

Film as High Art

Welles, Bergman, Fellini

Vladimir Nabokov

"STYLE IS MORALITY. STYLE JUDGES."

Overview

These three directors collectively take film to previously unseen levels of visual composition.

Each in their own distinctive way is responsible for confirming film's artistry and force – and for forever disproving any opinion that film is derivative or imitative or secondary to pictorial or photographic art.



Terminology Review

Previous Terms

- Continuity Editing
- Discontinuity/Disjunctive Editing
- Stationary Shot
- Establishing Shot
- Frame Narrative
- Iris Edit
- Mise en scene
- Framing
- Blocking
- Shot/Reverse Shot
- Eyeline Match
- Negative vs. Positive Space
- Tracking Shot/Travelling Shot

New Terms

- Diegetic sound
- Non-diegetic sound
- Low angle shot (worm view)
- High angle shot
- Pan
- Dutch or "canted" angles
- Deep Focus
- Dissolve
- Low-key lighting

Midterm Essay Question

The following question will apply to both of your midterm essays. I'm giving it to you tonight for practice analysis with our clips.

"Analyze the mise en scene of the following clip. Watch the clip twice, taking notes on the ways its visual techniques relate to its themes and meaning. Then, using appropriate terminology, discuss these technical elements as specifically as possible. Remember, your focus should be on the ways the film's form relates to (and creates) meaning."

1915-1985

ORSON WELLES

Career Highlights

- War of the Worlds radio broadcast (October 30, 1938)
- Citizen Kane (1941)
 - Co-wrote, produced, directed & lead actor
 - All at age 26!
- The Magnificent Ambersons (1942)
- The Lady from Shanghai (1947)
- Macbeth (1948)
- The Third Man (Carol Kane, dir.; 1949)
- Othello (1952)
- Touch of Evil (1958)
- Chimes at Midnight (1965)



"I can't take his genius any more"

-- Rita Hayworth, actress & Welles's second wife (1943-48), explaining to the press her reason for filing for divorce



"Daddy was not an easy person to live with. You can't be a genius ... and be a normal person." -- Welles' daughter Beatrice

Citizen Kane

Opening Scene (0:30-2:44)

Technical & Thematic Analysis

- Begins with deep focus, then switches to close ups
- Motif of entrapment
- Succession of dissolves (fades & wipes)
- Graveyard & Madhouse imagery
- Close ups become extreme close ups (esp. lips)
- Dutch angles
- Low key lighting
- Reflection of care-taker in snow globe



Citizen Kane

Famous Marriage Montage Sequence (52:00-54:26)
Famous Ending (in two weeks)


Technical & Thematic Analysis

- Visually synthesizes the disintegration of the marriage over decades – in only two minutes
- Frame narrative (flashback)
- Slow zoom in, focusing on characters
- Montage sequences
- Slow zoom out, restoring perspective & closing the frame narrative





The Third Man
 Harry Lime Appears (1:05:27-1:06:40)
 Ferris Wheel Scene (1:20:15-1:22:00)
 Sewer Chase (1:35:35-1:40:00 & 1:40:00-1:41:30)



The Third Man
 Ending (1:42:20-1:44:35)



Touch of Evil
 Famous Opening Tracking Shot (1:06-5:41, last class)
 Ending (1:42:15-1:46:00 – or final 7:30)

Technical & Thematic Analysis

- Extensive use of Dutch or canted angles
- Diegetic sound and echoing
- Low angle close ups vs. high angle pans
- Camera-work becomes more important, and creates more meaning, than dialogue
- Visual contrasts: human vs. machine (oil well). See the pun?
- Shadows and Light ... justice & guilt ... grey areas
- Highly expressionistic, almost grotesque at times



1918-2007
INGMAR BERGMAN

Career Highlights

- Smiles of a Summer Night (1955)
- The Seventh Seal (1957)
- Wild Strawberries (1957)
- Through a Glass Darkly (1961)
- The Virgin Spring (1961)
- Persona (1966)
- Cries and Whispers (1972)
- Scenes from a Marriage (1973)
- Fanny and Alexander (1982)
- The Magic Lantern (autobiography, 1987)



"probably the greatest film artist, all things considered, since the invention of the motion picture camera."
– Woody Allen

"I guess I'd put it like this: if you were alive in the 50s and the 60s and of a certain age, a teenager on your way to becoming an adult, and you wanted to make movies, I don't see how you couldn't be influenced by Bergman. You would have had to make a conscious effort, and even then, the influence would have snuck through."
-- Martin Scorsese

"I believe Ingmar Bergman, Vittorio De Sica, and Federico Fellini are the only three filmmakers in the world who are not just artistic opportunists.

By this I mean they don't just sit and wait for a good story to come along and then make it. They have a point of view which is expressed over and over and over again in their films, and they themselves write or have original material written for them."

-- Stanley Kubrick

The Seventh Seal

Famous Opening, Chess with Death (1:15-5:25)

Technical & Thematic Analysis

- Glaring music, then high angle upward shots/perspective
- Hovering bird, stillness & quiet & voice-over narration gives way to sounds of waves then knight reclining
- Series of stationary shots – camera unobtrusive
- Knight and death always framed centrally – yet iris outlines seem to appear in a few shots, as though death is watching
- first camera movement is a pan to chessboard, which dissolves into waves, then once again into death
- Quick zoom in as death opens his cape and walks past the camera – plus obvious ominous music
- Beautifully framed final image: opposite sides, board, water ... life as fluid/ever-changing, always involving risk and judgment



The Seventh Seal

Death takes the Knight's Confession (2:10-7:01)

Technical & Thematic Analysis

- Alternating perspectives: high angle vs. eye-line vs. low angle
- Framing: knight confesses, a statue to his side (significant?), then slow zoom in
- Low-key lighting and importance of shadows, esp. the confessional window which seems to act as the knight's cage
- Pan back then slow zoom into death as knight confesses to lack of faith
- Death too is caged in & turns his face sideways – classic Bergman framing
- Knight craves clarity of divine vision -- wants to see God – in a scene where vision is never clear
- Unobtrusive camera accentuates dialogue between death & knight
- Brilliant zoom in and up after knight reveals his chess combination & death reveals himself
- Final juxtaposition of knight, the confessional window, and his words










The Seventh Seal
Ending: Dance of Death (0:00-6:24)

"Today I feel that in *Persona* — and later in *Cries and Whispers* — I had gone as far as I could go. And that in these two instances when working in total freedom, I touched wordless secrets that only the cinema can discover."

-- Ingmar Bergman

Persona
Opening Montage (0:00-6:02)
Conflating Faces (1:03:20-1:05:30)






Cries and Whispers
Opening Scene (1:16-3:05 & 6:50-9:00)
Final Scene (1:25:40-End)

"All my films can be thought of in terms of black and white, except for *Cries and Whispers*. In the screenplay, I say that I have thought of the color red as the interior of the soul.

When I was a child, I saw the soul as a shadowy dragon, blue as smoke, hovering like an enormous winged creature, half-bird, half-fish. But inside the dragon, everything was red"

-- From *Images: My Life in Film*

1920-1993
FEDERICO FELLINI

Career Highlights

- Italian Neorealism period (1950-1959)
 - Worked as a screenwriter on two Roberto Rossellini films
 - The White Sheik (1951)
 - I Vitelloni (1953)
 - La Strada (1954)
- Art Films (1961-1969)
 - Discovers work of Carl Jung
 - Surrealist and dream imagery supplants neorealism
 - La Dolce Vita (1961)
 - 8½ (1963)
 - Juliet of the Spirits (1965)
- Later Highlights (1970-1993)
 - Amarcord (1973)
 - I, Fellini (autobiography, 1995)



La Dolce Vita

Opening (1:15-4:17)

Famous Trevi Fountain Scene (48:45-51:45)



La Dolce Vita

Work in Peace (1:29:00-1:32:00)

Famous Ending (2:48:22-2:53:27)

8½

Famous Opening (0:10-3:10)

Technical & Thematic Analysis

- Slow pans and tracking shots
- Camera too seems trapped, unable to move ... themes of entrapment vs. liberation
- Faces looking back at camera, then smoke ... suffocation, potential death ... do the people in our lives "kill" us? How?
- Still shot of headless torsos in bus
- Reality vs. dream imagery
- Quick cuts from faces to floating man, then tracking shot through traffic
- Images from later in film appear
- Comes crashing back to reality/earth once the scene shifts to the beach



8½

Asa Nisi Masa (37:40-40:47)

Technical & Thematic Analysis

- Present reality of middle-aged man flashes back/cuts to recollections of happy swaddled youth
- Alternating imagery of youth and age, play and work
- Very dynamic mise en scene: signif. of foreground and background imagery plus movement (characters & camera) ... what, if anything, is stable?
- Numerous camera angles & perspectives
- Importance of shadow and light ... both natural and artificial
- Masterful use of blocking and framing, esp. in scenes featuring fire
- Visual pun: moving picture



8 ½

The Cardinal and Saragina (55:00-1:00:55)
Descent into Hell (1:05:17-1:09:24)



8 ½

Claudia in Black (1:57:30-2:02:30)

Technical & Thematic Analysis

- Masterful use of framing
- Juxtapositions between negative and positive space
- Conflation of illusion and reality mirrored before us on the screen: symbiosis of subject and style
- Shadows and light reinforce the character's beautiful confusion
- Beauty is truth, truth beauty ... "because he doesn't know how to love"
- Dreams of preserving illusion, or making it real, come crashing down
- Two of the most beautiful people in human history discussing love in the bleakest possible setting, aka one's own mind & hopes



8 ½

Press Conference (2:06:45-2:08:33)
Famous Ending (2:10:15-2:17:36)



Amarcord

Grand Hotel in Past (1:01:10-1:02:32)
Grand Hotel in Present (1:33:25-1:35:42)
Ending (2:01:00-End)