ANALYSIS

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A NORTON READER

JEFFREY GEIGER R. L. RUTSKY

Film Analysis

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Film Analysis

A NORTON READER

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Preface

Images are omnipresent in our increasingly global and digital age. They attempt to persuade us; to sell us commodities; to comfort, cajole, and stimulate us; to tell us stories and entertain us; to convey information. In this context, the importance of visual literacy, of developing strategies for critical, analytical thinking about images, can scarcely be overestimated. Film Analysis: A Norton Reader is an effort to help students develop the skills necessary to analyze how images are constructed, how they create meanings, how they affect us, and how they are intricately embedded in cultural and ideological frameworks. And while it may seem that film has become a rather antiquated medium in this era of digitization, the basic characteristics of technologically reproduced images remain—as Walter Benjamin foresaw the same. In the same way, whether images are digital or analog, recorded on memory cards or celluloid film, the basic ideas and approaches for analyzing them remain remarkably similar. In short, the study and analysis of films has much to teach us about analyzing images and visual culture more generally.

Although *Film Analysis: A Norton Reader* is designed to introduce students and general readers to the analysis of films, it is not a text-book in the conventional sense. Rather than competing with the variety of film studies and film history textbooks currently available for classroom and general use, *Film Analysis* is designed to complement them, offering analyses that give practical expression to the broader descriptions of formal, historical, and theoretical issues raised in such textbooks. Consequently, this book does not attempt to give a systematic account of cinematic techniques, styles, and analytical procedures, nor does it include chapters that detail the precise workings of cinematography, editing, art design, film sound, and so on. Rather, as a classroom *reader*, it approaches film study and analysis by offering

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critical essays on individual films, written specifically for this volume by leading film scholars.

Film Analysis offers concise, readable analyses of a diverse selection of important films, while at the same time exposing students to a range of approaches to analytical writing about film. These essays, moreover, raise key historical and theoretical issues related to these films, which should encourage further discussion and debate. The volume's introductory essay is designed to give an overview of film analysis—summarizing what it means and its value, while providing some starting points for critically engaging with film. We have also included a glossary of film-related terms at the end of the book, which can be used in conjunction with reading the essays. Of course, the essays in Film Analysis need not be seen purely as pedagogical tools; they may also be enjoyed for their own merits, for the insights they provide into individual films and into the possibilities of cinema in general.

In any reader such as this one, the number of essays that can reasonably be included is necessarily restricted. In this context, the choice to include an essay on one film inevitably means the exclusion of analyses of other films. Just as inevitably, there will be—and, indeed, should be—disagreements and debate over the choice of films (those chosen, those not included) and the criteria (or lack thereof) by which such decisions were made.

The films discussed in this volume were ultimately chosen through a variety of means: polls of film instructors at different academic levels, examination of a variety of course syllabi, and the personal preferences of the contributors. It has not been our aim in this volume to produce a "best of" cinema collection. We have not attempted to compile a list of the "greatest" films of all time, nor even of the greatest of a genre, region, or historical period. Making such judgments among the very different styles of filmmaking that make up world cinema is obviously an impossible task. We happily leave the compilation of "Top Films" lists, and similar exercises, to others.

It should be clear, too, that this book makes no claim to provide a comprehensive or "representative" survey of world cinema, which would be difficult even in a much larger volume. Although we have aimed for diversity, we are conscious that this volume has omitted many films—and even whole areas of filmmaking—that are part of

the vast range of world cinema. Some of these decisions, it should be noted, were based on rather practical considerations. We have, for example, attempted to restrict our selections to films that are readily available in home viewing formats. And in keeping with the time constraints of most courses, we have deliberately omitted a number of films with particularly long running times. Under different circumstances (practical and otherwise), the basis for these decisions and the resulting choices would undoubtedly have been different.

Our goal has been to produce a book that would be useful in introductory film studies and film history classes. To that end, we have attempted to balance our selections between well-known films commonly taught in these courses and films that, by virtue of their differences in style, national or cultural origin, or historical period, demonstrate the diverse array of cinematic options and alternatives. In fact, despite this volume's seeming emphasis on readings of individual films, many of the films discussed here have been chosen with an eye to comparative analysis, so that the films of a particular director, artistic movement, culture, or era might be considered in relation to different films and filmmaking traditions. Indeed, the chronological structure of the book should allow for interesting comparisons between contemporary or nearly contemporary cinema movements, such as film noir and the rise of Italian neorealism, "classical" Hollywood cinema and the "golden age" of Japanese and French cinemas in the 1930s, or the creative power of African American filmmaking in the late 1980s and early 1990s as reflected in the cluster of important films examined here.

We should point out, however, that it has not been our concern in this volume to propose canonical or evaluative standards for films. Rather, this volume aims to address *film analysis* as a practice. That is, unlike most film studies textbooks, which rarely have the space to provide more than a handful of examples of film analysis, *Film Analysis* focuses on *how* to analyze films, rather than describing or categorizing different aspects of and approaches to analysis. Its essays offer different models for how film analysis can be practiced, while still emphasizing the contextual, analytical, and research aspects that these essays share. In keeping with this practical approach, our goal has been simply to provide, within the scope allowed by this volume, a broad enough sample of films and filmmaking styles to give introductory

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students a sense of cinema's many possibilities. We hope, then, that this reader will offer useful means for analyzing and thinking critically about not only the films discussed here, but about cinema and other visual texts more generally.

Film Analysis: A Norton Reader has gone from a rather vague idea about what kind of a new volume might be valuable in the classroom to something much more substantial and expansive than we could have imagined. For this, we would like to thank our contributors, who have lent us their time, their encouragement, and their remarkable intellectual and creative insights. Individually, many of them have been far more generous with their help than we had any right to expect. And collectively, they have helped to reveal the range and depth of the work that currently constitutes film studies. We would also like to express our gratitude to those who lent their support and offered valuable ideas at various stages along the way, particularly Lisa Cartwright, Teshome Gabriel, Marilyn Manners, Robert B. Ray, and Belinda Waterman. We would also like to thank the Research Promotion Fund at the University of Essex for assistance in the final preparation of the manuscript. Finally, we are keenly aware that this book would not have been possible without the excellent editorial staff at W. W. Norton: Peter Simon, for his support, optimism, and helpful knowledge of the field; Rob Bellinger; Evan Leatherwood; copy editor Ann R. Tappert; and proofreader Susan Forsyth.