

FILM ART

An Introduction

SEVENTH EDITION



David Bordwell
Kristin Thompson

FILM *ART* *An Introduction*

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David Bordwell
Kristin Thompson
University of Wisconsin



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Film Art: An Introduction

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FILM
ART

*To our parents
Marjorie and Jay Bordwell
and Jean and Roger Thompson*

About the Authors

David Bordwell is Jacques Ledoux Professor of Film Studies at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. He holds a master's degree and a doctorate in film from the University of Iowa. His books include *The Films of Carl-Theodor Dreyer* (University of California Press, 1981), *Narration in the Fiction Film* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), *Ozu and the Poetics of Cinema* (British Film Institute/Princeton University Press, 1988), *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* (Harvard University Press, 1989), *The Cinema of Eisenstein* (Harvard University Press, 1993), *On the History of Film Style* (Harvard University Press, 1997), and *Planet Hong Kong: Popular Cinema and the Art of Entertainment* (Harvard University Press, 2000). He has won a University Distinguished Teaching Award.

Kristin Thompson is an Honorary Fellow at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. She holds a master's degree in film from the University of Iowa and a doctorate in film from the University of Wisconsin–Madison. She has published Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible* (Princeton University Press, 1981), *Exporting Entertainment: America in the World Film Market 1907–1934* (British Film Institute, 1985), *Breaking the Glass Armor: Neoformalist Film Analysis* (Princeton University Press, 1988), *Wooster Proposes, Jeeves Disposes, or, Le Mot Juste* (James H. Heineman, 1992), *Storytelling in the New Hollywood: Understanding Classical Narrative Technique* (Harvard University Press, 1999), and *Storytelling in Film and Television* (Harvard University Press, 2003). In her spare time she studies Egyptology.

The authors have also collaborated on *Film History: An Introduction* (McGraw-Hill, 2nd. ed., 2003) and, with Janet Staiger, on *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (Columbia University Press, 1985).



Preface

When we undertook the writing of *Film Art: An Introduction* in 1977, film had only recently become a regular subject of study in universities. There were a few introductory film textbooks available at the time, but they seemed to us oversimplified and lacking a clear organization in their description of the basic techniques that make up a film.

Our goal was to provide a text that would describe those techniques—mise-en-scene, cinematography, editing, and sound—in a systematic, clear, but thorough way. Beyond that, we wanted to deal with something that was ignored in earlier books—the overall form (or shape or structure) of a film that resulted from the filmmakers' choices and combination of specific techniques. We wanted to discuss whole films, not simply isolated scenes.

Although *Film Art* has undergone several revisions since that first edition, our goal has remained the same: to introduce the reader to the fundamental aspects of cinema as an art form. By stressing film as art, we seek to isolate those basic features of film that can constitute it as such. *Film Art* explores how the film medium gives us experiences akin to those offered by painting, sculpture, music, literature, theater, architecture, or dance.

As we wrote this book, we envisioned readers of three sorts. First is the interested general reader who frequently goes to the movies and would like to know more about them. Second is the student in an introductory film course, for whom *Film Art* functions as a textbook. Third is the more advanced student of film, who may find here a convenient outline of the principal issues and concepts in cinema studies and a set of suggestions for more specialized work.

Film Art first appeared more than two decades ago, and during that time a number of other introductory film texts have surfaced. We believe, however, that *Film Art* still offers the single most comprehensive and systematic description of the filmic art that has been written. It is gratifying to us that scholarly works on cinema often cite *Film Art* as an authoritative source on matters of film style and form.



ORGANIZATION OF THE TEXT

Analyzing the Whole Film

Organizationally, *Film Art* offers a distinct approach to studying its topic. It might be possible to randomly survey all contemporary approaches to film studies, but we judged this to be too eclectic for an introductory text. Instead, we present an approach that leads the reader in logical steps through the techniques and struc-

tures that make up the *whole film*. Audiences experience whole films, not snippets or abstract themes. If the particular film is the center of our inquiry, we need an approach that will help us understand it through analysis. The approach we have chosen emphasizes the film as an artifact—made in particular ways, having a unity and a set of concrete techniques, existing in history. We can outline our approach in a series of questions.

How does a film get from the planning stages to the screen? To understand film as an art, we must first understand how people create the artifact and disseminate it to audiences. This question leads to a study of film production, distribution, and exhibition (**Part One**).

How does an entire film function? We assume that, like all artworks, a film may be understood as a *formal* construct. That is, it is made up of parts that relate to one another in specific and deliberate ways in order to have an effect on an audience. In **Part Two**, we examine what film form is and how it affects us. We also introduce the most familiar type of film form—the narrative.

How do we classify films? We seldom go to the movies without having some idea of the kind of film we will be seeing. **Part Three** looks at two ways of classifying films. One way is by *genre*, such as when we label a film as a Western, a musical, or a horror film. Another way is by our assumptions concerning the filmmaker's intentions and the way in which the film was made. In addition to live-action narrative films, we recognize documentaries, experimental films, and animated films.

How do film techniques contribute to film form? Film is a specific medium, and every film contains a distinctive combination of many stylistic techniques that combine to create a whole. In **Part Four**, we examine the artistic possibilities of the four primary film techniques: mise-en-scene, cinematography, editing, and sound. In each case we also analyze how these techniques contribute to a film's overall form.

How may we analyze a film critically? Armed with both a conception of film form and a knowledge of film technique, we can go on to analyze *specific films* as artworks. We analyze several important films of various kinds as examples in **Part Five**.

How does film art change through history? Although a thorough history of cinema would require many volumes, here we can suggest how the formal aspects of film work within historical contexts. We survey the most noteworthy *periods and movements in film history* to show how understanding form helps us define films' larger context (**Part Six**).

This approach to the entire film resulted from several years of teaching introductory film courses. As teachers, we wanted students to see and hear more in the films we studied, but it was evident that simply providing the lecturer's view would not teach students how to analyze films on their own. Ideally, we decided, students should master a repertory of *principles* that would help them examine films more closely. We became convinced that the best way to understand cinema is to use general principles of film form to help analyze specific films. Our success with this approach led us to decide that this book should be skills-centered. By learning basic concepts of film form and technique, the reader can sharpen his or her perception of any particular film.

The stress on skills has another consequence. Although we refer to a great many films, we assume that very few readers will have seen all of the titles we mention, and certainly no teacher could possibly show every title during a course. Because *Film Art* stresses the acquisition of conceptual skills, the reader need not see all of the films we mention in order to grasp the general principles. Many other films could be used to make the same points. For example, the possibilities of camera movement can be as easily illustrated with *La Ronde* as with *Grand Illusion*. To exemplify classical Hollywood filmmaking, *My Darling Clementine* will serve as well as *North by Northwest*. Indeed, although a course syllabus could adhere closely to the series of major examples used in *Film Art*, teachers might decide to use a wholly different set of films with equal effect. Our book rests not on titles but on concepts.

Frame Enlargements and Captions

Film Art: An Introduction has several unique features. A book on film must be heavily illustrated, and most are. Many film books, however, use production stills—photographs taken during filming. These are taken with a still camera, almost never placed in the same position as the motion-picture camera. The result is a picture that does not correspond to any image in the finished film. All of our images from films are frame enlargements—magnified photographs taken from images on the actual strip of film. In recent years, some books have been illustrated with frames scanned from video copies of films. We have taken most of our frame enlargements directly from 35mm and 16mm distribution copies of films. (For more on frame enlargements, see the Notes and Queries for Chapter 1.)

Notes and Queries Sections

Another unique feature of this book is the Notes and Queries sections at the end of most chapters. In these sections we attempt to raise issues, provoke discussion, and suggest further reading and research. As chapter supplements, the Notes and Queries sections constitute a resource for the advanced undergraduate, the graduate student, and the interested general reader.

Bibliography, Glossary, and Internet Sites

Although the Notes and Queries sections act as bibliographic sources for specific issues in most chapters, the final chapter, on film history, demanded its own bibliography. We have provided a list of the most basic and current introductions to the main periods and movements in film history discussed in Chapter 12.

Film is an art form based on elaborate technical components like camerawork and editing. To clarify the terminology involved, we offer a glossary of terms at the end of the book. In addition, we include a list of many of the best Internet sites related to cinema.

NEW TO THE SEVENTH EDITION

When we set out to write an introduction to film in 1977, we could not have anticipated that it would meet with a welcome warm enough to carry it through seven editions. This version of *Film Art: An Introduction* seeks to enrich the ideas set

forth in preceding editions. We have again tried to make the book more comprehensive, flexible, and up to date.

Improved Design and Illustrations

The seventh edition represents the most dramatic changes ever in the overall look of *Film Art*. By going to four-color printing throughout the book, we have been able to expand the number of color frame enlargements used as illustrations. When *Film Art* first appeared, it had one modest color-insert page with sixteen frame enlargements. That insert grew gradually over the years to 63 color plates in the sixth edition. Now we are pleased to be able to use hundreds of color frames, often from films that were previously illustrated only in black and white. We have also taken advantage of new printing technology to improve the clarity of the black-and-white frames. This change allows us to offer an even greater range of illustrations from world cinema. As our title states, we treat film as an art, and this edition comes much closer to the kinds of design used in books about painting and the other visual arts.

New “Cut-in” Boxes

The use of boxes to highlight selected important topics in our other textbook, *Film History: An Introduction*, has proven so popular with users that we have adopted a similar feature here. Seven chapters include Cut-ins, boxes that take a closer look at issues of importance in contemporary cinema. In Chapter 1, we discuss the production, distribution, and exhibition of films. Since the early 1990s, independent cinema has become increasingly visible and has in some cases moved into the mainstream; we examine the successful independent firm Good Machine and its absorption into the larger firm Vivendi Universal.

In Chapter 3, we deal with the ways in which recent films, like *Memento*, *Sliding Doors*, and *Groundhog Day*, play with the order of story events—a vivid way of demonstrating the story–plot distinction central to our discussion of narrative form. Chapter 4, on genre, highlights a particularly important contemporary genre, the crime thriller. In Chapter 6, on mise-en-scene, we go into greater detail concerning one important area, acting—especially the modern tendency to center on the face—and how control of the features and the use of makeup (for men as well as women) are used to create performances.

Chapter 7’s Cut-in deals with the important expansion of computer-generated imagery (CGI) in filmmaking. Using a state-of-the-art special-effects film, *The Lord of the Rings*, we explain how CGI is used for obvious purposes like the creation of monsters but also for more mundane purposes at every stage of planning, production, and postproduction. In Chapter 8, we examine a pervasive but little-noticed aspect of modern film style, the exaggeration of classical filmmaking principles and the emergence of intensified continuity, looking shot by shot at a scene from *L.A. Confidential*. Finally, Chapter 9 also narrows in on part of the climactic scene of Michael Mann’s *The Last of the Mohicans*, showing how closely timed musical and visual tracks can heighten the effect of cinematic action.

A New Sample Analysis: *Chungking Express*

With each edition, we try to find films that seem particularly suited to the classroom and that we can add to our chapter of short model analytical essays. Wong Kar-wai’s *Chungking Express* seems to us such a film—one that students find

SUPPORT FOR INSTRUCTORS

Revised Instructor's Manual

The instructor's manual has been revised to reflect the extensive changes in Chapter 1, "Film Production, Distribution, and Exhibition" as well as the boxes added to Chapters 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, and 9. An updated list of useful addresses is offered.

Online Support

The Website and Online Learning Center (www.mhhe.com/filmart) is an Internet-based resource for students and faculty alike. Instructors will find the password-protected Instructor's Manual and a wide array of options for testing and research.

The online content of *Film Art* is supported by WebCT, eCollege.com, and Blackboard. To find out more, contact your local McGraw-Hill representative or visit www.mhhe.com/solutions.

As an adopter, you may also be eligible to use our PageOut service to get you and your course up and running online in a matter of hours—at no cost to you and without knowing HTML. To find out more, contact your local McGraw-Hill representative or visit www.pageout.net.

SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

Updated Filmviewer's Guide

The *Filmviewer's Guide*, included with *Film Art: An Introduction*, suggests how readers can get more out of the moviegoing experience and how they can improve their ability to write about the films they see. It offers practical advice on what to look for in watching films, both in theaters and on video, suggests ways to take notes, and indicates some strategies for writing argumentative papers and journalistic film reviews.

New Online Learning Center www.mhhe.com/filmart

McGraw-Hill offers extensive Web resources for students with Internet access. Students will find the Online Learning Center of particular use with *Film Art* because, for each chapter, it offers objectives, discussion questions, and online testing. In addition to text-specific exercises, the site hosts links to assist with researching topics in film on the World Wide Web.

intriguing, enjoyable, and challenging in its unconventional presentation of two stories. Its narrative form moves outside the classical tradition, and we offer *Chungking Express* as a further example of how filmmakers devise original alternatives to that tradition.

A New Historical Section on Hong Kong Cinema

Chungking Express exemplifies a modern national cinema that has only recently come to wide international attention. Hong Kong has fostered an important national cinema that thrived for decades in the face of Hollywood competition and without any government subsidies. We offer a brief overview of how this situation came about and what distinctive formal and stylistic traits characterize modern Hong Kong cinema.

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*David Bordwell
Kristin Thompson*

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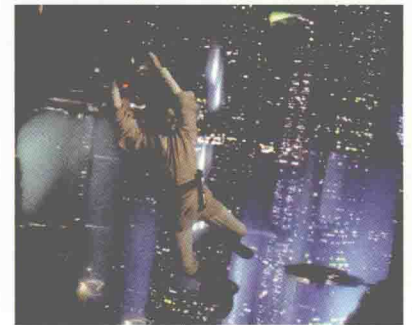
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