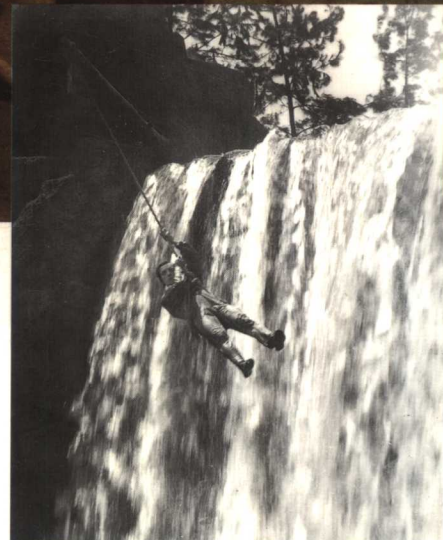
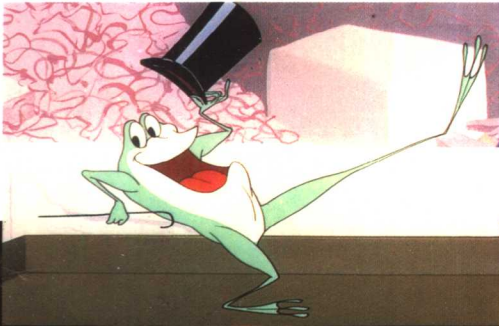


# FILM ART An Introduction

Sixth Edition



David Bordwell  
Kristin Thompson

# Film Art An Introduction

Sixth Edition

David Bordwell  
Kristin Thompson  
*University of Wisconsin*



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## FILM ART: AN INTRODUCTION

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This book is printed on acid-free paper.

domestic 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 QPD/QPD 0 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0

international 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 QPD/QPD 0 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0

ISBN 0-07-231725-6

Editorial director: *Phillip A. Butcher*

Associate editor: *Allison McNamara*

Marketing manager: *David S. Patterson*

Senior project manager: *Pat Frederickson*

Production supervisor: *Rose Hepburn*

Senior designer: *Kiera Cunningham*

Supplement coordinator: *Carol Bielski*

Media technology producer: *Todd Vaccaro*

Cover photographs: *"The Matrix," "One Froggy Evening," and "Our Hospitality": Photofest*

Compositor: *York Graphic Services, Inc.*

Typeface: *10.5/12 Times Roman*

Printer: *Quebecor Printing Book Group/Dubuque*

### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Bordwell, David.

Film art : an introduction / David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson.—6th ed.

p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN 0-07-231725-6 (softcover : alk. paper)

1. Motion pictures—Aesthetics. I. Thompson, Kristin, 1950– II. Title.

PN1995 B617 2001

791.43—dc21

00-031863

INTERNATIONAL EDITION ISBN 007118001X

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The International Edition is not available in North America.

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# ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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The authors have also collaborated on *Film History: An Introduction* (McGraw-Hill, 1994) 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 which 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.

Over the two decades since *Film Art* first appeared, a number of other introductory film texts have surfaced. We believe, however, that *Film Art* still offers the single most comprehensive and systematic basic description of the filmic art that has been written. The fact that *Film Art* is often cited as an authoritative source on matters of film style and form in scholarly works on cinema tends to confirm our opinion.

## 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 structures 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 filmmakers' 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 (**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* which 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 SIXTH 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 six 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.

## Expanded Coverage in Chapter 1

The opening chapter, which formerly dealt primarily with film production, has been thoroughly rewritten. This change has two purposes. We felt it would be better to include more material on exhibition and distribution. Since the movie theater is the

venue where most people directly encounter films, we decided to make that the leaping-off point, then to trace back through the process of distributing films to theaters and ultimately back to how they are made. We have also updated this chapter to take into account the huge changes in filmmaking technology that have occurred recently, largely in the realm of digital imagery for special effects.

## A Reorganized Discussion of Types of Film

In the previous edition, we dealt with ways of classifying films. In the second chapter, we briefly introduced the basic types of film—documentary versus fiction, experimental versus “main-stream,” and animation versus live-action. We also covered the concept of genre (e.g., Westerns, musicals). In another chapter we examined how nonnarrative films could be classified according to the types of form they employed.

In the sixth edition, we have modified the way we deal with types of film. The new Chapter 4 is devoted entirely to an expanded coverage of the important topic of film genres. The new Chapter 5 deals with “Documentary, Experimental, and Animated Films.” Here the different types of nonnarrative form are discussed as characteristic of these modes of filmmaking.

## Captions

Previous editions of *Film Art* have used figure numbers without captions. For this edition, we have added captions for the illustrations, so that users may identify at a glance the films and concepts being discussed.

## Marginal Quotations

We have also scattered comments from filmmakers, critics, and artists in other media throughout the margins of the book. These provide pithy, sometimes amusing, insights into the topics addressed in the text.

## New Examples and Illustrations

We have always tried to draw upon a wide range of films for both our brief and our more extended examples: modern films, silent films, color and black-and-white, made in many different countries. For the sixth edition, we have retained this wide range while adding references to more recent films, such as *L.A. Confidential*, *The Usual Suspects*, *The Sixth Sense*, *Run Lola Run*, and *Titanic*, as well as to “modern classics” like *The Silence of the Lambs*, *Back to the Future*, *Groundhog Day*, and *Tootsie*.

We have also added several new frame enlargements to illustrate examples that previously were only described in the text.

## A New Sample Analysis: *The Thin Blue Line*

In each new edition we make some changes to the Sample Analyses section of *Film Art*, hoping to include films that teachers want to use in their classes. Our new sample film, Errol Morris’s *The Thin Blue Line*, is an important work that raises issues about the boundaries between fictional and documentary filmmaking, as well as employing an intriguing and complex style.



## 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"; Chapter 4, "Film Genres"; and Chapter 5, "Documentary, Experimental, and Animated Films." Additional information on slide-making equipment is offered, as well as an updated list of useful addresses.

### Online Support

The Website and Online Learning Center ([www.mhhe.com/filmart](http://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](http://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](http://www.pageout.net).

## SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

### New Filmgoer's Guide

The *Filmgoer'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](http://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* as, 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.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Over the past twenty-three years, many people have aided us greatly in the writing and revision of this book. We are grateful to David Allen, Tino Balio, John Belton, Joe Beres, Ralph Berets, Les Blank, Eileen Bowser, Edward Branigan, Martin Bresnick, Ben Brewster, Michael Budd, Peter Bukalski, Elaine Burrows of the British Film Institute, Richard B. Byrne, Jerome Carolfi, Corbin Carnell, Jerry Carlson, Kent Carroll, Noël Carroll, Paolo Cherchi Usai of George Eastman House, Jeffrey Chown, Gabrielle Claes and the staff of the Cinémathèque Royale de Belgique, Bruce Conner, Mary Corliss of the Museum of Modern Art Film Stills Department, Susan Dalton of the American Film Institute, Robert E. Davis, Dorothy Desmond, Kathleen Domenig, Maxine Fleckner-Ducey of the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research, Don Fredericksen, Jon Gartenberg, Ernie Gehr, Kathe Geist, Douglas Gomery, Claudia Gorbman, Ron Gottesman, Eric Gunneson, Howard Harper, Denise Hartsough, Kevin Heffernan, Linda Henzl, Richard Hinch, Jan-Christopher Horak of the Munich Film Museum, Lea Jacobs, Bruce Jenkins, Kathryn Kalinak, Charlie Keil, Vance Kepley, Laura Kipnis, Barbara Klinger, Don Larsson, Thomas M. Leitch, Gary London, José Lopez of New Yorker Films, Patrick Loughney of the Library of Congress Motion Picture Division, Mike Maggione of the Walker Art Center, Mark McClelland of Films Inc., Roger L. Mayer of MGM Inc., Norman McLaren, Jackie Morris of the National Film Archive, Kazuto Ohira of Toho Films, Badia Rahman, Paul Rayton, Leo Salzman, Rob Silberman, Charles Silver of the Museum of Modern Art Film Study Center, Joseph Evans Slate, Harry W. Smith, Jeff Smith, Michael Snow, John C. Stubbs, Dan Talbot of New Yorker Films, Edyth von Slyck, and Chuck Wolfe.

In preparing this edition, we are grateful to several of the above, as well as to Rick Altman, University of Iowa; Marshall Deutelbaum, Purdue University; Susan Felleman, Southern Illinois University; Paul Helford, Northern Arizona University; Jenny Lau, Ohio University; Moya Luckett, University of Pittsburgh; Charles Maland, University of Tennessee; Charles Musser, Yale University; David Popowski, Minnesota State University–Mankato; Robert Silberman, University of Minnesota; Jeff Smith, New York University; Richard Terrill, Minnesota State University–Mankato; and Beth Wintour, Texas Tech University.

As always, we thank our team at McGraw-Hill—Allison McNamara, David Patterson, Kiera Cunningham, Joe Murphy, and Pat Frederickson (as well as past editors Peter Labella, Roth Wilkofsky, and Cynthia Ward).

*David Bordwell  
Kristin Thompson*

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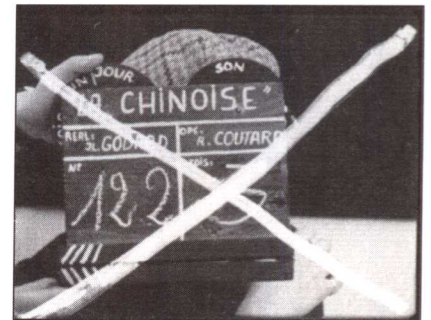
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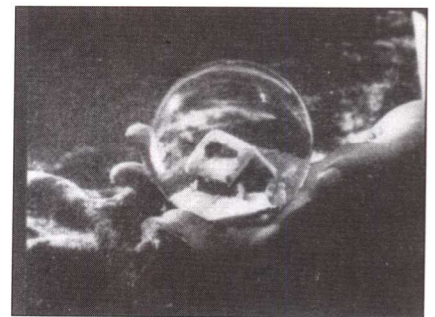
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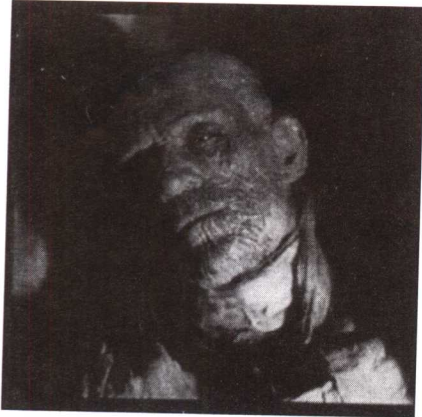
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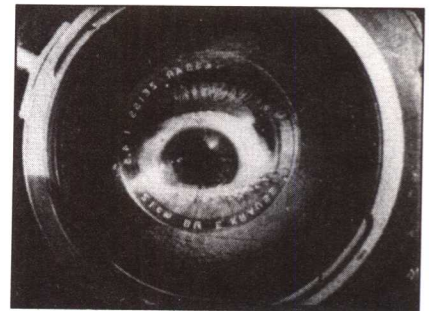
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# PART ONE

Film Production, Distribution,  
and Exhibition

