Theater 4 - Introduction to Film

Professor Michael Abbott
Fine Arts Center T113, x6448

Office Hours:
MWF 10:00-11:00, 1:00-2:00
TTh 10:00-noon
Syllabus

- Mondays
  - Lecture
  - Text assignment

- Wednesdays
  - Screenings - 2-hour class

- Fridays
  - Discussion and analysis
Cook, A History of Narrative Film, 3rd ed.

- 1087 pages, most comprehensive text available
- Bibliography of nearly 100 pages
- Glossary of film terms
- Movie stills and shot sequences
- Designed for a 2-semester film history course
Screenings

- Films begin promptly at 2:10
- Guests allowed
- Absolutely no talking, eating, or drinking
- Supplementary Screenings
  - Selected Fridays at 3:15 p.m.
  - Attendance encouraged, but not required
Grading

- Paper 15%
- Storyboard 15%
- Quizzes/Writing Assignments 20%
- Midterm 20%
- Final 30%
Overview of Course

- Film as Art
  - Directing
  - Cinematography, editing, sound and music
  - Narrative
  - Acting

- History of Cinema
  - 100 years: 1872-1972
  - Technical evolution of motion pictures
  - Significant films, movements, artists
Objective: “Cinemaliteracy”

- Viewing films with a critical eye
  - How films are “built”
  - How movies communicate
- Finding connections among films and filmmakers
- Observing how film reflects and impacts culture
Origins and early development

1872-1903
Optical Principles

- Persistence of vision
- “Phi phenomenon”
- Illusion of continuous motion
  - 16 fps - silent
  - 24 fps - sound
  - Rotating shutter
  - Each frame flashed twice on screen
Edward Muybridge

• Series Photography: 1872-1882
  - Action *simulated* with still photos
  - Limitations:
    • Long photographic exposure times
      - Needed to reduce exposure time from 15 minutes to 1/1000 of a second
    • Inflexible film stock
      - Resolved by use of celluloid mass-produced by George Eastman
Thomas Edison

• Kinetograph
  - first motion-picture camera, invented by lab assistant William Dickson
• “Black Maria”
  - first motion-picture studio
• Vitascope
  - projection system, post Lumieres
Lumiere Bros.

- Cinematographe
  - Camera/projector/film printer
  - Established 16 fps standard
- Shot hundreds of “actualities”
- First to project motion-picture on a screen for an audience
Georges Melies

- Cinema’s first narrative filmmaker
- Innovator
  - fade-in, fade-out
  - lap dissolve
  - stop-action
- Influence
  - D.W. Griffith
  - Charlie Chaplin
Edwin Porter

- Began as projectionist
- Influenced by Melies’ A Trip to the Moon
- Combined stock footage with staged scenes for Life of an American Fireman
- Developed concept of continuity editing
Continuity Editing

- New narrative form unique to cinema
  - Illusion of separate, simultaneous parallel actions
  - Linear continuity from shot to shot
  - Unit of meaning in film language is the shot, not the scene.
The Great Train Robbery

- Continuity editing
- Unique camera placements and in-depth shooting
- "Matting-like" double printing on film
- Panning shots
- Special effects
- Rise of nickelodeons in response to popularity of The Great Train Robbery
German Cinema between the wars

Murnau, Lang, and German Expressionism
UFA - 1920-1933

- Nationally subsidized film studio
- Consolidated existing production companies, distributors into one giant film company
- Briefly competed with Hollywood
- Struggled financially throughout existence
  - Parufamet Agreement
- Eventually became a Nazi propaganda tool
Expressionism

- Highly stylized subjective visual world
- Exaggerated spatial dimensions
- Unnatural human forms
  - Heavy make-up
  - 2-dimensional characterizations
- Mood, atmosphere over narrative
- Chiaroscuro lighting

Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (1919)
Expressionism - Key Figures

Fritz Lang

F.W. Murnau
Original artwork for *Metropolis* (1922)
Original Poster

The Robot (screen shot)
Additional Posters
The City (screen shot)
Soviet Cinema

Vertov, Kuleshov, Eisenstein, and the rise of Film Theory
Early Developments

- Moscow Film School (1919)
- “Agitprop” documentary cinema
- Vertov
  - Kino-Eye
    - Narrative cinema is “impotent”
    - Film must capture reality and “arrange” it for meaning
    - Self-reflexive cinema (*The Man with a Movie Camera*)
The Rise of Montage

- The Kuleshov Workshop
  - Rise of film theory
    - Films without celluloid
    - Dissection and reassembly of Griffith’s *Intolerance*
  - The “Kuleshov Effect”
- Montage
  - The shot has two values
    - That which it possesses by itself
    - That which it acquires in relationship to other shots
  - The second value is greater than the first
Ramifications of Montage

- Meaning is derived from the sequential arrangement of shots, not photographed reality
- Film is an inherently manipulative art form
- The director (editor?) emerges as the supreme creative artist of the cinema
Sergei Eisenstein

- Along with Griffith, a pioneering artist of the cinema
- Began in the theater
- Formulated a modernist theory of editing (Montage) that transcended Griffith’s 19th-century aesthetic
- *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) one of the most influential masterpieces ever made, along with:
  - *Birth of a Nation*
  - *Citizen Kane*
  - *Breathless*
  - *Star Wars?*
Hollywood in the Twenties

The American Studio System
Hollywood Becomes an Industry

- In the 1920’s motion pictures became the most popular form of entertainment for the middle class
- Filmmaking practice was standardized to facilitate mass production
- Wall Street invested heavily in motion pictures
- Major Hollywood studios consolidated power and dominated the world market
The Big Five

- Paramount, Loews (MGM), Fox, Warner Bros., RKO
  - Universal, Columbia, United Artists
- Studios dominated through “vertical integration”
  - Production
  - Distribution
  - Exhibition
Thomas Ince and the “studio system”

- Established “Inceville” near Hollywood
- Built the first modern Hollywood studio
- Mode of production became prototype for American film industry
  - separate shooting stages
  - production units with separate directors
  - shooting scripts
Mack Sennett

- Founded Keystone Studios
- Created silent “slapstick comedies”
  - Made thousands of 1 and 2-reelers, hundreds of features
  - Dominant film genre of the 20’s.
- Credited with discovering:
  - Charlie Chaplin
  - Buster Keaton
  - Fatty Arbuckle
  - W.C. Fields, et al
- Contributed to world-wide popularity of Hollywood films
Hollywood Scandals

- Jazz age Hollywood decadence
- Fatty Arbuckle and Virginia Rappe, et al.
- Formation of MPPDA
- Will Hays
  - The “Hays Office
  - The “Don’ts and Be Carefuls”
The Sound Era Arrives

The effects and aftershocks of Hollywood’s transition to “talkies”
Film before “talkies was not silent

- Dickson achieved sound synchronization with Kinetograph as early as 1889
- Examples of synchronized phonograph recording in France, Germany, and Britain
- Live sound effects machines were used to accompany silent films
- Live music was employed from the beginning
  - Organ or piano music
  - Full orchestral scores with cue sheets
Experimentation

- Early sound-on-film invented by Dickson assistant in 1910
  - followed by similar European inventions
- Phonofilm process perfected by radio pioneer Lee DeForest (1922)
  - initial interest and implementation
  - failure due to Hollywood’s reluctance to accept costly new system
Vitaphone and Warner Bros.

- Vitaphone - sound-on-disc system invented by Western Electric and AT&T
  - ignored by major studio heads
- Warner Bros. establish Vitaphone corporation
  - financed by Goldman Sachs
  - intended to provide musical accompaniment for theaters with no orchestras
  - lavishly debuted in New York with MPPDA president Will Hays delivering filmed speech (1926)
Reasons for major studio resistance to sound

- Huge expense in converting to sound-proof studios.
- Huge expense converting movie theaters for sound.
- Huge backlog of silent films would be useless.
- Overseas market decimated.
- Star system thrown into disarray.
The Jazz Singer

- 1927 Warner Bros. builds first sound studio and releases *The Jazz Singer*
- *The Jazz Singer* becomes a monumental hit
- Studios rush to convert to sound
Problems of early “talkies”

- When the movies started to talk, they ceased to move
- Between 1928 and 1931, filmmaking regressed to the Melies-era style
  - Cameras were stuffed into sound-proof booths
  - Editing became transitional
  - Cross-cutting, montage, fluid camera movement were eliminated
Theoretical question of sound

- Filmmakers like Chaplin and Keaton initially rejected "talkies"
- Eisenstein and others saw it as a "two-edged sword"
- Synchronous vs. Asynchronous sound
The Studio System

Genres new and old
Hollywood genres

- The Musical
- Disney animated features
- The Gangster film / Newspaper film
- The Western
- Biopics
- Dialogue comedy
- Screwball comedy
The Genius of the System

Hollywood and big business in the 1930’s
Hollywood as industry

✓ By the 1930’s Hollywood had become a dominant American industry
✓ Nearly 100 million ticket-buyers per week
✓ Hundreds of films released each year
  – most prolific, MGM, averaged 1 per week
✓ Major studios and investors earning huge sums of money on hit pictures
  – corporate profitability becomes the bottom line
Ramifications of corporate control

✓ Producers exert artistic control over filmmaking process
✓ Proven successes exploited for maximum economic gain
  – sequels, remakes, and serials
  – formula pictures become “sure-fire” hits
✓ Quest for predictable sales vehicles
  – Popular novels, plays translated for film
  – Popular stars billed over the title
The Star System

- Actors were under contract to studios
- Projects were assigned by the studio
- Studios cultivated star images
  - managed appearances
  - orchestrated “romances”
  - trained budding stars for various skills
- Rewarded or punished stars based on loyalty to studio
Stars of the golden era
Witchhunts and Blacklists

HUAC and Hollywood

Edward Dmytryk

Sen. Joseph McCarthy
Hollywood investigated

HUAC undertakes a full investigation of "communism in motion pictures" in 1947

Committee subpoenaed 47 witnesses
  - "Friendly" Jack Warner, Louis B. Mayer, Ronald Reagan, Walt Disney, others
  - "Unfriendly" Dalton Trumbo, Edward Dmytryk, others
  - 13 of 17 "unfriendly witnesses" were Jews

Final list known as the "Hollywood Ten"
Committee for the First Amendment (CFA) formed

- John Huston, William Wyler, John Ford, Humphrey Bogart, others

Hollywood Ten refused to testify

All were convicted and sent to prison

- No legal representation
- No cross-examination of accusors
- No documented evidence
Hollywood closes ranks

- MPAA and MPPDA produce the “Waldorf Statement”
  - Fired Hollywood Ten
  - Caused widespread blacklisting of other “communist sympathisers”
- SAG, under Reagan, requires loyalty oaths from each member
- In the end 324 people were fired by the studios and no longer permitted to work in the industry
Orson Welles and Citizen Kane
Alfred Hitchcock (1899-1980)

Master of Suspense
Highlights

- Began as a young director in the silent era working in German studios
  - influenced by expressionism and kammerspielfilm
- Came to Hollywood in 1939
- Famous for “cameos” in his Hollywood films
- Became a cultural icon for murder and suspense
Classic Hitchcock

- An innocent man, falsely accused
- Spectacular chase scenes in prominent locales
- Avoidance of on-screen violence
- Psychological tension paramount
- Technical virtuoso
- Audiovisual montage
- Morbid fascination with death and murder.
Master at work

- Master of cinematic language
  - Intraframe narrative (Griffith)
  - Expressive use of camera (Murnau)
  - Montage (Eisenstein)
- Master of genre - the suspense thriller
- Master craftsman
  - Storyboards
  - Editing
  - Music
Bernard Herrmann

- Began working on radio dramas with Orson Welles
- Famous for unorthodox orchestrations, “themes” and avoidance of melody
- Nominated for 5 Academy Awards, winner of 1 (*Devil and Daniel Webster*)
- Last film: Scorsese’s *Taxi Driver*
Post-War Italian Cinema

Neorealism and its pioneers

The Bicycle Thief (1948)
The Effects of War

- W.W.II devastated the European film industry
- England: air raids destroyed 330 film theaters
- Germany: 60% of film-producing studios lost
- France: film production halted by Allied bombardment and liberation fighting
- 48 million people killed in Europe, 35% of all permanent dwellings in Western Europe destroyed
- Only Italy was left with film production facilities reasonably intact
Mussolini and the Italian Cinema

- Mussolini re-organized Italian film industry ala Soviet model of agitprop cinema
- Founded government agency to produce documentaries for “civil and national education”
- Seized control of distribution and exhibition of films
- Ordered the formation of a national film school
- Constructed vast Cinecittà studios in Rome, rivaling UFA in size and facilities
Neorealism

- Cesare Zavattini - theoretical founder - called for new kind of film that would:
  - abolish contrived plots
  - replace professional actors
  - shoot on the streets, reject studio
  - establish contact with contemporary social reality
  - embrace the “dignity and sacredness of the everyday life of ordinary people”
Neorealism: Major Figures and Films

- *Rome, Open City* (Rossellini)
  - considered first neorealism classic
  - shot just after Nazi occupation
  - shot silent on location, voices dubbed later
  - film stock assembled piecemeal from street photographers
- Won grand prize at Cannes, 1946
- Immense world-wide success
- Became paradigm for Italian neorealism, which changed cinema history

Roberto Rossellini
Impact of Neorealism

- Introduced some of the great directors of the cinema
  - Rossellini
  - Fellini
  - Antonioni

- Liberated cinema from artificial confines of the studio and studio system

- Incorporated unconventional filmmaking techniques which have now become mainstream

- Embraced humanism in cinematic terms
The French New Wave

Breathless (1960)
The 1950s

- France rebuilt its film industry after W.W. II
  - Modeled after Hollywood studio system
  - Dominated by stylish craftsmen and performers
  - Elegant filmmaking, often adapted from novels
- Documentary movement spawned the careers of young directors who would later begin the “new wave”
New Wave

- Theory founded by critics Alexandre Astruc and André Bazin
- Highly influential journal, *Cahiers du cinéma*
- Assembled a group of critics who later became the major directors of the New Wave
  - François Truffaut
  - Jean-Luc Godard
  - Claude Chabrol
  - Jacques Rivette
  - Eric Rohmer

Francois Truffault
Principles of the New Wave

- Cinema should bear the subtlety and expressiveness of novels
- A departure from the “tyranny of narrative”
  - rejection of heavy emphasis on plot, dialogue
  - challenge the “tradition of quality”
- Reject montage theory in favor of *mise-en-scene*, long takes, and deep focus composition
  - emphasis on emotional and psychological impact of film
  - The cinema must express human thought
- Film is a medium of personal expression--authorship--*auteurism*
Major Films of the New Wave

- *The 400 Blows* - Truffault
- *Hiroshima, mon amour* - Resnais
- *Breathless* - Godard

All three films made in 1959
Technical characteristics of the New Wave

- Inexpensive, “unpolished” look
- Shaky handheld camera
- Location shooting
- Natural lighting
- Improvised dialogue
- Direct sound recording on portable tape machines
- Jagged editing, jump cuts
- Destruction of spatial, temporal continuity
New Wave Style

- Young, film-savvy directors who were first generation of filmmakers to grow up with cinema
- Self-reflexive style
- Aesthetic distance between audience and film
- Paves way for cinema verite
- Embrace of “film culture”
- Call to question the very form and process of narrative cinema

Hiroshima, mon amour
Japanese Cinema

Kurosawa’s *Dreams* (1990)
Early Japanese Film (1900-1925)

- Cut off from Western influences until after WWII
- Heavily influenced by traditional Kabuki Theater
  - narrative structure of film derived from Kabuki conventions
- Film industry destroyed by Tokyo earthquake of 1923
Kabuki Theater

- Highly stylized form of theater dating back to 17th century
- Men play all roles
- Highly ritualized movement
- “Benshi” serves as narrator
  - stands offstage and narrates onstage action
- Depictions of feudal samurai period of Japanese history
Forms of Cinema (1925-45)

- **Jidai-geki**
  - films set in feudal era - prior to 1868
    - samurai films
    - historical romances
    - ghost films

- **Gendai-geki**
  - films of contemporary life
    - comedies
    - children’s films
    - gangster films
World War II

- Japan establishes Ministry of Propaganda
- Progressive films censored
- Pro-military films were commissioned showing Japanese prowess in battle
- Ten existing studios were consolidated under Office of Public Information
  - virtually all genres were pressed into service of “national policy”
Occupation

- Douglas MacArthur (SCAP) led Occupation forces in Japan
- Primary objective: “democratization” of Japan
- SCAP imposed strict censorship on Japanese film industry
  - banning all films which “glorified feudalism, imperialism, or militarism
- 225 wartime and postwar films were banned by SCAP

Douglas MacArthur
The end of the studio system

Hollywood in the 1960’s
The Eroding Production Code

- Influx of “unapproved” foreign films in the early 1950s
- Rise of independent producers and directors
- Studios could no longer own theaters, so theater owners were free to show any films they wanted
- Organizations like the Catholic Legion of Decency had declined in membership and influence
The Demise of the Production Code

- In 1952, New York State Supreme Court ruled Rossellini’s *The Miracle* a “sacrilege”
- The case was appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, which ruled that movies were protected under the 1st and 14th amendments
- Otto Preminger released two films which openly challenged the production code
  - *The Moon Is Blue* (1953)
    - word “virgin” used on-screen
  - *The Man with the Golden Arm* (1955)
    - Frank Sinatra played a heroin addict
The Decline of Hollywood

■ By the 1960’s Hollywood had fallen behind the rest of the world

■ Aesthetically
  ♦ France, Italy, Germany, and Latin America surpassed American cinema

■ Commercially
  ♦ Television had eroded American audiences by 50%
  ♦ Admission prices far exceeded inflation
  ♦ Production costs skyrocketed

■ Technologically
The Studios React

- Increased tolerance for independent production. Studios sponsored young directors like Coppola, Kubrick, and Peckinpah.
- Studios turned to television production.
- Studios became distributors of independent productions and foreign films.
American filmmakers began to reflect the alienation and rebellion that pervaded 60s era youth

- *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967)
- *Easy Rider* (1969)
- *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968)