
FILM THEORY

FILM THEORY

Film theory debates the essence of the cinema and provides conceptual frameworks for understanding film's relationship to reality, the other arts, individual viewers, and society at large. This term is not to be confused with film analysis, a way of analyzing film, which may draw upon ideas from film theory.

FILM ANALYSIS

Film analysis is the process in which a film is analyzed in terms of mise-en-scène, montage, cinematography, sound, and editing. One way of analyzing films is by the shot-by-shot analysis, though that is typically used only for small clips or scenes.

HISTORY OF FILM THEORY

As the new art form of the twentieth century, film immediately and continuously invited theoretical attempts to define its nature and function. Mostly as a result of film's own inferiority complex as the youngest of the arts, the impetus for much of early film theory was to gain a degree of respectability.

In some respects, French philosopher Henri Bergson's *Matter and Memory* anticipated the development of film theory at a time that the cinema was just being born as a new medium. He commented on the need for new ways of thinking about movement, and coined the terms "the movement-image" and "the time-image". However, in his 1906 essay *L'illusion cinématographique* (in *L'évolution créatrice*), he rejects film as an exemplification of what he had in mind. Nonetheless, decades later, in *Cinéma I and Cinema II* (1983-1985), the philosopher Gilles Deleuze took *Matter and Memory* as the basis of his philosophy of film and revisited Bergson's concepts, combining them with the semiotics of Charles Sanders Peirce.

Early film theory arose in the silent era and was mostly concerned with defining the crucial elements of the medium. It largely evolved from the works of directors like Germaine Dulac, Louis Delluc, Jean Epstein, Sergei Eisenstein, Lev Kuleshov, Dziga Vertov, Paul Rotha and film theorists like Rudolf Arnheim, Béla Balázs and Siegfried Kracauer. These individuals emphasized how film differed from reality and how it might be considered a valid art form.

In the years after World War II, the French film critic and theorist André Bazin reacted against this approach to the cinema, arguing that film's essence lay in its ability to mechanically reproduce reality not in its difference from reality.

In the 1960s and 1970s, film theory took up residence in academe, importing

concepts from established disciplines like psychoanalysis, gender studies, anthropology, literary theory, semiotics and linguistics.

During the 1990s the digital revolution in image technologies has had an impact on film theory in various ways. There has been a refocus onto celluloid film's ability to capture an indexical image of a moment in time by theorists like Mary Ann Doane, Philip Rosen and Laura Mulvey who was informed by psychoanalysis. From a psychoanalytical perspective, after the Lacanian notion of the Real, Slavoj Žižek offered new aspects of the gaze extensively used in contemporary film analysis. There has also been a historical revisiting of early cinema screenings, practices and spectatorship modes by writers Tom Gunning, Miriam Hansen and Yuri Tsivian.

TYPES OF THEORIES

structuralist film theory

The structuralist film theory emphasizes how films convey meaning through the use of codes and conventions not dissimilar to the way languages are used to construct meaning in communication. An example of this is understanding how the simple combination of shots can create an additional idea: the blank expression on a person's face, an appetising meal, and then back to the person's face. While nothing in this sequence literally expresses hunger—or desire—the juxtaposition of the images convey that meaning to the audience. Unraveling this additional meaning can become quite complex. Lighting, angle, shot duration, juxtaposition, cultural context, and a wide array of other elements can actively reinforce or undermine a sequence's meaning.

marxist film theory

Marxist film theory is one of the oldest forms of film theory. Sergei Eisenstein and many other Soviet filmmakers in the 1920s expressed ideas of Marxism through film. In fact, the Hegelian dialectic was considered best displayed in film editing through the Kuleshov Experiment and the development of montage. While this structuralist approach to Marxism and filmmaking was used, the more vociferous complaint that the Russian filmmakers had was with the narrative structure of Hollywood filmmaking.

Eisenstein's solution was to shun narrative structure by eliminating the individual protagonist and tell stories where the action is moved by the group and the story is told through a clash of one image against the next (whether in composition, motion, or idea) so that the audience is never lulled into believing that they are watching something that has not been worked over. Eisenstein himself, however, was accused by the Soviet authorities under Stalin of "formalist error," of highlighting form as a thing of beauty instead of portraying the worker nobly.

French Marxist film makers, such as Jean-Luc Godard, would employ radical editing and choice of subject matter, as well as subversive parody, to heighten class consciousness and promote Marxist ideas.

Situationist film maker Guy Debord, author of *The Society of the Spectacle*, began his film *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni* [Wandering around in the night we are consumed by fire] with a radical critique of the spectator who goes to the cinema to forget about his dispossessed daily life.

Situationist film makers produced a number of important films, where the only contribution by the situationist film cooperative was the sound-track. In *Can dialectics break bricks?* (1973) a Chinese Kung Fu film was transformed by redubbing into an epistle on state capitalism and Proletarian revolution. The intellectual technique of using capitalism's own structures against itself is known as *detournement*.

screen theory

Screen theory is a Marxist film theory associated with the British journal *Screen* in the 1970s. The theoreticians of this approach -- Colin MacCabe, Stephen Heath and Laura Mulvey -- describe the "cinematic apparatus" as a version of Althusser's Ideological State Apparatus (ISA). According to screen theory, it is the spectacle that creates the spectator and not the other way round. The fact that the subject is created and subjected at the same time by the narrative on screen is masked by the apparent realism of the communicated content.

formalist film theory

Formalist film theory is a theory of film study that is focused on the formal, or technical, elements of a film: i.e., the lighting, scoring, sound and set design, use of color, shot composition, and editing. It is a major theory of film study today. Formalism, at its most general, considers the synthesis (or lack of synthesis) of the multiple elements of film production, and the effects, emotional and intellectual, of that synthesis and of the individual elements. For example, let's take the single element of editing. A formalist might study how standard Hollywood "continuity editing" creates a more comforting effect and non-continuity or jump-cut editing might become more disconcerting or volatile. Or one might consider the synthesis of several elements, such as editing, shot composition, and music. The shoot-out that ends Sergio Leone's Spaghetti Western "Dollars" trilogy is a valid example of how these elements work together to produce an effect: The shot selection goes from very wide to very close and tense; the length of shots decreases as the sequence progresses towards its end; the music builds. All of these elements, in combination rather than individually, create tension. Formalism is unique in that it embraces both ideological and auteurist branches of criticism. In both these cases, the common denominator for Formalist criticism is style.

feminist film theory

Feminist film theory is the theoretical film criticism derived from feminist politics and feminist theory. Feminists have many approaches to cinema analysis, regarding the film elements analysed and their theoretical underpinnings. The development of feminist film theory was influenced by second wave feminism and the development of women's studies within the academy. Feminist scholars began applying the new theories arising from these movements to analyzing film. Initial attempts in the United States in the early 1970's were generally based on sociological theory and focused on the function of women characters in particular film narratives or genres and of stereotypes as a reflection of a society's view of women. Works such as Marjorie Rosen's *Popcorn Venus: Women, Movies, and the American Dream* (1973) and Molly Haskell's *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in Movies* (1974) analyzed how the women portrayed in film related to the broader historical context, the stereotypes depicted, the extent to which the women were shown as active or passive, and the amount of screen time given to women.[1]

auteur theory

In film criticism, the 1950s-era Auteur theory holds that a director's films reflect that director's personal creative vision, as if he were the primary "Auteur" (the French word for "author"). In some cases, film producers are considered to have a similar "Auteur" role for films that they have produced. In law the Auteur is the creator of a film as a work of art, and is the original copyright holder. Under European Union law the film director shall always be considered the author or one of the authors of a film. [1]

Auteur theory has had a major impact on film criticism ever since it was advocated by film director and film critic François Truffaut in 1954. "Auteurism" is the method of analyzing films based on this theory or, alternately, the characteristics of a director's work that makes him an Auteur. Both the Auteur theory and the Auteurism method of film analysis are frequently associated with the French New Wave and the film critics who wrote for the influential French film review periodical *Cahiers du cinéma*.

apparatus theory

Apparatus theory, derived in part from Marxist film theory, semiotics, and psychoanalysis, was a dominant theory within cinema studies during the 1970s. It maintains that cinema is by nature ideological because its mechanics of representation are ideological. Its mechanics of representation include the camera and editing. The central position of the spectator within the perspective of the composition is also ideological. Apparatus theory also argues that cinema maintains the dominant ideology of the culture within the viewer. Ideology is not imposed on cinema, but is part of its nature. Apparatus theory follows an institutional model of spectatorship.

philosophy of language film analysis

The philosophy of language film analysis is a form of film analysis that attempt to study the aesthetics of film by investigating the concepts and practices that comprise the experience and interpretation of movies. It is based on the philosophical tradition begun by Ludwig Wittgenstein. Critics from this tradition often clarify misconceptions[citation needed] used in theoretical film studies and instead produce analysis of a film's vocabulary and its link to a form of life.

psychoanalytical film theory

The concepts of psychoanalysis have been applied to films in various ways. However, the 1970s and 1980s saw the development of theory that took concepts developed by the French psychoanalyst and writer Jacques Lacan and applied them to the experience of watching a film. The film viewer is seen as the subject of a "gaze" that is largely "constructed" by the film itself, where what is on screen becomes the object of that subject's desire.

The viewing subject may be offered particular identifications (usually with a leading male character) from which to watch. The theory stresses the subject's longing for a completeness which the film may appear to offer through identification with an image; in fact, according to Lacanian theory, identification with the image is never anything but an illusion and the subject is always split simply by virtue of coming into existence.