

A man with dark hair and a light beard is leaning against a weathered brick wall. He is wearing a dark fedora, a patterned scarf, and a dark, textured trench coat. His hands are clasped in front of him, wearing red leather gloves. The wall behind him is made of old, uneven bricks with some mortar missing. A small wooden plaque with the number '6' is visible on the wall to the left.

# FILM

A CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

Maria Pramaggiore  
Tom Wallis

Second Edition



# Film

## *A Critical Introduction*

**SECOND EDITION**

**Maria Pramaggiore  
Tom Wallis**

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# Preface

*Film: A Critical Introduction* proposes that film is an art form and a cultural institution worthy of serious intellectual consideration. It demystifies the process of academic inquiry for students who love movies but may not possess the tools for creating interpretive arguments.

Teaching film studies is more exciting and challenging than ever. New technologies that make films—and information about films—readily available have produced a flurry of interest in the medium. Viewers can watch DVDs with special features and commentary tracks, and they can find information on the Web ranging from official studio sites to reviews by individual fans. The Internet has made even some of the most esoteric, hard-to-find experimental films available to the general public. Moreover, viewer upload sites like YouTube now provide exhibition outlets for every budding filmmaker. Even casual film enthusiasts now want to learn how to describe the cinematic techniques used by their favorite directors. Not surprisingly, film studies instruction is growing at every educational level.

This textbook is designed for students who possess a broad range of information but don't have the framework for understanding cinema as an aesthetic and cultural institution. The book provides that framework by focusing on the skills of analysis and argument that are critical to an intellectual engagement with the medium. The material helps readers master film techniques and terminology. It highlights research skills and rhetorical strategies, enabling students to build comprehensive, thoughtful interpretations of films. And rather than limiting a discussion of writing to a single chapter, it encourages readers to build their interpretive skills at the same time that they enhance their knowledge of form, visual style, and sound.



## The Structure of This Book

In this Second Edition, the authors have reorganized the chapters in order to foreground and better integrate the book's emphasis on writing instruction. The book is divided into three parts. Part One introduces readers to the importance of film analysis, offering helpful strategies for discerning the ways in which films produce meaning. The final chapter in Part One formally establishes a key aspect of the book's overall focus: the importance of developing interpretive and evaluative skills by constructing written arguments.

In Part Two, individual chapters examine the fundamental elements of film, including narrative form, *mise en scène*, cinematography, editing, sound, and alternatives to narrative cinema. Each chapter introduces basic terms,

techniques, and concepts, then goes much further, showing readers how this information can be used to interpret films. In Chapters 4–9, *Techniques in Practice* sections model the way that specific details (for example, the choice of a lens) can be used as the basis for interpreting a scene or film. In addition, end-of-chapter film analyses address one of that chapter's larger topics in relation to a specific film, such as *The Grand Illusion*, *Notorious*, *Triumph of the Will*, and *Mesher of the Afternoon*.

Part Three introduces readers to critical frameworks that foreground the way in which cinema functions as a cultural institution. Individual chapters move beyond textual analysis to consider the relationship between film and society, exploring subjects such as stardom, genre, ideology, and the contemporary film industry. Part Three offers readers access to current theoretical debates about film in cultural, historical, and economic contexts.



## Special Features

*Techniques in Practice* sections in Chapters 4–9 use key concepts and film techniques to analyze and interpret a scene, a film, or several films. These sections reinforce the idea that the ultimate goal of mastering definitions and concepts, and paying close attention to details, is to formulate rich interpretations.

*Inset boxes* in Chapters 4–8 help students understand the filmmaking process, including industry personnel and trades.

*Film Analysis end-of-chapter essays* in Chapters 2 and 4–9 address a broad topic area of the chapter (for example, setting) in a carefully developed analysis of one or two films. *Sidebars* draw attention to rhetorical strategies, demystifying the process by which writers move from gathering details to generating ideas and organizing an argument.

*Samples of published film scholarship and criticism* throughout Part Three illustrate important modes of inquiry in film studies (for example, genre criticism) and familiarize readers with the conceptual and rhetorical diversity of writing about film.

*Works Consulted* lists at the ends of chapters point students to possibilities for further research.

*Relevant examples from a wide variety of films* engage the reader's interest without sacrificing intellectual rigour. While the book focuses on narrative filmmaking, it also offers in-depth discussions and analyses of avant-garde and documentary films, and features a number of important narrative films made outside Hollywood.

*An extensive glossary* defines the terms discussed in each chapter.

*An expanded selection of color stills* throughout the text.

*Expanded coverage of film history and film genres*, including the musical, *film noir*, action, and horror.

*Updated coverage* of technology and industry issues.





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Maria Pramaggiore and Tom Wallis

*January 2007*

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*Part One*

# Introduction to Film Analysis

1 Introduction

2 An Approach to Film Analysis

3 Writing About Film

Baz Luhrmann's *Moulin Rouge*  
with Nicole Kidman.

Film is a complex art form and cultural institution whose influence spans the 20th century and transcends it. In its infancy, film depended on the technology of the industrial revolution and the business model associated with the penny arcade. In its maturity, the cinema emerged as a global entertainment industry, instigating and taking advantage of technological developments in photography, sound recording, and, eventually, electronic and digital imaging. The cinema not only contributed to a mass culture of entertainment and celebrity; it also provided a forum for education and critique through the tradition of social documentary, and served as a medium of personal expression in the form of avant-garde films and home movies.

Many film lovers value movie spectacles that transport them to a magical world of romance, drama, and adventure. Others seek out challenging films that provide a rigorous intellectual and aesthetic experience. This book contends that these two desires are not mutually exclusive: the most profound moments of immersion in cinema art also invite audiences to ponder social, aesthetic, moral, and intellectual questions.

In Part One, Chapter 1 provides an overview of the book's approach. Chapter 2 introduces the foundation of film interpretation. It helps readers to develop strategies for critical reading and analysis so that they may better understand the way films build meaning through the systematic use of details. It also lays out the goal of film analysis: the clear and convincing description, evaluation, and interpretation of films. Chapter 3 takes film analysis to the next stage: developing, organizing, and writing thoughtful interpretations.