

Academic Year/course: 2023/24

31944 - Iconography of cinema

Teaching Guide Information

Academic Course: 2023/24

Academic Center: 801 - Masters Centre of the Department of Communication

Study: 8014 - Master in Contemporary Film and Audiovisual Studies

Subject: 31944 - Iconography of cinema

Credits: 5.0

Course: 1

Teaching languages:

Theory: Group 1: Catalan

Teachers: Carles Feixa Pampols, Jordi Ballo Fantova

Teaching Period: First Quarter

Presentation

This subject aims to start a journey through the iconology in cinema, to bring to light a visual thought and representation figures through the study of sets of significant images applied to classical, modern and contemporary cinema. In each session, two related iconographic motifs will be approached —two motifs that share some bonds about cinema's typical expressive mechanisms: intimacy, landscaping, indirect presence, the scenography dynamism, the ability to immobilize the action or the abstraction, among many others. In order to establish a comparative study between images, this course uses the system of detail in film, that is, the selection of these significant fragments that can establish a dialogue between different films, considering each film segment as a work of art that dialogues with other films and expressive systems. This is a strategic question in the consideration of cinema and television as a central part of the artistic construction of culture.

Associated skills

- 1) Knowing the researching methods and techniques in film theory in relation to the models borrowed from philosophical, literary, sociologic, anthropologic and aesthetic studies applied to new objects in the field of film and audiovisual studies.
- 2) Analyzing comparatively the historical relations between the visual, humanity and audiovisual arts.
- 3) Recognizing the evolutions, transgressions and new figurations in visual arts and humanities based on an imaginary that is expanded in cinema and television images.
- 4) Adding a genre perspective into the analysis of motifs and iconography, a field where the contribution of filmmaker women can add certain expressive twists.
- 5) Performing a hermeneutical reading of images based on journeys or mythical figures from iconography, narrative structures and *mise-en-scene*.
- 6) Justifying and defending the same research work, showing that the researches are original and they meet the requirements of academic ethics and that the student can communicate the knowledge and reasons behind them in a clear way, to a specialized or not specialized audience.

Learning outcomes

Based on the analysis of the iconographic imaginary around every movie, students have to participate actively in class (through watching films), investigating the plastic and literary arts so as to understand the aesthetic nature and the pictorial tradition of film visual motifs. The goals are:

- 1) Being able to build a multidisciplinary method with transversal connections to carry out a research work (or a research exercise), both in the classical theory format and in the format of a curatorial script of an exposition.
- 2) Elaborating aesthetic reflections derived from film and audiovisual images.
- 3) Being able to delimit the research field and evaluate the possibilities of study that the chosen topic has.
- 4) Carrying out a compared analysis of film and audiovisual works that are related to other representation figures, previous and contemporary.

Contents

1. Iconography and visual motifs
2. The cinema exposed: a compared iconography
3. Visual motifs of intimacy
 - The woman in the window
 - In front of the mirror
4. The construction of landscape
 - Towards the horizon
 - The labyrinth
5. Objects and setting
 - Stairs
 - The excavator
6. Immobilizing the action
 - Mercy
 - The thinker
7. Indirect presence
 - The spectator
 - Under the rain
8. Abstract figuration
 - The stain
 - The scar
9. Iconography in television (I)
 - The orphic world
10. Iconography in television (II)
 - The Oedipal city

These theory and debate sessions are combined with presentations in class by the students.

Evaluation and grading system

The evaluation of this course is based on two elements: the participation of the student in class when different exercises are suggested and the realization of an analysis project where the student draws a formal journey through the evolution and mutation of a given visual motif or through the dialogue that can be established between different motifs. In both cases, the goal of this project is for the formal itinerary to generate debate and reflection around cinematographic forms.

From the third session, each student will collaborate with an iconographical element, a visual motif that they have detected in their repetition and that will be the center of their research. For the motif to be considered deep enough, in the sense of answering to an expressive need of cinema or television fiction, it has to meet some traits, which are discussed by the students: it has to mean an economy of expression, to correspond to a narrative function of cinema and television fiction, to involve a condensation of sense, to be plural, ambiguous and universal and to raise a specific cinematographic. Establishing the circulation of these motifs between past and present, between genres and authors, between diverse national cultures and between diverse artistic expressions will be the method to end up enriching their analysis. This all has to do with the strategies of reception as well: it must not be forgotten that iconography in the arts, the cinema and television share a deep complicity with the viewer, who will be able to understand these images because they are born out of a contract of confidence between author and spectator.

Once each student has decided the visual motif they will work on, there will be particular tutoring sessions for each project, in the perspective of a final project that will be presented orally in class with a visual support. There are two possible formats for this project: a) an academic project with a visual extension; b) the script for an exhibition that would unfold all the possible variations of the chosen motif. This second option is especially interesting because it is currently evident how many iconographic analysts expend their research work into exhibition commissioning, a subject around which the second session revolves. It is easy to see how most of these curating works come from a motif (the tree, the horizon, the shade, the mirror...) and establish within the script all necessary comparative devices for researching. It is in the style of this trend, that recognizes the central role of film and television iconography in the contemporary imaginary, that students can get familiar with a new analytic format, which is visual, textual, documental and comparative from its own essence.