

Lectures 9-10: Critical Film Analysis Pts. I & II

COMM 103F, Dr. Collins

Class Announcements

- **Paper Proposal Discussion**
- Course Evaluations
 - Tuesday 9/3 In-Class COMM Eval
 - CAPE Extra-Credit Opportunity → if 90% of class completes a CAPE evaluation by Friday 9/6 8:00 am, 5 points (+2.5%) <http://www.cape.ucsd.edu/>
- Today → Guest Lecture
 - Rachel Fox, Scholar of Fat Studies, Disability Studies, STS, Medical/Health Narratives
 - Discuss Creating Academic Arguments About Film
 - Graphic Content Warning
- Final Paper (No late assignments accepted)
- This Week's Office Hours → OUTSIDE CCC as it will be closed
- Final Class (Will wait 5 minutes)

Critical Analysis Overview

CH. 11: Film Criticism: Sample Analyses

- “Thinking and talking in an informed way about a movie” (Bordwell, 399)
 - For our purposes → in an ACADEMIC way
- “Film analysis, the activity of looking closely at how the movie works...” (Bordwell, 399, emphasis mine)
 - Step-back
 - Unpack
 - Analyze
 - Argue
 - Support
 - Conclude
- https://canvas.ucsd.edu/courses/3644/assignments/24736?module_item_id=71304

Film Analysis

- Dissecting a scene
- Commenting on form and structure
- Situating a film historically
- Correctly utilizing course film concepts:
 - Narrative
 - Montage sequence
 - Mise-en-scene
 - Cinematography
 - Sound
 - Continuity Editing
 - Genre
 - Ideology



Creating an Argument

Crafting and supporting your
thesis statement...

So What?

Argument Missteps

- General LACK of an argument...
 - I saw this movie and noticed or liked these specific aspects, so I'm going to walk through these aspects...SO WHAT?
 - What critical discussion are you contributing to this exercise?
- Underdeveloped, tentative, or vague arguments
- Backwards writing arguments that finally arrive at the end of the paper
- Disappearing arguments (where a claim is stated at the onset of the paper and then abandoned or only re-appears at the conclusion)
- **ALL OF THESE missteps create writing that is often disjointed, unfocused, and not anchored to an overarching narrative and critical thread...**

Strong Arguments...

- Are PRESENT
- Are: (1) Stated clearly and upfront in a nuanced **thesis statement**, (2) are supported throughout the writing, and (3) are reiterated in a conclusion

“*Star Wars* set a new standard in the world of special effects and film narrative while expressing American values of the 1970s towards war, Communism, and the new space frontier.”

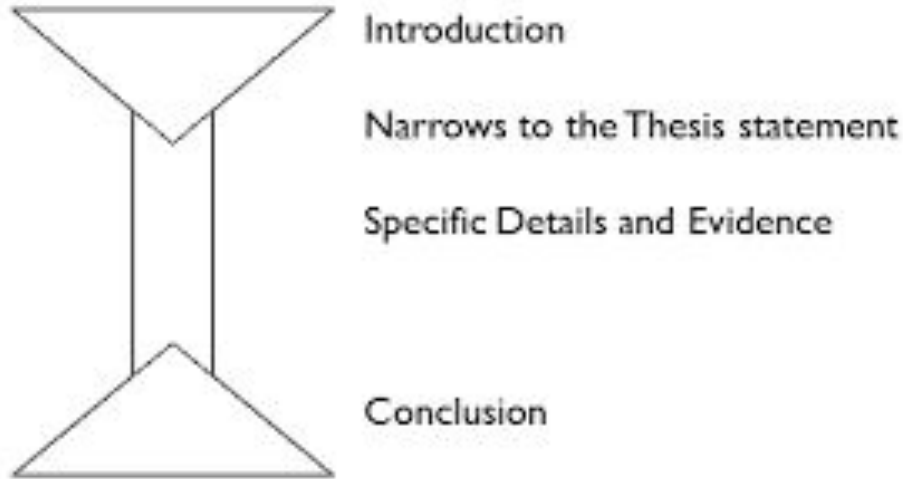
“On the surface, [*Fatal Attraction*] can be seen as a moral parable, showing the consequences of marital infidelity...[however] the film is [also] an obvious criticism of feminism, showing the successful career woman who suffers because of being single, rather than finding freedom in it.”

“Even though all three [characters] choose completely different pathways, [*Boyz in the Hood*] exploits the prevailing challenges amongst lower class African American communities around drugs, racial inequality and police brutality. In the end, the film symbolizes three possible outcomes of an African American male: either death, prison, or a drastic reformation of character.”

Crafting A Thesis Statement

- Expresses the **MAIN IDEA** of the research paper or essay
- Usually one sentence...but we are going to look at a 2-sentence template
 - Sentence 1: Main Idea
 - Sentence 2: How you will examine and support it
- **[DIRECTOR'S NAME] [optional: GENRE] [FILM NAME] [FILM YEAR] [DOES/SHOWS/REPRESENTS THIS THING]. Utilizing cinematic techniques such as [THREE CINEMATIC ELEMENTS], the film [VERB] [THE SO WHAT? ELEMENT].**
- Rob Marshall's musical *Chicago* (2002) illustrates the making of micro-celebrity. Utilizing cinematic techniques such as mise-en-scene, editing, and sound, the film highlights the absurdity of the fleeting nature of celebrity culture in America.

Hourglass Writing Approach



- Start with a Big Idea (aka thesis) in your “hook” to grab the reader’s attention
- Get detailed and refined as you move through your argument to support your big idea (aka thesis)
- Conclude broadly, stating the implications of your research and future study

Writing Resources

- Google Scholar
 - www.scholar.google.com
 - Access to scholarly research and academic literature
- Purdue OWL
 - https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/purdue_owl.html
 - Citation and Writing Tips
- UCSD Writing Resources
 - <https://students.ucsd.edu/academics/success/writing-programs.html>
 - Appointments may be necessary!
College affiliation may apply...



TEACHING + LEARNING
commons
WRITING + CRITICAL EXPRESSION HUB

S219 COMM Course Evaluations

Step-by-step instructions to the survey:

1. From your laptop or smartphone, go to **communication.ucsd.edu**
2. Go to “**Undergraduate Studies**” and click on “**Forms.**”
3. The survey link is the last one on the list, called “**S219 COMM Course Evaluations.**”

QR Code to the survey:



The Social Functions of Genre

“Genres are tightly bound to cultural factors.” (335)

- “Why do audiences enjoy seeing the same conventions over and over?”

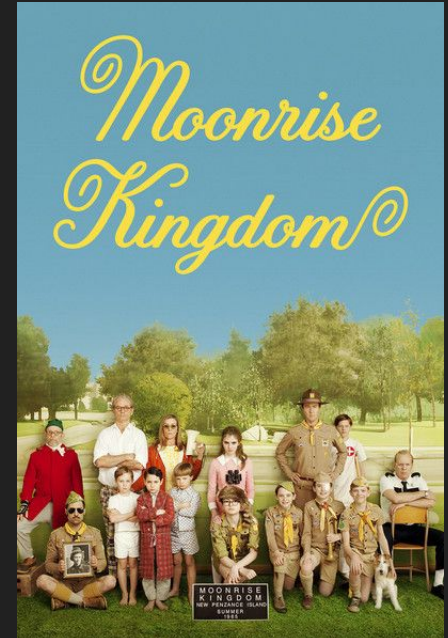
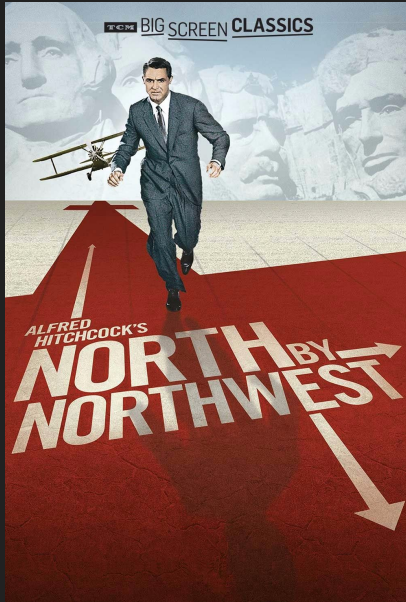
Index Card Question

Write a question for our guest lecturer regarding the practice of writing academically about film:

- You can ask about general challenges and/or frustrations regarding process
- You can inquire about paper mechanics (e.g. crafting an argument, offering support and evidence, expressing the So What? Element, etc.)
- You can ask specific thematic questions that relate the content of her film and article (e.g. body politics, personhood, the power of the hegemonic gaze, writing about documentary film, cinematography, narration, etc.)

Types of Analysis From Ch. 11

- The Classical Narrative Cinema
 - Action, Character Goals, Pacing, Plot/Counterplot, Narration and Knowledge
 - *North by Northwest*, *Do the Right Thing*, *Moonrise Kingdom*



Do The Right Thing: Sample Narrative Argument (p. 408)

“At first viewing, Spike Lee’s *Do The Right Thing*, with its many brief, disconnected scenes, relentlessly wandering camera, and large numbers of characters without goals might not seem a classical narrative film...Yet it has the redundantly clear action and strong forward impetus that we associate with classical filmmaking. It also fits into a familiar genre of American cinema--the social problem film. Moreover, closer analysis reveals that Lee has also drawn on many traits of classicism to give an underlying unity to this apparently loosely constructed plot.”

- Thesis → this seemingly disjointed film actually draws on classical storytelling traits to provide itself with unity
- It might seem like...But/However/Yet → Cue to an ORIGINAL argument
- Sets up evidence to come
- A narrative argument, not an ideological argument... (So what?)

Other Types

- Narrative Alternatives to Classical Filmmaking
 - *Breathless*, *Tokyo Story*, *Chunking Express*
- Documentary Form and Style
 - *Man With a Movie Camera*, *The Thin Blue Line*
- **Form, Style, and Ideology**
 - Our emphasis for the final paper
 - Analyzing a film for its ideological standpoints
 - “Any film combines formal and stylistic elements...to create an ideological stance,” (Bordwell, 442)
 - *Meet Me in St. Louis* (family/home values in America), *Raging Bull*



ROBERT DE NIRO



"RAGING BULL"

A ROBERT CHARTOFF-IRWIN WINSLER PRODUCTION
ROBERT DE NIRO
in A MARTIN SCORSESE PICTURE "RAGING BULL"
Produced in association with PETER SAVAGE Screenplay by PAUL SCHRADER and MARION MARTIN
Based on the book by JAKE LA MOTTA with JOSEPH CARTER and PETER SAVAGE
Produced by IRWIN WINSLER and ROBERT CHARTOFF Directed by MARTIN SCORSESE
Read the Raging Bull Book
R RESTRICTED 15
Copyright © 1980 United Artists Corporation All Rights Reserved
United Artists

Analyzing Ideology in *Meet Me in St. Louis*

“*Meet Me in St. Louis*... provides a clear example of a film that doesn’t seek to change people’s ways of thinking. Instead, it tends to reinforce certain aspects of a dominant social ideology...Like most Hollywood films, [it] seeks to uphold what are conceived as characteristically American values of family unity and home life.” (Bordwell, 442)

- Thesis → the film reinforces an American social ideology (family/home life)
- Evidence:
 - “The opening of the film quickly introduces the idea of St. Louis as a city on the boundary between tradition and progress” (442)
 - Family life through mise-en-scene and music: “Many stylistic devices build up a picture of a happy family life. The Technicolor design contributes greatly to the lushness of the mise-en-scene...association of family unity with the holidays...Another motif of family unity involves light. The house is ablaze much of the time...” (443-444)

Don't Forget...

Final Papers are due to Canvas by:

Saturday September 7, 2019 at 2:30 pm

****No late papers will be accepted****

Thank you for a wonderful quarter.
Enjoy the remainder of your summer!