Film Program Coming Up

Korea, North and South: A Cinematic Perspective

- January 25-27 in Atkinson Hall, CALIT2
- Info on the program at

http://kns.ucsd.edu

Cinema and Form

- Formal expectations: patterns informed by conventions and experience (cultural, historical)

- Emotion or Affect (represented in cinema and induced in spectators), are caused by the dynamic of the form through expectations and are context-dependent

Form and Expectations

A Movie, 1958, by Bruce Conner

- uses found footage, clips from B-movies, news reels, and other sources
- narrative elements out of context
- associational
- thematically organized
- montage

Types of Meaning

- Referential, i.e. direct, descriptive, the bare plot summary
- Explicit, i.e. clearly conveyed messages, ideas or dynamics
- Implicit, i.e. derived from interpretation
- Symptomatic, i.e. situates media texts meanings in relation to ideology: social/cultural/historical frameworks

Narrative

- Cinematic narrative is a form of realist representation, which supplants experience of time perhaps more fully than literary ones.
- Our sense of time and the audio-visual field are taken over as we lose ourselves in the cinematic experience.
- It is narrative film's naturalism that many theorists have directed their attention.
- Thinking critically about the role of fictional representations in our understanding and engagement with the world.

Narrative and Film Theory

- Examining how structures and devices that reinforce film's naturalism are historically and culturally specific.

- Considering how these structures are ideologically complicit. All narratives convey messages that reinforce particular worldviews.

- Exploring possibilities for resistant or non-normative interpretations.

- Theories of spectatorship: how viewers make meaning; identification; interpolation.

Form and Critical Viewing

- There is no way to make a film that falls outside of ideological systems.

- However, some theorists have suggested that different systems of filmmaking might afford an increased space or possibility for reflection or critical distance.

- Open texts: media which encourages critical interpretation or reflection

- Closed texts: media which resist critical reflection.

Narrative as a formal system

- Chain of events in cause-effect relationship occurring in time and space
- Shapes viewers' expectations
- Temporal and causal relations allow us to make sense of the story

Plot and Story

- story is all that is shown or implied (may include elements outside the plot: prior events, background, etc..). Also called diegesis
- plot is all that is presented in the film (may include elements that are not part of the story: credits, titles, etc…).

Classical Hollywood Cinema

- Dominant tradition of narrative conventions that emerge in the Hollywood studio films from the 1920s - 1950s (and propagated to the world).

- Though many recent Hollywood and non-Hollywood films do not strictly adhere to these conventions, they still have a broad influence on cinema form.

Classical Hollywood Cinema (CHC)

- Temporal: organized trajectory through time
- Occurs in space (location)
- Emphasizes causal relations
- Main protagonist(s) usually the causal agent
- Requires viewers to link elements of the plot; to fill in the story
- Holds back narrative--actively engages audience
- Constructs meaning in relation to other *texts*, including media texts (Employing conventions of genre). This is referred to as intexuality.

Motivation and conflict in CHC

- In CHC a central protagonist drives the narrative through his/her decisions, choices, psychological traits, fait.

- Often narrative is driven by protagonist's desire.

- Impediments to this desire are counter-forces that shape the major conflict(s). These may be the actions and desires of other characters; or natural, social or political events.

- Almost all CHC involves overcoming one or more problem(s). Conflict is essential to CHC, and is often linked to flaws in key character

Closure

- Most classical narrative films display a strong degree of closure at the end and seek to complete their causal chains with a final effect.

Narration in CHC

- CHC is generally objective in its narration. Viewer has knowledge unavailable to any give character. Identification with filmmaking apparatus.

- Omniscience is significant as plot is commonly structured around the protagonist "coming into knowledge", epiphany.

- In mystery/detective films the viewer tends to share the limited knowledge of the protagonist.

Time: temporal order and duration

Temporal order is disrupted in the plot by flashbacks and flashforwards, parallel events.

- story duration usually stretches beyond plot
- plot duration, selects some spans or slices of story duration.
- screen duration, the physical time in which the film is shown. Independent from the story and plot duration. Screen duration can expand or contract story duration.
- temporal frequency: a story event can be shown more than once in the plot.

Space in CHC

- Space is almost always a key concern. (oral or literary texts might not specify space).
- Location in presented right away--the spatial characteristics of the opening scene are some of first information we take in.
- The physical setting and visual elements necessarily come right away.
- Camera movement confirms the extension of space beyond the frame.
- Information conveyed several ways at once. Condensation,Over-determination

Fargo (1996) Joel Coen & Ethan Coen

- Example of CHC Narrative Construction

Alternatives to CHC

- Films without protagonists and films where protagonist is passive.

- Films where major social forces take the place of protagonists. (documentaries may or may not follow the rule).

- A key principal of narrative is the representation of change. Films in which change is not the central principal: for example, where description is what is achieved.

La Jetée by Chris Marker (1962)

- How does la Jetee depart from Hollywood narrative convention? (lack of moving images--time/space continuity is shifted to emphasize time).

- What conventions does it retain? (the plot is driven by protagonist, his fixation on an image is both his strength and tragic flaw)

- How might we characterize this as an open text? (Use of past images to represent future)