

You mean that gun actually *means* something?

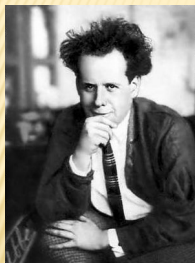


## FILM CRITICISM

## EARLY FILM CRITICISM

- Film is **NOT** just reproducing reality – it has greater artistic and social value
- Film is a language with semantics and syntax
  - Different interpretations of “language” – range from grammatical to structural
- Criticism is shaped by its origins...how we interpret film (or any art) says a lot about us.

## SERGEI EISENSTEIN



1898 - 1948

- Attended school to be an engineer like his father
- Caught up in Bolshevik revolution of 1917
- Mistrust of traditional art forms...desire to create a truly democratic art form
- Powerful juxtaposition of images could create a predictable emotional response in his audience without handicap of language
- Accessible, artistic, flexible to promoting social ideals

## MONTAGE ACCORDING TO EISENSTEIN

- Dialectic:
  - Idea of conversation – the whole is composed out of contrasting or unrelated pieces
  - Dialectic is a *dynamic* system based in conflict
- Eisenstein believes montage is a middle ground
  - Too much science kills art
  - Too much “organic inertia” kills art
- Everything is about rhythm and collision of ideas

## MONTAGE ACCORDING TO EISENSTEIN

- Original view:
  - Built via editing or creation of a constructed whole
  - One shot leads logically to the next on a path to an idea
- Eisenstein Layering of ideas/images
  - Montage should be collision not construction
  - Ideas created in the mind of the viewer by juxtaposing depth, ideas, or disparate images
- Montage is composed of
  - Set up via title card
  - Conflict within the shot (mise en scene)
  - Conflict between shots

## MONTAGE ACCORDING TO EISENSTEIN

- Conflicts arise
  - Between matter & space
    - Close up vs med shot vs long shot
  - Between matter and time
    - Speeded up, slowed down, cut between still and motion
  - Between visual and aural
    - Rhythm/ sound coordination with shots
- Viewer interprets
  - Draws meaning from juxtaposition.
  - Language is created - meaning derived from returning parts to a comprehensive whole
- Why does this theory fit for Eisenstein and his point of view?

## DERIVING MEANING FROM FILM

- Andre Bazin -**
- LANGUAGE is a matter of context & agreed symbols
  - Mise en scene
  - Meaning/effect is not the result of the juxtaposition of images, but already exists in the images themselves
  - Final expression of reality is deep focus
    - Illusion of 3 dimensional space
    - Creation of an intellectual "real" world
    - Citizen Kane



So tell me about your mother...

## PSYCHOANALYTIC CRITICISM

Psychoanalytic is considered one of the *simplest* schools of criticism to understand. Psychoanalysis is something we're all essentially familiar with.

The trick is splitting out what *real* theory says vs. what you've seen on TV. "Because I heard it on Dr. Phil" is not viable as a basis for applying psychoanalytic principles to film.

## THE UNCONSCIOUS

- Origins in childhood – importance of family
- Repression
- Expressed/identified by coping mechanisms
- Source of destructive patterns of behavior

## THE UNCONSCIOUS

- "You can't always get what you want"
  - Becomes "you can't always get what you *consciously* want, but you get what you *unconsciously* need.
- Until you acknowledge and deal with the problems in the unconscious, you will hang on to them in disguised, defeating ways. (i.e. need for father's love)

## DEFENSES

- Unconscious desire NOT to recognize or change destructive behavior
  - Formed identity around them
  - Afraid of what we will find if we look too closely
- Selective perception
- Selective memory
- Denial
- Avoidance
- Displacement
- Projection
- Regression
  - Active reversal*



## CORE ISSUES

- Fear of intimacy
- Fear of abandonment
- Fear of betrayal
- Low self-esteem
- Insecure/unstable sense of self
- Oedipal fixation

*More than one issue may be intertwined*

## ANXIETY/ CONFLICT

- ALWAYS INVOLVES THE RETURN OF THE REPRESSED
- How do we deal with that?
  - Acknowledgement
  - Avoidance
  - Dreams

## DREAMS & DREAM SYMBOLS

- Defenses against anxiety and the repressed are not active while we sleep

- Latent content
- Dream displacement
- Condensation

•Dreams are completely our creation – everyone/everything in them is something our minds created to deal with or reveal the unconscious

- Phallic symbols
- Gynic symbols



## DEATH

- Fear of loss
- Usually abstracted or theorized
- Freud claims there is a death drive or Thanatos
  - Explanation for self-destructive behavior
  - Paired with need to affirm life - eros/thanatos
- Tied into fear of abandonment & intimacy

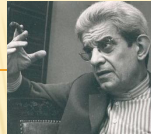
## SEX

- Sexuality tied to identity, gender, self image
- The way sex is handled reflects the nature of the individual and of their interaction with society
- Morality is a non-issue
- ID - instincts, libido & gratification of desire*
- SUPEREGO - social values & taboos that are internalized*
- EGO - conscious self that acts as referee*
- Understanding sexuality & expressions of repressed issues via sex (pleasure/forbidden desire) is vital to psychoanalysis

## JACQUES LACAN (1901-1981)

- Ambiguous/ hard to understand on purpose
- Establishment of self
  - Infancy - no differentiation of self/world
  - Mirror stage - recognizes sense of self as a whole
  - Imaginary order - illusion of control over the environment
  - Symbolic order - introduction of language "I" am "me" and not "you" - isolation & loss of control
- Language is tied into that sense of loss. We need WORDS/symbols to fill in because we have lost the real thing. We no longer have our former experience, so something must be used to replace it.

## JACQUES LACAN (1901-1981)



- Unconscious is created by repression of loss
- Unconscious is structured like a language
- Metaphor**
  - One object stands in for another (ie rose/love)
  - Based on qualities/ meaning derived
- Metonymy**
  - A part of an object is used for the whole (crown)
  - Function/ quality meaning derived
- Part of dreams, communication (language is metaphor)



### APOCALYPSE NOW

Coppola 1979

Film, as an art form, has a lot to do with re-creating, interpreting, and dealing with reality.

We've talked about film as diegesis rather than mimesis – the film makers have control over a lot of elements. The viewer also has a measure of control.

Psychoanalytic criticism interprets film as being about psychological, individual reality. The characters in the film deal with inner issues that may reflect those of the viewer. Reality has to do with repression, dreams, and central issues.

But how else can film be viewed as dealing with reality?

It's all a part of the system

## STRUCTURALIST CRITICISM



### FOR EXAMPLE...

*Examine the structure of a building to see if it is stable or "purty"*  
– **NOT STRUCTURALIST**

*Examine structures of all buildings built in urban America in 1950 to discover common underlying principles of construction.*  
– **STRUCTURALIST**

*Examine the structure of a single building to see how its composition reflects the given system or style.*  
– **STRUCTURALIST**

## STRUCTURALISM

Seeks to find out the underlying organizational principles/structures/meanings of a set of things.

Embraces the difference between specific/structure and physical/interpretation

Visible (surface reality) vs. invisible (organization/"real" reality)

Structures created in human mind

EVERYTHING belongs to some structure



## WHAT IS STRUCTURE?

Any system must have 3 components to be considered a viable system or structure:

### •Wholeness

- System functions as a unit
- NOT a collection of independent items
- Whole is different from sum of parts b/c working together they create something new

### •Transformation

- System is not static; it is capable of change
- New material is always being structured based on the system

### •Self-regulation

- Transformations never lead beyond the structure of the system
- New elements play by the structural rules

## STRUCTURAL LINGUISTICS

*No, this is not a class in linguistics, but you've got to understand the beginning before you can understand where we're going.*

- Ferdinand de Saussure between 1913-1915

- Viewed language not as a bunch of words with individual histories, but as a system of relationships between words and usage
  - Connotation vs denotation

- STRUCTURE is differentiated from INDIVIDUAL USES

## STRUCTURAL LINGUISTICS

### •Langue

- Structure of a language

### •Parole

- Individual words/sentences/etc.

### •Difference

- We perceive meaning based on what is DIFFERENT about an object (context)
- Red is only Red because we know how it differs from blue or green

- Every word has 2 parts

### •Signifier

- Word/image that references

### •Signified

- Concept that is referenced

## STRUCTURAL LINGUISTICS

- Signifiers don't really refer to things...they refer to our IDEA of things

- Signifiers inherently shape our view of the world

## SEMIOTICS

- Application of structuralist ideas to sign systems
  - "linguistic or non-linguistic object or behavior that can be analyzed as if it were a specialized language." (Tyson)
- Images
- Individual elements reveal larger cultural structures

## SEMIOTICS

- Sign = signifier + signified
- 3 classes of signs, but only ONE is of interest to semiotics:
  - Index**
    - Signifier has direct, causal link to signified (smoke/fire, knock/visitor)
  - Icon**
    - Signifier physically resembles signified (portrait)
  - Symbol**
    - Relationship between signifier/signified is arbitrary, decided by community or group

## HOW IS SEMIOTICS USED

### **Restaurant menus...**

- Color
- Size
- Decoration
- Print
- Blank space
- Prices
- Name of dishes/ tags (i.e. a la Parisienne, haricot vert)
- Foods with symbolic connotation (ie hamburger, caviar, etc)
- Semiotics says that you can read a system of "Food snobbery" or cultural message from the menus

## HOW IS SEMIOTICS USED

### **Film?**

- **plot structures**
- **genre**
- **visual symbol/conveyance of meaning**
- **Link innate ways of understanding to film**




It's all about stuff...and who owns it

**MARXISM**



**MARXIST CRITICISM**

- Is based on the ideas of Carl Marx
- Is Not an attempt to found a political system
- Is incredibly politically/socially based



**MARXISM**

The real forces that create human experience are the economic systems that structure human society.

EVERYTHING – philosophy, religion, entertainment, art, government is built on a economic reality

**Material circumstances** – economic conditions

**Historical situation** – social/ political/ ideological atmosphere

**Deriving meaning from human product (i.e. film) requires an understanding of concrete conditions in the world. Ideas can only be judged by their applicability to the real world.**

**MARXISM**

THE basic division between people is socioeconomic.

**Bourgeoisie** – those who control the world's natural, economic, and human resources

**Proletariat** – the majority of the global population who live in substandard conditions and have always performed the manual labor that fills the coffers of the rich.

The proletariat do not recognize how they are being used and allow minor differences (gender, race, religion, ethnicity) to divide them.

## MARXISM

**Ideology** – a belief system which is the direct product of cultural conditioning.

- i.e. capitalism, communism, fascism, Marxism, Karate, astrology, environmentalism
- Even the assumption that nature obeys the laws of science as we are taught them

## MARXISM

Putting Marxism in our terms...

- **“Every family wants to own its own home on its own land.”**
  - Capitalist ideology created by capitalist culture/ power structure
  - Contrast – Native American idea about ownership of land

We must recognize the ideologies programmed into us rather than just living by them.

## MARXISM

Putting Marxism in our terms...

- The *American Dream* is no more than a capitalist ideology that tells people success is the product of initiative and hard work.
- This is manipulation by those in power to maintain their economic status.

For the Marxist, in capitalist countries the means of production are privately owned. Those who own them become the dominant class.

The “dream” blinds people to the failure of the system. The success of few rests on the misery of the many.

Any system that masks its own failure instead of embracing it is false.

## MARXISM

Putting Marxism in our terms...

- The lie operates on gambling
  - anyone can win.
  - The worse off we are, the more we need something to hope for.
- Relies on ego
  - We are “as good as” the wealthiest
  - Rugged individualism
  - People who “have” can rationalize that they “deserve” it

## MARXISM

### Putting Marxism in our terms...

The lie of capitalist ideology spawns 4 major ideologies/socioeconomic structures

#### •Classism

- Those who are of a higher social class are superior
- Intelligent, responsible, ethical, etc.

#### •Religion

- “the opiate of the masses”
- Focus on organized religion not spirituality
- Give kindness, push ideology that non-violence offers heavenly reward.

## MARXISM

### Putting Marxism in our terms...

The lie of capitalist ideology spawns 4 major ideologies/socioeconomic structures

#### •Rugged Individualism

- Romanticizes individual who risks for a unique/personal goal
- Oppressive – puts the individual before the needs of the group
- Promotes the illusion that we actually make our own decisions

#### •Consumerism

- “I am only as good as what I can afford to buy”
- I can be “as good as” the rich if I can buy the same stuff

## MARXISM

Ultimately, it's about how ideology affects human values –

Use Value – usability

Exchange Value - Value for sale, trade, barter

Sign-Exchange value- Status conferred (value)

Commodification – relating to people/ objects in term of exchange/sign-exchange value

Ideological imperialism

## MARXISM

- Accessibility
  - Art
  - Wealth
  - Power

- Good of the group before good of the individual



## MARXIST CRITICISM

- Form as well as content
  - Accessibility
  - Relevance
  - Alienation/association
  - Concept of the “original”

Cinema Verite & NeoRealism

## SHOWING REALITY



## REALISM

“The artistic attempt to recreate life as it is in the context of an artistic medium” –

*McConnell*

- Revolt against
  - classic art that showed life as more orderly than it is
  - Revolt against Romanticism that showed life as more emotionally satisfying than it is

## CINEMA VERITE

**“The truth about them, the answer to ‘what is life really like?’ is thought to be out there, somewhere, and the way to tease it out is through the use of battery-powered sync camera lined to a portable sync recorder.”**

– Henry Breitrose

**“Film is a way of seeing more than meets the eye.”** – Iris Barry

## CINEMA VERITE

- Literally – “Film Truth”
- Developed by French film makers in the 1960s
- NO stars, no created sets, props, extras, special effects, big budgets
- Non-actors, hand-held cameras, homes/natural surroundings
- Real people in unrehearsed situations
- Shot without a script, assembled later in editing

## CINEMA VERITE

- REAL DIFFERENCE – goals
  - **Typical film**
    - creating fantasy/ narrative to draw in & interest audiences
  - **Cinema Verite**
    - Show mundane truth of lives
    - Show social context
    - Social conscience
    - Sometimes political agenda
    - Enlighten audience, show them Truth as (s)he sees it and give the information/enlightenment needed to live a better life

## NEO-REALISM

- Born out of post WWII European cinema. Related to Cinema Verite, but openly narrative.
- Films of working class life, set in the culture of poverty with the implicit message that in a better society, things would be more evenly distributed.
- Often attempts to run in “real time” or as close to real time as possible
- Emphasizes the small, the moment of drama

### The Bicycle Thief – Ladri di biciclette (1948)

Vittorio de Sica

Neorealist – often considered the neorealist film  
...but is it psychoanalytic or marxist?

### Fight Club – 1999

David Fincher

Manipulation of reality – extreme distortion for the purpose of narrative  
How do *you* see the film’s reality? Psychoanalytic? Structuralist? Marxist?