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Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	vi
<i>Publisher's notes</i>	vii
<i>Introduction</i>	ix
Chapter 1: The basics	1
<i>The first basic rule</i>	1
<i>Basic terminology – 'film' and 'cinema'</i>	2
<i>Basic terminology – common film terms</i>	4
<i>Film style or film language</i>	7
<i>Narrative</i>	8
<i>Genre</i>	8
<i>Intertextuality</i>	9
<i>Hollywood and arthouse cinema</i>	9
Chapter 2: Mise-en-scène	13
<i>Settings</i>	15
<i>Lighting</i>	20
<i>Costumes</i>	32
<i>Acting style</i>	36
<i>One last thing before the credits - CGI</i>	41
Chapter 3: Cinematography	43
<i>Exposure</i>	44
<i>Speed</i>	48
<i>Focus</i>	50
<i>Perspective</i>	54
<i>Camera position</i>	59
<i>Camera movement</i>	71
<i>Point-of-view shots</i>	78
<i>One last thing before the credits – Long takes</i>	79





Chapter 4: Editing	81
<i>Types of edits</i>	82
<i>Graphic editing</i>	85
<i>Rhythmic editing</i>	86
<i>Spatial editing</i>	89
<i>Temporal editing</i>	99
Chapter 5: Sound	105
<i>Uses of sound</i>	106
<i>Qualities of sound</i>	110
<i>Sound motifs</i>	111
<i>Sources of sound</i>	112
<i>One last thing before the credits – Sound bridges</i>	114
Chapter 6:	
<i>Narrative and narrative structure</i>	115
<i>Story and plot</i>	116
<i>Narrative structure</i>	118
<i>Narration</i>	126
<i>One last thing before the credits – Narrators</i>	130
Chapter 7: Genre	133
<i>Generic conventions</i>	134
<i>Genres with specific characteristics</i>	136
<i>Mixed genres</i>	137
<i>Sub-genres</i>	137
<i>Subverting generic conventions</i>	138
<i>One last thing before the credits – Documentaries</i>	140

Chapter 8: Intertextuality	143
<i>Spoofs</i>	144
<i>Postmodern films</i>	144
<i>Revisionist films</i>	145
<i>Homages</i>	146
<i>Allusionism</i>	147
<i>Non-film sources of intertextuality</i>	148
<i>One last thing before the credits – Adaptations</i>	149
Chapter 9: Active viewing	153
<i>Preparing to view the film</i>	154
<i>Viewing the film</i>	160
<i>Taking notes</i>	161
Chapter 10: Writing about film	169
<i>Example of writing about film: Gattaca</i>	170
<i>How to acknowledge film authorship</i>	172
<i>How to write about narrative</i>	172
<i>Annotated example</i>	174
<i>How to write about characters</i>	176
<i>Annotated example</i>	179
<i>How to write about themes</i>	180
<i>Annotated example</i>	183
<i>How to write about social values</i>	184
<i>Annotated example</i>	188
<i>How to write a film review</i>	189
<i>Annotated example</i>	195
<i>Photocopiable activity sheets</i>	197
<i>Glossary</i>	205
<i>Recommended websites</i>	213
<i>Index of films</i>	216
<i>Index of names and terms</i>	223



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Publisher's notes

The *Film Analysis Handbook* contains a number of special features:

- photographs specifically shot to demonstrate filmic and cinematographic techniques
- clear definitions of film terms
- numerous activities in tabular form for students to copy into their own workbooks or to use as the basis for discussion
- full-page photocopiable Activity Sheets for exercises that can be used more generically for film study (pages 197–204)
- annotated essays and reviews demonstrating how to integrate film terminology into analytical writing on film.

The classifications of films referred to in this book have not been identified. Films are referred to for descriptive purposes only, in order to illustrate the application of a particular technique in a commercially released film. We do not advocate the selection of any particular film or films for study; we can only urge all students and teachers to explore film and film analysis as widely and enthusiastically as possible. It is our sincere hope that this book will provide an invaluable resource for doing so.

vii

Iris Breuer, Publisher & Robert Beardwood, Editor



Introduction

Part of the pleasure of studying films, and one of the reasons for the popularity of Cinema Studies, is that film analysis enables you to discover much more in a film than you may initially have thought possible. In fact, studying a film increases your enjoyment and appreciation of a film once you start delving into it. Cinema is a very popular and accessible form of entertainment; it is also an art form that is absorbing and rewarding to explore. Indeed, films are so culturally significant, both reflecting and influencing social and political values, that they simply cannot be ignored.

'Reading' a film

We all know what it means to read a book: but what does 'reading' a film mean? The two things are similar in many ways, but there are also important differences – most obviously, due to the fact that a film is made up of 'moving pictures'. To 'read' a film is to analyse how that film uses images and sounds to tell a story and to powerfully affect the audience's thoughts and feelings about that story. So in fact, 'reading' a film is something that everybody is capable of, since most people have unconsciously done it all their lives.

We are all so used to moving-image cultural forms, such as film and television, that we are conditioned to react in particular ways when confronted with various images and stylistic devices. We know that creepy music means danger; we know that the two people running towards each other in slow motion with their arms outstretched are in love; and we know that the character who is dressed in black, hidden by shadows and holding a gun, is the villain. 'Reading' or analysing a film requires us to become conscious of our often unconscious responses, and to identify the techniques and conventions that make watching films such a meaningful, as well as enjoyable, experience.

ix

What this book covers

When analysing a film it is essential to understand and be able to write about 'film language'. In many ways 'film language' is an inappropriate term because 'language' implies the written or spoken word, whereas cinema is a visual art form, not a written one. 'Film language' is hence better described as **film style**. Chapter 1 introduces the basic terminology associated with film analysis while the four components of film style – *mise-en-scène*, **cinematography**, **editing** and **sound** – are explored thoroughly in chapters 2–5.

Part of analysing a film is being able to discuss how its storyline unfolds. When discussing film we refer to the storyline as the film's **narrative**. The ways in which narratives are developed and structured in film are explored in chapter 6. Some films use similar narrative and stylistic conventions to identify themselves as belonging to a specific group of films. These groups are known as **genres** and they are discussed in chapter 7. Chapter 8 examines **intertextual references**, whereby films deliberately mimic or evoke an aspect of another film.

Chapter 9 discusses the best ways of viewing and taking notes about films which you need to analyse. Finally, chapter 10 describes and demonstrates how to actually write about film using all the information and terminology covered in the previous chapters.

References

To make this book easier to use, I have not referenced any of the material contained within it. This is partly because it is common knowledge and standard terminology for discussing film, although some people may have slightly different preferences for terms describing elements of film style.

One significant reason for the terminology and concepts in this book being so widely used is the enormous ongoing popularity and influence of the book *Film Art: An Introduction* by David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, first published by McGraw-Hill in 1979. *Film Art* was the first major collection of the terminology used to discuss film. It is regularly reprinted and updated, with the seventh edition being published in 2004. Bordwell and Thompson's book contains detailed information on every aspect of film style and narrative, and is widely considered 'The Bible' of film analysis. Without it, this book and many others would not have been possible.

The aim of this book

Although the *Film Analysis Handbook* is indebted to *Film Art*, it is not simply a repackaging of Bordwell and Thompson. The aim of this book is to get straight to the point and give students the precise knowledge required for the analysis of film. The *Film Analysis Handbook* therefore offers accessible, straightforward definitions of key filmic terms and concepts, which are visually represented using original photographs. Through detailed examples drawn from both classic and contemporary cinema, this book explains how cinematic conventions are used by filmmakers to generate particular intellectual and emotional responses from their audiences. Students are shown how to actively engage with a film while watching it, and how to write analytically about it using the key terms and concepts associated with cinema.

Three random pieces of advice for aspiring film buffs



- See as many films as you can, and try to make the films you see as diverse as possible. Don't just watch one type of film, such as Hollywood blockbusters or European art-house.
- Realise that a film does not have to be realistic or accurate to be a good film. If you want realism, look out the window, don't go to the cinema!
- Remember that nearly every film has its own purpose and place in the history of cinema and deserves to be appreciated on its own merits. Even the worst films contain at least one element that makes them worth watching or enjoyable – and enjoyment, after all, is what most films are made for.