- II. Themes
 - Show business: community: the show goes on
 - High culture, popular culture
 - Class or position vs. talent, merit
 - Convention, restraint vs. spontaneity, energy, "the natural"
- III. History
 - Revue, Operetta – *Love Me Tonight* (Rouben Mamoulian, 1932)
 - Busby Berkeley and Warner Brothers – *42nd Street* (1933)
 - Astaire, Rogers and RKO – *Top Hat* (1935)
 - MGM and "the integrated musical"
 - *Singin' in the Rain* (Donen and Kelly, 1952)
 - Arthur Freed (1894–1973): The Freed Unit

Lecture 12 – Astaire, Kelly, Fosse

- I. Astaire vs. Kelly
- II. *Singin' in the Rain*
 - Self-consciousness: an encyclopedia of musical history

- Key themes
 - The place of song and dance
- III. *Cabaret* (Bob Fosse, 1972)
- Beyond genre: the end of Hollywood
 - Fosse's career: the inheritor
 - Weimar Germany and America in the late 1960s
 - Style: mise en scène and montage
 - Texture: multiplicity
 - Musical numbers: true integration
 - Key themes: innocence, history, the limits of satire

Lecture 13 – The Western

- I. Movies as consensus narrative
 - The Western genre as a space of discourse
- II. Historical and cultural background
 - The "real" west: 1860–1890
 - Popular culture before film
 - Intellectual culture: The Turner Thesis
- III. The Western as cultural myth
 - Founding story
 - Dichotomies
 - The divided hero: savior and savage

Lecture 14 – Ford and *The Searchers*

- I. The Western film – a quick history
- II. John Ford (1895–1973)
- III. *The Searchers* (1956)
 - Damaged hero
 - Setting: Monument Valley
 - Plot: founding story, captive's tale
 - A turning point
 - The title: ambiguity

Lecture 15 – Film in the 1970s

- I. Transformations and subversion
 - Directors
 - Actors
 - Style and endings
 - Dissenting genres
- II. Social history

- Vietnam war
 - Assassinations
 - JFK, LBJ, Nixon
 - Watergate
- III. Film and Television
- A new consensus medium
 - Two versions of *MASH*

Lecture 16 – Altman

- I. Robert Altman (1925–2006)
- Career
 - Defining qualities:
 - Moral skepticism
 - Sympathy for the marginal
 - Plot vs. character
 - Fiction vs. "reality"
- II. *McCabe and Mrs. Miller* (1971)
- "Ruin the sacred truths"
 - Sound and image: a new realism?
 - Hero/savior – clown or fool
 - Love story: gal from the East
 - Founding myth: Presbyterian Church
 - The ending: slapstick murder as the town is born

Lecture 17 – Renoir and Poetic Realism

- I. French film
- A parallel history
 - Film theory
- II. Jean Renoir (1894–1979)
- 1926 *Nana* (Zola novel)
 - 1928 *The Little Match Girl*
 - 1931 *La Chienne*
 - 1932 *Boudu Saved from Drowning*
 - 1934 *Madame Bovary* (Flaubert novel)
 - 1935 *Toni*
 - 1937 *Grand Illusion*
 - 1939 *Rules of the Game*
 - 1950 *The River*
- III. Poetic Realism
- Forerunner: Jean Vigo (1905–34)
 - Key features
 - Andre Bazin (1918–58) on Renoir

- IV. Two examples
 - The ending of *Boudu*
 - Dinner in prison: *Grand Illusion*
- V. Visual style as moral vision

Lecture 18 – *Grand Illusion*

- I. Camera
 - Invisible witness: respectful, attentive, restless
- II. Actors
 - Von Stroheim: The man you love to hate
 - Gabin: Mad proletarian
- III. Themes
 - Prison camp as microcosm
 - Barriers, boundaries
 - Historical transition
- IV. Renoir's maturity
 - Character
 - Plot
 - The title: how many grand illusions?

Lecture 19 – Italian Neorealism

- I. The Opening of *Bicycle Thieves*
 - The multiplicity principle
- II. Historical Context
 - WW II
 - Italian film under Fascism
 - Hollywood film
- III. Origins
 - Italian, German, French
- IV. Key Features
 - Character vs plot, mise en scene, the contemporary world
- V. Central Figures
 - Cesare Zavattini (1902-77)
 - Luchino Visconti (1906-76)
 - *Obsession* (1942), *The Earth Trembles* (1948)
 - Roberto Rossellini (1906-77)
 - *Open City* (1945)
 - Vittorio De Sica (1902-74)
- VI. The Neorealist Counter-plot
 - The beginning of *Open City*

Lecture 20 – De Sica, *Bicycle Thieves*

I. Vittorio De Sica (1902-74)

- *The Children Are Watching Us*
- *Shoeshine*
- *Bicycle Thieves*
- *Miracle in Milan*
- *Umberto D*
- *Two Women*
- *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis*

II. *Bicycle Thieves*

- Structure: organic form
- Social themes
- Character: father and son
- The title

Lecture 21 – Federico Fellini (1920-1994)

I. The opening of *Nights of Cabiria*

- Beyond neorealism

II. Fellini's career

- 1953: *The Loafers (I vitelloni)*
- 54: *The Road (La strada)*
- 55: *The Swindle (Il bidone)*
- 57: *Nights of Cabiria*
- 60: *The Sweet Life (La dolce vita)*
- 63: *8 ½*
- 65: *Juliet of the Spirits*
- 69: *Fellini Satiricon*
- 70: *The Clowns*
- 73: *I Remember (Amarcord)*

III. *8 ½*

- The title: a film about itself
- Layers of reality: duration, transitions
- Seraghina
- Other themes
- The finale

Lecture 22 – Film as Art and Artifact

I. Film as a cultural form

- Stories and culture
- Culture as a process, always unfinished
- “Golden Lads”: consensus narrative
conservative, collaborative, accessible

II. Film as art

- Art as a form of intelligence and competence
- Texture, multiplicity
- Two examples:
Seven Samurai --To the village
McCabe and Mrs. Miller -- Gunfight on the bridge

III. Thanks to all of you