

SIGHT

SOUND

MOTION

APPLIED MEDIA AESTHETICS

HERBERT ZETTL



S O U N D

M O T I O N

A E S T H E T I C S

H E R B E R T Z E T T L

San Francisco State University



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To Renée and Mike

About the Author



HERBERT ZETTL is a professor of Broadcast and Electronic Communication Arts at San Francisco State University, where he teaches in the areas of video production and media aesthetics. Prior to joining the SFSU faculty, he worked at KQVR (Sacramento-Stockton) and as a producer-director at KPIX, the CBS affiliate in San Francisco. He has participated in a variety of CBS and NBC network television productions. He has also been a consultant on television production and media aesthetics for universities and professional broadcasting operations here and abroad, and is currently engaged in various experimental television productions.

Zettl's other books include the *Television Production Handbook* and *Video Basics 2*, both of which, along with this book, have been translated into other languages. His numerous articles on television production and media aesthetics have appeared in major media journals in this country as well as in Europe and Asia. He has read key papers on television production and media aesthetics at a variety of communication conventions.

His interactive multimedia CD-ROM, *Zettl's Video Lab 2.1*, published by Wadsworth Publishing Company, has won several prestigious awards, among them the Macromedia People's Choice Award, the New Media Invision Gold Medal for Higher Education, and Invision Silver Medals in the categories of Continuing Education and Use of Video.

Preface

THE basic purpose of this edition of *Sight Sound Motion* has not changed from the two previous ones: It describes the major aesthetic image elements—light, space, time/motion, and sound—and how they are used in television and film. With the ever-increasing demand for more and more higher-quality programs, a thorough understanding of the principles of media aesthetics and their prudent use is no longer a matter of choice; it has become an essential prerequisite for the responsible producer and consumer of television and film communication.

As media producers, we can no longer rely solely on instinct when it comes to encoding messages. We need to acquire the knowledge and skill to select and apply those aesthetic elements that help us translate significant ideas into significant messages efficiently, effectively, and predictably. Ever-increasing time and money restrictions make it impractical, if not impossible, to produce three or more versions of the same message before deciding on which one might be the most effective. Media aesthetics provides us with the techniques and criteria to produce optimal messages the first time around.

Media aesthetics supplies the basis for media literacy—an educational discipline that has become an essential prerequisite for responsible citizenship. The criteria explained in *Sight Sound Motion* help us, as consumers of media messages, to see behind the obvious text and experience and judge television and film communication on several emotional and intellectual levels with accuracy and consistency.

This book is not necessarily restricted to the media field, however. If we simply can be shaken loose from our perceptual complacency and made to see, feel, listen, and move about with heightened awareness and joy; if we can be helped to find our way through the chaos of daily experiences, to recognize the significant ones and share them with the people of our global community; and, finally, if we can be helped to reach even a minimal degree of emotional literacy that contributes to self-awareness, self-respect, and genuine compassion for our fellow human beings, this book has proved its worth.

Although media aesthetic principles are not necessarily linked to changes in production equipment, this edition contains several new concepts in media aesthetics that are a direct outgrowth of digital video effects (DVE). For example, the section on first- and second-order television space explains some

of the aesthetic consequences of digitally created video space. Other new concepts include the aesthetic uses of the jump cut, and new techniques available for complexity editing.

Here are some more features of this edition:

- *Content and Method* To make the book optimally readable without sacrificing any of its complex material, I have divided it into five principal aesthetic fields: (1) light and color, (2) two-dimensional space, (3) three-dimensional space, (4) time/motion, and (5) sound. This organization allows for careful study of the individual aesthetic elements while at the same time maintaining their essential interrelation. Many of the aesthetic principles described in this edition have been confirmed by rigorous empirical research. Others have been developed through keen observation and educated insight. Because aesthetics is contextual and not a rigorous science, the empirical method does not reign supreme; the various heuristic and phenomenological approaches serve the investigation of media aesthetics equally well.
- *Cross-references* Frequent reference is made in the text to how a specific aesthetic principle in one field recurs in another or several other fields. These cross-references should help students see the interrelationships among the various principles and their contextual effect on one another.
- *New Chapter* Because of the ever-increasing importance of post-production editing, I have divided the editing section into two separate chapters. I hope that this division will facilitate learning the complex aesthetics of editing while, at the same time, serve as a stimulus for thinking of new ways of sequencing images. These chapters include expanded aesthetic principles spawned by a new time consciousness and the advancement of digital technology.
- *Instructor's Manual* For the first time, this edition of *Sight Sound Motion* is accompanied by an extensive *Instructor's Manual*, containing suggestions for classroom demonstrations, exercises, discussions, and a battery of tests. It is intended strictly as a guide, not as a dictum. The demonstrations do not require top-of-the-line equipment. They can be done with a simple consumer camcorder and a low-end VCR; but they can also be done somewhat more effectively in a multicamera studio setup. Ideally, the *Instructor's Manual* should stimulate the instructor to come up with maximally effective ways to make the connection between media aesthetic principles and their applications.
- *Zettl's Video Lab 2.1 CD-ROM* This interactive CD-ROM combines the basic television production techniques with some of the fundamental aesthetic media principles. It is truly interactive, which means that the user can zoom in and out, turn on various lighting instruments, mix various sounds, and edit certain shots together and immediately see the results. An extensive quiz program and instant access to the glossary reinforce learning. It can be used as a convenient way to help the user acquire or reinforce basic video and film production techniques, and to show aesthetic concepts that need to be seen in motion. The *Instructor's Manual* refers to the relevant sections of the *Zettl's Video Lab 2.1* CD-ROM for each chapter of *Sight Sound Motion*.

I should like to give sincere thanks to my colleagues Jim Carter of California University of Pennsylvania, Bill Deering of the University of Wisconsin/Stevens Point, Anthony Friedmann of Mount Ida College, Glen Johnson of Catholic University, Philip Kipper of San Francisco State University, Michael Korpi of Baylor

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