SO370-15 Sociology of Film, Film as Sociology

22/23

Department
Sociology
Level
Undergraduate Level 3
Module leader
David Turner
Credit value
15
Module duration
10 weeks
Assessment
100% coursework
Study location
University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

Description

Introductory description

The aim of this module is to address some basic sociological themes through the medium of film. Film will be treated here both as a source of illustrations or examples of themes more properly articulated in sociology, and as condensed and intensified explorations of them. It will make reference to both the sociology of culture, where cinema or literature is placed in its 'social context', and to 'visual sociology', where images are called upon to do some of the work that sociological accounting does. But it will not reflect on 'the role of the image in late modern/postmodern/postindustrial society', or on the changing ways in which film is consumed. Instead it will look at the ways in which films can be said to complement sociological theory and substantive empirical inquiry.

Module aims

- to foster in students a sense of the interactions between sociological and cinematic knowledge claims
- to allow students to develop a sensitivity to sociological themes at work in cinema
- to enrich students' range of reference for the exploration of sociological themes and perspectives

- to explore the interfaces and crossovers between social sciences and the arts

Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

1. Film as Frame Analysis: We begin with a basic theoretical question explored most vigorously in the phenomenological and symbolic interactionist traditions, namely the reality status of social experience, and the devices by means of which a definition of the situation is maintained or undermined. Two cases will be considered, David Mamet's House of Games, on confidence tricksters, and Lars von Trier's The Five Obstructions, a series of short remakings on Jorgen Leth's 1967 film 'The Perfect Human'. Both will be considered here as examples of what Goffman calls frame analysis. Reading: Goffman, E. Frame Analysis, Hillel Schwartz The Culture of the Copy. Films: House of Games (Mamet), The Five Obstructions (von Trier).

2. Dyadic and Triadic relationships: While the work of the sociological classics are peppered with portraits of social groups and social types – the bourgeois, the worker, the stranger, the miser and the spendthrift, the flaneur and so on – its heart is the study of interactional dynamics. A notable contribution here is Simmel's discussion of the significance of numbers for social life, in particular the difference between dyadic and triadic relationships. We will focus here on two issues: relations of dependency and superordination, and the potential for reversal, in non-reciprocal dyadic relationships (explored through Losey's The Servant); and the effect of an introduction of a third party into one between two parties (explored through Polanski's Knife in the Water). Reading: Simmel, 'Dyadic and Triadic Relationships', in The Sociology of Georg Simmel Films: Knife in the Water (Polanski); The Servant (Losey).

3. Social Change: Social Change and how to think about it is about the most basic sociological question there is, and depicting it one of social theory's greatest challenges. This is no less the case in film. Almost any film is an attempt to meet that challenge, to deal with the problem of social time in some way. Here we focus on one dimension of this, change over several generations in societies marked by violent political upheaval. Istvan Szabo's 25 Fireman's Street seeks to grasp social change in Hungary between the late 19th century and the 1970s through the lives of residents in one Budapest apartment building; Sunshine does the same via a Budapest café. Reading: Mannheim, The Problem of Generations; Sztompka, P. Social Theory and Social Change. Films: 25 Fireman's Street (Szabo); Distant Voices, Still Lives (Davies).

4. War: Stanislav Andreski began Military Organization and Society by remarking that professional armies were the first modern organizations, but neither military hierarchies nor war as a social relationship have been of widespread sociological concern. By contrast they have been an endless source of inspiration for film makers. This session tries to find a half way point between sociology and the war film by focusing on the effects of military occupation on different social groups, and the legacy of war in a post-war landscape. Reading: Norman Lewis, Naples 1944; von Krockow, C. The Hour of the Women.; Jahner, Aftermath. Films: Ashes and Diamonds (Wajda); Rome, Open City (Rossellini); Lacombe Lucien (Malle).

5. Work: If war has been an endless topic for film-makers but a marginal one for sociologists, the opposite is true of work, the sociology of industry and labour, and of occupational life,

having been a major concern for many decades. By contrast, sustained treatments of social relations in the workplace, or depictions of people working, are relatively rare in cinema if one discounts police work. Rarer still are efforts to connect the world of work with a broader economic and political context. Films: The Adjuster (Egoyan) Man is not a Bird (Makavejev); Falling Leaves (Iosellani).

6. Stigma. The publication of Erving Goffman's Stigma: the management of spoiled identity coincided with two films that examined prejudice in relationship to visible and non-visible 'potentially discrediting traits', homosexuality and race. Victim is about a gay lawyer in early 60s London and much of it is about 'passing' as straight, and the danger of blackmail. The Intruder, set on the first day of school desegregation in the southern US, is a study in the more visceral dimensions of racism. Reading: Goffman, E. Stigma. Films: Victim (Dearden); The Intruder (Corman).

7. The City and Urban Experience. Central to much sociological reflection on the nature of modernity has been the growth of the city, and of the forms of experience attendant on that growth. In this session we look at sociological efforts to theorise the urban experience and at a selection of efforts to represent that experience in film. Reading: Paul Connerton, How Modernity Forgets. Films: Metropolis (Lang); Blade Runner ; Robinson in Space (Keiller)

8. Inequality. While sociological studies of inequality and stratification can readily downplay the role of human agency, films are almost duty bound to explore the interaction between structures of inequality and human agency. Here we look at two films that address this, the one an account of the experience of poverty in relationship to class, the other an account of poverty in relationship to the state. Films: Viridiana (Bunuel); I, Daniel Blake (Loach)

Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- respond critically to film as both an artistic and social scientific endeavour
- appreciate some central questions in the representation of social reality
- understand some crossovers between film as world making and sociology as world understanding

Indicative reading list

Connerton, P. . How Modernity Forgets
Goffman, E. Frame Analysis,
Goffman, E. Stigma
Kracauer, From Caligari to Hitler
Krockow, C. The Hour of the Women.
Lewis, N. Naples 1944
Mannheim, K. The Problem of Generations, in Essays in the Sociology of Culture
Pippin, R. Cinema as Filmed Thought
Pippin, R. Hollywood Westerns and American Myth
Scarry, E. The Body in Pain
Schwartz, H. The Culture of the Copy
Simmel, G. 'Dyadic and Triadic Relationships', in The Sociology of Georg Simmel
Sztompka, P. Social Theory and Social Change

Interdisciplinary

The material covered includes classical social theory, social history, memoir and film, both feature film and documentary

International

Most of the films studied come from outside the UK

Subject specific skills

Critical analysis of key readings
Linking written representation of ideas with visual ones

Transferable skills

Ability to move confidently between different media of expression
Personal cultivation

Study

Study time

Type	Required
Lectures	9 sessions of 1 hour (6%)
Seminars	9 sessions of 1 hour (6%)
Private study	97 hours (65%)
Assessment	35 hours (23%)
Total	150 hours

Private study description

Students will be expected to watch 2 films per week during leisure hours, with a slightly lighter reading load than would otherwise be expected.

Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

Assessment

You must pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Assessment group A

	Weighting	Study time
Film Review	50%	15 hours
Summative Essay	50%	20 hours
Essay		

Feedback on assessment

Scholarly dialogue

Availability

Courses

This module is Core optional for:

- Year 3 of ULAA-ML33 Undergraduate Law and Sociology

This module is Optional for:

- USOA-L301 BA in Sociology
  - Year 3 of L301 Sociology
  - Year 3 of L301 Sociology
  - Year 3 of L301 Sociology
- Year 4 of USOA-L306 BA in Sociology (with Intercalated Year)
- Year 3 of USOA-L314 Undergraduate Sociology and Criminology

This module is Option list A for:

- ULAA-ML34 BA in Law and Sociology (Qualifying Degree)
  - Year 3 of ML34 Law and Sociology (Qualifying Degree)
  - Year 4 of ML34 Law and Sociology (Qualifying Degree)
- Year 4 of ULAA-ML33 Undergraduate Law and Sociology

This module is Option list B for:

- Year 4 of UPOA-ML14 Undergraduate Politics and Sociology (with Intercalated year)

This module is Option list C for:

- Year 3 of UHIA-VL13 Undergraduate History and Sociology
- Year 4 of UHIA-VL14 Undergraduate History and Sociology (with Year Abroad)

This module is Option list D for:

- Year 3 of UHIA-VL13 Undergraduate History and Sociology
- Year 4 of UHIA-VL14 Undergraduate History and Sociology (with Year Abroad)