**Instructor Resource Manual**

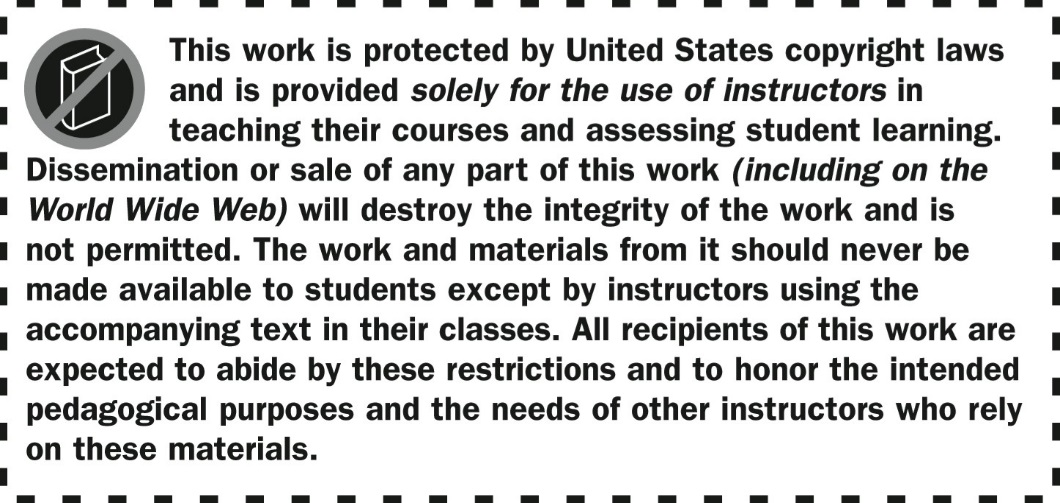
*for*

Understanding Movies

Fourteenth Edition

Louis Giannetti

Pearson Logo



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**Preface**

If I had but one film to choose for a film analysis course, I would choose either *Citizen Kane* or *Amadeus*. *Amadeus* is so rich aesthetically, dramatically, and intellectually that it can support sustained analytical attention. Like *Citizen Kane, Amadeus* provides superior material for analysis in concert with each chapter of *Understanding Movies*.

*Amadeus* is a good film to study early in the course so that it can be used as a *reference film* for the rest of the semester. Use of a reference film facilitates class discussion, offers a touchstone for comparison to other films, and presents a suitable alternative to *Citizen Kane* for synthesis exercises and assignments. Any film can be selected as a course reference film, but *Amadeus* vibrates with creativity in every aspect of the cinema, making the film an excellent selection.

*Supplemental resources for this text:*

www.imdb.com This is the Internet Movie Database website. It is one of the world’s largest compilations of film titles, viewer reviews, and movie production information.

www.filmsite.org Another comprehensive website that provides detailed summaries of many films in many genres.

www.rottentomatoes.com This website tracks film releases, box office grosses, and other pertinent information, including professional critic reviews. It is highly recommended.

[www.metacritic.com/film/](http://www.metacritic.com/film/%20) Another website along the lines of Rotten Tomatoes.

www.rogerebert.com The home of one of the most popular film critics of modern times, Roger Ebert.

[www.commonsensemedia.org](http://www.commonsensemedia.org/%20) This website provides reviews and recommendations of films, especially for parents with young children. The critical reviews here are not geared toward an audience that seeks out journalistic and theoretical criticism.

[www.worldbest.com/movies.htm](http://www.worldbest.com/movies.htm%20) A website that provides links to the websites listed above as well as many others that review film and follow Hollywood news and information.

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**INSTRUCTOR’S RESOURCE MANUAL**

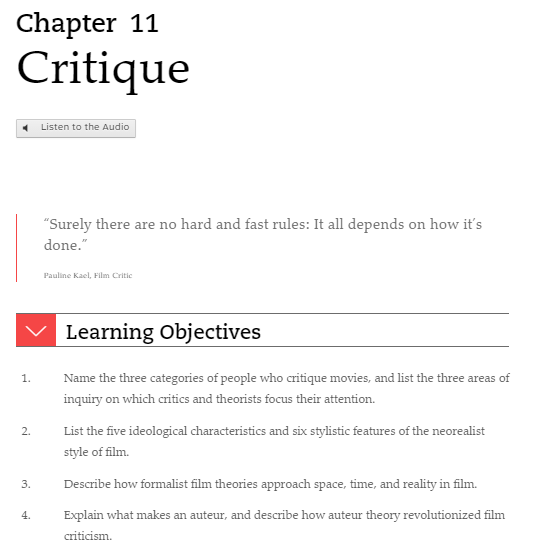
**Introduction to REVEL**

Welcome to the REVEL edition of *Understanding Movies* by Louis Giannetti.

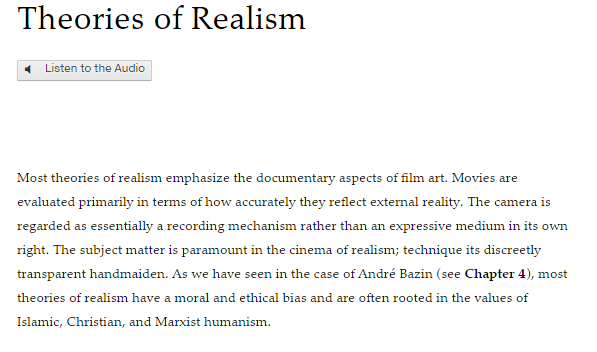
Every chapter in the fourteenth edition of *Understanding Movies* has been carefully revised for publication in REVEL, a fullydigital experience designed to integrate text contents with interactive elements. *Understanding Movies* continues to be organized around elements of film and provides valuable insight into how movies communicate and convey meaning to their audiences through a unique network of language systems and techniques.

The narrative content is the same as the print text but contains enhancements; integrated media interactives and assessments let students read the content and engage with the material through hands-on applications. This immersive educational technology boosts student engagement, which leads to better understanding of concepts and improved performance throughout the course.

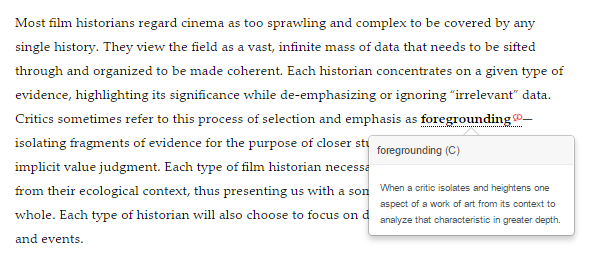
All chapters begin on an introductory screen with chapter-specific **learning objectives**.



Each subsection of content appears on its own screen.



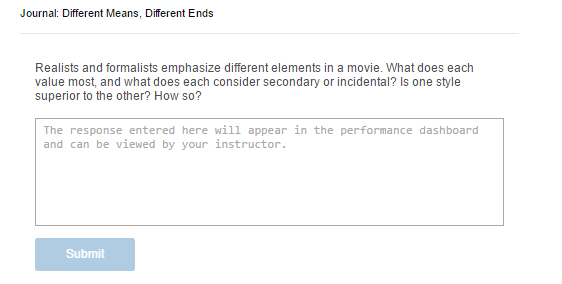
Students can click on key terms to read a term’s definition in-line with chapter content.



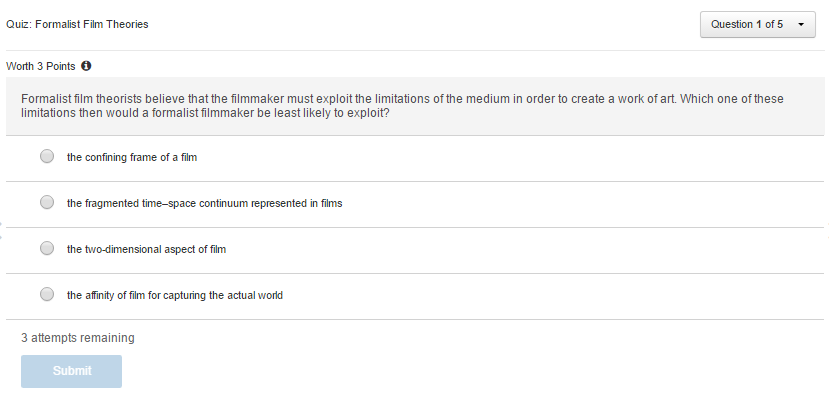
Movie stills and publicity shots not directly correlated to the text are clustered into interactives by topics related to the main narrative. These galleries allow students to pause and individually click through a group of images and their annotations.



Each chapter includes a **journal prompt**. The journal prompt serves as a guided note-taking exercise to build student ability to critically analyze key elements in the development and creation of movies.



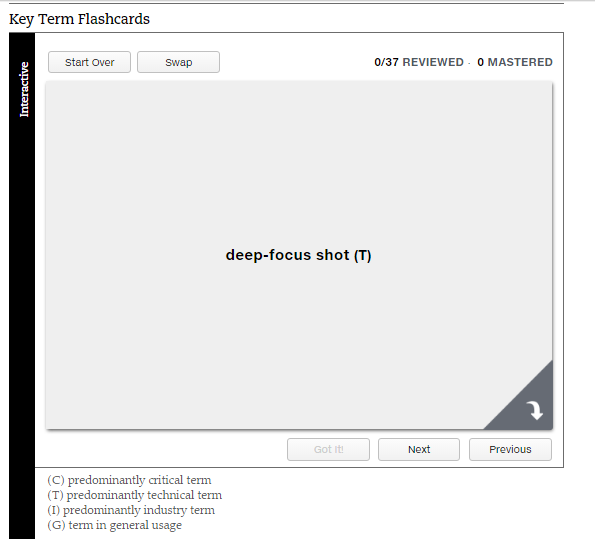
Each main section ends with a three- to five-question **multiple-choice quiz**.



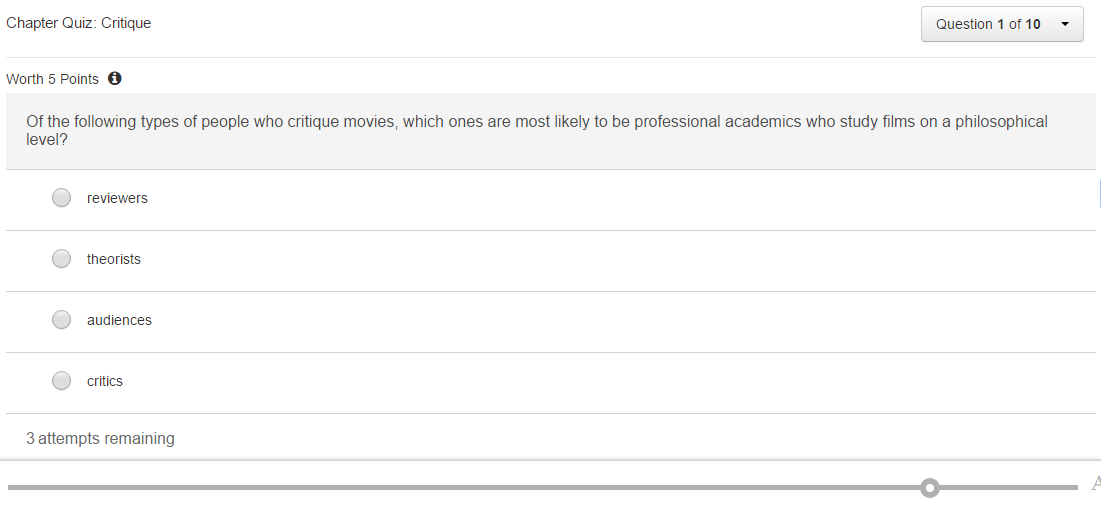
A variety of other interactive features integrated throughout each chapter also enhance student learning.

Every chapter ends with a **review** screen. The interactive elements on this screen provide students with opportunities to study the content of the chapter.

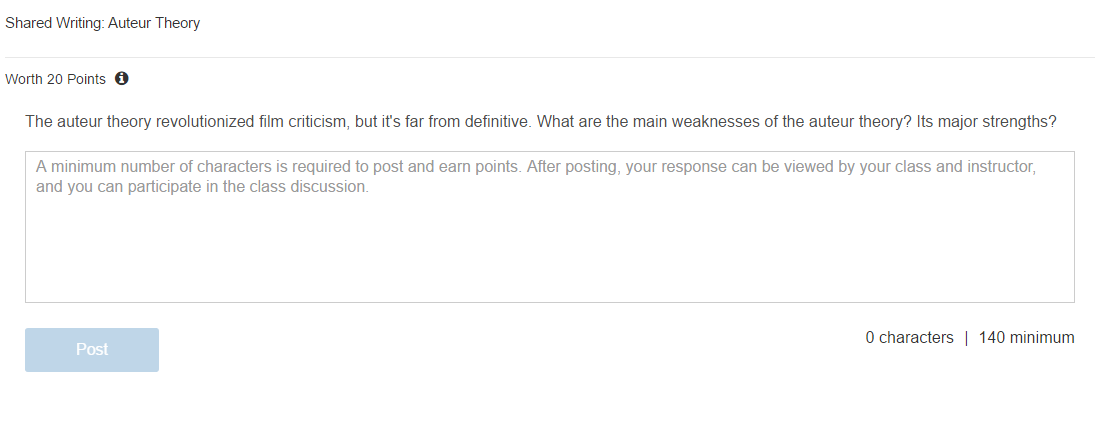
**Advanced flash cards** allow students to review and study each chapter’s key terms.



End-of-chapter material also includes a ten-question **chapter quiz** and a **shared writing** **prompt**.



The **shared writing prompt** serves as an online discussion for students in a specific class to apply and analyze an essential chapter concept through contribution and response with their peers.



**CHAPTER 1: PHOTOGRAPHY Learning Objectives**

1. Recognize the distinctions among the three principal styles of film and the three types of movies, and evaluate how the style affects the presentation of the story.
2. List the six basic categories of film shots and their purpose in developing the scene.
3. Describe the five basic angles in the cinema and what contextual information the audience derives from each choice.
4. Outline the various types of lighting styles used in film and the symbolic connotations of each.
5. Explain the way directors consciously use colors to symbolically enhance the film’s dramatic content.
6. Identify how lens, filters, and stocks can intensify given qualities within a shot, and suppress others.
7. Evaluate the changes that digital technologies have had on film production, editing, presentation, and distribution.
8. Assess the role of cinematographers in the filmmaking process and identify how they are able to consolidate the various elements of film photography.

**Outline**

1. Realism and Formalism

a. Even before 1900, movies began to develop in two major directions: the realistic and the formalistic

i. Lumiere brothers’ *The Arrival of a Train*

ii. Georges Melies’ *A Trip to the Moon*

b. styles in cinema:

i. realism

1. reproduces the surface of reality with a minimum

of distortion

1. preserves the illusion that the film world is unmanipulated

ii. formalism

1. deliberately stylizes and distort raw materials
2. the stylization calls attention to itself

iii. classicism

1. most fiction films fall somewhere between these two extremes
2. avoids the extremes of realism and formalism

c. types of films: documentary, fiction, avant-garde

2. The Shots

a. defined by the amount of subject matter that’s included within the frame of the screen

b. six basic categories of shots

i. extreme long shot

1. photographed from a great distance away

2. used as establishing shot

ii. long shot

* + - 1. roughly the same amount of space as the staging area of a large theater
      2. deep-focus shot

A. a long shot consisting of a number of focal distances and photographed in depth

B. sometimes called a wide-angle shot because it requires a wide-angle lens to photograph

iii. full shot

* + - 1. closest range within the long shot category
      2. just barely includes the human body in full

iv. medium shot

1. the shot of the couple

2. split focus rather than a single dominant focus

v. close-up

1. shows very little if any locale

2. concentrates on a relatively small object

vi. extreme close-up

3. The Angles

a. the angle from which an object is photographed

b. often serves as an authorial commentary on the subject matter

c. five basic angles in the cinema

i. bird’s-eye

1. directly overhead

2. permits us to hover above a scene like all-powerful gods

3. the people photographed seem vulnerable and insignificant

ii. high

* + - 1. not as extreme as bird’s-eye

1. often taken from a crane or high point to maximize locale
2. gives viewer a general overview
3. reduces the importance or power of a subject
4. slows movement

iii. eye-level

1. as if an observer were viewing the events

2. permits us to make up our own minds about what kind of people are being presented

iv. low

1. has the opposite effect of high

2. a person photographed from below inspires fear and awe

v. oblique

1. involves a lateral tilt of the camera

2. suggests tension, transition, and impending movement

4. Light and Dark

* 1. comedies and musicals tend to be lit in high key
  2. tragedies and melodramas are usually lit in high contrast
  3. mysteries, thrillers, and gangster films are generally lit in low key
  4. styles of lighting

i. high key: bright, even illumination and no conspicuous shadows

ii. low key: diffused shadows and atmospheric pools of light

iii. high contrast: harsh shafts of lights and dramatic streaks of blackness

1. lights and darks have had symbolic connotations in general, artists have used darkness to suggest fear, evil, the unknown
   * 1. light usually suggests security, virtue, truth, joy
     2. some filmmakers deliberately reverse light–dark expectations
2. three-point lighting
   * 1. cinematographers developed the technique during the Hollywood big-studio era
     2. the key light is the primary source of illumination, creates the dominant of an image
     3. fill lights, which are less intense than the key, soften the harshness of the main light source, revealing subsidiary details that would otherwise be hidden by shadow
     4. the backlights separate the foreground figures from their setting, heightening the illusion of three-dimensional depth in the image.
3. painterly versus linear styles
   * 1. a painterly style is soft-edged, sensuous, and romantic
     2. line is de-emphasized: colors and textures shimmer in a hazily defined, radiantly illuminated environment
     3. on the other hand, a linear style emphasizes drawing, sharply defined edges, and the supremacy of line over color and texture

5. Color

a. color tends to be a subconscious element in film

* + 1. strongly emotional in its appeal
    2. expressive and atmospheric rather than intellectual

b. since earliest times, visual artists have used color for symbolic purposes

* + 1. cool colors (blue, green, violet) tend to suggest tranquility, aloofness, and serenity
    2. cool colors also have a tendency to recede in an image
    3. warm colors (red, yellow, orange) suggest aggressiveness, violence, and stimulation
    4. they tend to come forward in most images

6. Lenses, Filters, and Stocks

a. lenses

* + 1. the camera’s lens is a crude mechanism compared to the human eye
    2. especially with regard to size and distance, the camera records things literally
    3. realist filmmakers tend to use normal, or standard, lenses to produce a minimum of distortion
    4. formalist filmmakers often prefer lenses and filters that intensify certain qualities and suppress others
    5. telephoto lenses produce a number of side effects that are sometimes exploited by directors for symbolic use
       1. most long lenses are in sharp focus on one distance plane only
       2. the longer the lens, the more sensitive it is to distances
       3. long lenses also flatten images, decreasing the sense of distance

1. wide-angle lenses, also called short lenses, have short focal lengths and wide angles of view
   * + 1. used in deep-focus shots
       2. preserve a sharpness of focus on virtually all distance planes
       3. the wider the angle, the more lines and shapes tend to warp
       4. movement toward or away from the camera is exaggerated when photographed with a short lens
       5. the fish-eye lens is the most extreme wide-angle modifier
   1. filters
2. used for purely cosmetic purposes to make an actor taller, slimmer, younger, or older
3. some trap light and refract it in such a way as to produce a diamond-like sparkle in the image
4. many filters are used to suppress or heighten certain colors
5. film stocks
   1. two basic categories: fast and slow
   2. fast stock is highly sensitive to light and in some cases can register images with no illumination except what’s available on location
   3. slow stock is relatively insensitive to light and requires as much as ten times more illumination than fast stocks
   4. traditionally, slow stocks are capable of capturing colors precisely, without washing them out
   5. fast stocks are commonly associated with documentary movies

7. The Digital Revolution

* 1. digital cinema combines television and computer technologies and is essentially electronic in nature
  2. the images are not stored on a filmstrip, but on memory cards and hard drives
  3. digital images can have a higher degree of clarity and resolution than celluloid images
  4. digital images are composed of “pixels” (short for picture elements) seen as tiny dots on the TV monitor
     1. the more pixels that make up an image, the closer it resembles the subject being photographed, with a minimum of distortion
     2. pixels are usually arranged on a two-dimensional grid
     3. the sharpness or resolution of an image is a function of the number of pixels it contains
     4. standard video screens have about 480 scan lines of visual information
     5. high-definition video (which is the favored form in cinema) has up to 1,080 scan lines

1. digital technology has revolutionized special effects in movies
2. digital video cameras are much more portable than big, clumsy 35mm film cameras
3. digital technology can save millions of dollars in motion picture production costs
4. complex makeup can also be created digitally
5. computer-generated images can be stored for future use
6. traditional animation is being replaced by computer generated animation
7. digital editing is also much easier than traditional methods
8. digital technology is making motion picture distribution and exhibition cheaper
9. computer-generated images have radically undermined the traditional distinctions between realism and formalism in film theory

8. The Cinematographer

* 1. director is generally the dominant artist in the best movies
  2. the principal collaborators—actors, writers, cinematographers—perform according to the director’s unifying sensibility
  3. sweeping statements about the role of the cinematographer are impossible to make
     + - 1. varies widely from film to film and from director to director
         2. virtually all cinematographers agree that the style of the photography should be geared to the story, theme, and mood of the film

1. during the big-studio era—roughly from 1925 to 1955—most cinematographers believed that the aesthetic elements of a film should be maximized
2. beautiful pictures with beautiful people was the goal
3. today such views are considered rigid and doctrinaire
4. “Many times, what you don’t see is much more effective than what you do see,” the late Gordon Willis noted.
5. realist directors are especially likely to prefer an unobtrusive style
6. there are far more films in which the only interesting or artistic quality is the cinematography

**Summary**

Critics and scholars categorize movies according to a variety of criteria. Two of the most common methods of classification are by style and by type. The three principal styles—realism, classicism, and formalism—might be regarded as a continuous spectrum of possibilities, rather than airtight categories. Similarly, the three types of movies—documentaries, fiction, and avant-garde films—are also terms of convenience, for they often overlap.

Even before 1900, movies began to develop in two major directions: the realistic and the formalistic. The three styles of film, identified as realism, formalism, and classicism are general rather than absolute terms, and in the end, are really just labels.

Generally speaking, realistic films attempt to reproduce the surface of reality with a minimum of distortion. Formalists, on the other hand, deliberately stylize and distort their raw materials so that no one would mistake a manipulated image of an object or event for the real thing. Classical cinema can be viewed as an intermediate style that avoids the extremes of realism and formalism.

Few films are exclusively one style over the others. Virtually all film directors go to the photographable world for their subject matter. What they do with this material captured by the camera lens, and how they shape and manipulate it, determines the eventual style the viewer perceives in the finished product.

The shots are defined by the amount of subject matter that’s included within the frame of the screen. In general, shots are determined on the basis of how much of the human figure is in view. The shot is not necessarily defined by the distance between the camera and the object photographed. In actual practice, shot designations vary considerably.

Although there are many different kinds of shots in the cinema, most of them are subsumed under the six basic categories: (1) the extreme long shot; (2) the long shot; (3) the full shot; (4) the medium shot; (5) the close-up; and (6) the extreme close-up. The deep-focus shot is usually a variation of the long shot, consisting of a number of focal distances and photographed in depth.

The angle from which an object is photographed can often serve as an authorial commentary on the subject matter. There are five basic angles in the cinema: (1) the bird’s-eye view; (2) the high angle; (3) the eye-level shot; (4) the low angle; and (5) the oblique angle.

If the angle is slight, it can serve as a subtle form of emotional coloration. If the angle is extreme, it can represent the major meaning of an image. The angle is determined by where the camera is placed, not the subject photographed. Film realists tend to avoid extreme angles. Formalist directors are concerned with the angle that best captures the essential nature of the subject. Extreme angles involve distortions. By distorting the surface realism of an object, a greater truth may be achieved—a symbolic truth.

The use of light and shadow can also create mood and emotional impact. The illumination of most movies is seldom a casual matter, for lights can be used with pinpoint accuracy. There are a number of different styles of lighting. Usually designated as a lighting key, the style is geared to the theme and mood of a film, as well as its genre. Comedies and musicals tend to be lit in high key, with bright, even illumination and no conspicuous shadows. Tragedies and melodramas are usually lit in high contrast, with harsh shafts of lights and dramatic streaks of blackness. Mysteries, thrillers, and gangster films are generally in low key, with diffused shadows and atmospheric pools of light.

Lights and darks have had symbolic connotations. In general, artists have used darkness to suggest fear, evil, the unknown. Light usually suggests security, virtue, truth, joy. Lighting can be used realistically or expressionistically. The realist favors available lighting, at least in exterior scenes. Formalists use light less literally. They are guided by its symbolic implications and will often stress these qualities by deliberately distorting natural light patterns.

During the Hollywood big-studio era, cinematographers developed the technique of three-point lighting, which is still widely practiced throughout the world. With three-point lighting, the key light is the primary source of illumination. Fill lights, which are less intense than the key, soften the harshness of the main light source. Backlights separate the foreground figures from their setting.

A painterly lighting style is soft-edged, sensuous, and romantic, best typified by the Impressionists. Line is de-emphasized: Colors and textures shimmer in a hazily defined, radiantly illuminated environment. On the other hand, a linear style emphasizes drawing, sharply defined edges, and the supremacy of line over color and texture.

Color in film didn’t become commercially widespread until the 1940s.Sophisticated film color was developed in the 1930s, but for many years a major problem was its tendency to prettify everything.

Color tends to be a subconscious element in film. It’s strongly emotional in its appeal, expressive and atmospheric rather than intellectual. Since earliest times, visual artists have used color for symbolic purposes. In general, cool colors (blue, green, violet) tend to suggest tranquility, aloofness, and serenity. Cool colors also have a tendency to recede in an image. Warm colors (red, yellow, orange) suggest aggressiveness, violence, and stimulation. They tend to come forward in most images.

Because the camera lens is so primitive compared with the human eye, some of the most striking effects in a movie image can be achieved through the distortions of the photographic process, using appropriate lenses, filters, and stocks.

Realist filmmakers tend to use normal, or standard, lenses to produce a minimum of distortion. These lenses photograph subjects more or less as they are perceived by the human eye. Formalist filmmakers often prefer lenses and filters that intensify certain qualities and suppress others.

Long lenses tend to flatten images, decreasing the sense of distance between depth planes. Two people standing yards apart might look inches away when photographed with a telephoto lens.

The wide-angle lenses, also called short lenses, have short focal lengths and wide angles of view. These are the lenses used in deep-focus shots, for they preserve a sharpness of focus on virtually all distance planes. The wider the angle, the more lines and shapes tend to warp, especially at the edges of the image. Distances between various depth planes are also exaggerated with these lenses.

Film stocks fall into two basic categories: fast and slow. Fast stock is highly sensitive to light and in some cases can register images with no illumination except what’s available on location, even in nighttime sequences. Slow stock is relatively insensitive to light and requires as much as ten times more illumination than fast stocks.

Digital technology has radically changed how movies are photographed, how they are edited, how they are distributed, and how they are shown to the public. Introduced in the 1980s and refined in the 1990s, digital technology has, for all intents and purposes, replaced the celluloid technology that dominated the motion picture industry for over a hundred years.

Digital cinema combines television and computer technologies and is essentially electronic in nature. The images are not stored on a filmstrip, but on memory cards and hard drives. Digital images can have a higher degree of clarity and resolution than celluloid.

Digital images are composed of “pixels” (short for picture elements), which can be seen as tiny dots on the TV monitor. Because these pixels can be easily manipulated by computer, digital technology has revolutionized special effects in movies.

Digital video cameras are much more portable than the big, clumsy 35mm film cameras. Digital video is also cheap. Digital video can save movie producers millions in other costs such as in editing, which is also much easier than traditional methods, as well as in distribution and exhibition of movies. Traditional animation, with its time-consuming, hand-drawn celluloid images, is also being replaced by computers, which produce images that are created digitally, not by hand.

The cinematographer plays a vital role in the creation of a film. Generally speaking, the cinematographer (who is also known as the director of photography, or D.P.) is responsible for arranging and controlling the lighting of a film and the quality of the photography. Usually the cinematographer executes the specific or general instructions of the director.

The collaborative work between this person and the director shapes the overall vision of the film and how it will look onscreen. Of course, certain directors take more control over this vision than others, but the cinematographer is still the person who oversees the camera crew. Films worth discussing include any Hitchcock film*, Traffic,* and *Days of Heaven.*

**Active Learning Assignments**

**Learning Objective 2. List the six basic categories of film shots and their purpose in developing the scene; and Learning Objective 3. Describe the five basic angles in the cinema and what contextual information the audience derives from each choice.**

1. Watch the “Cropduster, Highway 41” scene from Alfred Hitchcock’s *North by Northwest* (available on YouTube). List all the camera shots and angles used by the filmmaker. Which shots do you think are the most effective? Why? How would you characterize the style of this scene? Realist? Formalist? Classical? Why?

**Learning Objective 1. Recognize the distinctions among the three principal styles of film and the three types of movies, and evaluate how the style affects the presentation of the story.**

1. Make a list of science fiction or western films you’ve seen and then a list of comedies or romantic comedies. Now think about which category of film, sci-fi/western or comedy/rom-com, uses which shots and angles most often. Does one genre use more long and extreme-long shots than the other? What about medium shots and two-shots? If you think there is a difference, explain why. Do you think there are any hard-and-fast rules when it comes to shooting any particular genre of film?

**Learning Objective 7. Evaluate the changes that digital technologies have had on film production, editing, presentation, and distribution.**

1. Compare two scenes, one from the original *War of the Worlds (1953)* and one from the most recent remake by Steven Spielberg in 2005. Explain how special effects have changed from one film to the other, in terms of the technical capabilities available to the production team, and also how those effects strengthen or weaken the narrative.

**In-class Discussion Questions and Answers**

**Learning Objective 1. Recognize the distinctions among the three principal styles of film and the three types of movies, and evaluate how the style affects the presentation of the story.**

1. **Question:** *Gold Diggers of 1933* presents us with a unique cinematic experience, especially with respect to style. What type of film is this, documentary, fiction, or avant-garde? Or is it a mixture of one or more of these types? Why? What filmmaking style best describes this film: realist, formalist, or classical? Why?

**Consider:**

* The choreographies of Busby Berkeley are triumphs of artifice, far removed from the real world. Depression-weary audiences flocked to movies like this precisely to get away from everyday reality. They wanted magic and enchantment, not reminders of their real-life problems.
* Berkeley’s style was the most formalized of all choreographers.
* He liberated the camera from the narrow confines of the proscenium arch, soaring overhead, even swirling among the dancers, and juxtaposing shots from a variety of vantage points throughout the musical numbers.
* He often photographed his dancers from unusual angles.
* Sometimes he didn’t even bother using dancers at all, preferring a uniform contingent of good-looking young women who are used primarily as semiabstract visual units, like bits of glass in a shifting kaleidoscope of formal patterns.

**Learning Objective 5. Explain the way directors consciously use colors to symbolically enhance the film’s dramatic content.**

1. **Question:** How does color, or the lack of it, create mood and atmosphere in Vittorio De Sica’s *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis*? Why did De Sica shoot the film in color? Why didn’t he just shoot the film in black-and-white? Why do you think he did not mix color and black-and-white?

**Consider:**

* Since earliest times, visual artists have used color for symbolic purposes. In general, cool colors (blue, green, violet) tend to suggest tranquility, aloofness, and serenity. Cool colors also have a tendency to recede in an image.
* Warm colors (red, yellow, orange) suggest aggressiveness, violence, and stimulation. They tend to come forward in most images.
* Black-and-white photography in a color film is sometimes used for symbolic purposes. Some filmmakers alternate whole episodes in black and white with entire sequences in color.
* The problem with this technique is its corny symbolism. The jolting black-and-white sequences are too obviously “significant” in the most arty sense. A more effective variation is simply not to use too much color, to let black and white predominate.
* In De Sica’s *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis*, which is set in Fascist Italy, the early portions of the movie are richly resplendent in shimmering golds, reds, and almost every shade of green.
* As political repression becomes more brutal, these colors almost imperceptibly begin to wash out, until near the end of the film the images are dominated by whites, blacks, and blue-grays.

**Learning Objective 7. Evaluate the changes that digital technologies have had on film production, editing, presentation, and distribution.**

1. **Question:** In *Life of Pi*, the special effects are so realistic they almost convince us that we’re actually seeing the young protagonist sharing a lifeboat with a ferocious tiger. Explain why this might be a problem in categorizing this film as realist or formalist in style? Explain why you think the filmmakers chose to use digital effects as opposed to a real tiger for example? What was the result of the audience viewing the film in 3-D? Did it change the style at all?

**Consider:**

* Critic Stephen Prince has observed that such technological advancements as computer-generated images have radically undermined the traditional distinctions between realism and formalism in film theory. Why do you think that is?
* In *Life of Pi*, the tiger was not a real tiger, but was created by CGI (computer-generated imagery). The tiger was created by hundreds of artists at Rhythm & Hues, based in Los Angeles.
* Most of the movie takes place within the narrow confines of the boat. Is this important?
* The crew viewed film footage of actual tigers before constructing their digital tiger. Why?
* The 3-D is strikingly realistic, as the tiger seems to be snarling, growling, and lunging at the viewer—a perfect demonstration that realism is not always based on reality.

**CHAPTER 2: MISE EN SCÈNE Learning Objectives**

1. Identify the two main screen aspect ratios and evaluate how directors have used masks and other techniques in order to both enhance and overcome them.
2. Analyze the way the human eye perceives a composition and the way design and the geography of the frame is used to enhance a thematic idea.
3. Describe how the three visual planes suggest depth in a scene and how the use of this territory can act as a means of communication.
4. Diagram the five basic positions in which an actor can be photographed, and describe the different psychological undertones of each.
5. Explain the four main proxemic patterns in film and culture, and describe how the distances between characters can be used to establish the nature of their relationships.
6. Illustrate why open and closed forms serve as two distinct attitudes about reality and list in which circumstances they each prove most effective.

**Outline**

Introduction to mise en scène (“placing on stage”)

phrase refers to the arrangement of all the visual elements of a theatrical production within a given playing area—the stage

in movies, mise en scène is more complicated, a blend of the visual conventions of the live theater with those of painting

1. filmmaker arranges objects and people within a given three-dimensional space
2. once this arrangement is photographed, it’s converted into a two-dimensional image of the real thing
3. mise en scène in the movies resembles the art of painting in that an image of formal patterns and shapes is presented on a flat surface and is enclosed within a frame
4. cinematic mise en scène is also a fluid choreographing of visual elements that are constantly in flux
5. The Frame

a. functions of the frame

i. each movie image enclosed by the frame of the screen

ii. defines the world of the film

iii. separates it from the actual world of the darkened auditorium

iv. film is temporal as well as spatial

v. single-frame image from a movie is necessarily an artificially

frozen moment

b. aspect ratios for film, television, and video

i. most movies projected in one of two aspect ratios: 1.85:1 (standard) and 2.35:1 (widescreen)

ii. television used to have aspect ratio of 1.33:1

iii. today television has a wider aspect ratio, but still not as wide as most theatrical widescreens

c. frame as an aesthetic device

i. in traditional visual arts, frame dimensions are governed by nature of subject matter

ii. in movies, frame ratio is standardized and isn’t necessarily governed by nature of materials being photographed

iii. constant size of movie frame is especially hard to overcome in vertical compositions

iv. as an aesthetic device, the frame performs in several ways

1. the sensitive director is just as concerned with what’s left out of frame as with what’s included

2. frame is thus essentially an isolating device

d. symbolic implications within the frame and off-frame

i. some directors like Hitchcock use the frame voyeuristically

ii. placement within the frame is another instance of how form is actually content

iii. each of the major sections of the frame—center, top, bottom, and sides— can be exploited for such symbolic purposes

1. central portions of the screen generally reserved for the most important visual elements, and a kind of norm

2. area near the top of the frame can suggest ideas dealing with power, authority, and aspiration

3. bottom of frame tends to suggest meanings opposite from the top: subservience, vulnerability, and powerlessness

4. left and right edges of the frame tend to suggest insignificance

5. there are instances when a director places the most important visual elements completely off-frame—especially when character is associated with darkness, mystery, or death

6. two other off-frame areas can be exploited for symbolic purposes: the space behind the set and the space in front of the camera

e. circular history of motion picture viewing

3. Composition and Design

a. one of the primary problems facing the filmmaker is much like that confronting the painter: the arrangement of shapes, colors, lines, and textures on a flat rectangular surface

b. in classical cinema, this arrangement is generally held in some kind of balance harmonious equilibrium

c. when a visual artist wishes to stress a lack of equilibrium, many of the standard conventions of classical composition are deliberately violated

d. human eye automatically attempts to harmonize the formal elements of a composition into a unified whole

i. the eye can detect as many as seven or eight major elements of a composition simultaneously

ii. in most cases, however, the eye doesn’t wander promiscuously over the surface of an image but is guided to specific areas in sequence

1. through the use of a dominant contrast

2. after we take in the dominant, our eye then scans the subsidiary contrasts subsidiary contrasts

e. generally, visual interest of the dominant corresponds with the dramatic interest of the image

f. because films have temporal and dramatic contexts, however, the dominant is often movement itself

i. some aestheticians call this intrinsic interest

ii. movement is almost always an automatic dominant contrast

iii. importance of motion varies with the kind of shot used

g. visual confusion can result when there are more than eight or nine major compositional elements

h. compositional elements (weights. and their location within the frame

i. for instance, we tend to scan pictures from left to right

ii. upper part of the composition is heavier than the lower

iii. images seem more balanced when the center of gravity is kept low

iv. isolated figures and objects tend to be heavier than those in a cluster

i. certain lines suggest directional movements

i. horizontal lines tend to move from left to right

ii. vertical lines, from bottom to top

iii. diagonal lines are more dynamic—they tend to sweep upward

j. a skeletal structure underlies most visual compositions

i. artists have favored S and X shapes, triangular designs, and circles

ii. binary structures emphasize parallelism

iii. triadic compositions stress the dynamic interplay

iv. circular compositions can suggest security, enclosure, the female principle

4. Territorial Space

a. since most movie images deal with the illusion of volume and depth, the film director must keep these spatial considerations in mind while composing the visuals

b. filmmakers compose on three visual planes: foreground, middle, and background

c. space is a medium of communication, and the way we respond to objects and people within a given area is a constant source of information in life as well as in movies

i. findings of psychologists and anthropologists—including Konrad Lorenz, Robert Sommers, and Edward T. Hall—are revealing in terms of how space is used in cinema

ii. in his study *On Aggression*, Lorenz discusses how most animals—including humans—are territorial

iii. territories have a spatial hierarchy of power

iv. space is one of the principal mediums of communication in film

v. the way that people are arranged in space can tell us a lot about their social psychological relationships

vi. in film, dominant characters are almost always given more space to occupy than others

vii. the amount of space taken up by a character in a movie relates to their dramatic importance

d. the five ways of photographing an actor

i. full front—facing the camera

ii. quarter turn

iii. profile—looking off frame left or right

iv. three-quarter turn

v. back to camera

e. because the viewer identifies with the camera’s lens, the positioning of the actor vis-à-vis the camera will determine many of our reactions.

f. the more we see of the actor’s face, the greater our sense of privileged intimacy; the less we see, the more mysterious and inaccessible the actor will seem

g. tightly framed versus loosely framed shots

i. generally, the closer the shot the more confined the photographed figures appear to be; such shots are usually referred to as tightly framed

ii. conversely, longer, loosely framed shots tend to suggest freedom

h. the psychology of territorial space

5. Proxemic Patterns

a. anthropologist Edward T. Hall demonstrated that **proxemic patterns**—the relationships of organisms within a given space—can be influenced by external considerations

b. Hall subdivided the way people use space into four major proxemic patterns

i. intimate: from skin contact to about eighteen inches away

ii. personal: from eighteen inches to about four feet away

iii. social: from four feet to about twelve feet

iv. public distances: from twelve feet to twenty-five feet and more

c. proxemic patterns and their camera shot equivalents

i. the intimate: close and extreme close shot

ii. the personal: medium close range

iii. the social: the medium and full shot ranges

iv. the public distances: long and extreme long shot ranges

d. in general, the greater the distance between the camera and the subject, the more emotionally neutral we remain.

e. usually, director selects the shot that most clearly conveys the dramatic action of a scene.

f. 3-D movies and the expansion into the “fourth wall”

6. Open and Closed Forms

a. open forms

i. emphasize informal, unobtrusive compositions

ii. seem to have no discernible structure and suggest a random form of organization

iii. objects and figures seem to have been found rather than deliberately arranged

b. closed forms

i. emphasize a more stylized design

ii. although such images can suggest a superficial realism, seldom do they have the accidental, discovered look that typifies open forms

iii. objects and figures are more precisely placed within the frame, and the balance of weights is elaborately worked out

c. realism and formalism

i. generally, realist filmmakers tend to use open forms

ii. formalists lean toward closed forms

d. the use of the frame in open forms

i. in open-form images, frame tends to be de-emphasized

ii. suggests a window, a temporary masking

iii. implies that more important information lies outside the edges of the composition

iv. space is continuous in these shots

v. to emphasize its continuity outside the frame, directors often favor panning their camera across the locale

vi. shot seems inadequate, too narrow in its confines to contain the copiousness of the subject matter

e. the use of the frame in closed forms

i. shot represents a miniature proscenium arch

ii. all necessary information carefully structured within the confines of frame.

iii. space seems enclosed and self-contained rather than continuous

iv. elements outside the frame are irrelevant, at least in terms of the formal properties of the individual shot, which is isolated from its context in space and time

f. in open-form movies, the dramatic action generally leads the camera

i. such anticipatory setups tend to imply fatality or determinism

ii. the camera seems to know what will happen even before it occurs

g. in closed-form films, the camera often anticipates the dramatic action

i. tend to imply destiny and the futility of the will

ii. characters don’t seem to make the important decisions; camera does—and in advance

h. fifteen visual principles of mise en scène

* + 1. Dominant: Where is our eye attracted first? Why?
    2. Lighting key: High key? Low key? High contrast? Some combination of these?
    3. Shot and camera proxemics: What type of shot? How far away is the camera from the action?
    4. Angle: Are we (and the camera) looking up or down on the subject? Or is the camera neutral (eye level)?
    5. Color values: What is the dominant color? Are there contrasting foils? Is there any color symbolism?
    6. Lens/filter/stock: How do these distort or comment on the photographed materials?
    7. Subsidiary contrasts: What are the main eye-stops after taking in the dominant?
    8. Density: How much visual information is packed into the image? Is the texture stark, moderate, or highly detailed?
    9. Composition: How is the two-dimensional space segmented and organized? What is the underlying design?
    10. Form: Open or closed? Does the image suggest a window that arbitrarily isolates a fragment of the scene? Or a proscenium arch, in which the visual elements are carefully arranged and held in balance?
    11. Framing: Tight or loose? Do the characters have no room to move around, or can they move freely without impediments?
    12. Depth: On how many planes is the image composed? Does the background or foreground comment in any way on the midground?
    13. Character placement: What part of the framed space do the characters occupy? Center? Top? Bottom? Edges? Why?
    14. Staging positions: Which way do the characters look vis-à-vis the camera?
    15. Character proxemics: How much space is there between the characters?

**Summary**

Mise en scène is basically the arrangement of all the visual elements of a scene within a film. It is a blend of the visual conventions of live theater with those of painting. As a result, it is an art that is intimately linked with cinematography. There are formal elements at work in mise en scène, that when used effectively, create a successful interpretation of what we see on screen.

The “frame” as used in cinema, is a defined area of visual and narrative activity. It functions as the basis of composition in a movie image. One of the primary factors that filmmakers must consider when composing the contents of a frame of film is the *aspect ratio* that will be used. That is the ratio of the frame’s vertical and horizontal dimensions as it will look on a movie theater or television screen. As an aesthetic device, the frame performs in several ways. The sensitive director is just as concerned with what’s left out of the frame as with what’s included. The framing of visual content for a film implies symbolism and metaphor. The major sections of the frame—center, top, bottom, and sides—can all imply psychological and emotive meanings. This also is true for what may be off-frame. Motion picture viewing has come full circle from early peepshows to IMAX 3-D screens and now returning to the miniature screens of cellphones.

The composition and design of what we see on the screen is an important process for the filmmaker. How the content of the frame is presented to us helps us determine what is important and what is not when interpreting the narrative. Patterns are the key to creating a sense of narrative continuity. We are guided in this process through the use of *dominant* and *subsidiary contrasts*. Included in the prominence of *dominant contrast*, as our guide to following the narrative, is *intrinsic interest*. Also, movement and motion, which are part and parcel of *dominant contrast,* contribute to the content of the frame. They point out for us what is significant and what is not. The compositional elements (weights of shape, color, and texture), when distributed across the frame either balanced or asymmetrical, help create a psychological mood and convey the narrative as the filmmaker perceives it. One must remember that cinematic design is generally fused with a thematic idea. The number of characters seen in any given frame of film can create stable or unstable points within the narrative.

Film is an art form that exists in time and space. But film, despite being displayed on a two-dimensional surface, also creates the illusion of depth and three-dimensional space. The film director must always be aware of this in his creation of the visuals. The primary manner in accomplishing a sense of three-dimensionality in film is the use of all three areas of the frame: foreground, middle, and background. One of the most elementary, yet crucial, decisions the film director makes is how much detail should be included within the frame. Along with this is the determination of where the camera should be in relation to the subject, which in turn means how close do *we* get to the subject. The spatial relation between us, and who we see on screen, involves the notion of *territories*, which have a spatial hierarchy of power. The main characters in a film’s narrative tend to occupy more visual and dramatic space. Thus, the way an actor can be photographed, five positions in all, determines how we react to them and interpret the narrative. This also closely follows along with the idea that the frame itself is a territory, and thus *tightly framed* and *loosely framed* shots shape our interpretations of the frame’s contents. When everything is finally put together in a frame, it becomes apparent that territorial space can be manipulated with considerable psychological complexity.

Anthropological studies of *proxemic patterns*, the relationships of organisms within a given space and the influence of external factors such as light, noise, and climate, can be applied to filmmaking. There are four major proxemic patterns: intimate, personal, social, and public. These patterns can have associated camera position equivalents, which will assist the viewer’s interpretation of the scene. The choice of a shot is generally determined by practical considerations. If there is a conflict between the effect of certain proxemic ranges and the clarity needed to convey what’s going on, most filmmakers will opt for clarity and gain their emotional impact through some other means. The popularity of 3-D movies has added a new dimension to territorial space: 3-D makes the depth of an image much more realistic than the conventional illusion of depth in two dimensions. This can engage the viewer even more as the image moves into the personal space of the viewer. This new realism combined with surround sound takes the viewer into a realm of total immersion, and closer to their perception of the real world.

The concepts of *open* and *closed forms* are generally used by art historians and critics, but these terms can also be useful in film analysis. In practical applications, they are best used in a relative rather than absolute sense. No film is completely one or the other, but rather gravitates to one type. These terms are used only to help understand the level of reality presented in the film’s narrative. Open and closed forms are loosely related to the concepts of realism and formalism discussed in this text. In general, realist filmmakers use open forms, which emphasize informal, unobtrusive compositions and are stylistically recessive. Open forms use imagery that has no discernible structure and suggest a random form of organization. The open form film allows the dramatic action to lead the camera, and the frame is de-emphasized. Formalist filmmakers tend to use closed forms, which emphasize a more stylized design. Objects and figures are more precisely placed within the frame, and the balance of weights is elaborately worked out. Closed forms are generally self-conscious and visually appealing. The closed form film allows the camera to anticipate the dramatic action. Open and closed forms are most effective in movies where these techniques are appropriate to the subject matter. A systematic mise en scène analysis of any given shot includes fifteen elements. These fifteen visual principles can be applied to any image analysis. Applying these principles can help us train our eyes to “read” a movie image with more critical sophistication.

While mise en scène is just as important to realism as it is to classicism and formalism, it is generally easier for students to perceive and discuss the self-consciously artistic visual designs of more formalistic films. Two good examples, *Amadeus* and *Dangerous Liaisons,* are excellent studies for mise en scène analysis.

**Active Learning Assignments**

**Learning Objective 6. Illustrate why open and closed forms serve as two distinct attitudes about reality and list in which circumstances they each prove most effective.**

1. Define open and closed forms. Pick one scene from the first half of *Full Metal Jacket* and one from the second half of the film that contrast form. What does the choice of compositional form say about the characters? What does it say about the theme of the movie? Does Kubrick change the predominant form from the first half of the film to the second? If so, what might this transition mean in terms of the dramatic context and the narrative?

**Learning Objective 5. Explain the four main proxemic patterns in film and culture, and describe how the distances between characters can be used to establish the nature of their relationships.**

1. How is the concept of “territorial space” defined and used in filmmaking? What are the concerns of the director when working with space and its illusion on-screen? Along with territories, how do tightly framed and loosely framed shots shape our interpretations of the frame’s contents? Use examples from *The Graduate* to aid in this discussion, and have the students explain the “spatial hierarchy of power” found in several scenes of this film.

**Learning Objective 1. Identify the two main screen aspect ratios and evaluate how directors have used masks and other techniques in order to both enhance and overcome them.**

1. View a scene shot in widescreen and one shot in a traditional aspect ratio (for example, a scene from *Lawrence of Arabia* and a scene from *Rush Hour)*. Discuss how changing the aspect ratio can change the meaning of a particular shot, scene, or even whole movie. Does genre matter in the choice of an aspect ratio? Do some film genres work better in widescreen?

**In-class Discussion Questions and Answers:**

**Learning Objective 2. Analyze the way the human eye perceives a composition and the way design and the geography of the frame is used to enhance a thematic idea.**

**1.** **Question:** Compare and contrast two scenes that have the same characters in them but use different framing techniques for composing the images, for example, from a movie like *The Good Thief* or *Finding Neverland*.

**Consider:**

* Where to put the camera is perhaps the most important decision a film director makes before shooting a scene.
* What do the differences in framing imply about the characters?
* Does the dramatic context affect the meaning of the framing?

**Learning Objective 4. Diagram the five basic positions in which an actor can be photographed, and describe the different psychological undertones of each.**

**2. Question:** View two scenes from *Like Water for Chocolate* that have the same character in them, but that photograph them from different angles or camera placementsand discuss the differences in how the scenes reveal story and character.

**Consider:**

* Do the scenes use different proxemic traits or the same?
* What do the proxemics imply about the relationships between the characters?
* Does the dramatic context affect the meaning of the proxemics?

**Learning Objective 2. Analyze the way the human eye perceives a composition and the way design and the geography of the frame is used to enhance a thematic idea.**

**3. Question:** Name the fifteen visual principles used for mise en scène analysis, and apply them to a scene of your choice from the Coen Brothers’ *Blood Simple*.

**Consider:**

* What techniques of mise en scène, if any, do the Coen Brothers emphasize in this film?
* What techniques do they use only minimally?
* Does the film rely on open or closed forms?
* Is the framing predominantly tight or loose?
* Based on your analysis of the mise en scène, is *Blood Simple* a realistic or formalistic film? Why? What evidence can you show to support your answer?

**CHAPTER 3: MOVEMENT Learning Objectives**

1. Describe the three main types of motion and kinetic arts, and explain how each type can be affected by stylization.
2. Illustrate the basic ways that movement is used within the genres of slapstick comedies, action films, dance movies, animation, and musicals.
3. Compare the kinetic richness within the staged choreography of dance sequences and action scenes.
4. Explain the psychology of movement on the screen, and how it can create an emotional response based on the depth of the shot, motion of the camera, and the camera’s lens.
5. Identify the seven basic moving camera shots and the different psychological meanings implied by each.
6. Differentiate the five basic distortions of film movement.

**Outline**

1. Cinema derives from the Greek word for “movement,” as do the words *kinetic, kinesthesia,* and *choreography*—terms usually associated with the art of dance

2. Kinetics (the art of motion)

a. relating film genres to movement

i. a naturalistic actor like Bruce Willis uses only realistic movements

ii. pantomimists like Charles Chaplin tended to use motion more balletically, more symbolically

iii. even more stylized are the movements of performers in a musical

b. intrinsic meanings associated with various portions of the frame are closely related to the significance of certain kinds of movements

i. upward motion seems soaring and free because it conforms to the eye’s natural tendency to move upward over a composition

ii. movements in this direction often suggest aspiration, joy, power, and authority

iii. downward movements suggest opposite ideas: grief, death, insignificance, depression, weakness

c. psychological implications of movement

i. because the eye tends to read a picture from left to right, physical movement in this direction seems psychologically natural

ii. movement from right to left often seems inexplicably tense and uncomfortable

iii. movement toward or away from the camera is somewhat like a character moving toward or away from us

1. movement toward the audience is generally strong and assertive, suggesting confidence on the part of the moving character

2. movement away from the camera tends to decrease the intensity and the character seems to grow remote

d. lateral movement vs. depth on the screen

i. generally, if the character moves from right to left (or vice versa, he or she will seem determined and efficient

ii. lateral movements tend to emphasize speed and efficiency

iii. when a character moves in or out of the depth of a scene, the effect is often one of slowness

iv. when depth movement is photographed in an uninterrupted lengthy take, the audience tends to anticipate the conclusion of the movement

e. movement in relation to shots and angles

i. distance and angle from which movement is photographed determine much of its meaning

ii. the longer and higher the shot, the slower the movement tends to appear

iii. from close and low angles, movement seems more intense, speeded up

f. movement vs. stasis

i. movement in film is a subtle issue, for it’s necessarily dependent on the kind of shot used

ii. neither movement or stasis is more “intrinsically filmic” than the other

iii. epic and psychological movies use movement in different ways, with emphasis on different shots

1. epic movies usually depend on the longer shots for their effects

2. psychological films tend to use the closer shots

3. one stresses action, the other reaction

iv. two filmmakers can approach the same story and produce totally different results

1. *Hamlet* is a good example

2. Olivier vs. Zeffirelli

v. conveying emotions through kinetic symbolism

1. Sergei Eisenstein’s *Old and New*

2. Charles Vidor’s *Ladies in Retirement*

3. ecstasy and joy are often expressed by expansive motions

4. fear by a variety of tentative or trembling movements

5. eroticism can be conveyed through the use of undulating motions

vi. minimalist movement

1. Ozu and Bresson

2. experiments in restricted movement such as in *Buried*

3. The Moving Camera

a. background

i. before the 1920s, filmmakers tended to confine camera movements to the subject photographed

ii. in the 1920s, such German filmmakers as F. W. Murnau and E. A. Dupont moved the camera within the shot not only for physical reasons but for psychological and thematic reasons

iii. a major problem of the moving camera involves time

iv. films that use this technique extensively tend to seem slow-moving since moving in or out of a scene is more time consuming than a straight cut

v. a director must decide whether moving the camera is worth the film time involved

vi. and whether the movement warrants the additional technical and budgetary complications

b. There are seven basic moving camera shots: pan; tilt, dolly, handheld, crane, zoom, and aerial shots

i. panning

1. scan a scene horizontally from a stationary point

2. most common use is to keep the subject within frame

3. swish pan used for transitions

4. emphasize unity of space and connectedness of people and objects

ii. tilting

1. vertical movements of the camera around a stationary horizontal axis

2. used to keep subjects within frame, to emphasize spatial and psychological interrelationships, to suggest simultaneity, and to emphasize cause–effect relationships

3. Since a tilt is a change in angle, it is often used to suggest a psychological shift within a character

iii. dollying

1. sometimes called trucking or tracking shots

2. taken from a moving vehicle (dolly)

3. useful technique in point-of-view shots for capturing a sense of movement in or out of a scene

4. moving the camera enhances three-dimensional space: It seems to put the spectator into the space

5. if the experience of the movement itself is important, the director

is more likely to dolly; otherwise will use a cut

6. a common function of traveling shots is to provide an ironic contrast with dialogue

7. one of the most common uses of dolly shots is to emphasize psychological rather than literal revelations

iv. handheld

1. generally less lyrical, more noticeable than vehicular shots

2. usually mounted with a harness on the cinematographer’s shoulder

3. originally used by documentarists to permit them to shoot in nearly every kind of location

v. crane

1. essentially airborne dolly shots

2. employ a kind of mechanical arm, often more than twenty feet in length

3. steadicam often replaces crane shots today

vi. zoom

1. don’t usually involve the actual movement of the camera

2. a combination of lenses, which are continuously variable, permitting the camera to change from close wide-angle distances to extreme telephoto positions (and vice versa. almost simultaneously

3. can zip in or out of a scene much faster than any vehicle

4. they are cheaper than dolly or crane shots since no vehicle is

necessary

5. in crowded locations, zoom lenses can be useful for photographing from long distances, away from the curious eyes of passersby

6. certain psychological differences between zoom shots and those involving an actual moving camera

A. zoom lenses foreshorten people and flatten space

B. edges of the image simply disappear on all sides

C. effect is one of sudden magnification

D. instead of feeling as though we are entering a scene, we feel as though a small portion of it has been thrust toward us

vi. aerial

1. usually taken from a helicopter

2. really variation of the crane shot

3. can be much more extravagant than crane shot

4. for this reason they can occasionally be used to suggest a swooping sense of freedom

1. Mechanical Distortions of Movement

a. background

i. movement in film is not a literal phenomenon but an optical illusion

ii. each second, twenty-four separate still pictures are photographed

iii. when the film is shown in a projector at the same speed, these still photographs are mixed instantaneously by the human eye, giving the illusion of movement

iv. this phenomenon is called the persistence of vision

v. by simply manipulating the timing mechanism of the camera and/or projector, a filmmaker can distort movement on the screen

b. five basic distortions of this kind: 1. animation; 2. fast motion; 3. slow motion; 4. reverse motion; and 5. freeze frames

i. animation

1. each frame is photographed separately, rather than continuously

2. subjects photographed are generally drawings or static objects

3. thus, in an animated movie, thousands of frames are photographed separately; each frame differs from its neighbor only to an infinitesimal degree

4. when a sequence of these frames is projected at twenty-four fps, the illusion is that the drawings or objects are moving and, hence, are animated”

5. a popular misconception about animated movies is that they are intended primarily for the entertainment of children

6. another popular misconception about animated movies is that they are simpler than live-action films

7. feature-length animated movies are usually produced in assembly-line fashion, with dozens of artists drawing thousands of separate frames

8. today many animated movies are created entirely on computers

ii. fast motion

1. achieved by having events photographed at a slower rate than twenty-four fps

2. when the sequence is projected at twenty-four fps, the effect is one acceleration

3. intensifies the natural speed of a scene

4. comic effect: when a person’s movements are speeded up on film, he or she seems unhuman, ridiculous

iii. slow motion

1. achieved by photographing events at a faster rate than twenty-four fps and projecting the filmstrip at the standard speed

2. tends to ritualize and solemnize movement

3. slow, dignified movements tend to be associated with tragedy

4. *The Wild Bunch*: when violent scenes are photographed in slow motion, the effect is paradoxically beautiful

iv. reverse motion

1. involves photographing an action with the film running reversed

2. when projected on the screen, events run backward

v. freeze frame

1. suspends all movement on the screen

2. a single image is selected and reprinted for as many frames as is necessary to suggest the halting of motion

3. by interrupting a sequence with a freeze shot, the director calls attention to an image

4. *The 400 Blows*: the final image is a fleeting moment of poignancy

5. freeze frame can be used as an ideal metaphor for dealing with time, for in effect, the frozen image permits no change

**Summary**

Movement in motion pictures is generally taken for granted or ignored because the viewer expects to see action/motion, and becomes so caught up in the narrative. But choreographing the movements of actors in the cinematic frame is structurally vitally important and intrinsically aesthetic.

Like images, motion can be literal and concrete or highly stylized and lyrical. In the kinetic

arts—pantomime, ballet, modern dance—we find a wide variety of movements, ranging from the realistic to the formally abstract. This stylistic spectrum can also be seen in movies. The manner in which actors carry themselves on screen conveys important perceptual information, no matter whether they are walking naturally or creating comedic physical pratfalls.

One of the most obvious genres of film that takes advantage of movement is the musical, where the movement is a stylized convention. Ballet and mime are even more stylized, and even abstracted. On this level they are *lyrical*. In dance, movements are defined by the space that encloses the choreography—a three-dimensional stage. In film, the frame performs a similar function. However, with each setup change, the cinematic “stage” is redefined.

The intrinsic meanings associated with various portions of the frame are closely related to the significance of certain kinds of movements. For example, with vertical movements, an upward motion seems soaring and free because it conforms to the eye’s natural tendency to move upward over a composition. Movements in this direction often suggest aspiration, joy, power, and authority. Downward movements suggest opposite ideas: grief, death, insignificance, depression, weakness, and so on.

Movement laterally across the screen, toward or away from the camera, and in relation to camera shots and angles, creates various psychological implications and drama. Lateral movements tend to emphasize speed and efficiency, and so are often used in action films. Because the eye tends to read a picture from left to right, physical movement in this direction seems psychologically natural, whereas movement from right to left often seems inexplicably tense and uncomfortable.

When a character moves in or out of the depth of a scene, the effect is often one of slowness. The distance and angle from which movement is photographed determine much of its meaning. Movement in film is a subtle issue, for it’s necessarily dependent on the kind of shot used. If there is a great deal of movement in close (tightly framed) shots, its effect on the screen will be exaggerated.

Kinetic symbolism can be created and achieved through the filmmaker’s use of certain types of movements. Kinetic symbolism can be used to suggest all types of emotions and narrative ideas. Even a lack of motion, like silence in music, can create symbolism and psychological states.

Epic and psychological movies use movement in different ways, with emphasis on different shots. Epic movies usually depend on the longer shots for their effects, whereas psychological films tend to use closer shots. Epics are concerned with a sense of sweep and breadth, psychological movies with depth and detail. Epics often emphasize events, psychological films the implications of events. One stresses action, the other reaction.

During the early era of silent film (up to around 1920), filmmakers generally saw little need to move the camera. It was felt that shooting a motion picture was visually similar to staging a play. The camera may focus on one character at a time, the one carrying the weight of the dialogue at that particular moment in the narrative, or capture the whole set and all the actors, but the camera itself did not move.

By the mid to late 1920s though, filmmakers, especially German directors, realized the psychological and thematic potential of allowing the camera to move. A major problem of moving the camera involves time. It takes time to decide how and where the camera should move. Each major type of camera movement implies different meanings, some obvious, others subtle. There are seven basic moving camera shots: (1) pans; (2) tilts; (3) dolly shots; (4) handheld shots; (5) crane shots; (6) zoom shots; and (7) aerial shots.

Movement in film is not a literal phenomenon but an optical illusion. The speed at which each frame is shot and reproduced through a projector allows the human eye to sense movement. This phenomenon is called the *persistence of vision*. By simply manipulating the timing mechanism of the camera and/or projector, a filmmaker can distort movement on the screen. There are five basic distortions of this kind: (1) animation; (2) fast motion; (3) slow motion; (4) reverse motion; and (5) freeze frames.

There are two fundamental differences between animation and live-action movies. In animation sequences, each frame is photographed separately, rather than continuously, at the rate of twenty-four fps. Another difference is that animation, as the word implies, doesn’t ordinarily involve the photographing of subjects that move by themselves. The subjects photographed are generally drawings or static objects. Thus, in an animated movie, thousands of frames are photographed separately.

A popular misconception about animated movies is that they are intended primarily for the entertainment of children—perhaps because the field was dominated for so many years by Walt Disney. Another popular misconception about animated movies is that they are simpler than live-action films. The contrary is more often the case. For every second of screen time, twenty-four separate drawings usually have to be photographed. Thus, in an average ninety-minute feature, over 129,600 drawings are necessary.

Fast motion usually yields a comic effect; slow motion a tragic effect. Freeze frames tend to be poignant, and highlight the temporal nature of film.

In watching a movie, one ought to consider why a director is moving the camera during a scene; or conversely why it is not moving. Also consider how the camera is being used, which angles and positions and shot lengths are taking place. Is the camera effectively conveying the scene’s content and helping us understand the narrative, or is it confusing us?

In watching a movie, we ought to ask ourselves why a director is moving the camera during a scene. Or why the camera doesn’t move. Does the director keep the camera close in to the action, thus emphasizing motion? Or does he or she de-emphasize movement through the use of longer shots, high angles, and slow-paced action? Are the movements in a scene naturalistic or stylized? Literal or symbolic? Are the camera’s movements smooth or choppy? Lyrical or disorienting? What are the symbolic implications of such mechanical distortions as fast and slow motion, freeze frames, and animation?

Movement in film is not simply a matter of “what happens.” The director has dozens of ways to convey motion, and what differentiates a great director from a merely competent one is not so much a matter of what happens, but how things happen—how suggestive and resonant are the movements in a given dramatic context? Or, how effectively does the form of the movement embody its content?

**Active Learning Assignments**

**Learning Objective 2. Illustrate the basic ways that movement is used within the genres of slapstick comedies, action films, dance movies, animation, and musicals; and 3. Compare the kinetic richness within the staged choreography of dance sequences and action scenes.**

1. Watch the movie *Run Lola Run.* Now explain the way director Tom Tykwer uses movement to tell the story. When and how does he use lateral movement? When and how does he use movement toward or away from the camera? Does he ever use vertical movement? What about lens choices? Do they affect the way movement is perceived in the film? Does movement play a symbolic role in the story?

**Learning Objective 4. Explain the psychology of movement on the screen, and how it can create an emotional response based on the depth of the shot, motion of the camera, and the camera’s lens.**

1. Explain the differences in the way camera movement is used as a storytelling device in Laurence Olivier’s and Franco Zeffirelli’s versions of *Hamlet.* Does the way the camera is used in each change the basic genre of the story? If so, how?

**Learning Objective 6. Differentiate the five basic distortions of film movement.**

1. What are the five basic types of mechanical distortion in film? Looking at the endings of *The 400 Blows* and *Thelma and Louise*, discuss how the freeze frame works as a thematic device in both stories. What emotions do the two final images elicit? Are they the same in both films? Different? How and why?

**In-class Discussion Questions and Answers:**

**Learning Objective 5. Identify the seven basic moving camera shots and the different psychological meanings implied by each.**

1. **Question:** Watch the opening scene from *The Player*. This scene shows the camera at work in a very busy role of capturing all of the opening dialogue and feel of the film. Ask the students to find and list all of the movement seen in this scene, then elaborate on their list about the various “duties” the camera performs here.

**Consider:**

* *The Player* (1992) opens with a full shot of a satirical portrait of filmmaking: a real clapboard in the foreground and the familiar phrases and sounds of a Hollywood sound stage.
* The camera then dollies back, following a secretary, then elevates and assumes a high angle, picking up studio executive Griffin Mill (Tim Robbins) as he parks his Range Rover (car-as-status motif).
* Why does Altman show us the real-world business of filmmaking, something normally held off-screen and off-mic?
* All of this is done in a single long take. Why?
* Does the movement in this first scene make any kind of commentary on what the movie will be about? If so, how?

**Learning Objective 2. Illustrate the basic ways that movement is used within the genres of slapstick comedies, action films, dance movies, animation, and musicals.**

1. **Question:** Jackie Chan and Charlie Chaplin are essentially comedic actors. Explain how they each use movement in their films to build character. Use clips from Rush Hour and City Lights to illustrate your points.

**Consider:**

* Action and adventure films are among the most kinetic of genres, stressing physical movement above all other qualities. Though the genre is dominated by Americans, the influence of Hong Kong martial arts movies has been enormous.
* Chan blends traditional martial arts with slapstick comedy. How does movement help him do this? How does Chan use this blending of styles to portray his character in *Rush Hour*?
* Pantomimists are more stylized in their movements than action stars. Chaplin, for example, tended to use motion more balletically, more symbolically. A swaggering gait and a twirling cane symbolized Charlie’s (usually fleeting) arrogance and conceit.
* Chaplin was a traditional silent film actor whose forte was comedy. How did he blend the style of silent film acting (pantomime) with slapstick comedy to create the character of the Tramp?

**Learning Objective 6. Differentiate the five basic distortions of film movement.**

1. **Question:** Show a scene from *The Polar Express*. Then show a scene from *The Corpse Bride*. Finally, show a scene from *Snow White*. How have computers changed the way animation is done today?

**Consider:**

* How have animation techniques evolved in making animated films, especially the performance capture technique?
* What about stop motion animation? How is it similar to traditional animation? Motion capture? How is it different from both of these?
* What are the benefits of computer animation? Are there any drawbacks

**CHAPTER 4: EDITING Learning Objectives**

1. Explain the process and conventions set forth in the editing technique, “cutting to continuity.”
2. Match the five classifications of editing styles with how intrusively or interpretively they cut scenes.
3. Describe the elements present in classical cutting, and how D. W. Griffith used them in his film, *The Birth of a Nation*.
4. Illustrate the “180° rule” and explain its purpose as an editing guideline.
5. Show how editing can be used to create a variety of functions that help develop a film’s *mise en scene* and seamless story line.
6. Assess the construction of thematic editing sequences, or montages, and show how they fit into the Soviet formalist tradition.
7. Outline the realistic aesthetics of André Bazin and how emotional impact is created through the unity of space, not the juxtaposition of shots.
8. Evaluate the sequence from Sam Peckinpah’s *The Wild Bunch* as an example of lyrical editing.

**Outline**

1. Background

a. shots in film tend to acquire meaning when they are juxtaposed with other shots and structured into an edited sequence

b. editing is simply joining one strip of film (shot) with another.

c. editing eliminates unnecessary time and space

d. through the association of ideas, editing connects one shot with another, one scene with another, and so on

e. editing represents what critic Terry Ramsaye referred to as the “syntax” of cinema, its grammatical language

2. Continuity

a. in earliest years of cinema the duration of the shot and the event were equal

b. by the early twentieth century, filmmakers had devised a functional style of editing we now call **cutting to continuity**

i. a technique used in most fiction films even today, if only for exposition scenes

ii. tries to preserve the fluidity of an event without literally showing all of it

iii. for example, a continuous shot of a woman leaving work and going home might take forty-five minutes

1. cutting to continuity condenses the action into a few brief shots

2. each shot leads by association to the next

A. she enters a corridor as she closes the door to her office;

B. she leaves the office building;

C. she enters and starts her car;

D. she drives her car along a highway; and

E. her car turns into her driveway at home

F. the entire forty-five-minute action might take just ten seconds of screen time, yet nothing essential is left out

3. to keep the action logical and continuous, there must be no confusing breaks in an edited sequence of this sort

4. often, all the movement is carried out in the same direction on the screen to avoid confusion

5. cause–effect relationships must be clearly set forth

6. the continuity of actual space and time is fragmented as smoothly as possible

7. to make their transitions smooth, filmmakers generally use establishing shots at the beginning of their stories or at the beginning of any new scene within the narrative

3. D. W. Griffith and Classical Cutting

a. basic elements of editing syntax were in place when Griffith entered the field

b. but he more than any other individual molded these elements into a language of power and subtlety

c. film scholars have called this language **classical cutting**

i. Griffith seized on the principle of the association of ideas in the concept of editing and expanded it in a variety of ways.

ii. classical cutting involves editing for dramatic intensity and emotional emphasis rather than for purely physical reasons

iii. through the use of the close-up within the edited scene

1. Griffith used them for psychological rather than physical reasons alone

2. the slightest arch of an eyebrow could convey a multitude of subtleties

iv. splitting the action into a series of fragmentary shots, Griffith achieved a far greater degree of control over his audience’s reactions

1. space and time continuum of the real scene was radically altered

2. replaced by a subjective continuity—the association of ideas implicit in the connected shots

v. classical cutting presents a series of psychologically connected shots—shots that aren’t necessarily separated by real time and space

1. for example, if four characters are seated in a room, a director might cut from one speaker to a second with a dialogue exchange

2. then cut to a **reaction shot** of one of the listeners,

3. then to a two-shot of the original speakers, and

4. finally to a close-up of the fourth person

5. the sequence of shots represents a kind of psychological cause–effect pattern

d. during golden years of the American studio system—1930s and 1940s—directors were often urged (or forced) to adopt the **master-shot technique** of shooting

i. this method involved shooting an entire scene in one long shot without cuts

ii. this take contained all the dramatic variables and hence served as the basic or master shot for the scene

iii. the action was then repeated a number of times, with the camera photographing medium shots and close-ups of the principals in the scene

iv. when all this footage was gathered together, the editor had a number of choices in constructing a story continuity

v. master shots still used by many directors

e. other important techniques used in classical cutting

i. eye-line match

ii. 180 degree rule

f. Griffith also perfected the conventions of the chase—featuring **parallel editing**

i. cross-cutting between different scenes

ii. intensifies suspense by reducing the duration of the shots as the sequence reaches its climax

g. fragmentation of space and time

i. if the continuity of a sequence is reasonably logical, the fragmentation of space presents no great difficulties

ii. the problem of time is more complex, more subjective

1. movies can compress years into two hours of projection time

2. they can also stretch a split second into many minutes

3. most films condense time

4. only a handful attempt to make screen time conform to real time

iii. screen time is determined by the physical length of the filmstrip containing the shot

1. Raymond Spottiswoode, an early film theorist, claimed that a cut must be made at the peak of the “content curve”

2. that is, the point in a shot at which the audience has been able to assimilate most of its information

3. cutting after the peak of the content curve produces boredom and a sense of dragging time

4. cutting before the peak doesn’t give the audience enough time to assimilate the visual action

iv. there are no fixed rules concerning rhythm in films

h. Griffith expanded the art of editing to include a wide variety of functions:

i. locale changes, time lapses, shot variety

ii. emphasis of psychological and physical details

iii. overviews, symbolic inserts, parallels and contrasts

iv. associations, point-of-view shifts, simultaneity

v. repetition of motifs

vi. Griffith’s method of editing was economical

vii. related shots could be bunched together in the shooting schedule, regardless of their positions (or “time” and “place” in the finished film)

4. Soviet Montage and the Formalist Tradition

a. in the 1920s, the Soviet filmmakers expanded Griffith’s associational principles

b. established the theoretical premises for thematic editing, or montage

c. V. I. Pudovkin wrote the first important theoretical treatises on what he called “constructive editing”

i. Griffith’s use of the close-up, Pudovkin claimed, is too limited

1. used simply as a clarification of the long shot, which carries most of the meaning

2. close-up, in effect, merely an interruption, offering no meanings of its own

ii. Pudovkin insisted that each shot should make a new point

iii. through the juxtaposition of shots, new meanings can be created

iv. the meanings, then, are in the juxtapositions, not in one shot alone

d. Kuleshov’s experiments

i. Soviet filmmakers were strongly influenced by the psychological theories of Ivan Petrovich Pavlov,

ii. whose experiments in the association of ideas served as a basis for the editing experiments of Lev Kuleshov, Pudovkin’s mentor

1. Kuleshov believed that ideas in cinema are created by linking together fragmentary details to produce a unified action

2. these details can be totally unrelated in real life

3. Kuleshov and many of his colleagues also believed that traditional acting skills were quite unnecessary in the cinema

A. to prove this point he edited a shot of a man with a neutral expression with a close-up of a bowl of soup

B. when the combination was shown to audiences, they exclaimed at the actor’s expressiveness in portraying hunger

C. the emotion is produced by the cut, not by the performance

e. for Kuleshov and Pudovkin, a sequence was not filmed; it was constructed

f. Soviet theorists of this generation were criticized on several counts

i. this technique detracts from a scene’s sense of realism for the continuity of

actual time and place is totally restructured

ii. critics also believe that this manipulative style of editing guides the spectator too much—the choices are already made

1. political considerations involved

2. the Soviets tended to link film with propaganda

3. propaganda, no matter how artistic, doesn’t usually involve free and balanced evaluations

g. Sergei Eisenstein placed special emphasis on the art of editing

i. Eisenstein was interested in exploring general principles that could be applied to a variety of apparently different forms of creative activity

ii. believed that nature’s eternal fluctuation is dialectical—the result of the conflict and synthesis of opposites

iii. the function of all artists is to capture this dynamic collision of opposites

iv. unlike Pudovkin, Eisenstein criticized the concept of linked shots for being

mechanical and inorganic.

1. he believed that editing ought to be dialectical

2. the conflict of two shots (thesis and antithesis)

3. produces a wholly new idea (synthesis)

v. when Pudovkin wanted to express an emotion, he conveyed it in terms of

physical images—objective correlatives—taken from the actual locale

vi. movies should include images that are thematically or metaphorically relevant, Eisenstein claimed, regardless of whether they can be found in the locale or not

h. the Odessa Steps sequence from Battleship Potemkin

i. the highpoint of Soviet montage

ii. one of the most celebrated instances of editing virtuosity in the silent cinema

5. Andre Bazin and the Tradition of Realism

a. André Bazin was not a filmmaker, but solely a critic and theorist

b. for a number of years, he was the editor of the influential French journal *Cahiers du Cinéma*

c. he set forth an aesthetic of film in sharp opposition to that of formalists Pudovkin and Eisenstein

d. emphasized the realistic nature of the cinema

e. maintained that montage was merely one of many techniques a director could use

f. believed that in many cases editing could actually destroy the effectiveness of a scene

g. Bazin’s realist aesthetic

i. based on his belief that photography, television, and cinema, unlike the traditional arts, produce images of reality automatically

ii. the filmmaker’s image, on the other hand, is essentially an objective recording of what actually exists

iii. no other art can be as realistic

iv. the distortions involved in using formalist techniques—especially thematic editing—often violate the complexities of reality

v. filmmakers must preserve the ambiguities of reality by minimizing editing

vi. even viewed classical cutting as potentially corrupting

1. the editor makes a choice for us that we should make for ourselves

2. without thinking, we accept his analysis because it conforms to the laws of paying attention

vii. reduced editing to a minimum by substituting the use of **deep-focus** photography and lengthy takes

viii. did not advocate a simpleminded theory of realism

ix. perfectly aware that cinema—like all art—involves a certain amount of selectivity, organization, and interpretation

x. for Bazin, the best films were those in which the artist’s personal vision is held in delicate balance with the objective nature of the medium

xi. but abstraction and artifice ought to be kept to a minimum

xii. the cinema occupies a unique middle position between the sprawl of raw life and the artificially re-created worlds of the traditional arts

h. John Huston’s *African Queen* as an example

i. Bazin pointed out that in the evolution of movies, virtually every technical innovation pushed the medium closer to a realistic ideal

i. sound

ii. color

iii. widescreen

iv. even 3D

j. several of Bazin’s protégés were responsible for a return to more flamboyant editing techniques in the following decades

i. Jean-Luc Godard, François Truffaut, and Claude Chabrol

ii. French New Wave and jump cutting

iii. editing styles should be determined by the essence of the subject matter itself

k. Sam Peckinpah’s *The Wild Bunch*

i. lyricism in editing

ii. violence as beautiful and horrible

l. like many other language systems in movies, editing in the contemporary cinema has been revolutionized by the advent of digital technology

**Summary**

Editing is an artistic and narrative process by which scenes shot for a film are joined together to create a coherent visual and narrative form. On the most mechanical level, editing eliminates unnecessary time and space. Through the association of ideas, editing connects one shot with another, one scene with another, and so on.

**Cutting to continuity**is a technique used in most fiction films even today, if only for exposition scenes. Essentially, this style of editing is a kind of shorthand, consisting of time-honored conventions. Continuity cutting tries to preserve the fluidity of an event without literally showing all of it. Cutting to continuity condenses the action into a few brief shots, each of which leads by association to the next. To keep the action logical and continuous, there must be no confusing breaks in an edited sequence of this sort. Often, all the movement is carried out in the same direction on the screen to avoid confusion. The continuity of actual space and time is fragmented as smoothly as possible in this type of editing. By the early twentieth century, movie storytellers already knew that by breaking up an action into different shots, the event can be contracted or expanded, depending on the number of shots. In other words, the shot, not the scene, was the basic unit of film construction.

The basic elements of editing syntax were already in place when D.W. Griffith entered the field, but it was he more than any other individual who molded these elements into a language of power and subtlety. Film scholars have called this language **classical cutting**. Classical cutting involves editing for dramatic intensity and emotional emphasis rather than for purely physical reasons. By splitting the action into a series of fragmentary shots, Griffith achieved not only a greater sense of detail, but a far greater degree of control over his audience’s reactions. The space and time continuum of the real scene was radically altered. It was replaced by a subjective continuity—the association of ideas implicit in the connected shots.

The editing system that developed from the early years of filmmaking and the editing process into the classical era of Hollywood (1930–1945) resulted in a new vocabulary that included **long shots, establishing shots, close-ups, medium shots, reaction shots, master shots, 180° rule, cross-cutting**, and so on.

If the continuity of a sequence is reasonably logical, the fragmentation of space presents no great difficulties. But the problem of time is more complex. Its treatment in film is more subjective than the treatment of space. Movies can compress years into two hours of projection time. They can also stretch a split second into many minutes. Most films condense time.

On the most mechanical level, screen time is determined by the physical length of the filmstrip containing the shot. This length is governed generally by the complexity of the image subject matter. The sensitive treatment of time in editing is largely an instinctive matter that defies mechanical rules. Most great directors have edited their own films, or at least worked in close collaboration with their editors, so crucial is this art to the success of films.

There are no fixed rules concerning rhythm in films. Some editors cut according to musical rhythms. This technique is also common with American avant-garde filmmakers, who feature rock music soundtracks or cut according to a mathematical or structural formula. In some cases, a director will cut before the peak of the content curve, especially in highly suspenseful sequences. Filmmakers can interrupt the present with shots not only of the past but of the future as well.

From its crude beginnings, Griffith expanded the art of editing to include a wide variety of functions: locale changes, time lapses, shot variety, emphasis of psychological and physical details, overviews, symbolic inserts, parallels and contrasts, associations, point-of-view shifts, simultaneity, and repetition of **motifs**.

In the 1920s, the Soviet filmmakers expanded Griffith’s associational principles and established the theoretical premises for thematic editing, or **montage**as they called it (from the French, *monter,* to assemble). Filmmakers in the Soviet Union were strongly influenced by the psychological theories of Pavlov, whose experiments in the association of ideas served as a basis for the editing experiments of Lev Kuleshov. Kuleshov and many of his colleagues believed that traditional acting skills were quite unnecessary in the cinema.

For Kuleshov and Pudovkin, a sequence was not filmed; it was constructed. Using far more close-ups than Griffith, Pudovkin built a scene from many separate shots, all juxtaposed for a unified effect. The environment of the scene is the source of the images. Long shots are rare. Instead, a barrage of close-ups (often of objects) provides the audience with the necessary associations to link together the meaning. These juxtapositions can suggest emotional and psychological states, even abstract ideas.

Like many Soviet formalists, Sergei Eisenstein was interested in exploring general principles that could be applied to a variety of apparently different forms of creative activity. He believed that these artistic principles were organically related to the basic nature of all human activity and, ultimately, to the nature of the universe itself. Eisenstein placed special emphasis on the art of editing. Like Kuleshov and Pudovkin, he believed that montage was the foundation of film art. However, Eisenstein criticized the concept of linked shots for being mechanical and inorganic. He believed that editing ought to be dialectical: The conflict of two shots (thesis and antithesis) produces a wholly new idea (synthesis).

Editing for Eisenstein was an almost mystical process. He likened it to the growth of organic cells. Editing is done at the point that a shot “bursts”—that is, when its tensions have reached their maximum expansion. The rhythm of editing in a movie should be like the explosions of an internal combustion engine, Eisenstein claimed. Eisenstein wanted movies to be as flexible as literature, especially to make figurative comparisons without respect to time and place. Movies should include images that are thematically or metaphorically relevant, Eisenstein claimed, regardless of whether they can be found in the locale or not. The Odessa Steps sequence from Eisenstein’s *Battleship Potemkin* is one of the most celebrated instances of editing virtuosity (and Soviet montage) in the silent cinema.

André Bazin was not a filmmaker, but solely a critic and theorist. Although he emphasized the realistic nature of the cinema, he was generous in his praise of movies that exploited editing effectively. Throughout his writings, however, Bazin maintained that montage was merely one of many techniques a director could use in making movies. Furthermore, he believed that in many cases editing could actually destroy the effectiveness of a scene.

Bazin’s realist aesthetic was based on his belief that photography, TV, and cinema, unlike the traditional arts, produce images of reality automatically, with a minimum of human interference. This technological objectivity connects the moving image with the observable physical world.

Bazin believed that the distortions involved in using formalist techniques—especially thematic editing—often violate the complexities of reality. Bazin even viewed classical cutting as potentially corrupting. Classical cutting breaks down a unified scene into a certain number of closer shots that correspond implicitly to a mental process.

Unlike some of his followers, Bazin did not advocate a simpleminded theory of realism. He was perfectly aware, for example, that cinema—like all art—involves a certain amount of selectivity, organization, and interpretation. In short, a certain amount of distortion. Bazin pointed out that in the evolution of movies, virtually every technical innovation pushed the medium closer to a realistic ideal, especially the development of sound and deep-focus photography.

A problem facing every director is gauging the energy levels of the performers. This affects how many takes he or she can hope for. Directors will vary in the number of takes of a scene they will shoot depending on the actors they work with, and what they themselves want to see as a final version of the scene. Some directors refuse to rehearse before shooting, while others may shoot fifty or one hundred takes to get what they think makes the scene work within the narrative. Actors may become bored with repetitive takes or negatively react to the director, which in some cases is what the director wants so that the actor gives a performance the director is seeking for that scene.

Sam Peckinpah was a unique director, nicknamed “Bloody Sam” for his preference for violent films in the 60s and 70s. The technical brilliance of his film *The Wild Bunch* is what makes it stand out. The final shootout of the film is spectacularly edited. Peckinpah and his editor Lou Lombardo made the shootout savage and lyrical at the same time. The images are supremely beautiful, thanks to the cinematography of Lucien Ballard. Jerry Fielding’s virile score also contributed to the film’s emotional impact. Shootouts in westerns have always been standard features of the genre, of course, but they never had the visceral impact of Peckinpah’s film.

Much of the violence is choreographed in slow motion, lending it a balletic beauty. Geysers of blood spurt from the necks and bellies of the combatants, while innocent villagers run for cover. The editing of the sequence is strangely beautiful in its lyricism, temporarily blinding us to the fact that human beings are dying in all that terrible, apocalyptic beauty.

Like many other language systems in movies, editing in the contemporary cinema has been revolutionized by the advent of digital technology. With new systems, such as Avid, Lightworks, and Premiere, modern editors can cut a movie with phenomenal speed and flexibility. A film’s footage is entered on a computer’s hard drive, allowing the editor to try dozens of choices in a matter of minutes rather than days or even weeks when an editor had to manually cut and splice strips of celluloid.

Like most techniques, this one has been misused. Anne Coates, who edited David Lean’s *Lawrence of Arabia* as well as Steven Soderbergh’s *Erin Brockovich,* has pointed out the limitations of this new technology: “I’m not against flashy cutting; it can be great. But I don’t see the point of lots of cuts where you can’t see what’s happening at all. I think that’s going over the top with this, and it’s very easy to do on these machines.”

Some questions we ought to ask ourselves about a movie’s editing style include: How much cutting is there and why? Are the shots highly fragmented or relatively lengthy? What is the point of the cutting in each scene? To clarify? To stimulate? To lyricize? To create suspense? To explore an idea or emotion in depth? Does the cutting seem manipulative or are we left to interpret the images on our own? What kind of rhythm does the editing establish with each scene? Is the personality of the filmmaker apparent in the cutting or is the presentation of shots relatively objective and functional? Is editing a major language system of the movie or does the film artist relegate cutting to a relatively minor function?

**Active Learning Assignments**

**Learning Objective 2. Match the five classifications of editing styles with how intrusively or interpretively they cut scenes.**

1. Choose an early Alfred Hitchcock film such as *The 39 Steps* or *Saboteur* and briefly explain how the film was edited. What editing style does Hitchcock use? Is it ‘invisible’ or ‘showy’? Compare it with a film like *Intolerance* by D.W. Griffith. Does Hitchcock follow along with conventional editing, or does he create a new editing language?

**Learning Objective 5. Show how editing can be used to create a variety of functions that help develop a film’s mise en scène and seamless story line.**

1. View the scene from *The Graduate* where Ben (Dustin Hoffman) “drifts” between home, the swimming pool, and the hotel room with Mrs. Robinson. Discuss the editing techniques used to blur time and space. What is the effect on “realistic” time in this scene? What is the effect on “realistic” space in this scene?

**Learning Objective 3. Describe the elements present in classical cutting, and how D. W. Griffith used them in his film, The Birth of a Nation.**

1. It has been said that good editing is “invisible”; the viewer doesn’t notice it. Which

films shown in class thus far best demonstrate good editing practices? How and why? Which films that you’ve seen are poor examples? In what ways is the editing obvious, when it shouldn’t be? Is “invisible” editing the best choice for a filmmaker? Is it necessary? Why or why not?

**In-class Discussion Questions and Answers:**

**Learning Objective 2. Match the five classifications of editing styles with how intrusively or interpretively they cut scenes.**

**1.** **Question:** View the film *Locke* starring Thomas Hardy. What style of editing does writer/director Steven Knight use to tell this story? What editing choices does he make to keep the audience from getting bored with the story?

**Consider:**

* What does he cut to? How much cutting is there and why?
* Are the shots highly fragmented or relatively lengthy?
* How does he build suspense through the editing?
* What effect does the editing have on “realistic” time in this scene?
* What effect does the editing have on “realistic” space in this scene?

**Learning Objective 6. Assess the construction of thematic editing sequences, or montages, and show how they fit into the Soviet formalist tradition.**

**2.** **Question:** Show the baptism scene from the end of *The Godfather*. Discuss the editing style used by editor Peter Zinner and director Francis Ford Coppola in this sequence.

**Consider:**

* Is the style realist, formalist, or classical cutting?
* Are the shots highly fragmented or relatively lengthy?
* Why do you think Coppola chose to edit this scene the way he did?
* Is the editing “invisible” or “showy”? How and why?
* Compare it to other classic film sequences like the chase scenes of D.W. Griffith and the Odessa Steps scene from *Battleship Potemkin*. How are they similar? How do they differ?

**Learning Objective 8. Evaluate the sequence from Sam Peckinpah’s *The Wild Bunch* as an example of lyrical editing.**

**3.** **Question:** Show the final shootout scene from *The Wild Bunch*. Discuss the editing style used by Sam Peckinpah in this sequence.

**Consider:**

* What is the point of the cutting in this scene? To clarify the action? To stimulate the audience? To lyricize the subject matter? To create suspense?
* Does the scene explore an idea or emotion in depth?
* Does the cutting seem manipulative or are we left to interpret the images on our own?
* This is a very violent scene. Is the subject matter important to the choice of editing styles? What about the time period the movie was made (the late 1960s)? Does this affect the editing style in any way? If so, how and why?

**CHAPTER 5: SOUND**

**Learning Objectives**

1. Summarize the historical background of the use of sound in film, including technical advances.
2. Explain the overt and symbolic functions of sound effects, and how silence can be utilized just as strongly as sound in certain situations.
3. Describe the ways in which music, both foreground and background, can be used to create certain meanings and atmospheres in film.
4. Contrast the differences between realistic and formalistic musicals, and give examples of musical documentaries and biographies.
5. Show that spoken dialogue can have a deeper subtext than written language by demonstrating how an actor can change a phrase’s meaning by emphasizing certain words over others.
6. Demonstrate the applications of monologue, dialogue, and off-screen narration in film.

**Outline**

1. Historical Background

a. in 1927, *The Jazz Singer* ushered in the talkie era

b. many critics felt that sound would deal a deathblow to the art of movies

c. setbacks were temporary

d. today sound is one of the richest sources of meaning in film art

e. actually, there never was a silent period

i. virtually all movies prior to 1927 were accompanied by music

ii. in the large city theaters, full orchestras

iii. in small towns, a piano was often used

iv. in many theaters, the “Mighty Wurlitzer” organ was the standard

f. problems with early sound recording

i. most of the early “100 percent talkies” were visually dull

ii. required the simultaneous (synchronous. recording of sound and image)

iii. camera was restricted to one position

iv. actors couldn’t move far from the microphone

v. editing was restricted to its most minimal function

vi. images tended merely to illustrate the soundtrack

g. solutions to those early problems

i. camera was housed in a soundproof blimp

ii. permitted camera to move in and out of a scene silently

iii. several microphones, all on separate channels, were placed on the set

iv. overhead sound booms devised to follow an actor on a set

v. his or her voice was always within range, even when the actor moved around

h. formalists vs. realists

i. formalist directors remained hostile to the use of realistic (synchronous) sound recording.

ii. Sergei Eisentstein believed synchronous sound would destroy the flexibility of editing and thus kill the very soul of film art

iii. most of the talented directors of the early sound era favored nonsynchronous sound

1. Rene Clair

2. Ernst Lubitsch

iv. increased realism of sound forced acting styles to become more natural

v. coming from the world of radio, Orson Welles was an important innovator in the field of sound

1. In *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942) he perfected the technique of sound montage

2. dialogue of one character overlaps with that of another

2. Sound Effects

a. primarily atmospheric

b. can also be precise sources of meaning in film

c. cinematic sound is a constructed experience:

i. multiple layers of sound are **synthesized** (mixed in a studio rather than recorded on site)

ii. most film sounds are not even present during the actual shooting

d. the Foley artist

i. main sound effects technician

ii. Foley artist gathers all the different sounds necessary for a movie

iii. many of these are prerecorded and stored in sound libraries

e. the sound mixer

i. decides on the relative loudness of each piece of sound

ii. mixer also decides what sounds go into what separate channels of a stereophonic sound system

f. critics refer to sounds that the characters can hear as **diegetic**, while sounds they can’t hear are **nondiegetic**.

g. moviegoers are not usually consciously aware of how sound affects them, but

i. they are constantly manipulated by the mixer’s synthesis

ii. pitch, volume, and tempo of sound effects can strongly affect our responses to any given noise

1. high-pitched sounds produce a sense of tension

2. low-frequency sounds are used to emphasize the dignity or solemnity of a scene

3. low-pitched sounds can also suggest anxiety and mystery

4. loud sounds tend to be forceful, intense, and threatening

5. quiet sounds strike us as delicate, hesitant, and often weak

6. the faster the tempo of sound, the greater the tension

produced in the listener

iii. off -screen sounds bring off-screen space into play

h. sound effects can also serve symbolic functions

i. sound effects can also express internal emotions

j. absolute silence in a sound film tends to call attention to itself

i. silence creates an eerie vacuum—a sense of something impending

ii. silence in a sound film can be used to symbolize death

3. Music

a. music is a highly abstract art, tending toward pure form

b. theories about film music are surprisingly varied

i. Pudovkin and Eisenstein insisted that music must never serve merely as accompaniment

ii. film critic Paul Rotha claimed that music must even be allowed to dominate the image on occasion.

iii. Some filmmakers insist on purely descriptive music—a practice referred to as **mickeymousing**

c. directors and music

i. directors must know what they want from music dramatically

ii. beginning with the opening credits, music can serve as a kind of overture to suggest the mood or spirit of the film as a whole.

iii. certain kinds of music can suggest locales, classes, or ethnic groups

iv. music can be used as foreshadowing

v. music can also provide ironic contrast

vi. characterization can be suggested through musical motifs

d. frequent function of film music is to underline speech, especially dialogue

4. Musicals

a. one of the most enduring and popular film genres, whose principal raison d’être is song and dance

b. narrative elements of a musical are usually pretexts for the production numbers

c. but some musicals are exceptionally sophisticated dramatically

d. the realistic and the formalistic

i. realistic musicals

1. generally backstage stories

2. production numbers presented as dramatically plausible

3. usually justify a song or dance with a brief bit of dialogue

4. a few are virtually dramas with music

ii. formalist musicals

1. make no pretense at realism

2. characters burst out in song and dance in the middle of a scene without easing into the number with a plausible pretext

3. this convention must be accepted as an aesthetic premise, otherwise the entire film will strike the viewer as absurd

4. everything is heightened and stylized in such works—sets, costumes, acting

e. dominated by American film industry

i. intimately related to the American studio system

ii. in the 1930s, several major studios specialized in a particular type of musical

iii. in the 1940s and 1950s, the musical was dominated by MGM

f. the stage has no equivalent to the musical documentary, like *Woodstock*

5. Spoken Language

a. a common misconception, held even by otherwise sophisticated moviegoers, is that language in film cannot be as complex as it is in literature

i. in some respects, language in film can be more complex than in literature

ii. the words of a movie, like those of the live theater, are spoken, not written

iii. the human voice is capable of far more nuances than the cold printed page

iv. an actor can emphasize one word over the others and thus change the meanings of a sentence completely

v. written punctuation is likewise a simplified approximation of speech rhythms

b. dialects

i. speech patterns deviating radically from the official dialect are generally regarded as substandard

ii. dialects can be a rich source of meaning in movies

1. they are usually spoken by people outside the Establishment

2. they tend to convey a subversive ideology

c. text and subtext

i. the words of a text can be juxtaposed with the ideas and emotions of a subtext

ii. subtext refers to those implicit meanings behind the language of a film or play script text

iii. any script meant to be spoken has a subtext

iv. some contemporary filmmakers deliberately neutralize their language, claiming that the subtext is what they’re really after

d. as an art of juxtapositions, movies can also extend the meanings of language by contrasting spoken words with images

i. choice of shot and angle

ii. use of reaction shot

iii. this advantage of simultaneity extends to other sounds

1. music and sound effects can modify the meanings of words considerably

2. change of volume

3. alteration through mechanical distortion

e. movies contain two types of spoken language: the monologue and dialogue

i. monologue

1. often associated with documentaries

A. an off-screen narrator provides the audience with factual information accompanying the visual

B. the cardinal rule in the use of this technique is to avoid duplicating the information given in the image itself

2. in fiction films this technique is especially useful for condensing events and time

A. narrative monologues can be used omnisciently to provide an ironic contrast with the visuals

B. off-screen narration tends to give a movie a sense of objectivity and often an air of predestination

3. the interior monologue

A. can convey what a character is thinking

B. frequently used in adaptations of plays and novels

C. via a **voice-over** soundtrack

ii. theatrical vs. cinematic dialogue

1. theater

A. major difference between stage dialogue and screen dialogue is degree of density

B. in theater there is a need for articulation—characters must talk about their problems

C. in real life, people don’t articulate their ideas and feelings with such precision

D. in general, the spoken word is dominant in theater

2. movies

A. the convention of articulation can be relaxed.

B. the close-up can show the most minute detail, so verbal

comment is often superfluous.

C. this greater spatial flexibility means that film language doesn’t have to carry the heavy burden of stage dialogue.

D. in fact, the image conveys most meanings, so dialogue in film can be as spare and realistic as it is in everyday life

E. but movie dialogue doesn’t have to conform to natural speech

F. Generally, if dialogue is nonrealistic, the images must be co-expressive

iii. dubbed vs. subtitled

1. foreign language movies are shown either in dubbed versions or with written subtitles

2. each method has problems

A. dubbing

I. dubbed movies often have a hollow, tinny sound

II. in most cases, the dubbing is performed by less gifted actors than the originals.

III. sound and image are difficult to match in dubbed films

IV. especially in the closer ranges where the movements of the actors’ lips aren’t synchronized with the sounds

V. even bilingual actors who do their own dubbing are less nuanced when they’re not speaking their native language

B. subtitles

I. most experienced filmgoers still prefer subtitles

II. despite their cumbersomeness

III. an actor’s tone of voice is often more important than the dialogue per se

IV. subtitled movies allow us to hear these vocal nuances

V. subtitles permit us to hear the original actors

**Summary**

In 1927, when *The Jazz Singer* ushered in the talkie era, many critics felt that sound would deal a deathblow to the art of movies. But the setbacks were temporary, and today sound is one of the richest sources of meaning in film art. Actually, there never was a silent period. Music was always present.

Most of the early “100 percent talkies” were visually dull. The equipment of the time required the simultaneous (**synchronous**) recording of sound and image: The camera was restricted to one position, the actors couldn’t move far from the microphone, and editing was restricted to its most minimal function—primarily scene changes. The major source of meaning was the dialogue. But the advancements of microphones and camera **blimps** allowed filmmaking to progress technically and artistically.

Despite these technical advances, **formalist** directors remained hostile to the use of **realistic** (synchronous) sound recording. Eisenstein was especially wary of dialogue. Synchronous sound, he believed, would destroy the flexibility of editing and thus kill the very soul of film art. Alfred Hitchcock pointed out that the most cinematic sequences are essentially silent.

Most of the talented directors of the early sound era favored **nonsynchronous sound**. The Frenchman René Clair believed that sound should be used selectively, not indiscriminately. The ear, he believed, is just as selective as the eye, and sound can be edited in the same way images can.

Several American directors also experimented with sound in these early years. Coming from the world of radio, Orson Welles was an important innovator in the field of sound. In *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942) he perfected the technique of sound **montage**, in which the dialogue of one character overlaps with that of another, or several others.

The increased realism brought on by sound inevitably forced acting styles to become more natural. Performers no longer needed to compensate visually for the lack of dialogue. Like stage actors, film players realized that the subtlest nuances of meaning could be conveyed through the voice.

Although the function of sound effects is primarily atmospheric, they can also be precise sources of meaning in film. Cinematic sound is a constructed experience: multiple layers of sound are synthesized (mixed) in a studio rather than recorded on site, for most film sounds are not even present during the actual shooting. Often these sounds are completely unlike their on-screen counterparts.

A sound editor known as a **Foley artist** gathers all the different sounds necessary for a movie. Many of these are prerecorded and stored in sound libraries—sounds like thunderstorms, a squeaky door, the wind howling, and so on. Most movie theaters have five separate speakers: center, left-front, right-front, left-back, and right-back. Dolby sound systems, perfected in the 1990s, have as many as six or seven separate speakers.

Critics refer to sounds that the characters can hear as diegetic, while sounds they can’t hear are nondiegetic. Diegetic music is sometimes known as source music, whereas nondiegetic music is often referred to as scored music.

Moviegoers are not usually consciously aware of how sound affects them, but they are constantly manipulated by the mixer’s synthesis. The pitch, volume, and tempo of sound effects can strongly affect our responses to any given noise. Sound volume works in much the same way. Loud sounds tend to be forceful, intense, and threatening. These same principles apply to tempo. The faster the tempo of sound, the greater the tension produced in the listener. Off-screen sounds bring off-screen space into play: The sound expands the image beyond the confines of the frame. Sound effects can also serve symbolic functions, which are usually determined by the dramatic context. In reality, there’s a considerable difference between hearing and listening. Our minds automatically filter out irrelevant sounds.

Sound effects can also express internal emotions. Like absolute stasis, absolute silence in a sound film tends to call attention to itself. Any significant stretch of silence creates an eerie vacuum—a sense of something impending, about to burst. Like the **freeze frame**, silence in a sound film can be used to symbolize death, because we tend to associate sound with the presence of ongoing life.

Music is a highly abstract art, tending toward pure form. It’s impossible to speak of the “subject matter” of a musical phrase. When merged with lyrics, music acquires a more concrete content because words, of course, have specific references. Both words and music convey meanings, but each in a different manner. With or without lyrics, music can be more specific when juxtaposed with film images.

Theories about film music are surprisingly varied. Pudovkin and Eisenstein insisted that music must never serve merely as accompaniment: It ought to retain its own integrity. A filmmaker doesn’t need to have technical expertise to use music effectively. As Aaron Copland pointed out, directors must know what they want from music *dramatically.* It’s the composer’s business to translate these dramatic needs into musical terms. Beginning with the opening credits, music can serve as a kind of overture to suggest the mood or spirit of the film as a whole.

Certain kinds of music can suggest locales, classes, or ethnic groups. Music can be used as foreshadowing, especially when the dramatic context doesn’t permit a director to prepare an audience for an event. Music can also provide ironic contrast. Characterization can be suggested through musical motifs. Characterization can be even more precise when lyrics are added to music. Stanley Kubrick was a bold—and controversial—innovator in the use of film music.

A frequent function of film music is to underline speech, especially dialogue. A common assumption about this kind of music is that it merely acts to prop up bad dialogue or poor acting.

One of the most enduring and popular film genres is the musical, whose principal raison d’être is song and dance. Like opera and ballet, the narrative elements of a musical are usually pretexts for the production numbers, but some musicals are exceptionally sophisticated dramatically. Musicals can be divided into the realistic and the formalistic.

Realistic musicals are generally backstage stories, in which the production numbers are presented as dramatically plausible.

Formalist musicals make no pretense at realism. Characters burst out in song and dance in the middle of a scene without easing into the number with a plausible pretext. This convention must be accepted as an aesthetic premise; otherwise the entire film will strike the viewer as absurd.

Although musicals have been produced in several countries, the **genre** has been dominated by Americans, perhaps because it’s so intimately related to the American studio system. In the 1940s and 1950s, the musical was dominated by MGM, which had the finest musical directors under contract: Kelly, Donen, and Minnelli.

The combining of music with drama is a practice extending back at least to ancient Greece, but no other medium excels the expressive range of the cinema.

A common misconception, held even by otherwise sophisticated moviegoers, is that language in film cannot be as complex as it is in literature. In some respects, language in film can be more complex than in literature. In the first place, the words of a movie, like those of the live theater, are spoken, not written, and the human voice is capable of far more nuances than the cold printed page.

By definition, speech patterns deviating radically from the official dialect are generally regarded as substandard—at least by those who take such class distinctions seriously. Dialects can be a rich source of meaning in movies. Because dialects are usually spoken by people outside the Establishment, they tend to convey a subversive ideology.

Because language is spoken in movies and plays, these two mediums enjoy an advantage over printed language in that the words of a text can be juxtaposed with the ideas and emotions of a **subtext**. Any script meant to be spoken has a subtext, even one of great literary distinction. Some contemporary filmmakers deliberately neutralize their language, claiming that the subtext is what they’re really after.

As an art of juxtapositions, movies can also extend the meanings of language by contrasting spoken words with images. This advantage of simultaneity extends to other sounds. Music and sound effects can modify the meanings of words considerably.

Movies contain two types of spoken language: the monologue and dialogue. The audience, in short, is provided with two types of information, one concrete (visuals), the other abstract (narration). Off-screen narration tends to give a movie a sense of objectivity and often an air of predestination.

The interior monologue is one of the most valuable tools of filmmakers, for it can convey what a character is thinking. The interior monologue is frequently used in adaptations of plays and novels.

A major difference between stage dialogue and screen dialogue is the degree of density. One of the necessary conventions of the live theater is articulation. The theater is a visual as well as aural medium, but in general, the spoken word is dominant: We tend to hear before we see. In real life, people don’t articulate their ideas and feelings with such precision. In movies, the convention of articulation can be relaxed. Because the close-up can show the most minute detail, verbal comment is often superfluous. This greater spatial flexibility means that film language doesn’t have to carry the heavy burden of stage dialogue.

Movie dialogue doesn’t have to conform to natural speech. If language is stylized, the director has several options for making it believable. Foreign language movies are shown either in dubbed versions or in their original language, with written subtitles. Both methods of translation have obvious drawbacks.

The advantages of sound make it indispensable to the film artist. As René Clair foresaw many years ago, sound permits a director more visual freedom, not less. There are many instances where sound is the most economical and precise way of conveying information in film.

**Active Learning Assignments**

**Learning Objective 1. Summarize the historical background of the use of sound in film, including technical advances.**

1. Explain the difference between **synchronous**sound and **nonsynchronous**sound. How did synchronous sound recording change acting styles from the silent era to the early sound era? Why didn’t the addition of music or sound effects have the same effect on acting?

**Learning Objective 4. Contrast the differences between realistic and formalistic musicals, and give examples of musical documentaries and biographies.**

1. View the movie *Saturday Night Fever* (1977) and state whether it is a realistic or formalistic musical, and explain why.

**Learning Objective 5. Show that spoken dialogue can have a deeper subtext than written language by demonstrating how an actor can change a phrase’s meaning by emphasizing certain words over others.**

1. Watch the film *Xala* (1975) and explain how the spoken word affects your understanding of the film. Are the subtitles important? Do they enhance or detract from the cinematic experience? Would you understand the movie without them?

**In-class Discussion Questions and Answers:**

**Learning Objective 2. Explain the overt and symbolic functions of sound effects, and how silence can be utilized just as strongly as sound in certain situations.**

**1.** **Question:** View Mel Brooks’s “tribute” to the silent era of filmmaking, *Silent Movie*, and then discuss what makes the film unique in its lack of sound dialogue and use of other sounds.

**Consider:**

* What exactly do we mean when we say a movie is “silent”?  
  Is there a difference between silence in a movie and a “silent” movie?
* Consider whether or not this film is a “tribute” or a parody of the Silent Era.
* How did directors of silent films compensate for the lack of dialogue and sound effects?

**Learning Objective 2. Explain the overt and symbolic functions of sound effects, and how silence can be utilized just as strongly as sound in certain situations.**

**2.** **Question:** View scenes from *The Exorcist* (1973) and explain how the film’s use of sound affects the audience’s sense of space in the film?

**Consider:**

* Is the sound realistic in this film? Or is it stylized?
* Is the sound used diegetic or nondiegetic? On-screen or off-screen?
* How does volume, pitch, or tempo affect our sense of space?
* Does the location matter in the way sound is used?
* What about genre? Do we accept certain sounds more readily in horror films than in other genres?
* Which sounds most affect our sense of space? Music? Sound effects? Spoken language?

**Learning Objective 6. Demonstrate the applications of monologue, dialogue, and off-screen narration in film.**

**3.** **Question:** View the opening scene of *Apocalypse Now* and discuss how sound and visuals collaborate and how they affect the viewer’s interpretation of the scene.

**Consider:**

* What is the effect of voice-over narration on the audience’s interpretation of this scene?
* What is the effect of music in this scene? What mood does it create?
* Do the visuals coincide with the sound or do they contrast with the sound?
* What about sound effects? Are they important to creating the mood in the opening of the film?

**CHAPTER 6: ACTING**

**Learning Objectives**

1. Identify the four categories of film acting and their purposes within film.
2. Contrast the differences between stage and screen acting, and identify why those differences make film “the director’s medium.”
3. Summarize the history of the American star system, including the golden age of film stars, and list benefits and drawbacks to being a film star.
4. Differentiate between personality stars and actor stars, and list examples of each.
5. Classify the various styles of acting through time and across national origins.
6. Describe the importance of casting in film, and explain why some actors try to avoid typecasting.

**Outline**

1. Categories of Film Acting

a. extras

b. nonprofessional performers

c. trained professionals

d. stars

i. personality stars

ii. actor stars

2. Differences between stage acting and screen acting

a. largely determined by the differences in space and time in each medium

i. the live theater medium for the actor

ii. in films, it’s the director who is the artist

b. the stage performer

i. to be seen and heard clearly

ii. a flexible trained voice

iii. must be believable, even when reciting dialogue that’s highly stylized and unnatural

iv. it helps to be tall, for small actors tend to get lost on a large stage

v. helps to have large and regular features

vi. actors can play roles twenty years beyond their actual age

vii. must be able to control body with some degree of precision

viii. theatrical acting preserves real time so the performer must build—by scene— toward the climactic scene near the end of the play

c. the screen actor

i. can get along quite well with a minimum of stage technique

ii. the essential requisite is “expressiveness”; that is, he or she must look interesting

iii. almost totally dependent on the filmmaker’s approach to the story

materials

1. the more realistic the director’s techniques, the more necessary it is to rely on the abilities of the players

2. the more formalistic the director, the less likely he or she is to value the actor’s contribution

3. through the art of editing, a director can construct a highly emotional “performance” by juxtaposing shots of actors with shots of objects

iv. the close-up allows the film actor to concentrate totally on the truth of the moment

v. not so restricted by vocal requirements because sound volume is controlled electronically

vi. doesn’t have to be tall

vii. features don’t have to be large, only expressive

viii. actor who moves clumsily is not necessarily at a disadvantage in film

ix. because the shot is the basic building unit in film, the actor doesn’t have to sustain a performance for very long

x. the shooting of various sequences can be out of chronology

xi. the screen actor doesn’t “build” emotionally as the stage actor must

xii. the film player must be capable of an intense degree of concentration—turning emotions on and off for very short periods of time

xiii. most of the time, the player must seem totally natural, as if he or she weren’t acting at all

xiv. because acting in the cinema is confined to short segments of time and space, the film player doesn’t need a long rehearsal period

xv. a film actor is expected to play even the most intimate scenes with dozens of technicians on the set

3. The American Star System

a. the backbone of the American film industry since the mid-1910s

i. the first stars: Mary Pickford, Charlie Chaplin

b. stars are the creation of the public, its reigning favorites

c. the public often fuses a star’s artistic persona with his or her private personality

d. audiences can be remarkably resistant to someone else’s notion of a star

e. the golden age—1930s and 1940s

i. the majors—MGM, Warner Brothers, Twentieth Century Fox, Paramount, RKO

ii. stars as commodity

1. in their first years under studio contract, stars were given maximum exposure

2. after a particularly popular performance, a star was usually locked into the same type of role

3. demand for stars was the most predictable economic variable in the business

4. majors viewed their stars as valuable investments

5. promising neophytes served an apprenticeship as starlets

6. top stars attracted the loyalty of both men and women

iii. mythology and iconography

1. mythology of stardom usually emphasizes the glamour

2. critic Parker Tyler observed that stars fulfill an ancient need, almost religious in nature

3. contemporary film stars have become quite savvy in exploiting the public’s fascination with their lives

4. stars must pay a high price for their wealth and fame; they must get used to being treated like commodities with a price tag

f. acting stars vs. personality stars

i. personality stars commonly refuse parts that go against their type

1. top box-office attractions tend to be personality stars

2. Tom Hanks, Sandra Bullock, etc.

ii. acting stars refuse to be typecast and attempt the widest array of roles possible

1. Daniel Day Lewis, Reese Witherspoon, etc.

2. undertake unpleasant character roles rather than conventional leads to expand their range

iii. many stars fall somewhere between the two extremes

iv. film theorist Richard Dyer has pointed out that stars are signifying entities

v. the distinction between a professional actor and a star is not based on technical skill, but on mass popularity

vi. sophisticated filmmakers exploit the public’s affection for its stars by creating ambiguous tensions between a role as written, as acted, and as directed

4. Styles of Acting

a. acting styles differ radically, depending on period, genre, tone, national origins, and directorial emphasis

i. period

1. Lillian Gish was regarded as a great realistic actress in the silent era

2. Kinski is stylized but realistic compared to Conrad Veidt

3. the art of silent acting encompasses only 15 years or so

ii. genre

1. stylized genres such as the samurai film

2. realistic contemporary story

iii. tone

1. Chaplin blended comedy with pathos

2. Greta Garbo perfected a romantic style of acting

b. British tradition

i. most important British film actors are often also the most prominent in the live theater

ii. British repertory system

1. almost every medium-sized city once had a resident drama company

2. there actors could learn their craft by playing a variety of roles from the classic repertory

3. especially the works of William Shakespeare.

4. as players improved, they rose through the ranks, attempting more complex roles

5. the best migrated to the larger cities, where the most prestigious theater companies were found

6. finest were regularly employed in the theaters of London, which is also adjacent to the centers of film production in Britain

iii. British repertory style of acting

1. tended to favor a mastery of externals

2. based on close observation

3. players being trained in diction, movement, makeup, dialects, fencing, dancing, body control, and ensemble acting

c. Method acting

i. post–World War II era tended to emphasize realistic styles of acting

ii. commonly associated with director Elia Kazan, Lee Strasberg in America

iii. developed by Constantin Stanislavsky at the Moscow Art Theater

iv. “You must live the part every moment you are playing it”

v. emotional recall: actor delves into his or her own past to discover feelings that are analogous to those of the character

vi. lengthy rehearsal periods, in which players were encouraged to improvise

vii. to discover the resonances of the text—the subtext

d. French New Wave—Godard, Truffaut, improvisation, cinema verite

i. popularized the technique of improvisation while their players were on camera

ii. resultant increase in realism was highly praised by critics

iii. capture a greater sense of discovery and surprise

5. Casting

a. requires an acute sensitivity to a player’s type (typecasting)

i. inherited from the live theater

ii. stage and screen performers are classified according to role categories: leading men, leading ladies, character actors, juveniles, villains, light comedians, tragedians, ingenues, singing actors, dancing actors, etc.

iii. the rule in silent cinema

iv. trained actors resent being typed and often attempt to broaden their range

b. Hitchcock—“Casting is characterization”

i. once a role has been cast, especially with a personality star, the essence of the fictional character is already established

ii. cunning exploiter of the star system

iii. Hitchcock’s casting is often meant to deceive

c. many filmmakers believe that casting is integral to character

i. acting is a kind of language system

ii. the filmmaker uses actors as a medium for communicating ideas and emotions

d. in analyzing the acting in a movie, we should consider what type of actors are featured and why

**SUMMARY**

Film acting is a complex and variable art that can be broken down into four categories: e**xtras, nonprofessional performers, trained professionals, and stars***.* No matter how a film actor is classified, virtually all performers in this medium concede that their work is shaped by the person who literally and figuratively calls the shots.

The differences between stage and screen acting are largely determined by the differences in space and time in each medium (see also Chapter 7, “Dramatization”). Even the requirements are different in each medium. The essential requisites for the stage performer are to be seen and heard clearly. Thus, the ideal theatrical actor must have a flexible, trained voice. Above all, the stage actor must be *believable,* even when reciting dialogue that’s highly stylized and unnatural. Theatrical acting preserves real time. The performer must build—scene by scene—toward the climactic scene near the end of the play.

In general, the film player can get along quite well with a minimum of stage technique. The essential requisite for a performer in the movies is what Antonioni called “expressiveness.” That is, he or she must *look* interesting. Acting in the cinema is almost totally dependent on the filmmaker’s approach to the story materials. In general, the more **realistic** the director’s techniques, the more necessary it is to rely on the abilities of the players. The more **formalistic** the director, the less likely he or she is to value the actor’s contribution.

Generalizing about acting in movies is difficult because directors don’t approach every film with the same attitudes. But whether a director is a realist or formalist, the differences between film acting and stage acting remain fundamental. Voice qualities can make a difference as to how the actor is perceived and received by the viewing audience. Similarly, the physical requirements for a film actor are different from those of a stage performer. A film actor’s features don’t have to be large, only expressive—particularly the eyes and mouth. Nor does a film actor have to be attractive.

Because acting in the cinema is confined to short segments of time and space, the film player doesn’t need a long rehearsal period to establish a sense of ease with other actors, the set, or costumes. The film player must be capable of an intense degree of concentration—turning emotions on and off for very short periods of time. A film actor is expected to play even the most intimate scenes with dozens of technicians on the set, working or observing. Because the camera distorts, actors are required to perform some scenes unnaturally. In short, the lack of continuity of time and space in movies places the performer almost totally in the hands of the director.

The star system has been the backbone of the American film industry since the mid-1910s. Stars are the creation of the public, its reigning favorites. Their influence in the fields of fashion, values, and public behavior has been enormous. Stars confer instant consequence to any film they appear in. Their fees have staggered the public. Stars are the direct or indirect reflection of the needs, drives, and anxieties of their audience: They are the food of dreams, allowing us to live out our deepest fantasies and obsessions.

Unless the public is receptive to a given screen personality, audiences can be remarkably resistant to someone else’s notion of a star.

The so-called golden age of the star system—roughly the 1930s and 1940s—coincided with the supremacy of the Hollywood studio system. Most of the stars during this period were under exclusive contract to the five major production companies: MGM, Warner Brothers, Paramount, Twentieth Century Fox, and RKO—known in the trade as the Big Five, or the **majors**.

To this day, stars are referred to as “bankable” commodities—that is, insurance for large profits to investors. The majors viewed their stars as valuable investments, and the build-up techniques developed by the studios involved much time, money, and energy.

Though stars were often exploited by the studios, there were some compensations. As a player’s box-office power increased, so did his or her demands.

The mythology of stardom usually emphasizes the glamour of movie stars, lifting them above the mundane concerns of ordinary mortals. Of course, this mythology also involves the tragic victims of stardom. The reality behind the mythology of the stars is not very romantic. For every actor who manages to scale the peaks of stardom, there are hundreds of thousands who fail.

Contemporary film stars have become quite savvy in exploiting the public’s fascination with their lives in order to promote their humanitarian work. Stars must pay a high price for their wealth and fame. They must get used to being treated like commodities with a price tag.

Personality stars commonly refuse parts that go against their type, especially if they’re leading men or women. If a star is locked into his or her type, any significant departure can result in box-office disaster. On the other hand, many stars prefer to remain in the same mold, playing variations on the same character type.

Film theorist Richard Dyer has pointed out that stars are signifying entities. Any sensitive analysis of a film with a star in its cast must take into account that star’s iconographical significance.

The top box-office attractions tend to be personality stars. They stay on top by being themselves, by not trying to impersonate anyone. On the other hand, there have been many stars who refuse to be typecast and attempt the widest array of roles possible. Many stars fall somewhere between the two extremes, veering toward personality in some films, toward impersonation in others.

The distinction between a professional actor and a star is not based on technical skill, but on mass popularity. By definition, a star must have enormous personal magnetism, a riveting quality that commands our attention.

Sophisticated filmmakers exploit the public’s affection for its stars by creating ambiguous

tensions between a role as written, as acted, and as directed.

Perhaps the ultimate glory for a star is to become an icon in American popular mythology. Like the gods and goddesses of ancient times, some stars are so universally known that one name alone is enough to evoke an entire complex of symbolic associations. As a number of cultural studies have shown, the iconography of a star can involve communal myths and symbols of considerable complexity and emotional richness.

Acting styles differ radically, depending on period, genre, tone, national origins, and directorial emphasis. Such considerations are the principal means by which acting styles are classified. Classifying acting styles according to national origins is also likely to be misleading, at least for those countries that have evolved a wide spectrum of styles, such as Japan, the United States, and Italy. Genre and directorial emphasis also influence acting styles significantly.

The art of silent acting encompasses a period of only some fifteen years or so, from 1915 to 1930. Within this brief span, however, a wide variety of playing styles evolved. A popular misconception about the silent cinema is that all movies were photographed and projected at “silent speed”—sixteen frames per second (fps). Among the most important and popular actors of the silent screen were Charlie Chaplin and Greta Garbo.

The most important British film actors are also the most prominent in the live theater. The British repertory system is considered one of the best in the world. The finest of these actors are regularly employed in the theaters of London, which is also adjacent to the centers of film production in Britain. Today, British actors usually enter the profession via several years’ training at a recognized drama school; although the emphasis placed on stage acting in these institutions reflects the heritage of the old repertory system.

In the acting profession, playing Shakespeare is considered the artistic summit. If you can act in Shakespeare convincingly, the argument goes, you can act in anything, because Shakespeare requires the broadest range of an actor’s technical skills and artistic insight. British acting traditions tend to favor a mastery of externals, based on close observation. Virtually all players are trained in diction, movement, makeup, dialects, fencing, dancing, body control, and ensemble acting.

The post–World War II era tended to emphasize realistic styles of acting. In the early 1950s, a new interior style of acting, known as “the Method,” or “the System,” was introduced to American movie audiences. It was based on the theory and work of Constantin Stanislavsky at the Moscow Art Theater. The central credo of Stanislavsky’s system was, “You must live the part every moment you are playing it.”

In the 1960s, the French New Wave directors—especially Godard and Truffaut—popularized the technique of improvisation while their players were on camera. Of course, there was nothing new in the technique itself. Godard and Truffaut, to capture a greater sense of discovery and surprise, would occasionally instruct their players to make up their dialogue while a scene was actually being photographed.

Casting a movie is almost an art in itself. It requires an acute sensitivity to a player’s type, a convention inherited from the live theater. Most stage and screen performers are classified according to role categories: leading men, leading ladies, character actors, juveniles, etc. Typecasting was almost invariable in the silent cinema. In part, this was because characters tended toward allegorical types rather than unique individuals and often were even identified with a label. Eisenstein insisted that players ought to be cast strictly to type and was inclined to favor nonprofessionals because of their greater authenticity.

“Casting is characterization,” Hitchcock pointed out. Once a role has been cast, especially with a personality star, the essence of the fictional character is already established. Hitchcock’s casting is often meant to deceive. His villains were usually actors of enormous personal charm.

Many filmmakers believe that casting is so integral to character; they don’t even begin work on a script until they know who’s playing the major roles. Like photography, mise en scène, movement, editing, and sound, acting is a kind of language system. The filmmaker uses actors as a medium for communicating ideas and emotions.

**Active Learning Assignments**

**Learning Objective 1. Identify the four categories of film acting and their purposes within film.**

1. Watch the movie *Tootsie* (1982). Research the cast on IMDB.com. List the leads and the supporting players. How many extras or nonprofessional actors can you count? Is director Sidney Pollack an amateur, a nonprofessional or a star actor? Why do you think Pollack cast himself in the film?

**Learning Objective 2. Contrast the differences between stage and screen acting, and identify why those difference make film “the director’s medium.”**

1. WatchJonathan Demme’s *The Silence of the Lambs*(1991) starring Anthony Hopkins as Dr. Hannibal Lecter and Jodie Foster as Clarice Starling. Do you see any differences in the acting styles of Hopkins and Foster? Explain where each got their training, and why this is important. Can different acting styles be blended into the same movie? If not, why not?

**Learning Objective 3. Summarize the history of the American star system, including the golden age of film stars, and list benefits and drawbacks to being a film star.**

1. Watch the prison cafeteria scene from *White Heat* with James Cagney reacting to the news of his mother’s death. Then research Cagney’s explanation of how he prepared for that scene and discuss. How did Cagney’s acting philosophy differ from present-day acting techniques? What influence do you think genre played on the acting style of this film? What do you think made Cagney a star of his time period? Is he still considered a star today? If not, why not?

**Learning Objective 4. Differentiate between personality stars and actor stars, and list examples of each.**

1. Watch*As Good as It Gets*(1997), directed by James L. Brooks. Which of the actors in the film would you consider actor stars and which personality stars? Use examples from both this film and other films these actors may have done to support your claim. What are the criteria for being a personality star? Do any of the actors in the film meet these? What are the criteria for being an actor star? Do any of the actors in the film meet these?

**In-class Discussion Questions and Answers:**

**Learning Objective 5. Classify the various styles of acting through time and across national origins.**

**1. Question:** View the classic Charlie Chaplin silent film *The Immigrant*. What does Chaplin do with gesture, physical activity, facial expression, and general appearance to create his character?

**Consider:**

* Describe Chaplin’s acting style.
* Is Chaplin’s style realistic or formalistic, or some blend?
* Is it more beholden to British repertory style or does it reflect a modern approach to acting?
* Is there any actor today he can be compared with? Why or why not?

**Learning Objective 6. Describe the importance of casting in film, and explain why some actors try to avoid typecasting.**

**2. Question:** Make lists of three current male and female superstars each who are considered the “benchmarks” for modern acting techniques. How have these actors progressed in their careers from early roles to more current roles?

**Consider:**

* What makes someone a star? Were they able to avoid typecasting?
* What defines great acting?
* What distinguishes these actors from each other?
* Why are these actors vital and influential today?

**Learning Objective 3. Summarize the history of the American star system, including the golden age of film stars, and list benefits and drawbacks to being a film star.**

**3. Question:** Why, in your opinion, do many people today criticize film actors from the 1940s and 1950s as being overly dramatic in their film characterizations?

**Consider:**

* Some say that these films do not “age” well when seen today.
* What does that mean?
* What is it that makes these actors, and films from that period seem stale and unable to sustain modern audience interest?

**CHAPTER 7: DRAMATIZATION**

**Learning Objectives**

1. Compare live theatre with film and describe how time, space, and language are used in each medium.
2. 2, Explain why it is easier to adapt a stage play to screen than to adapt a film for stage.
3. Illustrate the role of the director in film and live theatre, and identify what makes some directors “auteurs.”
4. Demonstrate how settings on stage and in film can act as symbolic extensions of theme and characterization.
5. Show how costumes and makeup are used to create aspects of character and theme, and describe how lines and color can be used to suggest psychological qualities.
6. Describe some of the costumes and settings film studios used during the golden age of Hollywood.

**Outline**

1. Time, Space, and Language

a. theater and film are similar arts, but not the same

i. both use action as a principal means of communication

ii. both are also collaborative enterprises

iii. both are social arts

iv. but the language systems of each are fundamentally different

b. time

i. in the live theater, time is less flexible than in movies

ii. basic unit of construction in the theater is the scene

iii. basic unit of construction in movies is the shot

iv. cinematic shot can lengthen or shorten time

v. theatrical time is usually continuous

c. space

i. three-dimensional (theater) vs. two-dimensional (film)

ii. unified space of the theater vs. fragmented space of the movie

d. acting on stage vs. screen

i. movies often seem dated because acting styles can’t be adjusted to newer audiences

ii. stage actors, on the other hand, can make even a 2,000-year old play seem fresh and relevant

iii. stage player interacts with audience; film actor can’t

iv. in the live theater audience is more active, the film audience more passive

e. language systems

i. theater is verbal, film is visual

ii. details in film are provided by close-ups and by edited juxtapositions

iii. film is a medium of high visual saturation

iv. conventions

1. two major sources of information in the live theater are action and dialogue

2. movies move easily among all the shot ranges, theater cannot

3. cinema often dramatizes the action that takes place on stage only “between curtains.”

4. the human being is central to the aesthetic of the theater

5. the aesthetic of film is based on photography

2. The Director

a. In the mid-1950s, the French periodical *Cahiers du Cinema* popularized the auteur theory

b. whoever controls the mise en scène is the true “author” of a movie

c. the most admired movies—from whatever country—tend to be director’s films

d. on the stage the director is essentially an interpretive artist

e. in live theater the dominant artist is the writer

f. all of the visual elements take second place to the language of the script

g. the stage director is a go-between for the author and the production staff

h. their influence is stronger during rehearsals than in the actual performance

i. screen directors have a good deal more control over the final product

j. unlike the stage director, the filmmaker controls virtually every aspect of the finished work as well

k. the stage director’s mise en scène is confined to the unit of the scene

l. the film director is not confined to a stationary set with a given number of “walls” because a camera can be placed virtually anywhere

3. Settings and Decor

a. in the best movies and stage productions, settings are not merely backdrops for the action, but symbolic extensions of the theme and characterization

b. spatial considerations force stage directors to make constant compromises with their sets

c. stage directors must also use a constant-sized space

d. the film director has far more freedom in the use of settings

e. most important, the cinema permits a director to shoot outdoors

f. realism and formalism

i. simply convenient critical labels.

ii. most sets tend toward one style or the other, but few are pure examples

iii. expressionistic sets are usually created in the studio

iv expressionistic sets appeal to our sense of the marvelous

g. during the golden age of the Hollywood studio system, each of the majors had a characteristic visual style, determined in large part by the designers at each studio

i. MGM specialized in glamour, luxury, and opulent production values under art director Cedric Gibbons

ii. Warner Brothers’ art director, Anton Grot, was a specialist in grubby, realistic locales

h. what matters most in a setting is how it embodies the essence of the story material

i. on the stage, a setting is generally admired with the opening of the curtain, and then forgotten as the actors take over the center of interest

ii. in the movies, a director can keep cutting back to the setting to remind the audience of its significance

iii. exploited for psychological and thematic reasons

i. a systematic analysis of a set involves a consideration of 8 characteristics

1. exterior or interior
2. style
3. studio or location
4. period
5. class
6. size
7. decoration
8. symbolic function

4. Costumes and Makeup

a. in the most sensitive films and plays, costumes and makeup aren’t merely frills added to enhance an illusion, but aspects of character and theme

b. costumes can reveal class, self-image, even psychological states

c. depending on their cut, texture, and bulk, certain costumes can suggest agitation, fastidiousness, delicacy, dignity, and so on

i. Chaplin’s tramp—most famous costume in film history

d. costume is another language system in the cinema

e. systematic analysis of costumes includes a consideration of the following characteristics:

1. period
2. class
3. sex
4. age
5. silhouette
6. fabric
7. accessories
8. color
9. body exposure
10. function
11. body attitude
12. image

f. makeup in the cinema is generally much subtler than on stage

1. the theatrical actor uses makeup primarily to enlarge his or her features so they will be visible from long distances
2. on the screen, makeup tends to be more understated
3. cinematic makeup is closely associated with the type of performer wearing it

**Summary**

Many people cling to the naive belief that drama and film are two aspects of the same art, only drama is “live,” whereas movies are “recorded.” There are similarities, but films are not mere recordings of plays. The language systems of each are fundamentally different. For the most part, movies have a far broader range of techniques at their disposal.

In the live theater, time is less flexible than in movies. The basic unit of construction in the theater is the scene, and the amount of dramatic time that elapses during a scene is roughly equal to the length of time it takes to perform. The basic unit of construction in movies is the shot. Because the average shot lasts only eight or ten seconds (and can be as brief as a fraction of a second), the cinematic shot can lengthen or shorten time more subtly. Theatrical time is usually continuous. It moves forward. Film can manipulate time.

Space in the live theater is also dependent on the basic unit of the scene. The action takes place in a unified area that has specific limits, usually defined by the proscenium arch. Drama, then, almost always deals with closed forms**.** Movies deal with a series of space fragments. Beyond the frame of a given shot, another aspect of the action waits to be photographed.

In the live theater, the viewer remains in a stationary position. The distance between the audience and the stage is constant. The film viewer, on the other hand, identifies with the camera’s lens, which is not immobilized in a chair. This identification permits the viewer to “move” in any direction and from any distance. These spatial differences don’t necessarily favor one medium over the other. Because of the spatial differences, the viewer’s participation is different in each medium. The theatre audience must fill in certain meanings in the absence of visual detail. A movie audience, on the other hand, is generally more passive. All the necessary details are provided by close-ups and by edited juxtapositions.

Although both drama and film are eclectic arts, the theater is a narrower medium, one specializing in spoken language. Most of the meanings in the theater are found in words, which are densely saturated with information. Because plays stress the primacy of language, one of the major problems in adapting them to the screen is determining how much of the language is necessary in a predominantly visual art like movies.

Both theater and cinema are audiovisual mediums, but they differ in their stress of certain conventions. The two major sources of information in the live theater are action and dialogue. Theatrical action is restricted primarily to objective long shots, to use a cinematic metaphor. The most subtle actions and reactions of stage characters are usually conveyed by language rather than by visual means. Because of these visual problems, most plays avoid actions requiring vast or minute spaces. Theatrical action is usually confined to the long- and full-shot range.

The human being is central to the aesthetic of the theater: Words must be recited by people; conflicts must be embodied by actors. The cinema is not so dependent on humans. The aesthetic of film is based on photography, and anything that can be photographed can be the subject matter of a movie. For this reason, adapting a play to the screen, although difficult, is hardly impossible, for much of what can be done on the stage can be duplicated on the screen.

The director, whether in stage or screen productions, is a critical element to the successful creation of an artistic visual form. To some in the 1950s film industry, the director was an *auteur*, a master of control and artistic vision. Again there are similarities and differences between the stage director and film director. On the stage, the director is essentially an interpretive artist. The stage director creates certain patterns of movement, appropriate gestures for actors, and spatial relationships, but all of these visual elements take second place to the language of the script, which is created by the playwright. The stage director is a kind of go-between for the author and the production staff.

On the other hand, screen directors have a good deal more control over the final product. They too dominate the preproduction activities, but unlike the stage director, the filmmaker controls virtually every aspect of the finished work as well.

The differences in control and precision between the stage director and the film director can best be illustrated by examining their handling of the mise en scène. Stage directors are much more restricted: They must work within one stationary set per scene. In the cinema, the director converts three-dimensional space into a two-dimensional image of space. Because the stage director’s mise en scène is confined to the unit of the scene, a certain amount of compromise is inevitable. Film directors have to make fewer compromises of this sort, for they have a greater number of “scene-lets” at their disposal: Most movies average well over a thousand shots.

In the best movies and stage productions, settings are not merely backdrops for the action, but symbolic extensions of the theme and characterization. Stage sets are generally less detailed than film sets, for the audience is too distant from the stage to perceive many small details. Spatial considerations force stage directors to make constant compromises with their sets. The film director has far more freedom in the use of settings. Most important, of course, the cinema permits a director to shoot outdoors—an enormous advantage.

In set design, as in other aspects of movies, the terms **realism**and **formalism**are simply convenient critical labels. Most sets *tend* toward one style or the other, but few are pure examples.

*Realism* is never a simple term. In movies, it’s used to describe a variety of styles. Some critics use modifiers like “poetic realism,” “documentary realism,” and “studio realism” to make finer distinctions. The nature of beauty in realism is also a complex issue. Beauty of form is an important component of poetic realism. In other realistic films, beauty—in this conventional sense—plays a lesser role. To the unsympathetic, the cult of realism verges on madness.

Expressionistic sets are usually created in the studio, where the contaminations of reality cannot penetrate. Magic, not realism, is the aim. Expressionistic sets appeal to our sense of the marvelous.

During the golden age of the Hollywood studio system, each of the majors had a characteristic visual style, determined in large part by the designers at each studio. Some were called production designers, others art directors, a few simply set designers. Because all the studios attempted to diversify their products as much as possible, however, their art directors had to be versatile.

Certain types of locales were in such constant demand that the studios constructed permanent **back-lot sets,** which were used in film after film. Of course, these were suitably altered with new furnishings to make them look different each time they were used. What matters most in a setting is how it embodies the essence of the story material. Settings can also be used to suggest a sense of progression in the characters. On the stage, a setting is generally admired with the opening of the curtain, and then forgotten as the actors take over the center of interest. In the movies, a director can keep cutting back to the setting to remind the audience of its significance. Even the furniture of a room can be exploited for psychological and thematic reasons. The setting of a movie—far more than any play—can even take over as the central interest. A systematic analysis of a set involves a consideration of eight characteristics: *exterior/interior, style, studio/location, period, class, size, decoration, symbolic function*.

In the most sensitive films and plays, costumes and makeup aren’t merely frills added to enhance an illusion, but aspects of character and theme. Costumes can reveal class, self-image, even psychological states. Depending on their color, cut, texture, and bulk, certain costumes can suggest agitation, fastidiousness, delicacy, dignity, and so on. A costume, then, is a medium, especially in the cinema, where a close-up of a fabric can suggest information that’s independent even of the wearer.

Perhaps the most famous costume in film history is Charlie Chaplin’s tramp outfit. The costume is an indication of both class and character, conveying the complex mixture of vanity and dash that makes Charlie so appealing. In most cases, especially period films, costumes are designed for the performers who will be wearing them.

During the Hollywood studio era, powerful stars often insisted on costumes and makeup that heightened endowments regardless of period accuracy. In realistic contemporary stories, costumes are often bought off the rack rather than individually designed. Costumes, then, represent another language system in movies, a symbolic form of communication that can be as complex and revealing as the other language systems filmmakers use. A systematic analysis of a costume includes a consideration of the following eight characteristics: *period, class, sex, age, silhouette, fabric, accessories, color, body exposure, function, body attitude, and image.*

Makeup in the cinema is generally subtler than on stage. The theatrical actor uses makeup primarily to enlarge his or her features so they’ll be visible from long distances. On the screen, makeup tends to be more understated. Cinematic makeup is closely associated with the type of performer wearing it. In general, stars prefer makeup that tends to glamorize them.

**Active Learning Assignments**

**Learning Objective 1. Compare live theatre with film and describe how time, space, and language are used in each medium.**

1. Arrange for your film class to attend a local community or professional theatre production after discussing this chapter. Then back in the classroom, discuss that live theatre experience from the standpoint of this chapter’s content.

**Learning Objective 5. Show how costumes and makeup are used to create aspects of character and theme, and describe how lines and color can be used to suggest psychological qualities.**

1. Charlie Chaplin’s tramp costume was and still is the most popular and well-known in film history. Discuss why this costume was so important to Chaplin and the creation of the “tramp” character. Is there any equivalent to this sort of costume in movies today? Any costume as iconic?

**Learning Objective 1. Compare live theatre with film and describe how time, space, and language are used in each medium.**

1. How does a film audience’s emotional response to what they see and hear on screen contradict the nature of film as a “participatory” art form? This is an important philosophical question. In other words, consider how actors in a stage production can hear their audience react and gain emotional encouragement and interaction, while a film actor receives none of that “feedback.”

**In-class Discussion Questions and Answers**

**Learning Objective 2. Explain why it is easier to adapt a stage play to screen than to adapt a film for stage; 3. Illustrate the role of the director in film and live theatre, and identify what makes some directors “auteurs.”**

**1.** **Question:** View Steven Spielberg’s film *War Horse* (2011)*.* What makes the movie experience different from the experience an audience would have reading it as a children’s book, or viewing it as a stage play?

**Consider:**

* How do the differentmediums affect the telling of the story?
* Is time handled the same?
* What about space?
* Does the language differ at all?
* How did Spielberg choose to adapt the stage play to film? Is his adaptation realistic or formalistic, or some blend?
* What were the challenges of retelling the story as a film, and how well did Spielberg address them?

**Learning Objective 4. Demonstrate how settings on stage and in film can act as symbolic extensions of theme and characterization.**

**2.** **Question:** Compare and contrast scenes from *The Sands of Iwo Jima* (1948) and *Letters from Iwo Jima* (2006).

**Consider:**

* How does setting act as an extension of theme in these two films?
* Could either of these movies be adapted to the stage? What would be gained, and what would be lost?
* Does the fact that the earlier film used process shots more than the other make any difference to the viewer’s experience watching these two films?
* Remember, a studio allows a director more control and precision than an actual location; some filmmakers use the so-called process shot in scenes requiring exterior locations.
* Today, process shots are being replaced by digital computer technology. Can you notice any shots in the newer film that are digitally composed or use digital special effects?

**Learning Objective 5. Show how costumes and makeup are used to create aspects of character and theme, and describe how lines and color can be used to suggest psychological qualities.**

**3.** **Question:** View the film *Lincoln* (2012) and then explain how costume designer Joanna Johnston helped create various aspects of the characters’ personalities. How did she use line and color to suggest psychological qualities of the characters?

**Consider:**

* Johnston carefully researched the clothing styles of the American Civil War era, as well as the social commentaries of the period concerning the sartorial habits of President Lincoln and his wife, Mary Todd Lincoln.
* The president was considered something of a fashion victim, totally without distinction.
* Many of his contemporaries thought he was indifferent about his appearance: Clothes for Lincoln were merely something to hold off the weather, Johnston discovered.
* Mary Todd was another story. Where Lincoln’s tastes were strictly utilitarian, his wife’s tended toward the elaborate and sometimes gaudy, in keeping with the prevailing fashions of the Victorian era.
* She over-decorated herself to compensate for the fact that she was plain, and not a great beauty, Johnston noted.

**CHAPTER 8: STORY**

**Learning Objectives**

1. Define narratology and describe how narration differs according to a movie’s
2. style.
3. Describe the role of the spectator as co-creator in making meaning in film.
4. Diagram the “classical paradigm” and give examples of it in film.
5. Identify seven traits of realistic narratives, and give examples.
6. Name the characteristics of formalistic narratives, and give examples.
7. List the three broad classifications of motion pictures and describe the narrative structures commonly used for each.
8. Outline the four main cycles of genre movies and analyze the advantages and shortcomings of movie genres as a means of classifying films.
9. Explain the influence Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung had on genre theorists.

**Outline**

1. Types of Fictional Narratives

a. *mimesis* (showing), the province of live theater

b. *diegesis* (telling), the province of the literary epic and the novel; employs a storyteller

c. cinema combines both forms of storytelling

2. Narratology

a. a study of how stories work

b. also the study of different narrative structures, storytelling strategies, aesthetic conventions, types of stories (genres), and their symbolic implications

c. narratologists are interested in the “rhetoric” of storytelling; that is, the forms that “message senders” use to communicate with “message receivers”

1. In cinema, a problem with this triadic communications model is
2. determining who the sender is
3. the implied author is the filmmaker
4. however, many stories are not created by a single storyteller
5. problem of the elusive film author is complicated when a movie has a voice-over narration

d. In classical narrative structures, we are generally aware of a shaping hand in

the story line

e. In formalistic narratives, the author is overtly manipulative, sometimes scrambling the chronology of the story or heightening or restructuring events to maximize a thematic idea

f. story vs. plot

* + 1. story—the raw materials of a dramatic action in chronological sequence
    2. plot—the storyteller’s method of superimposing a structural pattern over the story
    3. The implied author motivates the characters and provides a cause–effect logic to the sequence of events.
    4. plot involves the implied author’s point of view as well as the structuring of the scenes into an aesthetic pattern.

3. The Spectator

a. impossible to understand a movie without being actively engaged in a dynamic interplay with its narrative logic

b. David Bordwell and others have explored how the spectator is constantly interacting with a movie’s narrative

* + 1. we attempt to superimpose our sense of order and coherence on the film’s world
    2. we bring a set of expectations to a movie even before we’ve seen it
    3. our knowledge of a given era or genre leads us to expect a predictable set of variables
    4. either we adjust to a filmmaker’s presentation of the genre, or we reject the offending innovation as inappropriate

c. narrational strategies often determined by genre

1. suspense
2. rom-com

d. prior knowledge of a film’s star also defines its narrative parameters

1. Clint Eastwood—action genre, more generic certainty
2. Johnny Depp—broader range, less generic certainty

e. audiences also judge a film in advance by the connotations of its title

f. style of the opening credits and music help us to determine the tone of the picture

g. beginning scenes imply how the narrative will be developed and where it’s likely to end up

1. Godard and the jumbled narrative
2. flashbacks

h. we are never really passive in the face of a film’s plot

4. The Classical Paradigm

a. “classical” because it is the norm of actual practice, not because of artistic excellence

b. has dominated fiction film production ever since the 1910s especially in U.S.

c. “paradigm” meaning a set of conventions, not rules

d. derived from live theater, it is a narrative model based on protagonist and antagonist in conflict, which builds to climax and follows through to resolution

e. emphasizes dramatic unity, plausible motivations, and coherence of its constituent parts

f. Gustav Freytag’s inverted V diagram of structure

1. begin with an implied dramatic question
2. we want to know how the protagonist will get what he or she wants in the face of considerable opposition
3. following scenes intensify this conflict in a rising pattern of action
4. the conflict builds to its maximum tension in the climax
5. the protagonist and antagonist clash overtly; one wins, the other loses
6. after their confrontation, the dramatic intensity subsides in the resolution
7. story ends with some kind of formal closure—final image

g. Syd Field’s conceptual model of three-act narrative structure

1. plot points—major twists in the action
2. Buster Keaton’s *The General* has classic structure (parallel, too)

h. the three-act structure as exemplified through Frank Daniel’s eight-sequence form

1. sequences are roughly ten to fifteen minutes each
2. derived from the length, roughly, of a reel of film in early cinema
3. the eight sequences fit within the classical three-act structure

5. Realistic Narratives

a. the realistic storyteller attempts to submerge the pattern, to bury it beneath the surface “clutter” and apparent randomness of the dramatic event

b. have loose, discursive plots with no clearly defined beginning, middle, or end; “slice of life” plots

c. have conflict that is not always clear cut

d. have structures that often borrow from the cycles of nature

* + 1. circular
    2. cyclical
    3. episodic

e. other important traits

1. a nonintrusive, implied author
2. rejection of clichés
3. fondness for exposé
4. antisentimental point of view
5. avoidance of melodrama
6. scientific view of causality and motivation
7. avoidance of the lyrical impulse

6. Formalistic Narratives

a. revel in their artificiality

b. time is often scrambled and rearranged

c. plot is not concealed but heightened

d. structured according to the filmmaker’s theme

e. many formalistic narratives are intruded on by the author

f. often interrupted by lyrical interludes, exercises in pure style

7. Nonfictional Narratives

a. documentaries and avant-garde films usually don’t tell stories, at least not in the conventional (that is, fictional) sense

b. structured around an argument, not a story

c. report on the world rather than create it, but shape the raw material through selection and pattern

d. documentaries

1. deal with facts—real people, places, and events rather than invented ones.
2. reporting on the one that already exists
3. keep structure simple and unobtrusive
4. main interest is with subject matter rather than style
5. cinéma vérité style of documentary

1. lightweight 16mm handheld camera

2. flexible zoom lenses

3. fast film stocks

4. portable tape recorder

5. aesthetic amounted to a rejection of preplanning and carefully detailed scripts

6. minimal interference with reality

e. avant-garde cinema

1. hard to generalize about their narrative structures
2. not written out in advance
3. same artist usually shoots and edits
4. value chance and spontaneity
5. “personal” or “poetic”
6. concerned with probing the depths and layers of meaning of a given moment
7. often disdain any kind of recognizable subject matter

8. Genre and Myth

a. genres are distinguished by a characteristic set of conventions in style, subject matter, and values; a loose set of expectations

1. directed at a specific audience
2. “a form in search of content”
3. genre conventions are mere clichés unless they’re united with significant innovations in style or subject matter
4. as Aristotle noted in The Poetics, genres are qualitatively neutral
5. the most critically admired genre films strike a balance between the form’s pre-established conventions and the artist’s unique contributions
6. filmmakers are attracted to genres because they synthesize a vast amount of cultural information, freeing them to explore more personal concerns
7. the most enduring genres tend to adapt to changing social conditions
8. four main cycles of genre movies
   * + 1. primitive
       2. classical
       3. revisionist
       4. parodic

b. myth

i. Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung believed that art is a reflection of underlying structures of meaning, or archetypal patterns

1. for Freud, art was a form of daydreaming and wish fulfillment

2. Jung was fascinated by myths, fairy tales, and folklore, which he believed contained symbols and story patterns that were universal

ii. many of these archetypal patterns are bipolar and embody the basic concepts of religion, art, and society: god–devil, active–passive, male–female

iii. Claude Lévi-Strauss

1. French cultural anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss noted that myths have no author, no origin, no core axis

2. they allow “free play” in a variety of artistic forms

3. Walt Disney’s work is a good example

**Summary**

Since ancient times, people have been intrigued by the seductive powers of storytelling. In *The Poetics,* Aristotle distinguished between two types of fictional narratives: *mimesis* (showing) and *diegesis* (telling). Cinema combines both forms of storytelling and hence is a more complex medium, with a wider range of narrative techniques at its disposal.

Scholars in modern times have also studied narrative forms, with most of the focus devoted to literature, film, and drama. Narratology, as this new interdisciplinary field was called in the 1980s, is a study of how stories work, how we make sense of the raw materials of a narrative, how we fit them together to form a coherent whole.

In traditional terms, narratologists are interested in the “rhetoric” of storytelling; that is, the *forms* that “message senders” use to communicate with “message receivers.” The implied author is the filmmaker. However, many stories are not created by a single storyteller. The problem of the elusive film author is complicated when a movie has a **voice-over** narration.

Narration also differs according to a movie’s style. In realistic films, the implied author is virtually invisible. In classical narrative structures, we are generally aware of a shaping hand in the storyline. In formalistic narratives, the author is overtly manipulative, sometimes scrambling the chronology of the story or heightening or restructuring events to maximize a thematic idea.

Narratology is often arcane, and occasionally incomprehensible, because of its abstract language and jargon. Exotic terms are often used to describe traditional concepts. What are the differences between story and plot?

The implied author motivates the characters and provides a cause–effect logic to the sequence of events. Peter Brooks defines plot as “the design and intention of narrative, what shapes a story and gives it a certain direction or intention of meaning”. In short, plot involves the implied author’s point of view as well as the structuring of the scenes into an aesthetic pattern.

It’s impossible to understand a movie without being actively engaged in a dynamic interplay with its narrative logic. In the American cinema especially, the story reigns supreme, even if no one seems to take the story very seriously.

David Bordwell and others have explored how the spectator is constantly interacting with a movie’s narrative. We attempt to superimpose our sense of order and coherence on the film’s world. When narratives fail to act according to tradition, convention, or our sense of history, we are forced to reassess our cognitive methods and our attitude toward the narrative. Narrational strategies are often determined by genre. Our prior knowledge of a film’s star also defines its narrative parameters. Audiences also judge a film in advance by the connotations of its title.

Once a movie begins, we begin to define its narrative limits. The style of the credits and the accompanying score help us to determine the tone of the picture. The opening expository scenes also establish the internal “world” of the story—what’s possible, what’s probable, what’s not very likely, and so on. When a critic asked the radical innovator Jean-Luc Godard if he believed that a movie should have a beginning, middle, and end, the iconoclastic filmmaker replied: “Yes—but not necessarily in that order.”

An elaborate game is played out between a cinematic narrative and the spectator. While watching a movie, we must sort out irrelevant details, hypothesize, test our hypotheses, retreat if necessary, adapt, formulate explanations, and so on. The more complex the plot, the more cunning we must be—sorting, sifting, weighing new evidence, inferring motives and explanations, ever suspicious of being taken off guard.

The classical paradigm is a term invented by scholars to describe a certain kind of narrative structure that has dominated fiction film production ever since the 1910s. It’s by far the most popular type of story organization, especially in the United States, where it reigns virtually unchallenged.

Derived from the live theater, the classical paradigm is a set of conventions, not rules. This narrative model is based on a conflict between a protagonist, who initiates the action, and an antagonist, who resists it. The classical paradigm emphasizes dramatic unity, plausible motivations, and coherence of its constituent parts. Each shot is seamlessly elided to the next in an effort to produce a smooth flow of action, and often a sense of inevitability.

Classical plot structures are linear and often take the form of a journey, a chase, or a search. Even the characters are defined primarily in terms of what they do. Classicists favor characters who are goal oriented so that we can take a rooting interest in their plans of action. Screenwriting author Syd Fields believes that there are three components to a plot—Setup, Confrontation, and Resolution.

A surprising number of experts on story construction employ a three-act concept, though the details can vary. For example, Frank Daniel, who taught screenwriting at some of the world’s most prestigious film schools, employed an eight-sequence structure of roughly 10 to 15 minutes each (derived from the length, roughly, of a reel of film in the early days of cinema). These eight sections can be accommodated within the classical three-act structure.

Contemporary critics and scholars regard realism as a style, with an elaborate set of conventions that are less obvious perhaps, but just as artificial as those used by expressionists. Both realistic and formalistic narratives are patterned and manipulated, but the realistic storyteller attempts to submerge the pattern. Realists prefer loose, discursive plots, with no clearly defined beginning, middle, or end. Realists often borrow their structures from the cycles of nature. Often, we can’t guess the principle of narrative coherence until the end of the movie, especially if it has a circular or cyclical structure, as many realistic films do. Spectators who like fast-moving stories are often impatient with realistic films, which frequently move slowly. There are seven traits of realistic narratives.

Formalistic narratives luxuriate in their artificiality. Time is often scrambled and rearranged to hammer home a thematic point more forcefully. The design of the plot is not concealed but heightened. Formalistic plots come in a wide assortment, but usually they are structured according to the filmmaker’s theme. Many formalistic narratives are intruded on by the author, whose personality is part of the show. Formalistic narratives are often interrupted by lyrical interludes, exercises in pure style. Stylized genre films like musicals, science fiction, and fantasies offer the richest potential for displays of stylistic rapture and bravura effects. These lyrical interludes interrupt the forward momentum of the plot, which is often a mere pretext anyway.

There are three broad classifications of motion pictures: fiction, documentary, and avant-garde. Unlike most fiction films, documentaries deal with facts—real people, places, and events rather than invented ones. The concepts of realism and formalism are almost as useful in discussing documentaries as fiction films. The realistic documentary is best illustrated by the cinema verité or “direct cinema” movement of the 1960s. Television journalism was responsible for the development of a new technology, which in turn eventually led to a new philosophy of truth in documentary cinema. The concept of minimal interference with reality became the dominating preoccupation of the American and Canadian schools of cinéma vérité. The filmmaker must not control events in any way. Cinéma vérité also uses sound minimally. The tradition of the formalistic or subjective documentary can be traced back to the Soviet filmmaker Dziga Vertov, Documentarists in this formalistic tradition tend to build their movies thematically, arranging and structuring the story materials to demonstrate a thesis.

Avant-garde films are so variable that it’s hard to generalize about their narrative structures. Most of these movies don’t even try to tell a story. Autobiographical elements are common. With some exceptions, avant-garde films are not written out in advance. Avant-garde filmmakers also value chance and spontaneity in their movies, and to exploit these elements, they avoid the inflexibility of a script.

Fiction movies, on the other hand, are like novels and plays. They’re essentially “horizontal” in their development. Narrative filmmakers use linear structures that must progress from situation to situation, from feeling to feeling.

A genre film is a specific type of movie: a war picture, a gangster film, science fiction, and so on. There are literally hundreds of them, especially in the United States and Japan, where virtually all fiction movies can be classified according to genre. Genres are distinguished by a characteristic set of conventions in style, subject matter, and values. Genre is also a convenient way of focusing and organizing the story materials. The major shortcoming of genre pictures is that they’re easy to imitate and have been debased by stale mechanical repetition. Genre conventions are mere clichés unless they’re united with significant innovations in style or subject matter. The most critically admired genre films strike a balance between the form’s preestablished conventions and the artist’s unique contributions. Filmmakers are attracted to genres because they automatically synthesize a vast amount of cultural information, freeing them to explore more personal concerns. A nongeneric movie must be more self-contained.

The most enduring genres tend to adapt to changing social conditions. Most of them begin as naive allegories of Good versus Evil. Over the years, they become more complex in both form and thematic range. Film critics and scholars classify genre movies into four main cycles.

Some of the most suggestive critical studies have explored the relationship of a genre to the society that nurtured it. This sociopsychic approach was pioneered by the French literary critic Hippolyte Taine in the nineteenth century. He believed that art must be analyzed for both its overt and covert meaning, and that beneath its explicit content there exists a vast reservoir of latent social and psychic information. This approach tends to work best with popular genres, which reflect the shared values and fears of a large audience. Such genres might be regarded as contemporary myths, lending philosophical meaning to the facts of everyday life.

The ideas of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung have also influenced many genre theorists. Like Taine, both believed that art is a reflection of underlying structures of meaning, that it satisfies certain subconscious needs in both the artist and audience.

The French cultural anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss noted that myths have no author, no origin, no core axis—they allow “free play” in a variety of artistic forms. Many of Disney’s films are based on folklore and fairytales, and are loaded with archetypal elements; Pinocchio is a good example.

A story can be many things. To a producer it’s a property that has a box-office value. To a writer it’s a screenplay. To a film star it’s a vehicle. To a director it’s an artistic medium. To a genre critic it’s a classifiable narrative form. To a sociologist it’s an index of public sentiment. To a psychiatrist it’s an instinctive exploration of hidden fears or communal ideals. To a moviegoer it can be all of these, and more.

In analyzing a film’s narrative structure, we ought to ask ourselves some basic questions. Who’s telling the story? A voice-over narrator? Why him or her? Or does the story “tell itself,” like most stage plays? Who is the implied narrator of such stories, the guiding hand in the arrangement of the narrative’s separate parts? What do we as spectators supply to the story? What information do we provide in order to fill in the narrative’s gaps? How is time presented—chronologically or subjectively rearranged through flashbacks and other narrative disjunctions? Is the narrative realistic, classical, or formalistic? What genre, if any? What phase of the genre’s evolution? What does the movie say about the social context and period that it was made in? How does the narrative embody mythical concepts or universal human questions?

**Active Learning Assignments**

**Learning Objective 3. Diagram the “classical paradigm” and give examples of it in film.**

1. Buster Keaton’s *The General* is discussed in detail in this chapter. Show the film in class, and with the assistance of the charts in the text, discuss the structure of the narrative in this film.

**Learning Objective 7. Outline the four main cycles of genre movies and analyze the advantages and shortcomings of movie genres as a means of classifying films.**

1. As the author of this text states, “The most enduring genres tend to adapt to changing social conditions. Most of them begin as naive allegories of Good versus Evil. Over the years, they become more complex in both form and thematic range. Finally, they veer into an ironic mode, mocking many of the genre’s original values and conventions. Some critics claim that this evolution is inevitable and doesn’t necessarily represent an aesthetic improvement.” View *Dead Men Don’t Wear Plaid* and explain how this film reflects the evolution of the film noir genre over time. What part of the genre cycle does this film belong in and why?

**Learning Objective 2. Describe the role of the spectator as co-creator in making meaning in film.**

1. The spectator is seen as a vital component in the relationship between the story and the successful conveyance of its theme and comprehension. Discuss the importance of the spectator in Woody Allen’s *Annie Hall.* Make sure to also define genre, and discuss the narrative structure of the film. Explain how the narrative is presented to the viewer, and whether or not you think the narrative is successfully conveyed to spectators.

**In-class Discussion Questions and Answers:**

**Learning Objective 6. List the three broad classifications of motion pictures and describe the narrative structures commonly used for each.**

**1.** **Question:** Using Syd Field’s three-act pattern and Gustav Freytag’s inverted V (/\) structure (rising pattern of action) discuss Jan De Bont’s *Twister*(1996).

**Consider:**

* This film is an excellent example of a classical action-oriented/problem-solving narrative (the characters are basically static in the narrative flow) that clearly follows the three-act pattern and /\ structure in strict chronological order.
* The structure is clear to see once the ironic Bugs Bunny cartoon ends as well as the backstory (the little girl, Jo, loses her daddy to a twister 25 years before the primary action of the film).
* First comes the problem at the end of act 1, then the turning point in and the defining moment at the end of act 2, and then the climax (followed by a brief denouement) at the end of act 3.
* The plot doubles with a love story, a reconciliation between the two principal characters, Billy and Jo (Bill Paxton and Helen Hunt).

**Learning Objective 4. Identify seven traits of realistic narratives, and give examples.**

**2. Question:** View Yasujiro Ozu’s film Late Spring (1949) and then discuss the main characteristics of formalistic narratives, and how they apply to understanding this film.

**Consider:**

* Traditionally, critics have linked realism to “life,” formalism with “pattern.”
* Realism is defined as an absence of style, whereas style is a preeminent concern among formalists.
* Realists reject artifice to portray the material world “transparently,” without distortion or even mediation.
* One of the most common genres in Japan is the home drama. It was the only genre Yasujiro Ozu worked in, and he was one of its most popular practitioners.
* This type of film deals with the day-to-day routines of domestic life. Although Ozu was a profoundly philosophical artist, his movies consist almost entirely of “little things”—the bitter pills of self-denial that ultimately render life disappointing.
* Many of Ozu’s films have seasonal titles that symbolically evoke appropriate human analogues. *Late Spring*, for example, deals with the attempts of a decent widower (Ryu) to marry off his only daughter (Hara) before she wilts into spinsterhood.

**Learning Objective 5. Name the characteristics of formalistic narratives, and give examples.**

**3.** **Question:**

What are the main characteristics of formalistic narratives, and how do they apply to understanding a film like David Lynch’s *Mulholland Drive*(2000)?

**Consider:**

* Formalistic narratives luxuriate in their artificiality. Time is often scrambled and rearranged to hammer home a thematic point more forcefully. The design of the plot is not concealed but heightened. It’s part of the show.
* Formalistic plots come in a wide assortment, but usually they are structured according to the filmmaker’s theme.
* *Mulholland Drive*(2000) is half classical noir and half surrealist fable. It is fairly easy to follow until the turning point when the story becomes surreal and dreamlike (almost in the fashion of Bunuel), and proceeds in semi-parallel form, but with more jumbled sequences, with characters changing physical places and identities and with some settings disappearing and others appearing.
* The question for this film becomes this: Which is reliable? Is the first half (linear, chronological) of the narrative real, or is it the surreal? Is the second half (nonlinear, achronological, with shifting character identities) of the narrative real, or is it the surreal?
* In this, Lynch’s film may be contrasted to Tom Tykwer’s energetic *Run Lola Run*(1998), which shows three formalistic versions of the same fateful phone call, to which Lola responds desperately.

NOTE: The homoerotic element of Lynch’s film may offend some students.

**CHAPTER 9: WRITING**

**Learning Objectives**

1. Analyze the role of the screenwriter in the collaborative process that is filmmaking.

2. Describe how screenplays differ from published literature, and what features are more or less important in screenplays.

3. Explain how dialogue differs in films that cross time and genre, and how dialogue is used to develop characters’ ideologies.

4. Evaluate the reading version of *North by Northwest* for fluidity and note the formalistic differences between screenplays and published literature.

5. Identify the most common figurative techniques used in cinema, and explain how each can be used to convey meaning in film.

6. List the four basic types of narration, and give film examples of each.

7. Illustrate the three types of literary adaptations, and give film examples of each.

**Outline**

1. The Screenwriter

a. more than any of the director’s other collaborators, the screenwriter has been brought forward as the main “author” of a film

1. the writer’s role varies immensely from film to film and from director to director
2. many of the greatest directors have written their own scripts

b. the American studio system tended to encourage multiple authorship of scripts

1. screenwriter Scott Z. Burns remarked: “A movie is made at least four times: when written, when shot, when edited, and once more when marketed
2. in the heyday of the Hollywood studio system, a handful of intellectual writers enjoyed tremendous prestige

c. to be convincing, eloquent language must be dramatically probable

d. some filmmakers are at their best with talky scripts—Lina Wertmüller, Ingmar Bergman, and Woody Allen

e. some directors scoff at the notion that a writer could be the dominant artist in the cinema—Michelangelo Antonioni

f. movie scripts seldom make for interesting reading, precisely because they are like blueprints

g. the director’s choice of shot—the way the action is photographed—is the crucial element in most films

2. The Screenplay

a. rarely autonomous literary products

b. often modified by directors, actors

c. Joseph L. Mankiewicz, *All About Eve*

d. Bud Schulberg, *On the Waterfront*

e. John Osborne, *Tom Jones*

f. good dialogue is often the result of having a good ear

* + 1. catching the correct rhythms of speech, the right choice of words, the length of people’s sentences, the jargon, slang, or swearing people use

1. the foul-mouthed characters in Quentin Tarantino’s *Reservoir Dogs*

g. a movie’s central theme is often first articulated by its writer

3. *North by Northwest:* the Screenplay

a. Ernest Lehman’s screenplay has considerable fluidity as a piece of writing

b. like many of Hitchcock’s movies, revolves around the wrong-man theme

c. crop-duster sequence shows how Hitchcock broke down this screenplay into individual shots (can be accessed on YouTube)

4. Figurative Comparisons

a. in his essay “La Caméra-Stylo,” Alexandre Astruc observed that film has difficulty in expressing thoughts and ideas

b. invention of sound an enormous advantage to filmmakers, for with spoken language they could express virtually any kind of abstract thought

c. film directors also wanted to explore the possibilities of the image as a conveyor of abstract ideas

d. even before the sound era, filmmakers had devised a number of nonverbal figurative techniques

e. figurative technique defined as an artistic device that suggests abstract ideas through comparison, either implied or overt

i. motif

1. so totally integrated within the realistic texture of a film that we can refer to them as submerged or invisible symbols

2. anything systematically repeated in a movie yet doesn’t call attention itself

ii. symbol

1. imply additional meanings that are relatively apparent to the sensitive observer

2. symbolic meanings of these things can shift with the dramatic context

iii. metaphor

1. a comparison of some kind that cannot be literally true

2. editing is a frequent source of metaphors in film

3. two shots can be linked together to produce a third, symbolic, idea

iv. allegory

1. seldom used in movies because it tends toward simplemindedness

2. correspondence exists between a character or situation and a symbolic idea or complex of ideas

v. allusion

1. an implied reference

2. usually to a well-known event, person, or work of art

3. an overt reference or allusion to another movie, director, or memorable shot is sometimes called an homage

5. Point of View

a. generally concerns the narrator through whose words the events of a story are understood

1. may or may not be a participant in the action
2. may or may not be a reliable guide for the reader to follow

b. in movies, point of view tends to be less rigorous than in novels

c. although there are cinematic equivalents of the four basic types of narration

d. four basic types of point of view in literary fiction

i. first person

* + - 1. tells his or her own story
      2. reliable vs. unreliable narrator in fiction
      3. the cinematic equivalent to the “voice” of the literary narrator is the “eye” of the camera
      4. point of view shots

ii. omniscient

1. generally such narrators are not participants in a story
2. but are all-knowing observers who supply readers with all the facts they need to know to appreciate the story
3. fiction films tend to fall naturally into the omniscient form

iii. third person

1. nonparticipating narrator tells story from the consciousness of a single character
2. the anonymous commentator, usually found in documentaries

iv. objective

1. in film, a variation of omniscient
2. merely reports events from the outside

6. Literary Adaptations

a. problems of adaptation

1. the better the literary work, the more difficult the adaptation
2. how close to remain to the raw data of the subject matter

b. types of adaptation

i. loose

1. only an idea, a situation, or a character is taken from a literary source, then developed independently

2. can be likened to Shakespeare’s treatment of a story from Plutarch or Bandello

ii. faithful

1. attempt to re-create the literary source in filmic terms, keeping as close to the spirit of the original as possible

2. a translator who tries to find equivalents to the original

iii. literal

1. usually restricted to plays

2. major problem with stage adaptations is in the handling of space and time rather than language

c. movies can add many dimensions to a play

* + 1. especially through the use of close-ups and edited juxtapositions
    2. because these techniques aren’t found in the theater, even “literal” adaptations are not strictly literal
    3. they’re simply subtler in their modifications

**Summary**

Perhaps more than any of the director’s other collaborators, the screenwriter has been brought forward from time to time as the main “author” of a film. The writer’s role varies immensely from film to film and from director to director.

Many of the greatest directors have written their own scripts: Cocteau, Eisenstein, Bergman, and Herzog, to name only a few. In the American cinema, there are also many writer-directors: Griffith, Chaplin, Stroheim, Huston, Welles, Mankiewicz, Wilder, Sturges, Woody Allen, and Coppola are among the most famous.

The American studio system tended to encourage multiple authorship of scripts. In such collaborative enterprises, the screen credits are not always an accurate reflection of who contributed what to a movie.

For many years, American critics were inclined to believe that art must be solemn—if not actually dull—to be respectable. But to be effective artistically, ideas must be dramatized with tact and honesty, not parceled out to the characters like high-sounding speeches on a patriotic holiday.

Generally speaking, students, artists, and intellectuals are the individuals most likely to discuss ideas and abstractions without a sense of self-consciousness. To be convincing, eloquent language must be dramatically probable. We must believe that the words aren’t just the writer’s preachments dressed up as dialogue.

Some filmmakers are at their best with talky scripts—provided it’s scintillating talk, as in the best movies of Wertmuller, Ingmar Bergman, and Woody Allen. The French, Swedish, and British cinemas are also exceptionally literate.

Despite the enormous importance that the script can play in a sound film, some directors scoff at the notion that a writer could be the dominant artist in the cinema. Movie scripts seldom make for interesting reading, precisely because they are like blueprints of the finished product. Unlike a play, which usually can be read with pleasure, too much is missing in a screenplay.

A film script is rarely an autonomous literary product, otherwise they would be published with greater frequency. Screenplays are often modified by the actors who play the characters. This is especially true in scripts written for personality stars.

Good dialogue is often the result of having a good ear—for catching the correct rhythms of speech, the right choice of words, the length of people’s sentences, the jargon, slang, or swearing people use.

A movie’s central theme is often first articulated by its writer, or its various writers. Most screenplays are business-like and practical. Because they are not meant for publication, the action sequences are usually described simply, without literary flourishes.

In his essay “La Caméra-Stylo,” Alexandre Astruc observed that one of the traditional problems of film has been its difficulty in expressing thoughts and ideas. Even before the sound era, filmmakers had devised a number of nonverbal figurative techniques. A figurative technique can be defined as an artistic device that suggests abstract ideas through comparison, either implied or overt. There are a number of these techniques in both literature and cinema. The most common are **motifs, symbols,** and **metaphors**.

*Motifs* are so totally integrated within the realistic texture of a film that we can almost refer to them as submerged or invisible symbols. *Symbols* can also be palpable things, but they imply additional meanings that are relatively apparent to the sensitive observer. A *metaphor* is usually defined as a comparison of some kind that cannot be literally true. Two terms not ordinarily associated are yoked together, producing a sense of literal incongruity, power, and sometimes a sense of shock.

There are two other kinds of figurative techniques in film and literature: **allegory** and **allusions**. The first is seldom used in movies because it tends toward simplemindedness. What’s usually involved in this technique is an avoidance of realism. A correspondence exists between a character or situation and a symbolic idea or complex of ideas. An *allusion* is a common type of literary analogy. It’s an implied reference, usually to a well-known event, person, or work of art.

In the cinema, an overt reference or allusion to another movie, director, or memorable shot is sometimes called an **homage**. The cinematic homage is a kind of quote, the director’s tribute to a colleague or established master.

Point of view in literary fiction generally concerns the narrator, through whose words the events of a story are understood. The ideas and incidents are sifted through the consciousness and language of the storyteller. He or she may or may not be a participant in the action, and may or may not be a reliable guide for the reader to follow. There are four basic types of point of view in literary fiction: (1) the first person, (2) the omniscient, (3) the third person, and (4) the objective.

The **first-person narrator** tells his or her own story. Many films use first-person narrative techniques, but only sporadically. To produce first-person narration in film, the camera would have to record all the action through the eyes of the character, which, in effect, would also make the viewer the protagonist.

The **omniscient point of view** is often associated with the nineteenth-century novel. Generally, such narrators are not participants in a story but are all-knowing observers who supply the reader with all the facts we need to know to appreciate the story. Omniscient narration is almost inevitable in film. The omniscient camera can be a dispassionate observer.

In the **third person**, a nonparticipating narrator tells a story from the consciousness of a single character. In movies, there is a rough equivalent to the third person, but it’s not so rigorous as in literature. Usually, third-person narration is found in documentaries where an anonymous commentator tells us about the background of a central character.

The **objective point of view** is also a variation of the omniscient. Objective narration is the most detached of all: It doesn’t enter the consciousness of any character, but merely reports events from the outside.

A great many movies are adaptations of literary sources. In some respects, adapting a novel or play requires more skill and discipline than working with an original screenplay. Furthermore, the better the literary work, the more difficult the adaptation. The real problem of the adapter is not how to reproduce the *content* of a literary work (an impossibility), but how close he or she should remain to the raw data of the *subject matter.* This degree of fidelity is what determines the three types of adaptations: the **loose**, the **faithful**, and the **literal**. Of course, these classifications are for convenience only, for in actual practice most movies fall somewhere in between.

The *loose adaptation* is barely that. Generally, only an idea, a situation, or a character is taken from a literary source, then developed independently. *Faithful adaptations,* as the phrase implies, attempt to re-create the literary source in filmic terms, keeping as close to the spirit of the original as possible. André Bazin likened the faithful adapter to a translator who tries to find equivalents to the original. *Literal adaptations* are usually restricted to plays. As we have seen, the two basic modes of drama—action and dialogue—are also found in films.

The major problem with stage adaptations is in the handling of space and time rather than language. Movies can add many dimensions to a play, especially through the use of close-ups and edited juxtapositions. Because these techniques aren’t found in the theater, even “literal” adaptations are not strictly literal; they’re simply more subtle in their modifications. Furthermore, because even a literary film is primarily visual and only secondarily verbal, nearly all the dialogue is modified by the images.

**Active Learning Assignments**

**Learning Objective 1. Analyze the role of screenwriter in the collaborative process that is filmmaking.**

1. Go to Filmsite.org and collect a list of Academy Award-winning screenwriters over the past 10 years. Where are these people now? Have they had consistent success in their careers? How difficult is it to maintain success in Hollywood as a screenwriter?

**Learning Objective 4. Evaluate the reading version of *North by Northwest* for fluidity and note the formalistic differences between screenplays and published literature.**

1. After reviewing the section in this chapter on *North by Northwest*, watch crop-duster scene and discuss it in terms of Ernest Lehman’s vision in the reading version of the scene versus Alfred Hitchcock’s realization of the script in the filmed sequence.

**Learning Objective 2. Describe how screenplays differ from published literature, and what features are more or less important in screenplays;** **7. Illustrate the three types of literary adaptations, and give film examples of each.**

1. View *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, (2001). What were some of the pitfalls of adapting this novel into a screenplay? How did the screenwriter collaborate with the director to create a good adaptation? What makes for a good adaptation? Discuss what made this film so successful, and compare it with at least one film adaptation that was considered a flop.

**In-class Discussion Questions and Answers:**

**Learning Objective 3. Explain how dialogue differs in films that cross time and genre, and how dialogue is used to develop characters’ ideologies.**

**1.** **Question:** View a romantic scene from *Casablanca* (1940) and one from *Chasing Amy* (1997). Describe how the dialogue differs and how it’s similar in these two films that cross time and genre, and how the writers and filmmakers used dialogue to develop the romantic lead characters in each film.

**Consider:**

* *Casablanca* was written by Philip and Julius Epstein and Howard Koch, three of Warner Brothers’ ace writers. They agonized about how to end the movie until the final moment, when they decided that the Humphrey Bogart character had to give up the woman he loves.
* Unwittingly, the writers struck a responsive public nerve: *Casablanca* was released during the darkest days of World War II, when Americans and their allies were being called on to make personal sacrifices for a higher cause.
* One critic has suggested that the movie is not a portrait of the way we were, but of the way we wanted to be.
* The screenplay of *Chasing Amy* is profuse with slang, jive, and four-letter words galore. These people love to talk and talk and talk. The dialogue is funny, sexy, filled with surprises.
* A revisionist romantic comedy, the story centers on two comic book artists and their odd relationship. She’s a lesbian. He falls in love with her anyway. But surprise: She also falls in love with him. Until he screws up.
* Critic Stephen Farber noted: “The scene in which Alyssa explains to Holden that she fell in love with him not because she was programmed by society but because she chose him as an individual is one of the most stirring testaments to the mystery of love that the movies have ever offered.”
* Both screenplays are strongly “literary” in the sense that there is a genuine sense of pleasure in demonstrating the intellectual precision, wit, and emotional richness of the English language.
* One is classically romantic and imbued with idealism; the other is raunchy, quicksilver funny, and emotionally powerful.

**Learning Objective 5. Identify the most common figurative techniques used in cinema, and explain how each can be used to convey meaning in film.**

**2.** **Question:** View the movie *Lantana* (Australia, 2012). Discuss what common figurative techniques are used in the film, and explain how each is used to convey meaning.

**Consider:**

* Sometimes a movie’s main thematic concept is embodied in the symbolism of a central metaphor. For example, in Australia lantana is a tropical plant with colorful blossoms that hide a thick, thorny undergrowth.
* A psychological thriller, the movie opens with a dead body lying in a dense growth of lantana. The flower metaphor also symbolizes the shadowy, twisted tangle of anger and resentment that afflicts the five sad couples of the movie.
* This central metaphor is also embodied in the mise en scène of the film.

**Learning Objective 6. List the four basic types of narration, and give film examples of each.**

**3.** **Question:** View the film *Shallow Hal* (2001) and discuss what narration techniques the Farrelly brothers use to tell this story. How do the filmmakers use the point of view of the narrator and of the lead character for both comic effect and to create genuine meaning in the film?

**Consider:**

* Formerly a superficial jerk who valued women solely for their looks, the callow protagonist of this comedy (played by Jack Black) is hypnotized into seeing a woman’s inner beauty rather than her actual physical appearance.
* Thus, we are given two points of view at the same time, one objective, the other subjective—the source of much of the humor in the film.
* In one shot, for example, we see his 300-pound-plus girlfriend through his adoring eyes; but in the canoe’s precarious tilt, we also see the physical effects of her actual heroic girth.

**CHAPTER 10: IDEOLOGY Learning Objectives**

1. Identify the three broad categories of ideological explicitness, and explain how ideology serves as a “disguised language” in film.
2. Illustrate how a film’s ideology can be differentiated and divided into the left-center-right model traditionally used by journalists and political scientists.
3. Contrast the ideologies found in the bipolar categories listed in the chapter, and position them on the left-center-right model.
4. Explain how a culture, religion, and ethnicity influence the ideology and presentation of values in film.
5. Summarize the achievements of the Women’s Movement within the field of cinema, both on screen and behind the scenes.
6. Evaluate the history of homosexuality in cinema, both on screen and off screen, and explain why the progress of gay rights has varied from the advancements of other rights groups.
7. Describe the importance of tone on a movie, and describe how elements like genre, narration, and music contribute to the tone.

**Outline**

1. Ideology—background

1. body of ideas reflecting the social needs and aspirations of an individual, group, class, or culture
2. a given set of values implicit in any human enterprise
3. every film has a perspective that privileges certain characters, institutions, behaviors, and motives as attractive and downgrades the opposing set as repellent
4. based on the filmmaker’s own sense of right and wrong
5. critics have discussed art as having a double function: to teach and to provide pleasure
6. the tradition of classical cinema avoids the extremes of didacticism and pure abstraction
7. but even light entertainment movies are steeped in value judgments
8. we can classify movies under three broad ideological categories

i. neutral

1. escapist films and light entertainment movies
2. often bland out the social environment
3. in favor of a vaguely benevolent setting

ii. implicit

* + - 1. the protagonists and antagonists represent conflicting value systems

1. but these systems are not dwelled on explicitly

iii. explicit

* + - 1. thematically oriented movies that aim to teach or persuade as much as to entertain

1. patriotic films, many documentaries, political films, and movies with a sociological emphasis
2. school of social realism

i. the overwhelming majority of fiction films fall into the implicit category

j. in the American cinema especially, the star system is often a clue to values

k. a variety of other methods to enlist our sympathies, or not

1. underdogs
2. emotionally vulnerable characters
3. funny, charming, intelligent characters
4. negatively drawn characters incorporate unlikeable traits

l. a character’s ideological values are not necessarily those of the filmmaker

m. ideology is another language system in film, but it’s an often disguised language that usually speaks in codes

n. a word of caution: Ideological labels are just that—labels

2. The Left-Center-Right Model

* 1. journalists and political scientists have used the tripartite left-center-right model in differentiating political ideologies

1. we can differentiate a film’s ideology by focusing on some key institutions and values and analyzing how the characters relate to them
2. some of these key elements can be presented in bipolar categories
3. democratic vs. hierarchical
4. environment vs. heredity
5. relative vs. absolute
6. secular vs. religious
7. future vs. past
8. cooperation vs. competition
9. outsiders vs. insiders
10. international vs. nationalistic
11. sexual freedom vs. marital monogamy

3. Culture, Religion, and Ethnicity

1. culture encompasses the traditions, institutions, arts, myths, and beliefs that are characteristic of a given community or population
2. cultural generalizations—like most generalizations—are true most of the time; but there are many exceptions
3. especially in the arts, which often go against the grain in terms of generally accepted cultural norms
4. cultural generalizations can degenerate into stereotypes unless applied judiciously
5. for people who haven’t been exposed to alternative cultures, their own norms might seem universal
6. American audiences are often puzzled by foreign movies because they’re looking for familiar (American) cultural signposts.
7. failing to find them, they dismiss the movie rather than their irrelevant cultural assumptions
8. every nation has a characteristic way of looking at life (and movies), a set of values that is typical of a given culture.
9. British—literary tradition
10. Swedish—Lutheran tradition

f. an added complication of any ideological analysis involves period and historical context

g. religious values involve many of the same complexities as cultural values

h. ethnic groups are distinct social communities within a larger cultural system

* + 1. that claim or are accorded special status (usually inferior)

1. on the basis of such considerations as religion, language, ancestry, and race
2. in short, what we call minority groups

i. movies with an ethnic slant usually dramatize the tensions between the dominant culture and the beleaguered values of a minority community (subculture)

1. African American film historians have chronicled the sad, shameful treatment of blacks in American movies
2. For the first fifty years of the American cinema, black characters were usually relegated to demeaning stereotypes
3. In the 1950s, actor Sidney Poitier rose to the top ten as a leading man
4. In the contemporary cinema, no African American filmmaker has provoked more controversy than Spike Lee

j. ethnic filmmakers tend to favor realism as a style

4. Feminism

a. also known as the Women’s Liberation Movement, or simply the Women’s Movement

b. during the heyday of the big Hollywood studios—and especially the 1930s through the 1950s—the status of women within the industry was dismal

* + 1. some women in the areas of screenwriting, editing, and costuming
    2. only in the field of acting did women enjoy a degree of prominence

1. but female stars were treated like second-class citizens in the big-studio era

c. within the movies themselves, women were usually socially constructed as “the other” or “the outsider” in a male-dominated world

d. women didn’t get to tell their own stories because the images were controlled by men

1. studio-produced films marginalized female characters
2. heroine’s function was to cheer from the sidelines

e. certain Hollywood genres were more hospitable to women

i. love stories, domestic family dramas, screwball comedies, romantic comedies, and musicals

ii. most important genre was the women’s picture—usually domestic melodramas emphasizing a female star and focusing on “typical” female concerns

f. today there are about two dozen women directors working in the mainstream Hollywood

g. outside of North America and Europe, sexism is as dominant as ever

h. not all women filmmakers are feminists (and not all feminists are women)

i. Lina Wertmuller, Kathryn Bigelow, Penny Marshall

ii. feminist filmmakers attempt to overcome prejudice through their movies by providing fresh perspectives

5. Queer Cinema

1. Gay Liberation Movement drew much of its inspiration from other revolutionary groups of the 1960s, especially feminism and the Black Liberation Movement
2. however, whereas women and people of color could not pretend to be “the other,” most homosexuals could pass for straight
3. sexual researchers are by no means in agreement on what causes homosexuality
4. but agree that gender identity is formed before puberty
5. homosexuality is commonplace in the arts and entertainment fields, where it’s not regarded as relevant to talent
6. but homophobia, like racism and sexism, was widespread in the cinema until recently
7. after the 1960s, movies dealing overtly with gay themes became more common, especially in America and Europe
8. the old Production Code, the Hollywood film industry’s censorship arm, was scrapped in favor of the present-day rating system
9. the works of Germany’s Rainer Werner Fassbinder and Spain’s Pedro Almodóvar are multidimensional in their treatment of gay characters

h. camp sensibility

1. associated with the culture of male homosexuals, though not exclusively
2. comic mockery is a pervasive trait in camp movies, especially when it involves anything bizarre and outrageous
3. camp also delights in artistic excess, anything artificial, kitschy, and florid
4. frequently uses theatrical metaphors: role-playing, hammy performances, and life-as-theater comparisons

6. Tone

1. a film’s manner of presentation, the general atmosphere that a filmmaker creates through his or her attitude toward the dramatic materials
2. can strongly affect our responses to a given set of values
3. can also be elusive in movies, especially in those works in which it deliberately shifts from scene to scene
4. tone can be orchestrated in a number of ways in film
5. acting styles
6. genre
7. narration
8. music
9. without taking a film’s tone into account, a mechanistic analysis of its ideological values can be misleading

**Summary**

Ideology is usually defined as a body of ideas reflecting the social needs and aspirations of an individual, group, class, or culture. Every film has a slant, a given ideological perspective that privileges certain characters, institutions, behaviors, and motives as attractive, and downgrades an opposing set as repellent.

Since ancient times, critics have discussed art as having a double function: to teach and to provide pleasure. The tradition of classical cinema avoids the extremes of didacticism and pure abstraction, but even light entertainment movies are steeped in value judgments. In actual practice, movies are highly variable in their degree of ideological explicitness. For purposes of convenience, we can classify them under three broad categories: neutral, implicit, explicit. The overwhelming majority of fiction films fall into the implicit category.

Perhaps the most famous example of explicit moviemaking was the school of Socialist Realism that prevailed in the former Soviet Union, especially during the brutal totalitarian regime of Josef Stalin. Socialist Realism was strongly propagandistic: movies, books, and other media were required by law to “educate” the masses. Creative artists were severely restricted in what they could and could not include in their works.

Filmmakers create sympathetic characters by dramatizing such traits as idealism, courage, generosity, fair play, kindness, and loyalty. In the American cinema especially, the star system is often a clue to values. Good looks and sex appeal are compelling traits, predisposing us in favor of a given character. There are a variety of other methods to enlist our sympathies. Underdogs almost automatically win us over to their side. Negatively drawn characters incorporate such traits as selfishness, mean-spiritedness, greed, cruelty, tyrannical behavior, disloyalty, and so on.

Analyzing a character’s ideological values is often a difficult task precisely because many characters are a fusion of contradictory sentiments. Some filmmakers are so technically skillful that we can be swept up by a character’s values even when we don’t hold them ourselves.

In short, ideology is another language system in film. But it’s an often disguised language that usually speaks in codes. A lot of people claim that they’re not interested in politics, but virtually everything is ultimately ideological. A word of caution: Ideological labels are just that—labels. Seldom do they approach the complexity of human beliefs.

Traditionally, journalists and political scientists have used the tripartite left-center-right model in differentiating political ideologies. We can differentiate a film’s ideology by focusing on some key institutions and values and analyzing how the characters relate to them.

Leftists tend to emphasize the similarities among people. Rightists emphasize the differences among people, insisting that the best and the brightest are entitled to a larger share of power and the economic pie than less productive workers. Leftists believe that human behavior is learned and can be changed by proper environmental incentives. Rightists believe that character is largely inborn and genetically inherited. People on the left believe that we ought to be flexible in our judgments, capable of adjusting to the specifics of each case. Rightists are more absolute in judging human behavior. Children are expected to be disciplined, respectful, and obedient to their elders. Leftists believe that religion, like sex, is a private matter and should not be the concern of governments. Rightists accord religion a privileged status.

In general, leftists view the past with disdain because it was dominated by ignorance, class conflict, and exploitation of the weak. The future, on the other hand, is filled with hope, with infinite promise of improvement. People on the right have a deep veneration for the past, for ancient rituals, and especially for tradition.

People on the left believe that social progress is best achieved by a cooperative effort on the part of all citizens toward a common goal. Rightists emphasize open market principles and the need for competition to bring out the best in everyone. Leftists identify with the poor, the disenfranchised. They often romanticize rebels and outsiders. Rightists tend to identify with the Establishment—the people in power, the people who run things. They emphasize the importance of leadership in determining the main course of history.

Leftists are global in their perspective, emphasizing the universality of human needs irrespective of country, race, or culture. Right-wingers tend to be strongly patriotic, often regarding people from other countries as vaguely inferior.

Leftists believe that who you have sex with is nobody else’s business. They often accept homosexuality as a valid lifestyle, and they reject attempts to regulate sexual behavior among consenting adults. Rightists regard the family as a sanctified institution, and anything that threatens the family is viewed with hostility. Even ideologically explicit movies don’t hit on all of these value structures, but virtually every fiction film deals with some of them.

A social culture encompasses the traditions, institutions, arts, myths, and beliefs that are characteristic of a given community or population. Cultural generalizations—like most generalizations—are true *most* of the time. But there are many exceptions, especially in the arts, which often go against the grain in terms of generally accepted cultural norms.

Cultural generalizations can easily degenerate into stereotypes unless they’re applied judiciously, with respect for nuances. For people who haven’t been exposed to alternative cultures, their own norms might seem universal. Their knowledge of other cultures is often derived from movies. Typically, many people stereotype Americans as lawless, sex-obsessed, and “fast.” Likewise, American audiences are often puzzled by foreign movies because they’re looking for familiar (that is, American) cultural signposts.

Every nation has a characteristic way of looking at life, a set of values that is typical of a given culture. The same can be said of their movies. But there is always The Other—a countertradition that’s dialectically opposed to what might be considered the dominant strain in a culture.

In culturally diverse countries like the United States, there are many subcultures—pockets of cultural values that coexist within the dominant ideology. Movies that explore subcultures generally emphasize the fragile balance between conflicting cultural values. An added complication of any ideological analysis involves period and historical context.

Religious values involve many of the same complexities. Even religions that purport to be universal, like Roman Catholicism, are radically different from country to country. These differences are reflected in their movies. Sometimes one religious sect strongly objects to the portrayal of a revered figure in the arts.

Ethnic groups are distinct social communities within a larger cultural system that claim or are accorded special status (usually inferior) on the basis of such considerations as religion, language, ancestry, and race—in short, what we call minority groups. Movies with an ethnic slant usually dramatize the tensions between the dominant culture and the beleaguered values of a minority community. Ethnic filmmakers tend to favor **realism** as a style. Realism also excels in portraying the actual textures and sociological details of authentic locations.

The late 1960s was an era of intense political turmoil, not only in America but also in much of Western Europe. Feminism—also known as the Women’s Liberation Movement, or simply the Women’s Movement—was one of several progressive ideologies that emerged during this period. During the heyday of the big Hollywood studios—and especially the 1930s through the 1950s—the status of women within the industry was dismal. True, there were some women in the areas of screenwriting, editing, and costuming, but only in the field of acting did women enjoy a degree of prominence. Within the movies themselves, women were usually socially constructed as “the other” or “the outsider” in a male-dominated world. In the majority of studio-produced films, female characters were marginalized, seldom at the center of the action. The heroine’s function was to cheer from the sidelines, to wait passively until the hero claimed her for his reward. Today there are about two dozen women directors working in the mainstream Hollywood film industry, and their presence has made a difference: The range of female roles has broadened considerably since the 1960s. Outside of North America and Europe, however, sexism is as dominant as ever, especially in the Third World, where the oppression of women is harshest, both in films and in the larger society.

Contemporary feminists have concentrated on such fundamentals as equal pay for equal work, adequate prenatal care for pregnant women, domestic violence, abortion rights, child care, sexual harassment on the job, date rape, and female solidarity. Feminist filmmakers—both male and female—are attempting to overcome prejudice through their movies by providing fresh perspectives.

The Gay Liberation Movement drew much of its inspiration from other revolutionary groups of the 1960s, especially feminism and the Black Liberation Movement. There was a difference, however. Whereas women and people of color could not pretend to be “the other,” most homosexuals could pass for straight. They often did—and still do—because of the social prejudice against them. Hence the phrase “in the closet”—when a gay person conceals his or her sexual identity from the outside world and passes for straight.

Homosexuality is commonplace in the arts and entertainment fields, where it’s not regarded as relevant to talent. Bisexuality is even more common. In the larger society, however, the hostility toward gays has been so strong that most artists—especially actors—have gone to considerable lengths to conceal their sexual identity. Homophobia, like racism and sexism, was widespread in the cinema until recently.

After the 1960s, movies dealing overtly with gay themes became more common, especially in America and Europe. In part this was because the old Production Code, the Hollywood film industry’s censorship arm, was scrapped in favor of the present-day rating system. The camp sensibility is especially associated with the culture of male homosexuals, though it’s not their exclusive province. Comic mockery is a pervasive trait in camp movies, especially when it involves anything bizarre and outrageous. Camp frequently uses theatrical metaphors: role-playing, hammy performances, and life-as-theater comparisons.

A movie’s tone refers to its manner of presentation, the general atmosphere that a filmmaker creates through his or her attitude toward the dramatic materials. Tone can strongly affect our responses to a given set of values. Tone can also be elusive in movies, especially in those works in which it deliberately shifts from scene to scene. A film’s tone can be orchestrated in a number of ways. Acting styles strongly affect our response to a given scene.

Genre also helps determine a film’s tone. A voice-over narrator can be useful for setting a tone that’s different from an objective presentation of a scene, creating a double perspective on the events. Music is a common way to establish a movie’s tone. Without taking a film’s tone into account, a mechanistic analysis of its ideological values can be misleading.

The ideologies outlined in this chapter are conceptual models that can be helpful in understanding what a given movie seems to be saying (consciously or unconsciously) in terms of values. But they are merely formulas and clichés unless they seem relevant to our emotional *experience* of a movie.

**Active Learning Assignments**

**Learning Objective 1. Identify the three broad categories of ideological explicitness, and explain how ideology serves as a “disguised language” in film.**

1. Name the three categories of ideological explicitness, define them, and present examples from films viewed in class that represent each category. Pick one film screened in class and argue for or against that film as a true, pure, and obvious example of an ideological category. Make sure to discuss the film’s characteristics (if any exist) that demonstrate the overlapping nature of these categories.

**Learning Objective 3. Contrast the ideologies found in the bipolar categories listed in the chapter, and position them on the left-center-right model.**

1. Use the left-center-right model to analyze British filmmaker Mike Leigh’s movie *High Hopes* (1988). Which of the bipolar categories listed in the text are best to use for this analysis? Why?

**Learning Objective 4. Explain how a culture, religion, and ethnicity influence the ideology and presentation of values in film.**

1. In what significant ways does Hollywood filmmaking differ from foreign films as it regards culture, religion, and politics as represented in film? Which is the more liberal and which the more conservative, Hollywood or foreign films? What cultural influences dictate their respective approaches? What stands out as similarities, if any?

**Learning Objective 6. Evaluate the history of homosexuality in cinema, both on screen and off screen, and explain why the progress of gay rights has varied from the advancements of other rights groups.**

1. Compare and contrast the careers of Marlene Deitrich and Rock Hudson, paying special focus on how they fit into the history of homosexuality in the cinema. What similarities do you find in their careers? What differences?

**In-class Discussion Questions and Answers:**

**Learning Objective 7. Describe the importance of tone on a movie, and describe how elements like genre, narration, and music contribute to the tone.**

**1.** **Question:** View the film *The Big Short* (2015) and discuss the importance of tone to this movie.

**Consider:**

* How does the film use humor to set the tone? What kind of humor is used?
* How does genre effect the tone of this film, if it does at all?
* What about music?
* Is narration and/or point-of-view relevant to a discussion of tone in this film?

**Learning Objective 2. Illustrate how a film’s ideology can be differentiated and divided into the left-center-right model traditionally used by journalists and political scientists.**

**2.** **Question:** View the film *It’s a Wonderful Life* (1946). Then divide the class into groups and assign a left-center-right model to each group. Have each group analyze the film from the perspective of the left, center, and right.

**Consider:**

* Which of the bipolar categories listed in the text work best in analyzing the film from each ideological perspective?
* Is there only one way to look at a film like this? Only one perspective? Why or why not?
* Frank Capra was the foremost American film spokesman for a conservative ethic, stressing such traditions of Americana as good neighborliness, faith in God, committed leadership, and family values.
* Capra championed middle-class ideals like hard work, frugality, and healthy competition, but also generosity and wit.
* A character’s wealth is measured not by income, but in terms of his or her family and friends. Capra’s ideal was a romantic past of small towns, Christian values, close-knit families, and supportive neighbors.
* How would you describe George Bailey’s ideology? Left, center, or right? Why?

**Learning Objective 4. Explain how a culture, religion, and ethnicity influence the ideology and presentation of values in film.**

**3.** **Question:** How does the Polish film *Ida* (2013) deal with the topics of culture, religion, and ethnicity? Is there anything unique or different about how this film tackles those issues, as opposed to a mainstream Hollywood film like *Sister Act (1992)*? Is religion a bigger influence in American films or foreign films? What about culture and ethnicity?

**Consider:**

* The influence of religion has declined dramatically in contemporary Europe and North America. The result is that religious films are seldom made in these markets anymore.
* *Ida* is an exception, perhaps because Poland is still a heavily Catholic nation, and its citizens are more religiously observant than most of the rest of Europe.
* The lead character Anna’s journey into the secular world uncovers many hidden facts about her family: It turns out that they were Jewish and were murdered during World War II.
* She also learns that her birth name is Ida, and discovers other things about herself after sampling smoking, drinking, and (once) casual sex.

**CHAPTER 11: CRITIQUE Learning Objectives**

1. Name the three categories of people who critique movies, and list the three areas of inquiry on which critics and theorists focus their attention.
2. List the five ideological characteristics and six stylistic features of the neorealist style of film.
3. Describe how formalist film theories approach space, time, and reality in film.
4. Explain what makes an auteur, and describe how auteur theory revolutionized film criticism.
5. Identify what it means to be an eclectic critic, and describe the benefits and faults of an eclectic approach to film criticism.
6. Summarize the techniques of structuralism and semiology, and explain their relation to various scientific disciplines.
7. Define historiography and outline the four types of film history.

**Outline**

1. People who critique movies fall into three general classes:

* 1. reviewers
  2. critics
  3. theorists

2. Central concern of film theory—“What is the essential nature of cinema?”

a. the work of art

b. the artist

c. the audience

3. Theories of Realism

a. film as an attempt to accurately reflect external reality

b. Italian neorealism

1. examples *Open City, Bicycle Thieves*
2. the main ideological characteristics of the movement can be summarized as follows:
   * + 1. a new democratic spirit
       2. a compassionate point of view and a refusal to make facile moral judgments
       3. a preoccupation with Italy’s Fascist past and its aftermath
       4. a blending of Christian and Marxist humanism
       5. an emphasis on emotions rather than abstract ideas.
3. Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*
   * 1. plot is the natural enemy of realism
     2. find the random, fortuitous, “nature caught in the act”
     3. indeterminacy—film as “slice of life”
     4. literary adaptations are inappropriately concerned with “interior realities”
     5. favors didactic over entertainment value

4. Formalist Film Theories

1. the art of cinema is possible precisely because a movie is unlike everyday reality
2. exploit the limitations of the medium
   * 1. two-dimensionality
     2. confining frame
     3. fragmented time–space continuum
3. Rudolf Arnheim, *Film as Art*
4. human eye vs. camera “eye”
5. the director manipulates objects and perspectives through mise en scene
6. concern with patterns, restructuring reality into aesthetically appealing designs

5. Auteur Theory and the French New Wave

1. Francois Truffaut, editor of *Cahier du Cinema*
2. Focus on the director as the true artist of a film
3. Andrew Sarris, *The Village Voice*
4. genre—the best films are dialectical, holding the conventions of a genre in aesthetic tension with the personality of the artist
5. shortcomings of auteur theory
6. glosses over the collaborative nature of film
7. tendency toward “hero worship”
8. craftsman vs. artists

6. Eclectic and Synthetic Theories

1. Pauline Kael, former critic for *The New Yorker*
2. no single theory can explain all films
3. places films in most appropriate contexts
4. the “tradition of sensibility”
5. shortcomings of eclecticism
6. extreme subjectivity
7. no agreed-on principles or systematic approach

7. Structuralism and Semiotic Theories

1. analysis with scientific rigor, precise terminology
2. focus primarily on American cinema
3. Claude Levi-Strauss and myth as structure
4. semiology—how a film signifies
   * 1. symbolic sign as the minimal unit of signification
5. classification of signs and codes
6. the “principle of pertinence”
7. structuralism—how codes function within a film
   * 1. master codes—spatial, kinetic, etc.
     2. deep structure
     3. binary structures

8. Historiography

1. the assumptions, principles, and methodologies of historical study
2. no single film history
3. four different types of film history

aesthetic approach

technological approach

economic histories

1. Hollywood studio system
2. “vertically integrated”

social histories

1. foregrounding

**Summary**

This chapter devotes itself to how film critics and theorists have responded to movies—how they evaluate them and how they place them in a wider intellectual context. People who critique movies fall into three general classes: reviewers, critics, and theorists.

Most theorists are concerned with the wider context of the medium—its social and political implications. Theorists have also explored the essential nature of cinema—what differentiates it from other art forms, what its basic properties are. A theory is an intellectual grid, a set of aesthetic generalizations, not eternal verities. Some theories are more useful than others in understanding specific movies. No single theory can explain them all.

Traditionally, critics and theorists have focused their attention on three areas of inquiry: (1) the work of art, (2) the artist, and (3) the audience. Film theorists can be divided into **realists** and **formalists**, just as filmmakers tend to favor one style or the other. The most important artist-oriented approach is the **auteur theory**, the belief that a movie is best understood by focusing on its artistic creator, presumably the director.

Most theories of realism emphasize the documentary aspects of film art. Movies are evaluated primarily in terms of how accurately they reflect external reality. The camera is regarded as essentially a recording mechanism rather than an expressive medium in its own right. The subject matter is paramount in the cinema of realism; technique its discreetly transparent handmaiden. Roberto Rossellini’s *Open City* inaugurated the Italian **neorealist** movement, one of the triumphs of the cinema of realism.

The main ideological characteristics of the movement can be summarized as follows: (1) a new democratic spirit, with emphasis on the value of ordinary people such as laborers, peasants, and factory workers; (2) a compassionate point of view and a refusal to make facile moral judgments; (3) a preoccupation with Italy’s Fascist past and its aftermath of wartime devastation, poverty, unemployment, prostitution, and the black market; (4) a blending of Christian and Marxist humanism; and (5) an emphasis on emotions rather than abstract ideas.

The stylistic features of neorealism include (1) an avoidance of neatly plotted stories in favor of loose, episodic structures that evolve organically from the situations of the characters; (2) a documentary visual style; (3) the use of actual locations—usually exteriors—rather than studio sets; (4) the use of nonprofessional actors, sometimes even for principal roles; (5) an avoidance of literary dialogue in favor of conversational speech, including dialects; and (6) an avoidance of artifice in the editing, camerawork, and lighting in favor of a simple “styleless” style. Realists have shown a persistent hostility toward plot and neatly structured stories.

Formalist film theorists believe that the art of cinema is possible precisely because a movie is unlike everyday reality. The filmmaker exploits the limitations of the medium—its two- dimensionality, its confining **frame**, its fragmented time–space continuum—to produce a world that resembles the real world only in a superficial sense. Formalists have pointed out many instances where divergences exist between the camera’s image of reality and what the human eye sees.

Formalists are always concerned with patterns, methods of restructuring reality into aesthetically appealing designs. Patterns can be expressed visually, through the photography and mise en scene; or aurally, in stylized dialogue, symbolic sound effects, and musical **motifs**. Camera movements are often **kinetic** patterns superimposed on the visual materials, commenting on them in some heightened manner. The problems with most formalist theories are the same as with realists: There are too many exceptions.

In the mid-1950s, French theorists, journalists, and filmmakers led by Francois Truffaut proposed the **auteur**theory (that the greatest movies are dominated by the personal vision of the director). The auteur theory became the focal point of a critical controversy that eventually spread to England and America. Before long, the theory became a militant rallying cry, particularly among younger critics*.* Although a number of writers rejected the theory as simplistic, auteurism dominated film criticism throughout the 1960s, and is still a prominent approach among critics. Like other formalists, the auteur critics claimed that what makes a good film is not the subject matter as such, but its stylistic treatment.

Drawing primarily from the cinematic traditions of the United States, the French critics also developed a sophisticated theory of film genre. André Bazin believed that the genius of the American cinema was its repository of ready-made forms: westerns, thrillers, musicals, action films, comedies, and so on. “The tradition of genres is a base of operations for creative freedom,” Bazin pointed out. Genre is an enriching, not a constricting, tradition. The auteurists argued that the best movies are **dialectical**, in which the conventions of a genre are held in aesthetic tension with the personality of the artist.

French and American film theorists and critics insisted that total artistic freedom isn’t always a virtue. The most gifted American directors of the studio era were **producer**–**directors** who worked independently within the major studios. These tended to be the same artists the auteur critics admired most. But the lion’s share of American fiction movies produced during this era were studio films. That is, the director functioned as a member of a team and usually had little to say about the scripting, casting, or editing. Many of these directors were skillful technicians, but they were essentially craftsmen rather than artists.

Despite its shortcomings and excesses, the auteur theory had a liberating effect on film criticism, establishing the director as the key figure at least in the art of cinema, if not always the industry. To this day, the concept of directorial dominance remains firmly established, at least with films of high artistic merit.

Eclecticism is the favored approach of many film critics in the United States. Such critics place a movie in whatever context seems most appropriate, drawing from diverse sources, systems, and styles. Actually, almost all critics are eclectic to some degree. Eclecticism is sometimes called the tradition of sensibility because a high value is placed on the aesthetic discriminations of a person of taste and discernment. Such critics are often urbane, well educated, and conversant in the other arts. The best eclectic critics are gifted writers, including distinguished prose stylists.

Eclectic critics reject the notion that a single theory can explain all movies. They regard this as a cookie-cutter approach to criticism. Most of them insist that an individual’s reaction to a film is deeply personal. For this reason, the best a critic can do is to explain his or her personal responses as forcefully as possible. Eclecticism has been faulted on a number of counts. Because of its extreme subjectivity, this approach has been criticized as mere impressionism by more rigorously systematic critics. They insist that aesthetic evaluations ought to be governed by a body of theoretical principles rather than a critic’s unique sensibility, however refined.

In the early 1970s, two interrelated cinematic theories developed, partly in response to the inadequacies of the criticism of personal sensibility. **Structuralism**and **semiology**were attempts to introduce a new scientific rigor to film criticism, to allow for more systematic and detailed analyses of movies. Borrowing their methodology from such diverse disciplines as linguistics, anthropology, psychology, and philosophy, these two theories first concentrated on the development of a more precise analytical terminology.

Structuralism and semiology have also focused intently on the American cinema as the principal area of inquiry. Semiology (or **semiotics***,* as it’s also called) is a study of *how* movies signify. The manner in which information is signified is indissolubly linked with *what’s* being signified. The language of cinema, like all types of discourse, verbal and nonverbal, is primarily symbolic: It consists of a complex network of signs we instinctively decipher while experiencing a movie.

In most discussions of film, the **shot** was generally accepted as the basic unit of construction. Semiotic theorists rejected this unit as too vague and inclusive. They insisted on a more precise concept: they suggested that the **sign**be adopted as the minimal unit of signification. A single shot from a movie generally contains dozens of signs, forming an intricate hierarchy of counterpoised meanings.

Semiotic techniques can be valuable in aiding film critics and scholars to analyze movies with more precision. But the theory suffers some defects. For one thing, these are descriptive classifications only, not normative. In other words, semiotics will permit a critic to discern a sign, but it’s still up to the critic to evaluate how effective any given sign is within an artistic context.

Structuralism is strongly eclectic and often combines the techniques of semiotics with other theoretical perspectives, such as auteurism, genre studies, ideology, stylistic analyses, and so on. Structuralists and semiologists have been fascinated by the concept of a **deep structure**— an underlying network of symbolic meaning that is related to a movie’s surface structure but is also somewhat independent of it. The theory of structural anthropology popularized by the Frenchman Claude Lévi-Strauss can be used in a cinematic context. The methods of Lévi- Strauss are based on an examination of regional myths, which he believed express certain underlying structures of thought in codified form. These myths exist in variant forms and usually contain the same or similar binary structures—pairs of opposites. These polarities are usually found in dialectical conflict. Lévi-Strauss believed that once the full implications of a myth are understood, it’s discarded as a cliché. These structural techniques can be used to analyze a national cinema, a genre, or a specific movie. Consider the concepts of *traditional* and *modern*, as applied to Japanese cinema.

A number of structuralists have explored genre films in a similar manner. Critics have demonstrated how, for example, a cultural polarity of East and West in American westerns symbolizes a complex of positive and negative traits. Semiotics and structuralism expanded the parameters of film critique considerably. Their pluralistic approach allows for much more flexibility, complexity, and depth in the critical enterprise. But these theories are merely tools of analysis.

Historiography deals with the theory of history—the assumptions, principles, and methodologies of historical study. Film history is a relatively recent area of inquiry—a hundred years is not a very lengthy period of study compared to that of the traditional arts. Much of the best work in film historiography has taken place during the past two decades.

Film historians scoff at the naive notion that there is *a* film history. Rather, they insist that there are many film histories, and each is defined by the historian’s particular interests, biases, and prejudices. Theorists have charted four different types of film history, each with its own set of philosophical assumptions, methods, and sources of evidence: (1) aesthetic film histories—film as art; (2) technological film histories—motion pictures as inventions and machines; (3) economic histories—film as industry; and (4) social histories—movies as a reflection of the audience’s values, desires, and fears.

Most film historians regard cinema as too sprawling and complex to be covered by any single history. They view the field as a vast, infinite mass of data that needs to be sifted through and organized to be made coherent. Aesthetic film historians concern themselves with a tradition of masterpieces and great filmmakers. Constantly subject to reevaluation, this tradition encompasses a broad consensus of critics, historians, and scholars. Aesthetic historians value a work primarily for its artistic richness, irrespective of whether the film was commercially successful.

Cinema is the most expensive artistic medium in history, and its development has been largely determined by its financial sponsors—this is the thesis of most economic film histories. European film industries and their formation and expansion worked differently than those in Russia and America. Thus, an understanding of these differences reveals the levels of success and failure of filmmaking throughout the world.

Social histories are mainly concerned with the audience. They emphasize film as a collective experience, as a reflection of mass sentiments during any given era. These sentiments can be overtly articulated or subliminally insinuated by appealing to our subconscious desires. Social historians have also devoted a great deal of attention to the American star system, arguing that popular stars are usually a reflection of audience values and anxieties. Unfortunately, these concerns do not lend themselves to quantitative analysis, and social historians are sometimes criticized for their intuitive leaps in logic.

The many types of criticism suggest that one should be careful of each set of approaches and criteria for how a film is interpreted and valued. Many questions can be asked and many answers will result in the way we perceive films, relate to them, and appreciate them. Criticism assists us in this process.

**Active Learning Assignments**

**Learning Objective 1. Name the three categories of people who critique movies, and list the three areas of inquiry on which critics and theorists focus their attention.**

1. From various sources such as local newspapers, general news magazines like *Newsweek*, and other magazine types such as *GQ*, gather recent film reviews and share them with the class. Discuss the ways in which these reviews differ in approach and audience. Compose a format of how to write a review for the general public through discussion in class. Then have the class write a review as if they were a local reporter or film critic.

**Learning Objective 5. Identify what it means to be an eclectic critic, and describe the benefits and faults of an eclectic approach to film criticism.**

1. Make a list of the types of criticism discussed in this chapter. Execute an in-depth comparative analysis of characteristics shared among them, or differences. What are the important commonalities, if any, among these types of criticism? Is it more important to note the differences? Why or why not?

**Learning Objective 7. Define historiography and outline the four types of film history.**

1. Conduct a statistical analysis of three randomly chosen films at IMDb.com in the following manner: 1) tally the total number of written “user” reviews, 2) click on the “user” number, and then on the pop-up filter menu and tally the number of reviews considered “loved it.” Now click on the “hated it” filter and tally that number. Compute the percentages of “loved” and “hated,” and determine whether there is a consistent percentage of user critics who selected “hated” among the three films. If needed, expand your statistics to include a few more films. Do the “user” reviewers (“critics”) carry any weight or validity in their reviews despite not being professional film critics? Why or why not?

**In-class Discussion Questions and Answers:**

**Learning Objective 1. Name the three categories of people who critique movies, and list the three areas of inquiry on which critics and theorists focus their attention.**

**1.** **Question:** In your opinion, how do websites such as IMDb, Rotten Tomatoes, and Metacritic influence the general public in their choices for viewing films? Do you pay heed to what critics say before you go see a film, or do you wait until afterward? Or, do you ignore websites and local film reviews altogether?

**Consider:**

* + The types of people who critique movies fall into three general classes: reviewers, critics, and theorists.
  + Whose opinions do you value more: reviewers, critics, or theorists? Why?
  + What do you look for in the critique of a film? What is important? Not important?
  + What makes a movie great to you?
  + What makes a movie a masterpiece? Who decides?

**Learning Objective 4. Explain what makes an auteur, and describe how auteur theory revolutionized film criticism.**

**2. Question:** In your opinion, are mainstream Hollywood films better than their independent counterparts or not? What advantages and disadvantages do filmmakers have when making each type of film?

**Consider:**

* + In the contemporary American cinema, most mainstream movies are still collaborative enterprises.
  + Does the director matter in a mainstream movie? The actors? The writer? Who is most responsible for the success of the film, and how is success defined?
  + Why does the director of an independent movie matter? What about the actors? The writer? Are they important?
  + Who is most responsible for the success of an independent film, and how is success defined?

**Learning Objective 6. Summarize the techniques of structuralism and semiology, and explain their relation to various scientific disciplines.**

**3. Question:** Take a film discussed in this chapter and view it in class. Using the deep structure approach to structuralism discussed in this chapter, attempt to analyze and interpret the film with full class participation.

**Consider:**

* Does the film rely on or use a myth or myths as the structure?
* Where does the myth come from?
* What symbolic motifs are repeated in the film?
* What is more important to the structure of the film? National origin? Genre? Something specific to the movie?
* What binary pairs of opposites can be best used to interpret the film?

**CHAPTER 12: SYNTHESIS: *CITIZEN KANE***

**Learning Objectives**

1. Show how *Citizen Kane* ushered in a revolution in photography and how Welles dynamically staged complex actions within each shot.
2. Give examples of how Welles used the moving camera to embellish the story line of *Citizen Kane*.
3. Describe how Welles coordinated the editing techniques and sound within the film to create a rich, symbolic film experience.
4. Evaluate the quality of actors in *Citizen Kane*, and assess the art direction tricks that Welles learned from working in theater and radio.
5. Diagram the plot units of *Citizen Kane* and explain why the director chose to use the flashback structure in the film.
6. Illustrate the thematic complexity of *Citizen Kane* by addressing the film’s storytellers, narrative strategy, and symbolic motifs.
7. Defend the idea of Orson Welles as a film auteur.

**Outline**

1. Photography

1. cinematographer Gregg Toland considered *Citizen Kane* the high point of his career
2. *Citizen Kane* didn’t look like most American movies of its era
3. combined many techniques into one dazzlingly photographed film
4. deep-focus, low-key lighting, rich textures, audacious compositions
   1. dynamic contrasts between foregrounds and backgrounds, backlighting, sets with ceilings, side lighting, steep angles, epic long shots juxtaposed with extreme close-ups, dizzying crane shots, special effects galore
5. ushered in a revolution, challenging the classical ideal of a transparent style
   1. deep focus photography used flamboyantly



2. Mise en Scène—one example from the film

1. dominant—young Kane in the window
2. lighting key
   1. interior is moderate high key
   2. exterior is extreme high key
3. shot and camera proxemics
4. deep focus
5. personal distance from Thatcher and Mrs. Kane
6. public distance from young Kane
7. angles—eye level
8. color values—black & white
9. lens/filter/stock
10. wide angle lens
11. no filters, slow stock
12. subsidiary contrasts
13. from young Charles to Kane senior
14. to Thatcher, Mrs. Kane
15. to the spotlighted document
16. density—densely packed visual
17. composition
18. split vertically
19. segments and isolates the characters
20. form—closed
21. framing—tight
22. depth
23. photographed in 4 depth planes
24. table and occupants, Kane Senior, rear parlor, young Kane outside
25. character placement
26. Charles and Kane senior occupy the upper portions of the image,
27. Thatcher and Mrs. Kane the lower
28. intimate but ironic
29. staging positions
30. Kane senior and Thatcher full front
31. Mrs. Kane profile
32. character proxemics
33. Thatcher and Mrs. Kane are in intimate proximity
34. social distance from Kane senior, and a remote public distance from Charles
35. Movement
36. Welles was a master of the mobile camera
37. camera movements equated with the vitality and energy of youth in *Citizen Kane*
38. a static camera, on the other hand, tends to be associated with illness, old age, and death
39. bravura crane shots embody important symbolic ideas
40. opening shot
41. the “El Rancho” shot with Susan and the reporter
42. traveling vs. static shots
43. moving camera used brilliantly for comic effect in Susan’s opera debut
44. Kane’s destruction of Susan’s bedroom too static, and too distant

4. Editing

1. editing in *Citizen Kane* is a calculated display of virtuosity, leaping over days, months, even years with casual nonchalance
2. Welles often used several editing styles in the same sequence, for example when Susan recalls her opera career
3. first a lengthy take
4. then fragmentary shots
5. then parallel editing
6. then thematic montage
7. finally back to a lengthy take
8. difficult to isolate the editing because it often works in concert with the sound techniques

5. Sound

* 1. coming from the world of live radio drama, Welles was often credited with inventing many film sound techniques when in fact he was primarily a consolidator, synthesizing and expanding the piecemeal accomplishments of his predecessors
  2. Welles frequently cut from one time period or location to another with a shocking sound transition
  3. Welles frequently overlapped his dialogue, especially in the comical sequences
  4. Bernard Herrmann’s musical score is similarly sophisticated
     1. musical motifs are assigned to several of the major characters and events
     2. many of these motifs are introduced in the newsreel sequence
     3. then picked up later in the film, often in a minor key, or played at a different tempo, depending on the mood of the scene
     4. the score often parallels Welles’s visuals
     5. Herrmann’s scores are brilliant in portraying the psychology of the characters

1. in many scenes, Welles used sound for symbolic purposes
2. Acting
3. Welles had his own stable of actors, who worked with him in both radio and the New York live theater
   1. when he went to Hollywood, he took many of them with him
   2. none of these players was well known, and even Welles was known primarily as a radio performer

b. *Citizen Kane* boasts a first-rate ensemble cast

1. most notably Welles, Dorothy Comingore, Joseph Cotton, Everett Sloane, and Agnes Moorehead
2. even some of the cameo roles are performed with distinction

1. Ray Collins as Jim Gettys

2. Agnes Moorhead as Mrs. Kane

1. Everett Sloane and Joseph Cotten are flawless as Bernstein and Leland
2. Welles’s performance as Kane was lavishly praised.
3. Dramatization
   1. the live theater was Welles’s first love, especially Shakespeare
   2. Welles’s experience in live theater proved invaluable when he turned to making movies
      1. the lighting style of *Citizen Kane* is more indebted to the stage than the screen
      2. in the area of art direction, Welles was able to save hundreds of thousands of dollars by showing only parts of sets rather than entire rooms
4. Edward Stevenson’s costumes adhere closely to the actual styles of each period
   * 1. the costumes are symbolic as well as functional
     2. an analysis of Susan’s opera costume
5. period—nineteenth century, pastiche
6. class—royalty
7. sex—female
8. age—20s
9. silhouette—form fitting
10. fabric—beaded silks
11. accessories—turban, pearls, shoes
12. color—b&w metallic sheen
13. body exposure—revealing
14. function—totally without utility
15. body attitude—tall and proud
16. image—opera queen
17. Story
18. the differences between *Kane’s* story and plot can best be illustrated by comparing the narrative in chronological order with the restructured sequence of the plot
    * 1. Welles suggested scrambling the chronology of events through a series of flashbacks to sharpen the story line and infuse it with more dramatic urgency
      2. He and Mankiewicz also introduced a note of suspense—Rosebud

1. Welles claimed that the Rosebud motif was merely a plot gimmick

2. intended to hook the audience, but the gimmick works

1. the flashback structure of *Citizen Kane* allows Welles to leap through time and space, cutting to various periods of Kane’s life without having to adhere to a strict chronology
2. many critics have marveled at the intricate, jigsaw-puzzle structure of the movie, with its interlocking pieces that don’t click together until the final scene
3. the following plot outline sets forth the main structural units of the film
   * 1. prologue; Xanadu; Kane’s death; “Rosebud”
     2. newsreel backstory
     3. premise: Thompson is instructed to discover the mystery of Rosebud
4. flashback: Thatcher’s perspective on Kane
   * 1. flashback: Bernstein’s perspective
     2. flashback: Leland’s perspective
     3. flashback: Susan’s perspective
     4. flashback: Raymond, butler at Xanadu. Kane’s final days. “Rosebud”
     5. coda: Revelation of Rosebud
     6. cast and credits
5. Writing
   1. *Citizen Kane* is often singled out for the excellence of its screenplay
      1. its wit, its taut construction, its thematic complexity
      2. script’s authorship (Mankiewicz vs. Welles) provoked considerable controversy
         1. American scholar Robert L. Carringer settled the case once and for all
         2. in short, Mankiewicz provided the raw material; Welles provided the genius
6. the script sparkles with surprises
   * + 1. main characters are a far cry from the tired stereotypes of most movies of this era
       2. often tersely funny
       3. moments of pure poetry
   1. thematically, *Kane* is so complex that only a brief itemizing of some of its themes is possible
      1. like most of Welles’s other movies, *Citizen Kane* might well be entitled *The Arrogance of Power*
7. Welles’s sense of evil is mature and complex, seldom conventionalized
8. Welles considered himself a moralist, but his movies are never priggish or sanctimonious
9. Welles: the central theme in Western culture is the lost paradise
   1. Welles’s narrative strategy is something like a prism
      1. there are five different storytellers, and each tells us a different story
      2. this technique of multiple narration forces us to gauge the biases and prejudices of each narrator
10. literally dozens of symbolic motifs in the movie
    * 1. low camera angles
      2. the series of fences the camera must penetrate before we are able to see Kane
      3. the two most important motifs are Rosebud and the fragmentation motif
         1. Rosebud turns out to be a favorite childhood possession
         2. but Rosebud is also a more generalized symbol of loss
         3. the fragmentation motif acts as a foil to the simpleminded notion that any single word could “explain” a complex personality
         4. examples of this fragmentation motif are the jigsaw puzzles, the profusion of crates, boxes, and artwork
         5. the very structure of the movie is fragmented

10. Ideology

* 1. Welles was a lifelong liberal, firmly committed to the values of the moderate left
  2. *Citizen Kane* can be classified as liberal in its ideological slant
  3. the movie is definitely in the implicit range in terms of its bias
     1. it refuses to be the purveyor of glib certainties about its values
     2. the characters are too complex, often paradoxical
     3. the film is filled with the messy contradictions of life
     4. Kane himself is a relativist in terms of his morality
  4. *Citizen Kane* is also strongly feminist in its sympathies
     1. the three main female characters are all victimized
     2. Susan Alexander Kane is the most sympathetic of the three and the most ill-used

11. Critique

1. *Citizen Kane* is a masterpiece of formalism
   * 1. there are some realistic elements in the film—its basis in fact, the newsreel sequence, the deep-focus photography
     2. however, it’s the bravura sequences that are most memorable in the movie
2. Welles was one of the great lyricists of the cinema
   * 1. his stylistic rapture is best illustrated by the ornate visuals, the dazzling traveling shots, the richly textured soundtrack, the kaleidoscopic editing style, the highly fragmented narrative, and the profusion of symbolic motifs
     2. the movie is brazen in its technical audacity
3. *Kane* is indisputably the work of an auteur
   1. Wellesian themes
   2. executed in a showy style that became a virtual signature of its author
4. commercial and critical history
   1. an RKO picture
      1. RKO was in financial distress
      2. hired Welles because they reasoned that if anyone could produce quality movies that also made profits, surely it was the boy genius
   2. when Welles arrived in Hollywood in 1939, the resentment against him was immense
   3. almost from the start, the production of *Citizen Kane* was sparked by controversy
      1. rumors were rife about the identity of the leading character
      2. Hearst’s negative publicity campaign got vicious
   4. with only a few exceptions, *Citizen Kane* received rave reviews
   5. *Kane* received nine Academy Award nominations
      1. but at the ceremonies, Welles was booed whenever his name was mentioned
      2. significantly, the only Oscar that the movie won was for its screenplay
5. incredibly, *Citizen Kane* failed at the box office
6. so did his next film, *The Magnificent Ambersons*
7. hastening the end of Welles’s Hollywood career
8. Welles was always a favorite with critics, especially in France
9. “All of us will always owe him everything,” gushed Jean-Luc Godard
10. François Truffaut claimed that *Citizen Kane* inspired the largest number of French filmmakers to begin their own careers
11. Welles’s critical reputation has continued to rise
    * + 1. in the year of his death, 1985, three books were published about him
        2. *Citizen Kane* is routinely included in virtually every list of the ten greatest films of all time, often in the number one position
        3. Welles is listed most often as the greatest film artist of all time

**Summary**

*Citizen Kane* is the life story of a powerful newspaper magnate, Charles Foster Kane, who is as contradictory as he is controversial. The film is a fictionalized biography of the ruthless publishing baron William Randolph Hearst (1863–1951). Actually, the characters in the movie are composites, drawn from the lives of several famous American tycoons, but Hearst was the most obvious. Herman Mankiewicz, the coauthor of the screenplay, knew Hearst personally and was a friend of the old yellow journalist’s mistress, screen star Marion Davies. Davies was among the best-liked personalities in the film industry, and except for her fondness for alcohol and jigsaw puzzles, was quite unlike the Susan Alexander character in *Citizen Kane.*

Cinematographer Gregg Toland considered *Citizen Kane* the high point of his career. The veteran cinematographer thought he might be able to learn something from the “boy genius,” whose accomplishments were mostly in radio and the Broadway theater. Everyone saw at once that *Citizen Kane* didn’t look like most American movies of its era. There is not an indifferently photographed image in the film.

Photographically, *Kane* ushered in a revolution, implicitly challenging the **classical** ideal of a transparent style that doesn’t call attention to itself. In *Citizen Kane,* the stylistic virtuosity is part of the show. Gregg Toland had often experimented with deep-focus photography during the 1930s, mostly while working with director William Wyler. But the deep focus in *Kane* is more flamboyant than Wyler’s use of this technique. Deep focus also tends to encourage the audience to actively mine a shot for its information. Special effects are used throughout the movie for a variety of reasons.

The American cinema of the 1940s was to grow progressively darker, both thematically and photographically, thanks in part to the enormous influence of *Citizen Kane.* The most important style of the decade was **film noir**—literally, “black cinema.”

Coming from the world of live theater, Welles was an expert at staging action dynamically. Long shots are a more effective—and more theatrical—medium for the art of mise en scène, and hence the movie contains relatively few close shots. Most of the images are tightly framed and in **closed form.** Most of them are also composed in depth, with important information in the foreground, midground, and background. The **proxemic ranges** between the characters are choreographed balletically, to suggest their shifting power relationships.

From the very beginning of his film career, Welles was a master of the mobile camera. In *Citizen Kane,* camera movements are generally equated with the vitality and energy of youth. A static camera, on the other hand, tends to be associated with illness, old age, and death. No one has used crane shots so spectacularly as Welles. But once again, the virtuosity is rarely indulged in for its own sake. The bravura crane shots embody important symbolic ideas.

Like all movies—like every human enterprise—*Citizen Kane* is flawed. A number of scenes in the film are merely adequate, nothing more.

The editing in *Citizen Kane* is a calculated display of virtuosity, leaping over days, months, even years with casual nonchalance. John Spalding has pointed out that Welles often used several editing styles in the same sequence. It’s difficult to isolate the editing in this film because it often works in concert with the sound techniques, not to speak of the fragmentation of the story. Often Welles used editing to condense a great deal of time, using sound as a continuity device.

Coming from the world of live radio drama, Welles was often credited with inventing many film sound techniques when in fact he was primarily a consolidator, synthesizing and expanding the piecemeal accomplishments of his predecessors. With the help of his sound technician, James G. Stewart, Welles discovered that almost every visual technique has its sound equivalent. Sounds can be dissolved and overlapped like a **montage** sequence. Welles frequently cut from one time period or location to another with a shocking sound transition. Welles frequently overlapped his dialogue, especially in the comical sequences where several people are trying to speak at the same time.

Bernard Herrmann’s musical score is similarly sophisticated. Musical motifs are assigned to several of the major characters and events. Many of these motifs are introduced in the newsreel sequence, then picked up later in the film, often in a minor key, or played at a different tempo, depending on the mood of the scene. Herrmann’s score often parallels Welles’s visuals. In many scenes, Welles used sound for symbolic purposes.

Composer Howard Shore has pointed out how Herrmann’s scores are brilliant in portraying the psychology of the characters. In addition to using musical motifs to signal the reappearance of a character or thematic idea, Herrmann was also fond of the *ostinato* technique—short, repeated phrases of a few notes, a device he used throughout his career.

Welles had his own stable of writers, assistants, and actors, who worked with him in both radio and the New York live theater. When he went to Hollywood, he took many of them with him, including fifteen actors.

*Citizen Kane* boasts a first-rate cast. There are a few so-so performances, but none that is weak, and several that are outstanding, most notably those of Welles, Dorothy Comingore, Joseph Cotten, Everett Sloane, and Agnes Moorehead. Like most performers who are used to acting repertory-style, members of the cast work as an ensemble; the total effect is one of dramatic scenes that mesh seamlessly. Even some of the cameo roles are performed with distinction.

The live theater was Welles’s first love. As a youth, he attended a progressive prep school, where he directed and acted in over thirty plays. Shakespeare was his favorite dramatist. In 1930, at the age of 15, Welles left school permanently. With money left from an inheritance, he traveled to Europe and gained experience in Ireland. When he returned to America in 1933, he finagled an acting job touring with Katherine Cornell, one of the major stage stars of that era.

In 1937, Welles and Houseman formed their own company, The Mercury Theatre. Several of their productions were hailed for their brilliance, most notably a modern-dress, antifascist production of *Julius Caesar.* Welles not only starred and directed but also designed the sets, costumes, and lighting.

Welles financed his theater with his earnings as a radio star. During his halcyon years in the late 1930s, he was earning $3,000 per week in radio, two-thirds of which was plowed back into the Mercury Theatre. Welles’s experience in the live theater proved invaluable when he turned to making movies. He regarded film as essentially a dramatic rather than literary medium. Lighting, sets, and costumes for *Citizen Kane* were economically produced, staged and shot from a theatre perspective.

The differences between story and plot can best be illustrated by comparing the narrative in chronological order with the restructured sequence of the plot. When Herman Mankiewicz approached Welles with the idea of the story, Welles was concerned that the materials would be too sprawling, too unfocused. To sharpen the story line and infuse it with more dramatic urgency, he suggested scrambling the chronology of events through a series of **flashbacks,** each narrated from the point of view of the person telling the story. Welles had used this multiple flashback technique in a number of his radio dramas. Many critics have marveled at the intricate, jigsaw-puzzle structure of the movie, with its interlocking pieces that don’t click together until the final scene.

*Citizen Kane* is often singled out for the excellence of its screenplay—its wit, its taut construction, its thematic complexity. The controversy over its true authorship continued into the 1970s. John Houseman, Welles’s partner, helped John Mankiewicz, and in fact, Welles made extensive revisions on the first few drafts of the screenplay—so extensive that Mankiewicz denounced the movie because it departed radically from his scenario.

A number of commentators have noted that Welles was always at his best when he was writing with someone else, someone who could provide him with a narrative structure. Sometimes these structures were provided by the novels or plays that he was adapting—as in *The Magnificent Ambersons* or *Othello.* When he was the sole author of a screenplay—like *Mr. Arkadin*—the resulting film tended to be rambling and episodic. Welles always rebelled against restrictions.

The script sparkles with surprises. The main characters are a far cry from the tired stereotypes of most movies of this era. Only Thatcher seems conventional, a variation of the 1930s tycoon. The writing is often tersely funny. There are also moments of pure poetry.

Thematically, *Kane* is very complex. Like most of Welles’s other movies, *Citizen Kane* might well be entitled *The Arrogance of Power.* He was attracted to themes traditionally associated with classical tragedy and the epic: the downfall of a public figure because of arrogance and pride. Power and wealth are corrupting, and the corrupt devour themselves. The innocent usually survive, but they are severely scarred. There are five different storytellers, and each tells us a different story. Even when the events overlap, we view them from a different perspective.

Welles’s narrative strategy is something like a prism: The newsreel and the five interviewees each offer a unique view of the same man.

There are literally dozens of symbolic motifs in the movie. Some of them are technical, such as the film’s predominantly low camera angles. Others are more content oriented, such as the series of fences the camera must penetrate before we are able to see Kane. There are also persistent motifs of stillness, decay, old age, and death. The two most important motifs in the movie are Rosebud and the fragmentation motif.

Welles was a lifelong liberal, firmly committed to the values of the moderate left. The New York theater scene of the 1930s was intensely political and left-wing in its leanings. Like most intellectuals of that era, Welles was a Roosevelt enthusiast, strongly pro–New Deal in his sympathies. In fact, he helped write several of President Roosevelt’s famous radio speeches. Not surprisingly, *Citizen Kane* can be classified as liberal in its ideological slant. However, the movie is definitely in the implicit range in terms of its bias. It refuses to be the purveyor of glib certainties about its values: The characters are too complex, often paradoxical. The film is filled with the messy contradictions of life.

*Citizen Kane* is also strongly feminist in its sympathies. The three main female characters are all victimized. Mary Kane is trapped in a loveless marriage and feels she must sacrifice raising her son to get him away from his bullying father.

*Citizen Kane* is a masterpiece of formalism. True, there are some realistic elements in the film—its basis in fact, the newsreel sequence, the deep-focus photography that was so highly praised by realist critics like André Bazin. For the most part, however, it’s the bravura sequences that are most memorable in the movie.

*Kane* is indisputably the work of an *auteur.* Welles not only produced the film, he also coauthored its script, selected the cast and crew, starred in its leading role, and directed the entire production without interference. The movie is also typical in that it explores a complex of characteristic Wellesian themes and is executed in a showy style that became a virtual signature of its author.

The commercial and critical history of *Citizen Kane* is a fascinating story in its own right. Almost from the start, the production of *Citizen Kane* was sparked by controversy. A master publicist, Welles had the film colony buzzing with speculation. The movie was shot in “absolute secrecy.” Rumors were rife about the identity of the leading character, and when the syndicated Hearst gossip columnist, Louella Parsons, heard that the picture was to deal with her boss’s private life, a campaign against the movie was launched by Parsons, with Hearst’s blessings and full cooperation. As the film neared completion, Hearst’s campaign got vicious. He threatened the industry with a series of scandals and exposés unless the picture was destroyed before release.

With only a few exceptions, *Citizen Kane* received rave reviews. Bosley Crowther of *The New York Times* called it “one of the greatest (if not the greatest) films in history.” It won the New York Film Critics Award as Best Picture of 1941, which was a very good year for American movies. It received nine Academy Award nominations, but at the ceremonies, Welles was booed whenever his name was mentioned. Incredibly, *Citizen Kane* failed at the box office.

Welles was always a favorite with critics, especially in France. As early as the 1950s, excerpts from his scripts appeared in such journals as *Image et Son* and *Cinéma d’Aujourd’hui.* Welles was an idolized source of inspiration for the critics at *Cahiers du Cinéma,* who spearheaded the French **New Wave**.

Welles’s critical reputation continued to rise. In the year of his death, 1985, three books were published about him. In a poll of international film critics, conducted every 10 years by the prestigious British journal *Sight and Sound, Citizen Kane* has consistently topped the list of the ten greatest films of all time. The filmmaker who consistently receives the most votes as the greatest director in the history of the cinema: Orson Welles.

**Active Learning Assignments**

**Learning Objective 1. Show how *Citizen Kane* ushered in a revolution in photography and how Welles dynamically staged complex actions within each shot.**

1. Pick a scene you especially like from *Citizen Kane* and analyze it for its cinematography. Make sure you discuss the following: How do Welles and cinematographer Greg Toland light the scene? What is the lighting key? How does Welles stage the action within the scene? How are lighting and staging combined to tell the story in the scene?

**Learning Objective 2. Give examples of how Welles used the moving camera to embellish the story line of *Citizen Kane*.**

2. Pick a scene you especially like from *Citizen Kane* and analyze it for moving camera. Make sure you discuss what kind of moving camera shot(s) Welles uses in the scene, and why you think he chose that particular technique. How would the scene be different if Welles photographed it with a different style of moving camera?

**Learning Objective 3. Describe how Welles coordinated the editing techniques and sound within the film to create a rich, symbolic film experience.**

3. Pick a scene you especially like from *Citizen Kane* and analyze it for moving camera. Make sure you discuss how Welles combined the editing and sound in the scene to create a rich, symbolic film experience.

**Learning Objective 4. Evaluate the quality of actors in *Citizen Kane*, and assess the art direction tricks that Welles learned from working in theater and radio.**

4. Pick a scene from *Citizen Kane* with at least three actors in it and analyze the acting styles in it. Make sure you discuss who the actors are, which characters they play, and how their performances help create an effective scene within the larger context of the film.

**In-class Discussion Questions and Answers:**

**Learning Objective 5. Diagram the plot units of *Citizen Kane* and explain why the director chose to use the flashback structure in the film.**

**1.** **Question:** Following the plot outline discussed in the text that sets forth the ten main structural units of the film, discuss the structure of the story of *Citizen Kane*. Now see if you can fit these structural units into Syd Field’s or Frank Daniel’s story structure paradigms.

**Consider:**

* Is there an exposition section of the film (per Field)? What about rising action? Climax? Resolution?
* Is Daniel’s method more flexible with respect to analyzing the structure of *Kane*?
* How do the flashbacks affect the structure, if at all?
* Is a linear chronology critical to a classical paradigm story structure? Why or why not?

**Learning Objective 6. Illustrate the thematic complexity of *Citizen Kane* by addressing the film’s storytellers, narrative strategy, and symbolic motifs.**

**2.** **Question:** How does “Rosebud” act as both a literal object and a symbolic motif in *Citizen Kane*?

**Consider:**

* Define what a symbolic motif is. What type of motif is “Rosebud”?
* Why is this symbolism important to the film?
* How does it affect the narrative strategy Welles chose for the film?
* Does Rosebud mean different things to different characters in the film? If so, why?
* How does this illuminate the main themes of the film?

**Learning Objective 7. Defend the idea of Orson Welles as a film auteur.**

**3.** **Question:** Screen Welles’s film *The Magnificent Ambersons*, and discuss what aspects of both films point to Welles as an auteur filmmaker.

**Consider:**

* Define auteur. Apply that definition to Welles.
* Does Welles’s work outside the movies help define him as an auteur? If so, why?
* What aspects of each film either argue for or against Welles being an auteur filmmaker?
* Can you define a signature style for Welles from these two films? What elements or techniques used would you point to in order to make that distinction?