FILM 2332 — Understanding Film, Discussion 6

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Discussion Question

Eisenstein believed that simultaneous sound would force film "back to its stagey beginnings". Eventually, movies adapted famous musicals and stage plays. Several musicals rely on dialogue in music as a means of connecting visually disjoint shots of dancing and force continuity. Clearly then, in some contexts, dialogue in music allow visual continuity, just as Eisenstein feared. Even in the discontinuous film *Un Chien Andalou* (Buñuel, 1929), there is no dialogue or synchronous sound. Formalist films did not make a pretense of realism, allowing more abrupt transitions into singing, but this still did not break visual continuity (and serve as a jarring effect for the audience). What other methods did musicals, especially those of the formalists, employ which effectively broke visual continuity to present purely thematic material?

Commentary

The Conversation (Francis Coppola, 1974) repeatedly changes between diegetic and nondiegetic music. To the audience, music without a known source or reaction by the characters is appears to be nondiegetic, even if it is coming from the scene (i.e. characters simply choose not to react or produce the sound). This helps the audience separate the music from the events of the story when people's expressions are not in view. In the film, when the camera looks away from the audience, the music tends to separate from the action. Perhaps the clearest example of this is the introduction, where the sounds of the street are mixed with the music, making it unclear if the source is from the scene itself or from the narrator.-

Masculin Feminin (Jean-Luc Godard, 1966) the use of inter-titling is unusual. Rather than communicating information about dialogue and time as was used in silent films, it is used to make statements about the characters from the perspective of the audience. This breaks the fourth wall. While the characters are unaware of their place within the film, the inter-titling itself speaks, saying "This film could be called The Children of Marx and Coca-Cola". The use of unusual inter-titling draws the audience's attention away from the literal story and to instead focus on the film's message more clearly - as a commentary on the pop-culture of the times.