GERMAN 323

GERMAN CINEMA:
Film in the Republic from Weimar to Berlin

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FALL 2001
German 323 / Fall 2001

German Cinema:
Film in the Republic from Weimar to Berlin

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Class hours:  MF 2:30-3:20, W 2:30-4:25  HSS 203

Main goals
• to give an overview of the development of German film from the silent era to the present
• to set all the films in a historical and social context
• to provide tools of film analysis and practice in using them

Texts
• recommended, purchasable: David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, Film Art: An Introduction (also available in the Reserve Room under English 281)

• basic orientation is also available through a CD-ROM Film, Form, and Culture, by Robert Kolker, available on reserve in Hodges (PN1994 .K573 1999)

• the assigned readings are available on the university computer

Requirements / Grading
• see all the films (multiple times if necessary)
• do all the readings
• attend classes and participate in discussions (15%)
• complete the shot breakdown due September 7 (5%)
• turn in the first critical journal due September 28 (15%)
• write the in-class midterm on October 8 (20%)
• turn in the second critical journal due November 19 (25%)
• write the final exam on Saturday, December 8, from 2:45-4:45 p.m. (20%)

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Film screenings (usually Wednesdays)

W 22 Aug  The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari
W 29 Aug  Nosferatu
W 5 Sept  Metropolis
M 3 Sept  Ghosts for Breakfast
W 12 Sept  M
W 19 Sept  Olympia
W 26 Sept  La Habanera
W 3 Oct  The Marriage of Maria Braun
W 10 Oct  A Man Like EVA
W 17 Oct  Inextinguishable Fire
W 24 Oct  Every Man for Himself and God against All
W 31 Oct  The Legend of Paul and Paula
W 7 Nov  Wings of Desire
W 14 Nov  The All-Round Reduced Personality
W 21 Nov  Men
W 28 Nov  Run, Lola, Run or Winter Sleepers
M 3 Dec  Schwarzfahrer

Due dates:

F  7 Sept  shot breakdown
F 28 Sept  first critical journal
M  8 Oct  mid-term
M 19 Nov  second critical journal
Sa  8 Dec  final exam

Days on which there is no class

M  3 Sept  Labor Day
F 12 Oct  Fall break
F 23 Nov  Thanksgiving
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Reading Assignments

August


September

W 5  Choose one of the following from Fritz Lang's *Metropolis: Cinematic Visions of Technology and Fear*. Eds. Michael Minden and Holger Bachmann. n.p.: Camden House 2000.


Ben Morgan. "*Metropolis* -- the Archetypal Version: Sentimentality and Self-Control in the Reception of the Film." 286-309.


October


M 8  **Mid-term**

W 10F  No reading assignment

F 12  **Fall Break**


November

W 7  Judith Mayne, “Female Narration, Women's Cinema: Helke Sander's The All-Round Reduced Personality/Redupers,” *New German Critique*, Nos. 24-25 (Fall/Winter 1981-82): 155-71


F 23  **Thanksgiving**

W 28  No reading assignment

December

W 5  No reading assignment

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How to Read a Narrative Film -- Some Essentials

by Anton Kaes and Eric Rentschler

Some basics

The smallest units of meaning derive from signs. A sign is something that stands for something else to somebody in some respect. It is material occurrence: a letter, a gesture, a noise. It need not be intentionally produced by a human agent. One can understand it as a physical agent that sends us back to something else not present. Signs are understood on the basis of rules or conventions.

A repertoire or system of signs is a code. "A code is nothing other than the logical relationship which allows a message to be understood" (Christian Metz). Codes are the rules at work in a film, the logical forms we try to discern, the logical mechanisms that impart meaning to the flow of images and sounds.

In dealing with narrative films, we confront three central kinds of coding.

I. Dramatic/Narrative Coding

1. What does the title of the film signify or suggest? Does it refer to another text, is it a quotation, a place, a play on words?
2. What are the film's major narrative (i.e. syntagmatic) units?
3. In what time sequence are events presented? Is chronology interrupted, juggled, or is it straightforward? Is there a narrative frame?
4. Does the narrative flow smoothly, sweeping up viewers into a compelling illusion, giving them a sense of a fictional world with specific spatial and temporal coordinates (i.e. a "diegesis")?
5. Is there a subplot? Does it comment on the main action or maintain an independent existence?
6. Are there substantial time gaps between certain scenes?
7. What are the main locations of the film? Is there a preponderance of interior or exterior settings? In what relationship do different locations stand to each other?
8. What characters are associated with certain locations?
9. Does a character leave his/her habitual environment? Why? What are the consequences for the narrative?
10. In what sort of constellations are the characters grouped? Who opposes whom - - who are the protagonists, who are the antagonists?
11. Which characters change in the course of the film, which ones remain static? Which characters act; which characters are acted upon?
12. Are characters rounded or flat? Do they possess discernible motivations for their actions? Does the film give reasons for their acting in certain ways? Do certain characters only serve plot functions? Why?
13. How is change brought about - - through human or extra-human intervention? What role does history play? Does one speak of destiny or fate?
14. Are characters socially determined? Does the story line stress material factors?
15. How is the final outcome anticipated? Are there early signs (i.e. foreshadowing) of what is to come?
16. Is an alternative ending suggested? How does the subplot end?
17. Are all the strands of the plot action resolved or are there loose ends? Does the happy end seem contrived or unsatisfying - - in other words, does closure seemed forced?
18. What does the main character lack in the beginning? Does s/he attain it in the end?
19. What are the inherent oppositions at work in the film on the thematic level: rich vs. poor, nature vs. civilization, young vs. old, anarchy vs. order, etc.? What is the dominant polarity? What main conflict underlines the narrative structure?
20. What conflicts does the film "really" explore?
II. Sociological/Historical Coding

1. What are the social groupings of characters (upper/lower class, petty bourgeoisie, proletariat, establishment, etc.)? Are there hierarchies even among the oppressed?
2. Do we learn what characters do for a living? Do we see people at work? Do they talk about money?
3. Which spheres are emphasized (family, private or public, work place or recreational activity)?
4. Is the status quo criticized at any level? By whom? For what reason? How?
5. Is there an effort on any character's part to change society? Does anyone have a utopian vision? Are nonconformists portrayed sympathetically? Are they disturbances or useful additions? Are they accepted or rejected?
6. Who "wins" in the end, i.e. which interests triumph? Does the final outcome follow logically and inevitably? What image of society prevails ultimately?
7. Are there class antagonisms? Is there sign of class consciousness?
8. Are the relationships between characters a reflection or comment (direct or indirect?) upon certain social relationships and attitudes at the time the film was made?
9. What is the relationship of the historical time depicted in the film to the time in which it was made?
10. What are the different opinions on key issues: freedom, money, justice, love, power? Where do characters get their opinions? Does the narrative privilege certain types of discourse - - and how? Does a voice-over narrator, for instance, establish a social backdrop?
11. Is the outcome ambiguous or clear-cut? Does the film finally side with one character or social faction?
12. Does the film deal with a conflict still unresolved in our time and culture? Does it consciously present itself as a social statement?
13. Does a film intend to take on controversial matters in a provocative way? Does it work less indirectly - - and, if so, how?
14. Does it offer fictional alternatives to social convention or does it reaffirm accepted opinion? Is it oppositional or affirmative?
15. does the narrative offer a utopian perspective? Is it cynical?
16. In what way does the film appeal to the spectator? What forms of address does it use/ How does it (if at all) locate the spectator vis à vis the onscreen spectacle?
17. To what sort of audience does the film cater? What audience(s) and what sorts of interests does the film assume? Does the camera, for instance, privilege a male gaze?
18. Do social roles break down along lines of sex? Does the film suggest a certain gender-determined division of labor? Do women seem to assume "natural" roles? Do men influence narrative action more than women?
19. Is the female body a particular point of focus? Do women function as objects of spectacle? In short, does the camera fetishize the female body?
20. Are there suggested points of resistance in the film which inexplicably disappear or become obscured?

III. Formal/Stylistic Coding

1. What expectations does the film's title arouse/ What "sort" of film (i.e. genre) seems to be promised?
2. What does the advertising campaign and the representations on posters, blurbs, trailers, and ads seem to promise? What sort of associations are evoked; which connections are we called on to make?
3. How does the credit sequence lead us into the film - - if at all? What sorts of formal devices provide cues for what is to come?
4. What are the signals given in the first sequence:
   -- location and characters:
      relation between character and foreground/background?
      relation between character and environment?
      relation among characters and suggested constellations?
      which character does the camera privilege?
   -- perspective:
      whose look guides us? are looks exchanged?
      is a distinct point of view identified as such or does silent observer seem to be taking in the
      action reflected by the camera?
      does the camera favor a certain character's perspective?
   -- character movement/position:
      does the camera follow a particular character?
      kind of movement (jerky, smooth, elegant, slow) and its relation to the film apparatus?
      grouping of characters (composition, tableau)?
   -- dialogue/sound:
      who speaks the first words and what do they signify?
      do certain characters speak with more authority?
      noise, sound, background music (diegetic or nondiegetic)?
   -- camera movement/position:
      outside-inside, from above or below?
      stasis (long or short takes)?
      angle (high or low, straight-on)?
   -- lighting (high key, low key, flat)?
   -- editing (do images flow, are there shock cuts)?
5. Are certain patterns of images or certain sounds associated with particular characters?
6. Do certain technical and stylistic devices recur? Do they develop in their repetition?
7. How are attitudes and hidden thoughts externalized: role of body language, gestures, nuance? Is
   this done visually or is this a function of the dialogue?
8. What does the editing (both sound and image!) do to influence our response?
9. Does the film follow certain conventions (national, generic, historical)? Does it try to subvert our
   formal expectations, to play with then, and if so, how?
10. Does the film quote other films, books, songs, or texts? How? Why? Will most members of the
    audience "get" these references or are the quotations privileged information?
11. Does the film suggest a source of intelligence governing what we see and hear? Is this intelligence
    to be identified with an author (either a fictional or a real one)?
12. Does the film aim to construct an impression of the "real" world or does it present a consciously
    imaginary and stylized universe? In other terms: does the film see itself as a window onto a realistic
    realm or does it forward a sense of itself as a framed view of things, i.e. as an artifice and a
    construction?
13. Does the film self-reflect, i.e. turn back on itself and comment on its workings as a fictional product,
    as a shaped (and therefore not "real") world? Is the film's self-reflection, though, just another
    fiction?
14. What sort of formal shape does the narrative assume as a whole? What are its parts, what is its
    trajectory, what is the process involved?
15. What is the relationship of narration to the narrative, i.e. of how things are revealed in the course of the
    film to what is actually revealed?
16. The role of absences: do elements become manifest because they are missing or only vaguely
    present? Can we speak of a structuring of such absences?

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CONSTRUCTING A SCENIC BREAKDOWN

compliments of Chris Holmlund

I. Breaking down a film into shots

In analyzing a film it is useful to prepare a breakdown and transcript of it: roughly the opposite of what a director does when shooting it. The French term for scenic breakdown is "decoupage," and it describes this activity of verbally "cutting up" the film. The scenic breakdown is not itself an analysis, nor is it a substitute for seeing and reseeing the film. It is an aid to understanding. But you can't describe everything. What, then, do you notate in your scenic breakdown?

The vital information for the film analyst includes:

1. A numbered listing of shots in order through the film or the film sequence.

2. A description of salient visual properties of each shot. These include the following, but, and this is important, **NOT NECESSARILY FOR EACH AND EVERY SHOT. THE KEY WORD IS SALIENT.** The description is usually given as a narrative (see breakdown below, pp. 2-3).

   --Camera distance: extreme close-up, close-up, medium close-up, medium shot, MLS, long shot extreme long shot.

   --Camera angle: high, low. (If not specified, angle is assumed to be straight-on.)

   --Subject(s) of shot, described in sufficient detail to recall or identify. Settings, costumes, etc. described on first presentation.

   --Action(s) performed by subject: gestures, speech, movement, looking or glancing, etc. Movement is described in terms of screen direction. (This is especially of interest for looks.)

   --Camera movements, if any: pan, tilt, tracking shot, crane shot.

   --Changes in focus; zooms in and out.

   --Unusual lighting (side, back, etc.), decor, compositions.

   --Editing transitions between shots and sequences: wipes, fades, dissolves, iris in or out. If no special editing techniques are used (straight cuts), no notation is made.

   --Ideally, duration of shot in frames, seconds, or minutes. **DO NOT FEEL OBLIGED TO TIME YOUR DECOUPAGE.** It's too hard to do without an editing machine.)
3. A description of salient sonic properties accompanying each shot. These include:

--Type of sound: speech, music, noise. If speech, a transcript of the text. If music and/or noise, as precise a description as possible.

--Texture of sound: sound quality (pitch, volume, timbre).

--Source of sound: onscreen, offscreen. If onscreen, state source.

4. Extra data

a. As you describe a film shot by shot, you will find it useful to notate repeated elements. For instance, if two people are talking and the scene consists simply of shot/reverse shots between unchanging camera set ups of each person, it might be notated as: "5. (cu) Jane looking left, as 3." The same holds true for the sound track. Repeated musical motifs or lines of dialogue warrant re-marking, however.

b. It is best to keep the visual track column separate from the sound track columns. The units of the two will not necessarily correspond: sound, for instance, often flows across a cut.

c. Sometimes it helps to make a sketch of the composition of the shot. Such a sketch should contain at least the principle elements of the composition and the direction of movement of looks. Lightning, focus, and other factors may also be sketched if they warrant it.

5. Formats vary, but I propose the following, exemplified by the following excerpts from Hitchcock's *The Man Who Knew Too Much*:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Picture</th>
<th>Speech</th>
<th>Music</th>
<th>Noise</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>396. MCV Jill seated in profile, looking left. Track back slowly as she turns to camera and looks up and to the right.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Soprano voice enters piece.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>407. MLS Lawrence and gang in parlor. One gang member sits on left frame edge, in front of radio, smoking. Abbott sits at a table on the right of frame eating.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Cantata continues, but at lower volume and thinner timbre.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A henchman with bandage stands above him, leaning over chair. Another henchman sits on right edge of frame. Horse is bringing Abbott a bottle and pours him a drink. All except Abbott are listening intently.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>446. LS Oblique angle on Jill's section of audience, as 394. People look slightly left. She rises abruptly and screams.</td>
<td>Cantata pauses.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>447. MLS Lawrence and gang in parlor, as 407. All start at sound of scream. As music resumes, they relax and begin to disperse. Rawling stretches.</td>
<td>Scream stops</td>
<td>Cantata continues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbott looks left at Lawrence</td>
<td>Rawling: &quot;Sounds as if it went off all right.&quot; Abbott: &quot;I hope so, for all our sakes.&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

II. Breakdown into sequences.

A decoupage of a film should be divided into sequences. Roman numerals are best for this, to avoid confusion with shot numbers. Since opening and closing credit segments are often important to the meaning of a film, it is best to treat them as separate sequences.
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Film List  The German Department has a list of all the titles of German feature and documentary films in Hodges Library, in the Learning Resource Center (206 HSS), and in the German Department (701 McClung). This list is available at the following link:

http://web.utk.edu/~dlee/alph.pdf

Reading Assignments  All the reading assignments for German 323 will be available on a University server sometime in August. When the link becomes available, I will post it here:

link coming to this site soon

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