

# PREFACE

We started to write *Film Art: An Introduction* in 1977, when film had just become a regular subject of study in colleges and universities. There were a few introductory film textbooks available, but they seemed to us oversimplified and lacking a clear sense of organization. After studying film since the 1960s and after teaching an introductory course at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, we tried to pull together what we’d learned.

We had two purposes. First, we wanted to describe the basic techniques of cinema—mise-en-scene, cinematography, editing, and sound—clearly and thoroughly. Beyond that, we wanted to do something that earlier books hadn’t tried to do. We wanted to show students how to understand the overall form, or structure, of a film. The goal was to analyze whole films, not just isolated scenes. We wanted to show how the separate techniques of the film medium functioned in the film’s larger context.

To achieve these aims, we tried to go beyond summarizing what critics and theorists before us had said. Of course we couldn’t neglect important thinkers. But the more we studied films, the more we realized that there were many crucial aspects of film that had long gone unnoticed. We had to do more than synthesize; we had to innovate.

Sometimes the survey books that appear early in the history of a discipline produce original work, and *Film Art* wound up doing that. For instance, we found that film editing harbored a range of possibilities that had never been systematically presented. Similarly, no one had tried to survey the various sorts of overall form that a film can utilize. At almost every turn, we tried to fill gaps in understanding and come up with fresh insights into the creative choices that filmmakers had made.

In the thirty years since we began the project, *Film Art* has undergone several revisions. We’ve adjusted it to the needs of the educators who have found it useful, and we’ve tried to accommodate changes in the ways in which films are made and seen. When the first edition came out in 1979, Betamax videotape was just emerging as a consumer item. Today, people are watching films on their iPods. Throughout all these changes, though, the art of cinema hasn’t fundamentally changed. Internet and digital films use the same basic techniques and formal strategies that filmmakers have always employed. Likewise, the goal of *Film Art* has remained the same: to introduce the reader to the fundamental features of cinema as an art form.

We envision readers of three sorts. First is the interested general reader who likes movies and wants 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 can find here a convenient outline of film aesthetics and suggestions for more specialized work.

Since *Film Art* first appeared, a number of other introductory texts have been published. We believe that our book still offers the most comprehensive and systematic layout of the art of film. It also offers discussions of creative possibilities that aren’t considered elsewhere. It’s gratifying to us that scholarly works on cinema often cite *Film Art* as an authoritative and original source of film aesthetics.

## Organization of *Film Art*

One way to organize a book like this would be to survey all contemporary approaches to film studies, and there’s no shortage of books following that angle. But

we believe that the student wants to know the core features of the film medium before he or she is introduced to different academic approaches. So *Film Art* pioneered an approach that leads the reader in logical steps through the techniques and structures that make up the whole film.

Moviegoers become absorbed by films as complete experiences, not fragments. The approach we've chosen emphasizes the film as a whole—made in particular ways, displaying overall coherence, using concrete techniques of expression, and existing in history. Our approach breaks down into a series of questions.

**How does a film get from the planning stages to the screen?** To understand film as an art, it helps to know how people create a film and get it to audiences. This question leads to a study in Part One, "Film Art and Filmmaking," of film production, distribution, and exhibition. We can then see how these activities shape the final product. Decisions at every stage affect what we see and hear on the screen.

**How does an entire film function?** We assume that like all artworks, a film has a *form*. It's 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, "Film Form," we examine the idea of film form and how it affects us. We also introduce the most familiar type of form, the narrative.

**How do film techniques contribute to film form?** Film is a distinct medium, and every film combines various techniques as part of its whole. In Part Three, "Film Style," we examine the artistic possibilities of the primary film techniques: mise-en-scene, cinematography, editing, and sound. A chapter is devoted to each one, and each chapter ends with an analysis of how these techniques contribute to a film's overall form.

**How do we classify films?** We seldom go to the movies without having some idea of the kind of film we'll be seeing. Part Four, "Types of Films" examines two principal ways of grouping films. One way is by *genre*. When we label a film a science-fiction movie, a horror film, or a musical, we're using genre categories. We also usually classify films by some conception of the film's relation to reality or to its manner of production. So, besides live-action fiction films, we recognize *documentaries*, *animated films*, and *experimental films*.

**How may we analyze a film critically?** Once we have some conception of the possibilities of the medium, we can go on to analyze specific films. We try to show techniques of analysis by studying several important films in Part Five, "Critical Analysis of Films."

**How does film art change through history?** A complete history of cinema would take up many volumes, but we conclude our book by suggesting how formal aspects of film have changed in historical contexts. In Part Six, "Film Art and Film History," we survey some noteworthy periods and movements in film history to show how understanding form helps us define films' larger context.

## Our Approach: Analyzing the Whole Film

Our holistic approach to film resulted from several years of teaching. We wanted students to see and hear more in the films we studied, but simply providing the lecturer's view wouldn't help students understand cinema on their own. Ideally, we decided, students should master a repertory of principles that would help them examine films. We became convinced that the best way to introduce film's artistic potential is to highlight general principles of form and style and to show those

principles at work in particular movies. That is, we emphasized skills. By studying basic concepts of technique and form, students can sharpen their appreciation of any film that comes their way.

The stress on skills has another consequence. We refer to a great many films, largely to show the range and variety of cinema. But we know that most readers won't have seen, or even heard of, all of them. Because *Film Art* stresses the importance of conceptual skills, readers don't have to have seen the films we mention in order to grasp the general principles. Many other films could be used to make similar points.

For example, many possibilities of camera movement could be illustrated as easily with *La Ronde* or *Elephant* as with *Grand Illusion*. To exemplify classical Hollywood filmmaking, *My Darling Clementine* could serve as well as *North by Northwest*. 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. Our book rests not on titles but on concepts.

That said, we do believe that an introduction to any art should balance familiar examples with unfamiliar ones. If we want to suggest the range of creative possibilities in cinema, we can't limit ourselves just to recent Hollywood releases. One of an educator's tasks is to broaden the horizons and tastes of students, to take them beyond what they're accustomed to. Films are powerful and can change the ways we think and feel, and we benefit from opening ourselves up to them as widely as possible. So we haven't hesitated to mention films that lie off the beaten track, coming from the silent era, from other countries, and from experimental traditions. Many of these films have changed our own lives, and maybe they can change others' lives as well.

## Features of *Film Art*

### Frame Enlargements and Captions

A book on film must be heavily illustrated, and most are. Many film books, however, use production stills—photographs taken during filming. These are shot with a still camera, almost never placed in the same position as the motion picture camera. The result is a picture that doesn't correspond to any image in the finished film. Nearly all of our images from films are frame enlargements—magnified photographs taken from images on 16mm and 35mm film copies. *Film Art* contains more illustrations than any other book in the market, and new to the last edition, all stills from color films appear in full color. (For more on frame enlargements, see the “Where to Go from Here” section in Chapter One.)



**2.2** The itinerant Kansas fortune-teller, Professor Marvell, bears a striking resemblance to . . .



**2.3** . . . the old charlatan known as the Wizard of Oz.



**2.4** Miss Gulch's bicycle in the opening section becomes . . .



**2.5** . . . the Witch's broom in Oz.



**2.6** As the Lion describes his timidity, the characters are lined up to form a mirror reversal of . . .

## “Where to Go from Here” Sections

In the first edition of *Film Art*, we thought it was important to include a section at the end of each chapter that would steer readers to other sources, but without the simple listing of ordinary bibliographies. So our chapter supplements, now called “Where to Go from Here,” raise issues, provoke discussion, and suggest further reading and viewing. They also indicate Internet sites and DVD supplements that illustrate or develop ideas in the chapter.

## Where to Go from Here

### On the Origins of Mise-en-Scene

As a concept, mise-en-scene dates back to the 19th-century theater. For a historical introduction that is relevant to film, see Oscar G. Brockett and Robert R. Findlay, *Century of Innovation* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973). The standard film works are Nicolas Vardac, *Stage to Screen* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1949), and Ben Brewster and Lea Jacobs, *Theatre to Cinema: Stage Pictorialism and the Early Feature Film* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

### On Realism in Mise-en-Scene

Many film theorists have seen film as a realistic medium par excellence. For such theorists as Siegfried Kracauer, André Bazin, and V. F. Perkins, cinema's power lies in its ability to present a recognizable reality. The realist theorist thus often values authenticity in costume and setting, naturalistic acting, and unstylized lighting. "The primary function of decor," writes V. F. Perkins, "is to provide a believable environment for the action" (*Film as Film* [Baltimore: Penguin, 1972], p. 94). André Bazin praises the Italian neorealist films of the 1940s for "faithfulness to everyday life in the scenario, truth to his part in an actor" (*What Is Cinema?* vol. 2 [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970], p. 25).

Though mise-en-scene is always a product of selection and choice, the realist theorist may value the filmmaker who creates a mise-en-scene that *appears* to be reality. Kracauer suggests that even apparently unrealistic song-and-dance numbers in a musical can seem impromptu (*Theory of Film* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1965]), and Bazin considers a fantasy film such as

*The Red Balloon* realistic because here "what is imaginary on the screen has the spatial density of something real" (*What Is Cinema?* vol. 1 [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966], p. 48).

These theorists set the filmmaker the task of representing some historical, social, or aesthetic reality through the selection and arrangement of mise-en-scene. Though this book postpones the consideration of this problem—it lies more strictly in the domain of film theory—the realist controversy is worth your examination. Christopher Williams, in *Realism and the Cinema* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), reviews many issues in the area.

### Computer Imaging and Mise-en-Scene

*Digital*, or 3D, animation typically involves a few widely used programs, such as Maya for creating movement and Renderman for adding surface texture. Animators deal with specific needs of their projects by developing new software for such effects as fire, water, and moving foliage. The figures to be animated are created either by scanning every surface of a maquette (a detailed model, such as the dinosaur in 1.29) or by using motion capture ("mocap"), filming actors or animals in neutrally colored costumes covered with dots, which are the only things visible to the camera. The dots are connected by lines to create a "wire-frame" moving image, and the computer gradually adds more detailed layers to build a textured, three-dimensional, moving figure. Backgrounds can also be created digitally, using matte-painting programs. For figure animation, see *The Art of Maya: An Introduction to 3D Computer Graphics*, 3d ed. (Alias Systems, 2005), which includes a CD-ROM with introductory material.

## "A Closer Look" Boxes

These examine issues of importance in contemporary cinema. For example, computer-generated imagery (CGI) is addressed in a discussion of *The Lord of the Rings*.

A Closer Look
continued

**3.9** During one repetition of February 2 in *Groundhog Day*, Phil tests whether he can get away with crimes, getting himself tossed in jail in the evening . . .



must again travel back to 1955 to prevent Biff's change of events. By the end of Part II, he becomes trapped there, while Doc is accidentally sent back to 1885. Marty joins him there in Part III for another set of threatened changes to the future. If all this sounds complicated, it is. Although the narrative maintains a remarkably unified series of cause-effect chains, it becomes so convoluted that at one point Doc diagrams events for Marty (and us) on a blackboard!

Not surprisingly, such narrative games were influenced by a similar trend in European films. In 1981, Polish director Krzysztof Kieslowski made *Blind Chance*, which showed three sets of consequences depending on whether the protagonist caught a train at the beginning or not. Unlike *Sliding Doors*, however, *Blind Chance* presents these alternative futures as self-contained stories, one after the other. The same approach appears in *Run Lola Run* (Tom Tykwer, 1998, Germany), where the heroine's desperate attempts to replace a large sum that her inept boyfriend owes to drug dealers are shown as three stories that end very differently after small changes of action on Lola's part. Alternative versions of events based on characters' conflicting recollections had already been used, most famously in Akira Kuro-

**3.10** . . . only to find himself waking up, as on other Groundhog Days, back in bed at the bed-and-breakfast inn.



motivation for the changes, such as a time machine. The three *Back to the Future* films (Robert Zemeckis, 1985, 1989,

"If you wander unbidden onto a set, you'll always know the AD because he or she is the one who'll probably throw you off. That's the AD yelling, 'Places!' 'Quiet on the set!' 'Lunch—one-half hour!' and 'That's a wrap, people!' It's all very ritualistic, like reveille and taps on a military base, at once grating and oddly comforting."

—Christine Vachon, independent producer, on assistant directors

## Marginal Quotes

Throughout the book, quotes from authors, screenwriters, producers, directors, cinematographers, and actors appear in the margin. Whether amusing or insightful, informative or opinionated, these marginal quotes work to engage students from a filmmaker's point of view.

## Glossary

Like all art forms, film has specialized terminology, and so we've included a glossary. The initial mention of a term in the text is signaled in boldface, which indicates that the glossary provides further information.

—insert a half-page shot of the glossary, page TBD

## New to the Eighth Edition

### Reorganized Parts

Parts Three and Four from the previous edition have been switched. The "Types of Films" chapters on genre and on documentary, experimental, and animated films now follow the four chapters on film techniques. This change aligns the book's sequence of chapters with how adopters tell us they use the book. The advantage of this change is that the film techniques (which many users regard as the core of the book) come earlier. It also means that the analyses of documentary, experimental, and animated films are now continuous texts rather than being split between the "Documentary, Experimental, and Animated Films" and "Style as a Formal System" chapters.

### A New Lead-In Section in Chapter One

This section discusses the issue of film as an art form before launching into the technology and institutions behind filmmaking. Hitchcock's classic film *Shadow of a Doubt*, is showcased as the chapter-opening example.

### Revised "Where to Go from Here" Sections

Appearing at the end of each chapter, those sections raise issues that provoke class discussions. They also suggest further reading for research, acting as a bibliographic source for specific issues in the chapter.

### Film Art Blog at [INSERT URL TBD]

In this blog, David and Kristin share with teachers and students their ideas and experiences. Updated every two weeks, this weblog will feature film and book reviews, reports from festivals, and comments that connect ideas in *Film Art* to the current film scene in an accessible format.

***The McGraw-Hill Film Viewer's Guide*** (a booklet with important tips on film viewing and analysis), which was published as a separate pamphlet for a few editions, is now being reincorporated into the text as an introduction to the "Sample Analyses" chapter.

## Supplementary Instructional Materials

### For the Student

A **text-specific tutorial CD-ROM** will help clarify and reinforce specific concepts addressed in the text with the use of film clips (1–2 per chapter), a corresponding commentary for each film clip, and a quiz for students to take to test their understanding of the materials. This CD-ROM will be packaged FREE with all new copies of *Film Art, Eighth Edition*.

The **student website** to accompany *Film Art* is [www.mhhe.com/filmart8](http://www.mhhe.com/filmart8). Students will find numerous opportunities here to reinforce what they've learned from the text, as well as extend their knowledge. Sample Multiple Choice Quizzes, Essay Questions, Internet Exercises, and links tied to each chapter are included.

### For the Instructor

All instructor resources can be found at [www.mhhe.com/filmart8](http://www.mhhe.com/filmart8). For lecture preparations, the **Instructor's Manual** contains chapter outlines, goals for the chapter, and suggestions for guest lectures, case studies, bibliography, and suggestions for essay assignments and DVD supplements.

For quizzes and tests, you can also find a **Password Protect Test Bank** at the book website. This contains sample multiple choice, true/false, and essay questions.

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