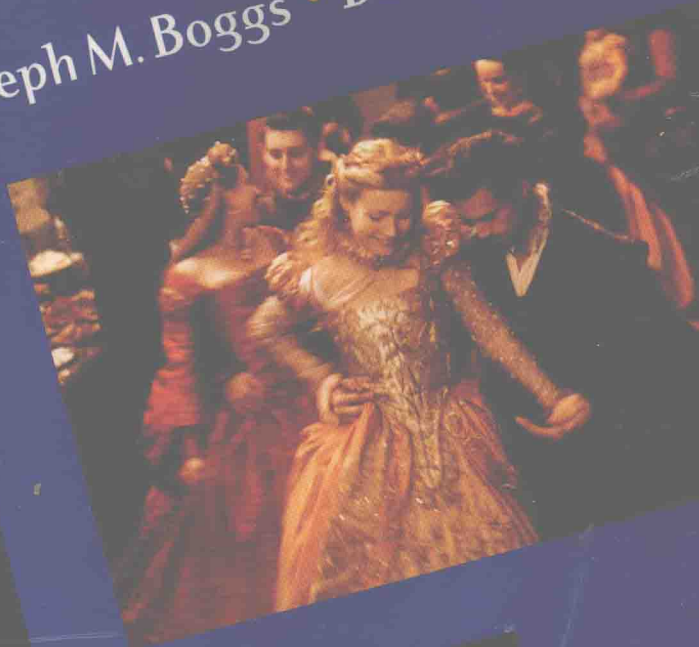# The Art of Watching Films

Fifth Edition

Joseph M. Boggs · Dennis W. Petrie

The Art of Watching Films

FIFTH EDITION

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The Art of
Watching Films

For
Elizabeth Petrie Gill
and
Robert D. Briles

Preface

The teaching of film has changed tremendously since the first edition of this book was published in 1978. At that time, film appreciation was generally taught by means of a 16mm projector in the classroom, and the films that students could study were limited to what they could see in local theaters or on network television. Since then, technology and cable revolutions have changed our options. VCRs and laserdisc players have made watching films an incredibly easy, enjoyable, and rewarding experience. And now, new DVD compression technology allows for the dissemination of more kinds of video information than ever before—and all of it is presented on a widely available disc the size of an audio CD with a sharpness that may be twice that of the videocassette. The DVD's greater storage capacity accommodates space for both widescreen and full-screen versions of films, in addition to a full menu of language, dubbing, and subtitling options. The DVD's additional tracks can introduce commentaries by directors, actors, writers, editors, cinematographers, and other film technicians; "making of" documentaries can reveal unique insights into the filmmaking process; direct digital access to individual scenes facilitates examination that is vastly more satisfactory than that afforded by the linear prison of the videocassette format or even the larger size of the laser disc. Now more than ever a movie is ours to study like a book. We can watch it as many times as we like and scrutinize it sequence by sequence, shot by shot, and even frame by frame. The ability to view a single scene over and over can lead to a much deeper understanding of the art of filmmaking than can be acquired by just watching movies from beginning to end in a theater or classroom.

Approach and Organization

The assumption underlying this text is that there is an art to watching films. The development of special skills and the use of certain techniques and technology can sharpen and enhance the film experience. Our aim is not to transform ordinary filmgoers into expert movie critics. Rather, our aim is to help

students become more aware of the complexity of film art, more sensitive to its nuances, textures, and rhythms, and more perceptive in "reading" its multilayered blend of image, sound, color, and motion.

The analytical approach that we use is by no means the only valid approach, but it offers one distinct advantage over others: It is teachable. Emotional and intuitive approaches are highly subjective and thus difficult to use in class. Helping students develop their critical thinking skills, in contrast, offers them a rational framework that can support the study of films as diverse as *On the Waterfront, The Fugitive, The Matrix, The Seventh Seal,* and *Pleasantville.*

In its formal organization and intent, *The Art of Watching Films* is as straightforward as possible. Since its subject is primarily narrative film, the text first develops a foundation for understanding theme and story (Chapters 2 and 3) and then moves on to discuss the dramatic and cinematic elements that filmmakers use to "tell" the film story (Chapters 4–11). With an understanding of these basic film elements established, Chapter 12 provides a framework for integrating knowledge of all these elements into an analysis of the whole film. Subsequent chapters (Chapters 13–16) explore major specialized concerns and problems of film analysis.

Our primary goal is to challenge students to sharpen their powers of observation, help them to develop the skills and habits of perceptive watching, and encourage them to discover complex aspects of film art that they might otherwise overlook. We designed this text to complement any film studied, to function as a treasure map to aid students in finding the riches embodied in the real "text" of any film course—the films themselves.

Features

Color An entire chapter on color (Chapter 7), illustrated in color, highlights the element of the film experience that critics often overlook and filmgoers often take for granted. The chapter discusses in some depth the creative function of color in the modern film, providing a basic understanding of filmmakers' uses of color and a starting point from which students can explore complex, subtle, and very human responses to color film.

Video Exercises and Study Questions Two kinds of end-of-chapter assignments give film appreciation a hands-on immediacy. Assuming that most students have at least limited access to a VCR, we have devised video exercises for eight of the chapters of the text. To view the section of film dealt with in each exercise, set the VCR counter at "0000" (or the real-time counter at 0:00:00) at the very end of the studio logo, just as the "movie proper" begins (the "movie proper" includes such things as "Paramount Pictures Presents," opening credits, and the main title). Then fast-forward until the numbers given in the exercise appear.

Designed to engender either class discussion or written response, the study questions help students organize their thoughts and focus their attention on the very heart of a film. The questions also increase students' involvement in the film experience, encouraging them to participate actively in an exciting quest rather than responding passively to the surface details.

Test Examples and Illustrations Detailed examples help students comprehend basic concepts or techniques. Because *The Art of Watching Films* is aimed at beginners, most of the examples are taken from films that are contemporary rather than classic, American rather than international, and commercially successful rather than esoteric. Most examples are also readily available for rental and purchase in videocassette, laserdisc, and DVD formats.

More than 500 images from contemporary and classic films illustrate key points in the text. Extensive, informative captions strengthen the link between the visual and textual examples.

Writing About Film Many instructors ask students to respond in writing to a film—to give formal structure and an essayist's logic to their own critical responses. In Appendix B are guidelines for writing a film analysis and three sample student papers. The first is a lengthy, complete analysis of John Ford's *The Grapes of Wrath*, showing how a student might approach a paper assigned as a major class project. The second is a shorter, simpler paper focusing on important techniques employed in Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver.* Both of these illustrate the types of analysis that you can expect students to write by using this text and a video source for multiple viewings. So that students can grasp the interrelationship of the text, film, and finished paper, we have noted in the margins of both papers the pages in *The Art of Watching Films* that helped each student writer. The third student essay is a sharply focused examination of Martin Scorsese's *The Age of Innocence*, without textual annotations.

Controversy The text introduces students to controversial issues that profoundly affect the films we see, such as censorship (Chapter 16), the cinematic liberties taken in fact-based films like *Mississippi Burning, Lean on Me, JFK, Quiz Show,* and *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* (Chapter 13) and colorization (Chapter 7).

New to This Edition

We have effected many changes that we hope will make this edition both more attractive and more teachable:

- **Updated visual and text examples.** Every chapter has been brought up to date with numerous text examples, and almost 100 new photos have

been added. Up-to-date topics include computer-generated imaging (CGI) and its contribution to special effects films such as *Contact*, *Independence Day*, and *Dark City*.

- **An expanded discussion of genre films is featured in Chapter 14.** Lengthier treatments of film *noir*, war films, horror movies, science fiction and fantasy films, screwball romantic comedies, and musicals are now included.
- **Detailed discussions of both documentary films and animated feature films now appear in Chapter 15.**
- **A chapter on censorship is included.** At the request of many users of previous editions, we have updated and reintroduced Chapter 16, "Censorship and Other Forces That Shape the American Film."
- **Films for Study lists at the ends of chapters have been greatly increased and now include U.S. release dates.**
- **A new appendix (A)** has been added that discusses the pitfalls and challenges inherent in attempting to examine films primarily through television viewing.
- **A new student paper** has been added to the existing two examples in the appendix on writing about film. "Dramatic Foils in *The Age of Innocence*" appears without annotation so that it can serve as both a model and an exercise in student evaluation.
- **Expanded glossary and bibliography** provide students with more help.

Instructor's Manual

Accompanying the text is a manual written by Kenneth Jurkiewicz, a long-time user of the text at Central Michigan University. It contains a complete set of test items, a list of film and video rental sources, and other resources. The test items are also available as computer files suitable for IBM-compatible and Macintosh computers.

Publisher's Note

After a lengthy and courageous battle with cancer, Joseph M. Boggs, beloved husband, father, baseball and jazz aficionado, teacher, and author, died in early June of 1996—soon after the publication of the fourth edition of The Art of Watching Films. *At Boggs's request, his long-time friend, former student, and colleague Dennis W. Petrie, who had been closely involved with the book since its inception, was invited to guide the creation of this fifth edition.*

Acknowledgments

My good friend Joe Boggs was an energetic, passionate man, with high expectations of both life and art. So when, during the final year of his illness, he kept

demanding that I agree to become a kind of designated hitter for his popular film book, I was of two minds: First, I found his unwavering belief in my abilities immensely flattering, but I also considered the task rather daunting. How could I possibly satisfy Joe's hopes for this new edition? In the end, though, I accepted his petition without question. My own love of film and my admiration for Joe were equally boundless; I realized that I must embrace the endeavor, and, as I worked, my appreciation for Joe's accomplishments continued to grow. To Joe Boggs, then, I am most deeply indebted for my experience with this project. As Joe, of course, knew I would, I have greatly enjoyed its challenges, and I pray that he would find the results of my struggles worthy.

There are, however, many others to thank for their kind assistance and encouragement, including my family, friends, colleagues, and students.

Key among these is an esteemed collaborator of Joe Boggs's, his son Michael Boggs, whose wise counsel and creative suggestions, notably in this edition's early stages, were of huge value to me. I am immensely grateful for his generosity.

My work on this book would have been virtually impossible without the enormous help of a few essential friends and colleagues nearby: Thomas P. Tierney, Jane A. Tubergen, Michael Blaz, Ray Condon, and, especially, Sue Van Wagner and Robert D. Briles, who were incredibly selfless in their assistance and supportive indulgence. I am forever in their debt.

Even over vast distances, Sandy Ridlington and Robert C. Petersen were still willing to offer creative input and encouragement at a moment's notice. Jacqueline E. Orsagh cheerfully provided observations and photographs from an insider's seat on a Louis Malle movie set. Elaine and Don Zimmer and Jane and Red Graves fed my cravings for movie memorabilia. Ray Hatton enthralled me with his acute observations about the spiritual aspects of cinema. And Jeanne Braham inspired me through her always gracious and talented example. I offer them all my heartfelt thanks.

In addition, I wish to express my appreciation to Elliott Armstrong, Deborah Blaz, Anne Bowden, Carol Briles, Miriam J. Briles, Miles Hession II, M. Sue Kahle, Glodine B. Petrie, and Roberta Tierney for their abiding thoughtfulness and support.

Among my students, I want particularly to thank Denise Tomlinson for permission to print her essay on *The Age of Innocence*, a new addition to the student papers for study in Appendix B.

At Mayfield Publishing Company, a whole cadre of talented and enthusiastic individuals nourished me with incredible patience and care. Among these, I am especially indebted to Senior Editor Janet M. Beatty, Senior Production Editor Melissa Williams Kreischer, and Jennifer Gordon, who copyedited the manuscript. I also wish to thank Design Manager Jean Mailander, Photo Researcher Brian Pecko, Art Editor Amy Folden, Marketing Manager Joe Hanson, and Marketing Communications Specialist Josh Tepfer.

Finally, I thank my colleagues who served as reviewers for this edition: Richard Booth, Crafton Hills College; R. W. Chapman, Des Moines Area Community College; Mary Jayne Davis, Salt Lake Community College; Richard C. Ekker, Modesto Junior College; John Heidger, St. Louis Community College; Deborah H. Holdstein, Governors State University; Scott L. Jensen, Weber State University; Kenneth Jurkiewicz, Central Michigan University; David Liban, University of Memphis; David J. Popowski, Mankato State University; Joanna E. Rapf, University of Oklahoma; and Donald L. Soucy, New England Institute of Technology.

Dennis W. Petrie

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