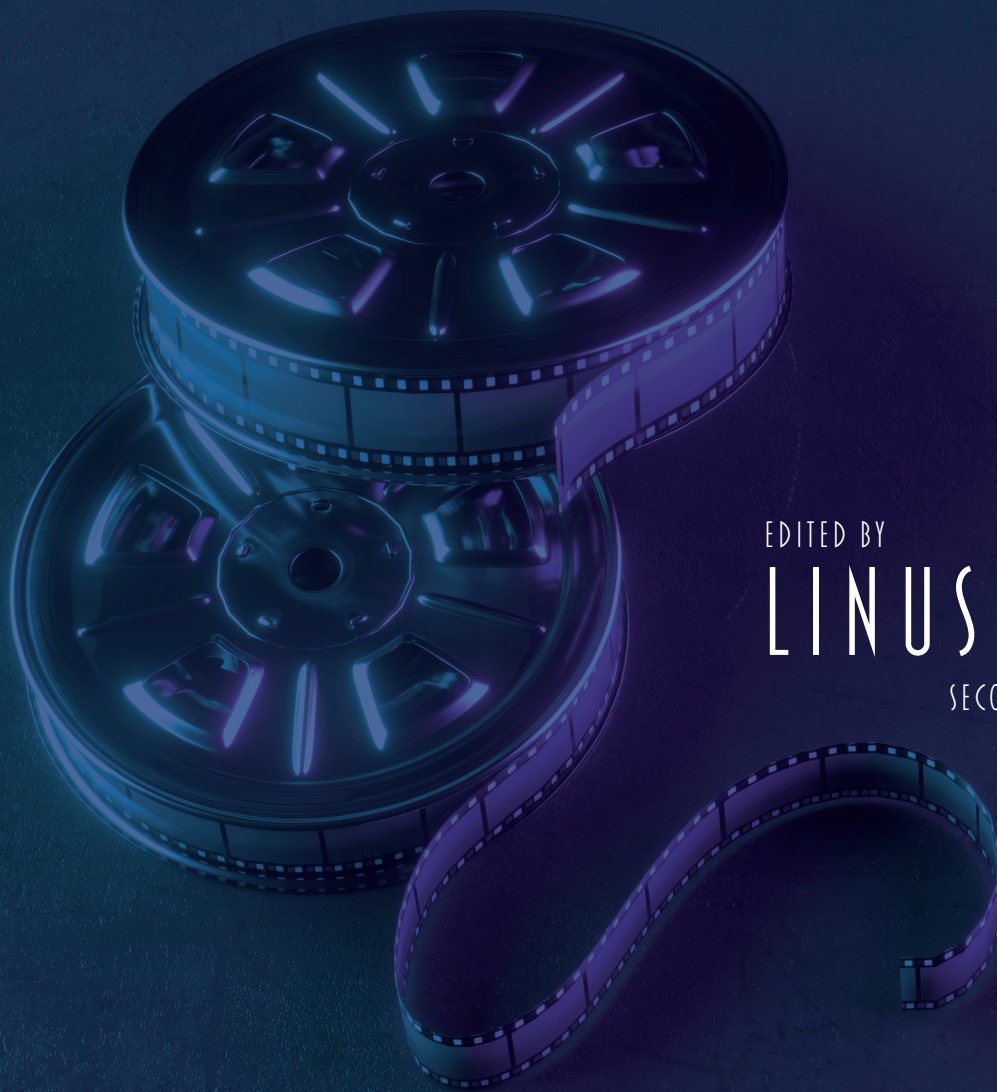


A FILM THEORIST'S

C O M P A N I O N



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SECOND EDITION

A Film Theorist's Companion

Second Edition

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Preface to the Second Edition

MOST PEOPLE ALIVE TODAY CAN ATTRIBUTE their understanding of speech, identity, and world view to the moving image. These early exposures to the medium were individual snapshots of music, terror, love, heroism. They were ingested, translated, and assimilated into our way of seeing the world long before we were self-aware. We fell in love in dreams that were not ours and reveled in places that we had never been. Our belief systems (including secular belief systems, e.g., ideologies), psychology, and general behavior are informed by our penchant for the fantastical and by the culture industry that formed around our obsession with fantasy.¹ Just as cameras and computers are used to create an illusion of space,² so too do directors, actors, and storytellers collaborate to create a very powerful and almost limitless emotional space: not only an arena in which we are free to test our emotional mettle, but also a prism through which we can interpret emotions. These invented emotional spaces are the foundation for how we see the world. Our psychology, morals, and cognitive processes are shaped by these emotional spaces we have not personally experienced.

Imagined spaces and movie moments affect us in a very significant way. They are a font of crowdsourced knowledge and emotion. Billions over billions of images of the inner workings of a filmmaker's mind become the individual "letters" and "words" of a universal language. It is a true global lingua franca.

What are the implications of our relationship to visual storytelling? It is safe to say that a key identifiable characteristic to being human is a propensity to ingest a language, process it, and extend it to new domains of thought.³

Our relationship with the screen is not static. Through the confluence of nature and culture, we all learn to become storytellers. Our roles of creator and spectator are interchangeable—each one of us seeking to express, inform, and teach using the same moving images that informed and taught us. And access to digital creator tools is just now becoming near-universal.

Phones, with their highly portable yet sophisticated cameras, are, in effect, subsidized weapons for social change, and we forget just how easily any weapon can be turned against us. The buy-in to be a media influencer today is practically free—all you need to surrender is yourself. Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok are tools through which everyday artists voluntarily objectify themselves, yet objects are ultimately disposable. Perhaps scholars in the field of cinema do not examine the lives of filmmakers to better understand their films; rather, maybe scholars examine film as a means to properly understand themselves.

Alternating in our role as spectator and creator, we take part of a grand conversation in images rather than words. To invoke the great psychologist James Hillman, good filmmaking, like “good language, asks to be spoken aloud mind to mind and heart to heart.”⁴ Movie-making is about making a statement—an elaborate statement that will be influenced by the movies that have come before it while allying itself with some avenue of artistic precedent.⁵ We see what works—what communicates—and we try to replicate that effort while adding our own take. We *design* a narrative, one that is more than just a representing of things,⁶ as they happened, on a screen. One could say that a designed narrative represents reality as much as it might deviate from reality.

Knowing this, one must think about the *responsibility* of movie-making as well.

App-based media platforms have become—inevitably, comically, and tragically—an extension of the larynx. They have become a means to generate real-time commentary on our lives projected onto the world. Grassroots reporters have the ability to distribute news faster than official news outlets. Backyard philosophers can achieve visibility comparable to that of production houses with hundreds of times more money and power. Product reviews are now the prelude to the press release. Fleeting thoughts can now be packaged, wielded, and shared without all the procedure and ceremony needed a decade ago. No matter how we might try to escape it, film is an arm of an ideological system by virtue of its role as an arm of our economic system. According to the great theorists Jean-Luc Comolli and Jean Narboni, “‘cinema and art’ are branches of ideology, ... and none can escape it.”⁷ These days, it is not so clear what is in fact the narrative itself or the *commentary* on that narrative.

We don’t know why we laugh—we just know we’re supposed to. We don’t know why we care—we just know we have to. Documentaries went from the informative to the over-editorialized. Political cartoons became replaced by the infographic. We went from “read all about it” to “here’s what you need to know.” Truly, the cart pushes the horse with regard to modern media.

Today, buying art or buying a performance of an art is more than just a simple economic transaction. You are also often buying one’s opinion about the art at the same time. Sometimes it’s the artists’ own opinions of their work. Users and consumers are not required to think, because the media-makers would be more than happy to do it for you.

In the West, personal and political experiences are being conflated and sold as the same. Writers tell people what they must think and how they must act. As media-makers ourselves, we have the power to cajole, proselytize, indoctrinate, and galvanize without the cross-checking of “inconvenient”

facts and figures. As Marshall McLuhan predicted in the 1960s, “the living room” became something of a “voting booth”⁸ and, lately, courts of public opinion reign supreme over artist intent. Quite startlingly, filmmakers, directors, and writers are identified, named, praised, and dismantled simply “by the grace of spectators,”⁹ and if one wishes to be an artist today, one apparently had better get used to it. What Thomas Schatz described in the early 1990s as an “intermingling” of the movie and the ad¹⁰ can now be seen as an intermingling of advertisement and editorial—the “advertorial,” as it’s now called.

What is to be our role in all of this? One wonders if the endeavor of film analysis would benefit from an in-depth study of film spectatorship itself. Spectators not only occupy an important position in the screen/audience relationship, but they are also, in fact, necessary. And the job of the film viewer is by no means passive. Thinking about films seriously and engaging in dialogue about films is an often-consuming endeavor that requires not simply identifying what one sees on the screen but thinking about three rather big ideas: (1) why movies affect us, (2) what movies say about a given culture, and (3) what our role as a participant in that culture is. Art—in the way it plays off itself, with artists borrowing from other artists, past or contemporary—suggests a continually evolving melting pot of ideas. And that is not to say that art is just a *mélange* of separate, disconnected pieces of media. As writer Stephen Crofts would argue, film crossbreeds¹¹ with other films, creating new genres and new movements that transcend the individual minds/nations/time periods that gave birth to them in the first place. Arguably, the study of ourselves as a film-viewing entity—a self-referential and changing group of people, ebbing and flowing through time as we continually learn about ourselves—is a valuable part of the screen/audience equation, too.

Whether you are invested in the study of philosophy, anthropology, or sociology, films and the culture of spectatorship form a rich area of study. The intersection of multiple disciplines in study is not new: fashion, for example, can be analyzed for not only its practical qualities but also the *cultural* function it serves. Different articles of cultural clothing can be seen as a visual narrative¹² of artistic monuments reflecting a maker/consumer relationship, revealing myriad human experiences that define our existence: technological prowess, ideological perspective, and cultural goals. Similarly, films studied as artifacts left behind¹³ uncover much evidence of a maker/consumer relationship that is relevant to understanding modern cultural resonances and contextualizing our position in a given culture. Films, rife with evidence of a large multi-generational cauldron of ideas are, as Marshall McLuhan would put it, a “total realization of the medieval idea of change, in the form of an entertaining illusion.”¹⁴

And what’s important to recognize is that film is more than illusion or entertainment en masse; it is also a *codebook*—a lens through which we can analyze the peoples and cultures that made them. It is a valuable schema on which we pattern and structure our current modes of thought. These artifacts teach us and reach us in ways that few books (sadly) and no leader (thankfully) could. This mutual

modification¹⁵ of society and individual through storytelling is the cyclic nature of film spectatorship/participation that helps us to see beyond a one-sided commercial wall of filmmaking wherein new products are churned out solely to substitute for old ones.¹⁶ The articles in this book assist in our endeavor to close not only the cultural distance between filmmaker and spectator, but also the temporal distance between people working and living in the past and people working and living today.

You might ask why we want to close the temporal distance between past and present. Why not see films as artifacts of a bygone time and appreciate that we can appreciate them? When we begin to close the temporal distance between past artists and contemporary artists, we start to be able to solve the prejudicial strictures that bind our thinking today.

The study of such a vast and factually elusive film history, that is as of this writing not much more than 140 years old,¹⁷ begs an organizational “frame” (so to speak) of *linearity*. And that makes sense given that the *very object of our study* (film) *is itself* a constructed, linear narrative.¹⁸ My students and I love to watch movies, and it makes sense to me that we also love to “see” moments of fleeting history as some sort of a grand timeline. But there may be a problem with seeing things this way.

Film studies is time travel along this historical timeline and requires a huge investment on the part of the spectator. Not an easy sell in our fast times when the preference for fifteen-seconds-or-less¹⁹ is so strong. If necessity begets invention, then we might say that distance is the mother of apathy—an excuse of convenience, really. Over the last thirty years it has become unfashionable to feign ignorance, so now we lean on the excuse of proximity. “*But black-and-white movies are boring.*” “*These movies aren’t relevant anymore.*” “*I’m not a fan of X cinema.*” Seems one can claim all sorts of truly “random” things, thanks to distance.

Imagine two categories of distance. One is cultural distance, which governs barriers of language, customs, and semiotics. This is the anthropological research of film studies. Archivists, preservationists, and university researchers are very good at providing scholars tools to traverse cultural barriers of understanding. When we tell people to “keep an open mind,” we actually mean “closing the gap” between cultures.

Then there’s *temporal distance*, which is tough to reconcile, as we cannot pin down time. The ephemeral past becomes hazier and murkier the further we move away from any fixed point. We have to *try* to remember things that are on the verge of disappearing from our memories. And the things we do remember we perceive “as if it happened yesterday.” The modern, purportedly complicated life is about forgetting the past, living in the now. And we seemingly live by this mantra with our history and with our entertainment. We inevitably view the events and people furthest from our historical position as “more different” and (unfortunately) “less relevant” than events closer to our historical position in time.

This problem has been discussed by a number of writers, most notably art critic and writer Jonathan Crary²⁰ and writer and professor Kaveh Askari.²¹ “Periodizing” even our brief history of global film culture is the inherent filtering of past events using a very limited frame. Organizing film into “time periods” for study might be convenient or even fun, but it limits our ability to see

the past as an important part of what informs the now. When we frame history for the sake of ease, we organize historical artifacts of the past in a way that affirms the preconception of trajectory.

In an effort to assuage the anxiety of our shared, troubled past, we may want to assume the role of virtual “time traveler”²² when studying history: whizzing through bygone events in an effort to find meaning today. And who can blame us? This has been bred into our very being via a diet of history classes and Hollywood narratives.

Perhaps this is the limitation of “organization.” What sorts of limitations are we talking about here? A Western-only viewpoint might be one example. Studying only “endorsed” material—that is, movies that have won awards—could be another. Still another limitation could be found in “when” we are positioned in time itself. Seeing arbitrarily organized history as simply distant objects reduces its profundity and manifests in the spectator as “temporal prejudice”: the idea that all the historical events and byproducts thereof have “led up” to “us,” and that artists today are positioned the most advantageously to optimally exploit form and language. In truth, there may be a lot of similarities between early cinema (them) and later film cultures²³ (us).

In “young” disciplines such as media studies and film studies, there is a temptation to see artifact as a simple series, following a single trajectory of expression rather than as the product of unique artists, all with their own individual voice. The notion that these are antiquated artists from bygone eras whose yet-undiscovered films should be seen in the context of apparent disadvantages—for example, suggesting that past artists somehow uniquely struggled to use “whatever” technology was “available”—is similarly short sighted, as in the periodization problem: analogous to regarding, say, ancient Hellenistic art as a “preparatory stage”²⁴ to the art of today. Students, scholars, and critics in the West rightly challenge cultural prejudices between groups today yet indulge in temporal prejudice.

“Straight-line” or causality thinking reduces history and the pursuit of its study to words on a ticker tape or ingredients on a shopping list: an unfolding of “rare objects”²⁵ placed in a comfortable but often arbitrary order. This sort of thinking gives way to theoretical and ideological suppositions that obscure our understanding of an artist’s true motivation or artistic purpose. And as a result, a rich tapestry of intellectually stimulating output from intrinsically diverse artists (from all over the world, no less) starts to look like a two-dimensional video game of random achievement levels, tempting the spectator into devising axioms and maxims based on (and what inevitably boils down to) a cursory glance at a few films. It is altogether too easy (and perhaps wrong) to simply think that “black-and-white” cinema existed because color film had not yet been achieved. One recalls the rather humorous observation made by Rudolf Arnheim in his essay *Film as Art* in which he essentially questions those who celebrate sound as the “missing” final piece to the “problem” of silent film.²⁶

How often does one hear that peoples of the past were primitive or backward? We wouldn’t use these painful adjectives when it comes to describing people alive today, yet we are willing to label people of the past this way. In a given month, how often do we hear (and read) that “back in the day” people didn’t yet possess the technological conveniences to live a properly good life (or to do

anything useful with themselves)? Polemicists, editorialists, and pseudo-philosophers speak this way. Salespeople, too. It's absurd that we are unable to see our existence, with all its knowledge of technological and societal structures, as evidence of the very prowess for survival we accuse past cultures of lacking.

Arguably, the real danger of seeing history simply as this “straight line” is that it potentially leads to a false sense of assurance: that what happened in the past must have “happened for a reason” (as a maker may have intended it) or that it is “utterly wrong” (cultural cynicism) and must be corrected. I would suggest that such an outlook would impede meaningful analysis—a depriving point of view that fails to take into account the “human” component of art, the “human” part of a conversation. For all the art artists produce for our enjoyment, we ought to extend a bit of understanding to those who dared to speak, who dared to try, who dared to risk being wrong.

Culture is an elusive object of study as it is at once constantly changing and simultaneously requiring our input. We are impressed upon to voice our opinion and to participate, sure, but our opinions and participation ought to take into consideration the depth and dignity of cultures established long before we were born,²⁷ and which still resonate in our art today.

The readings in this text are not meant to be comprehensive or exhaustive but as a supplement to an introductory understanding of film as text. It is an opportunity to attain wisdom about interesting (and important!) ideas proposed by compellingly intelligent thinkers, and perhaps thusly to inform the choices we make when we stream media at home, go out for a movie, or attend a performance.

If we can make better choices as viewers, creators will respond. And if we resonate with those responses, we will better understand ourselves.

Notes

1. Kurt Anderson, *Fantasyland: How America Went Haywire; A 500-Year History* (New York: Random House, 2017), 289.
2. Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 185–191, 293–302.
3. Steven Pinker, *The Stuff of Thought: Language as a Window into Human Nature* (New York: Penguin Books, 2007), 24.
4. James Hillman, “Language: Speaking Well and Speaking Out,” in *The Rag and Bone Shop of the Heart*, ed. Robert Bly, James Hillman, and Michael Meade (HarperCollins 1992), 159.
5. Michael Rabinger, “Form, Control, and Style,” in *Directing the Documentary* (Burlington, MA: Focal Press, 2014), 313.
6. Tino Balio, *Grand Design: Hollywood as a Modern Business Enterprise, 1930–1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 65.
7. Jean-Luc Comolli and Jean Narboni, “Cinema/Ideology/Criticism,” in *Screen Reader One: Cinema, Ideology, Politics*, ed. John Ellis. © 1977 Society for Education in Film and Television, British Film Institute, and Routledge and Kegan Paul.

8. Marshall MacLuhan, *The Medium is the Message: An Inventory of Effects* (Corte Madera, CA: Gingko Press, 1967), 22.
9. Dudley Andrew, "The Unauthorized Auteur Today," in *Film Theory Goes to the Movies*, ed. Jim Collins, Hilary Radner, and Ava Preacher Collins (New York: Routledge, 1993), 80.
10. Thomas Schatz, "The New Hollywood," in *Film Theory Goes to the Movies*, ed. Jim Collins, Hilary Radner, and Ava Preacher Collins (New York: Routledge, 1993), 32.
11. Stephen Crofts, "Reconceptualizing National Cinema(s)," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 14, no. 3 (1993): 49–67. © 1993 Harwood Academic Publishers GmbH
12. Fabrice Lyczba, "Conference Review: Archaeology of Fashion Film," *Film Journal 5: Screening the Supernatural* (Autumn 2019), 124–127.
13. Kaveh Askari, "An Afterlife for Junk Prints: Serials and Other 'Classics' in Late-1920s Tehran" in *Silent Cinema and the Politics of Space*, ed. Jennifer Bean, Anupama Kapse, and Laura Horak (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 102.
14. Marshall MacLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: Signet Books, 1964), 249.
15. Jordan Peterson, *Maps of Meaning* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 72.
16. M. E. Porter, *Competitive Strategy* (New York: Free Press, 1980), 5. Quoted in Jerome Christiansen, *America's Corporate Art: The Studio Authorship of Hollywood Motion Pictures* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006).
17. Let's use Muybridge's zoopraxiscope as a starting point.
18. It might even be that due to projected film's window-like aspect ratio, and the historical linearity by which we teach film studies in a school setting, the intended affordance of film has been rendered ambiguous as if to suggest a "window" into the past. For more on the concept of intended affordance, see Don Norman, *The Design of Everyday Things* (New York: Basic Books, 2013).
19. The maximum length of a single Instagram video post in early 2022. Instagram reel = 90 secs., Facebook story = 120 secs., Twitter video = 140 secs., TikTok video = up to 10 mins.
20. See Jonathan Crary, "Modernizing Vision," in *Vision and Visuality*, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle, WA: Bay Press/Dia Art Foundation, 1988), 29.
21. See Kaveh Askari, "An Afterlife for Junk Prints," chap. 1 in *Relaying Cinema in Midcentury Iran: Material Cultures in Transit* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2022), 26–44.
22. Jean M. Twenge, *Generation Me: Why Today's Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled—and More Miserable Than Ever* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 20.
23. Twenge, *Generation Me*, 26.
24. Lisa Gee, Alastair Horne, and Alex Woolf, "Sculpture and Archaic Temples, Part I; The Origins of Ancient Greece," in *Encyclopedia of Ancient Greece*, ed. Carlos Gomez (London: Amber Books, 2019), 147.
25. Jim Collins, Hilary Radner, and Ava Preacher Collins, eds., *Film Theory Goes to the Movies* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 3.
26. Rudolf Arnheim, *Film as Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 106.
27. Twenge, *Generation Me*, 8.

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Unit 1

How to Look

IN THE FIRST SECTION OF THIS text, the student will approach film from the vantage point of a viewing participant first. The readings represent a broad range of analytical perspectives that specifically address the spectator's point of view—not as a crew member, not as a movie subject, but as an audience member. Some provide a much-needed foundation for beginning film students: Robert Spadoni's *Film as Form* is a fantastic outline of the basic language of cinema theory; a clear and comprehensive guide with definitions and images. Some venture to go deeper such as Lucia Ricciardelli's *Integrating Film Theory with Film Production*, which frames the theoretical ideas of film analysis in the language of physical film production. Still, some of my favorite readings of this book are from this first section: Michael Rabiger's superb write-up *Form, Control, and Style* suggests that thoughtful artists set up artistic limitations as a means of controlling the image and the message, and Michele Pierson's *The Object of Film Analysis* asks us to consider the how the relationship between the filmmaker and film viewer has changed in response to modern technology. The landscape of movie spectatorship is undoubtedly changing as we engage with images that were once meant to be consumed in a larger-than-life theatre, but now as a transferable, transportable, and repeatable unit of media content. In Marshall McLuhan's classic essay *The Medium Is the Message*, the idea of technology as natural resource was ahead of its time and has influenced writers and thinkers since.

At the end of each of these three sections, there are some discussion questions to supplement the student's self-reflection.

Reading 1.1

Integrating Film Theory with Film Production

By *Lucia Ricciardelli*

Teaching filmmaking without being cognizant of fundamental cinematic theories means film craft to the mere level of an amateur workshop. And the opposite: studying film history and theory without a corresponding experience in the elemental aspects of filmmaking leaves theoretical research without a solid basis, forcing students to plunge into abstraction. —Lev Kuleshov

The recent emergence of the audiovisual essay in the study of film presses the use of images further and generates experiments with the critical potential of evoking and directly engaging the very objects it examines. Images are used to study images; film becomes quotable in its criticism. —Hoi Lun Law

Having a really good understanding of history, literature, psychology, sciences—is very, very important to actually being able to make movies. —George Lucas

Summary

Undergraduate students greatly benefit from reading film theory as it helps them think more deeply about their own movie productions. This [reading] will outline some of the major film theory movements, discussing effective ways to incorporate them in the undergraduate curriculum. Within this context, the creative and critical potential of the audiovisual film essay, a novel format of critical analysis, will be examined. An extension of the written essay format itself, the audiovisual essay is a multimedia text that combines video, audio, and written elements to convey a thesis-driven argument, collapsing the distinction between film theoretical analysis and the process of film production. A variety of undergraduate audiovisual essays and informative websites on how to produce them are included for your perusal.

What Is Film Theory?

Film theory is the ability to speculate about general principles and properties of film. Whereas film history analyzes patterns of continuity and change in the way specific films are produced and viewed over time, film theory is a philosophical inquiry into the nature and functions of film in general. Film theorists tend, in fact, to ask abstract, broad questions about the medium of film:

- What is film? What is a film made out of that makes it a film rather than something else? Is a film made out of celluloid, light beams, photographs, editing, time, or feelings? (ontological questions)
- What is the proper use of film techniques? What makes a scene powerful or mediocre? What criteria underlie our values and evaluations? (aesthetic questions)
- What is the relation of film to society and politics, and to society's economic institutions? What is the relation of film to history? How has film been used and regarded? (ideological questions)
- How is a spectator able to comprehend a film? What makes meanings occur to the viewer? How are we able to think and know something through a film? (epistemological questions)

Learning how to answer these types of questions helps undergraduate students understand the ways in which movies produce and deliver meaning, thus improving their ability to make better-informed choices during film production.

Since the 1960s, influential and often contested theoretical paradigms such as semiotics, post-structuralism, neo-Marxism, psychoanalytic theory, feminism, cultural studies, postcolonial studies, and postmodernism have attempted to explain how films impact our worldviews, affecting our goals, relationships, and social interactions. By becoming more aware of how cinema influences human behavior and community life, undergraduate students end up producing socially conscious films with relevant content. For example, by using feminist film theories to analyze the representation of female characters in Alfred Hitchcock's films, undergraduate students can become aware of how cultural constructs of gender influence their sense of self and the way they relate to each other, learning how to develop round and dynamic characters in their scripts. Along the same vein, becoming acquainted with 1970s apparatus theory, derived in part from Marxist film theory, helps undergraduates understand how governmental organizations and institutions have utilized cinema as a powerful propaganda instrument.

Film Theory in the Undergraduate Curriculum

For most undergraduate students, film theory presents a great challenge; like mathematics or theoretical physics, just a minority of film majors seems predisposed to do well in it. Yet, no matter what predisposition a student has, studying film theory at the undergraduate level has been shown to greatly increase students' critical thinking skills. Unfortunately, the majority of bachelor film degree curricula require only a couple of classes in film theory (usually one class in classical and one in contemporary film theory), offering further film studies seminars that adopt a theoretical approach as electives (typically attended by undergraduate students with a penchant for theoretical analysis!). Hence, the importance of offering a wide range of film studies elective courses that utilize diverse theoretical frameworks to analyze popular films and trendy movie genres among undergraduates.

Film industry professionals, and oftentimes film production teachers, fail to recognize the fruitful link between film studies and movie production, dismissing the importance of studying the art of filmmaking from a theoretical perspective; thus, the “bad rap” film studies courses tend to have among undergraduate students. Then, how can university professors entice students to read film theory?

First of all, film studies instructors can analyze the work of popular directors who have incorporated theoretical notions such as the “male gaze” (feminist film theory) or “ideological indoctrination” (Marxist film theory) into their pictures. By understanding the effective imbrication of theory and practice in the films of successful filmmakers, students realize that a critical understanding of film is essential to the realization of their own film projects. Quentin Tarantino's body of work offers a perfect case study that could attract many undergraduate students. Not only does his pastiche of film genres and styles provide the opportunity to review important contributions to the history of international cinema (e.g., the French New Wave, the Italian Spaghetti Western Movement, etc.), Tarantino's films deal with themes and characters that perfectly lend themselves to the discussion of sociopolitical issues such as racism and sexism through a theoretical lens. For example, film students could examine *Django Unchained* (2012), a film that tells the story of a former black slave who is on a quest to rescue his wife from the grips of a slave owner, in terms of racial stereotypes. Does Tarantino's revisionist historical film contribute to deconstructing racial assumptions about black men as being violent and threatening? Or rather, does it perpetuate the same longstanding stereotypes of black men as individuals to be feared? These kinds of questions help undergraduates better comprehend how theoretical concerns and concepts can make their film productions compelling and successful.

Alternatively, an undergraduate project in film theory can be conducted as part of a faculty research study. From working closely with film studies professors, undergraduate students learn to accomplish tasks such as (1) performing a bibliographic search; (2) writing a literature

review; (3) conducting surveys, questionnaires, and interviews; (4) analyzing film clips; and (5) evaluating research data. Mentoring students in faculty research is a winwin scenario as there are significant benefits for both sides: while undergraduates develop critical research skills that can be applied to their own creative and theoretical work, film studies professors can save considerable time and efforts that can be utilized for assessing and cross-referencing research findings.

Another way to ease undergraduates into studying film theory is through independent studies with a faculty whose expertise lies in theoretical methodologies for the study of cinema. In order to be original, an independent studies project in film theory might examine a local filmmaker's body of work that has never been analyzed by a third party; utilize qualitative methods for the assessment of high school students' experience and usage of film editing software such as Adobe Premiere or Final Cut Pro; or analyze the ways in which digital technology has influenced patterns of movie exhibition and moviegoing in a small town. Additional suggestions follow.

Possible Topics for Research in Film Theory

- Study cognitive dissonance in the storytelling style and aesthetic approach of specific filmmakers.
- Analyze the subjective nature of documentary representation through the lens of film semiotics.
- Research why some undergraduate film majors dislike studying theory.
- Investigate effects of early education in film theory, at different levels.
- Analyze the body of work of a local filmmaker about whom there are not available studies.
- Connect film theory with other studies such as computer science, psychology, or mathematics.
- Investigate some of the ways in which film theory informs film production.
- Do qualitative research on why some film production professors do not teach any film theory. Ask for tips from the ones who do.
- Explore ways that interactive web documentaries can be analyzed.
- Collect and summarize resources for teaching film theory as part of film production instruction.

- Compare film theory classes offered at different universities (theories studied, required film theory courses, types of assignments, etc.).
- Experiment with a peer-mentoring program for film theory.
- Do a meta-analysis of google reviews of film theory textbooks.
- Interview film theory professors to document and analyze the effectiveness of various pedagogical tools.
- Analyze the ideological effects of specific film genres, and compare and contrast them.
- Discuss the cinematic representation of minority ethnic groups through the lens of postcolonial theory.
- Analyze the audiovisual historical construction of national identity.
- Investigate the ways in which postmodern documentary films tend to blur the boundaries between fiction and nonfiction.
- Discuss documentary filmmaking as social justice activism.

Bridging the Gap between Film Theory and Film Production: The Audiovisual Essay

The digital age gave rise to a new format of film analysis: the audiovisual essay. An extension of the written essay format, the audiovisual essay mixes audio, video, and text files into the same digital platform to convey a thesis-driven argument. During the past decade, the audiovisual essay has received accolades from all over the world, encouraging film scholars and film reviewers alike to creatively edit images, video clips, and sounds in their critical analyses of films. Academic institutions around the globe have increasingly begun to incorporate audiovisual essay assignments in their film courses and online film journals are adopting audiovisual criticism more and more, overcoming the limitations of the frame-by-frame analysis.

Over the last two decades, the availability of DVD extras and the development of nonlinear editing software have been instrumental in expanding film studies scholars' analytical toolbox and techniques. By looking at the bonus material packed on a disk and by having the opportunity to recombine film clips with images, sound bites, and textual commentaries, film scholars and film students alike have produced new kinds of critical understandings of cinema that collapse the boundaries between makers and critics. In adopting audiovisual means to analyze films, not only do they circumvent convoluted passages in writing to describe a scene or sequence, they also avoid mediating a sensorial experience into words proving films' ability to evoke feelings and emotions. And although the audiovisual essay has raised questions about academic rigor and integrity—some film studies scholars have

resisted adopting the audiovisual format considering it the realm of the amateur cinephile—the audiovisual essay seems to appeal to those undergraduate students for whom the study of film theory presents a great challenge.

Samples Abstracts Submitted to NCUR

www.cur.org/what/events/students/ncur/past/abstracts/

The Hitchcock Blonde and How She Drives the Thriller

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The Hitchcock Blonde and How She Drives the Thriller. Alfred Hitchcock is known for his stylish films that explore themes such as sex, crime, and murder. He is also known for the “Hitchcock Blonde”: an icy, mysterious blonde woman that proves to be an important element in the structure of his important films, including *Vertigo* (1958) and *The Birds* (1963). The Hitchcock Blonde’s motives are typically concealed from other characters in the narrative but laid out for the audience to see; thus, she is a character of deception and mystery. While many critical analyses argue the function and purpose of the Hitchcock Blonde in Hitchcock films, I will show that she is more than just an iconic character. She is also responsible for the downfall and ultimate demise of the protagonist. In order to accomplish this feat, the Hitchcock Blonde hides her true intentions from the protagonist, she highlights the flaws of the protagonist through her sexual implications, and she perpetuates the narrative by being directly related to the antagonizing force of the film which is working against the male protagonist. I also show that her function is to work against the protagonist in such a way that she can be considered the villain of the film. These elements of the Hitchcock Blonde can be seen throughout the catalog of the director’s films but is most prevalent in the four films between 1958 and 1962: *Vertigo*, *North by Northwest* (1959), *Psycho* (1960), and *The Birds* (respectively). These films mark the peak of Alfred Hitchcock’s film career; they have turned such stars as Tippi Hedren and Eva Marie Saint into Hitchcock Blondes, women who influence whether we as an audience view the protagonist as a hero, a failure, or a villain.

Stereotypical Representations of Africa in *The Ghost and The Darkness*

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Stephen Hopkins’ 1996 film, *The Ghost and the Darkness*, is a fictionalized account of the Tsavo Man-Eaters, notorious man-eating lions that were responsible for the deaths of numerous construction workers on the Kenya-Uganda Railway in 1898. This paper explores how the

film's setting and historical reference, a period of British colonialism in Africa, reinvigorates conventional African myths and is the catalyst for stereotypical representations of Africa. The first representation of Africa depicts it as a large reservoir of resources available for the taking by Westerners. This is presented through the colonial exploitation of Africa by means of the construction of the Kenya-Uganda Railway. By displaying the rise in colonial exploitation in Africa near the turn of the 19th century and the use of African workers to exploit themselves, harkening back to the myth of the submissive African slave, the setting of the film is the catalyst for the representation of Africa as a land of resources to be acquired by Western nations. The second representation of Africa promotes the idea that Africa is a helpless land that needs the power of Western nations to protect it. Africans are rendered as feeble and incompetent while the popular myth of strong Westerners with big guns and safari hats is embodied. Thus, the film's setting fosters the representation of Africa as dependent on the protection of Western nations. The third representation of Africa fostered in the film illustrates Africa as a savage land that must be conquered by the Westerners. The man-eating lions are shown to be vicious and elusive, the latter trait leading to the Africans dubbing them "the Ghost and the Darkness." Only with the skills, technology, and natural willpower of the Westerners are the lions defeated. Through the exploration of the stereotypical representations of Africa depicted in *The Ghost and the Darkness*, we obtain a better understanding of the consistent circulation, even in more recent films, of these colonial era tropes.

Lights, Camera, Culture: Exploring Americans' Perception of French Cinema

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Pop music, movies, T.V. series ... countless elements of American popular culture are appreciated around the world. On the other end, mainstream America seems more reluctant to embrace foreign popular cultures. Cinema is a salient example of this trend. By looking at the highest grossing films in two of the top five feature film producing countries, France and the United States, one can observe the obvious disconnect between the United States and other nations regarding film importations. In this study, I will aim to unveil the reasons behind Americans' lack of interest in foreign cinema by examining French films. I will do so by exploring the concept of "culture" itself and the impact it has on one's tastes. Perceptions are influenced by one's own culture, which anthropologist Edward Hall defines as "a highly selective screen between man and the outside world. It designates what we pay attention to and what we ignore." As perceptions and tastes are shaped by culture, individuals often find themselves unable to relate to cultural elements that are foreign, and ultimately choose to reject them. This dynamic, I argue, is at the center of Americans' lack of attraction for

French cinema. I claim that certain cultural differences between France and the United States explain Americans' reluctance to embrace French cinema. More particularly, my study demonstrates that anthropological, psychological, and historical contrasts, which influence the two countries' perceptions of the role of cinema in society, the definitions of humor and of a successful movie, are at stake here. This research will reach far beyond what we see at the movies. By focusing on the root of cultural differences and perceptions, we can begin to understand the differences in perceptions on a larger scale, such as religion, economics, or politics.

SUBHuman-Representing Women in Film

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SUBHuman is a sci-fi action script set in a dystopian world where the rich reign and those born imperfect are enslaved. Fiona is a SUB (Scientifically Undesirable Bio form) who is raised without knowledge of her humanity and treated as property. When a traumatic event brings Fiona to a place where she meets her perfect sister, the women come together to stop the forces that are oppressing the SUB's. This script speaks to many social issues such as: class separation, patriarchal society, fertility and gender issues. The intent of this script is to not only tell a great story that will hopefully inspire discussion but also to create characters that are largely underrepresented in the Hollywood majority. My Hero is not only a woman but one born with a physical disability. It's Fiona's missing left arm that casts her into the enslaved class and yet she is ultimately the one who holds the power. A report by San Diego State University film professor Martha Lauzen states that "the top 100 grossing films of 2013 were overwhelmingly male. Just 15% of protagonists, 29% of major characters and 30% of all speaking characters were female." (Saba) I propose to exhibit a staged reading of several key scenes from my script that will be performed by some of the Spokane area's local acting talent. By presenting this reading I hope to positively represent women in film, as both a writer and, director. Few women are represented on screen in scripts with a feminist forward thinking analysis, even fewer are produced screenwriters and directors of the content created. There is a severe shortage of women in the industry: "Out of 1,452 filmmakers, 20.5% were women, but just 7% were directors. 19.5% of the writers were women, as were 22.7% of the producers" (Forbes). Forbes. "Geena Davis Institute New Research Shows That Girls and Women Are Missing Onscreen and Behind the Scenes Worldwide." *Forbes Magazine*. Web. 28 Nov. 2014. Saba Hamedy "Report: Just 15% of Lead Characters in Major Movies Are Female." *Los Angeles Times*. *Los Angeles Times*, 11 Mar. 2014. Web. 24 Nov. 2014.

Masculinity and Its Countertype in Pre-Nazi Germany: Reading Volker Schlöndorff's *Der Junge Törless* (1966) Through George L. Mosse's *The Image of Man*

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In *Der junge Törless* (1966), first-time director Volker Schlöndorff provided what was lacking in West German film up to that date: an incisive historical and psychological examination of the causes of National Socialism. Set in an Austrian military academy during the fin de siècle, the film focuses on Törless, a withdrawn, reflective cadet, as he struggles over his involvement in the secret, sadistic torturing of another classmate, Basini, by two of his friends, Beineberg and Reiting. Although there is widespread agreement among film scholars that Schlöndorff's *Der junge Törless* is a parable of Nazi Germany, little to no attention is paid to a close examination of the sociopsychological dynamics at work between the students that are productive of National Socialism. Utilizing George L. Mosse's *The Image of Man*, an historical treatment of the solidification of modern masculinity in Western Europe, this essay argues that central to the fascist dynamics at work between Törless, Basini, Beineberg, and Reiting is an uncompromising masculinity that codifies through violence a binary between the masculine type and its countertype. After situating this dynamic in its presupposition—the failure of institutions such as the academy to understand, incorporate, and work through such aggressiveness—I chart how both Törless and Basini, as countertypes, are compelled to perform masculinity given the threat of bodily violence posed to them by Beineberg and Reiting, both as representative of the newly developing fascist man. Drawing on Mosse's conceptualization of the *Männerbund* to explain the subsequent expulsion of Basini from the community of men, I argue that the sexual and bodily violence perpetrated against Basini serves to consolidate the masculine heterosexuality of both Beineberg and Reiting. Although Törless is implicated as an ambivalent spectator to Basini's torture, I explore how his lived, embodied engagement with Basini apart from Beineberg and Reiting serves as the material presupposition to an ethical maturity which rejects fascist masculinity. Despite the fact that I concede that at the film's closing Törless still partly evidences a lack of understanding regarding masculinity, I assert that what is of value in *Der junge Törless* is the example Schlöndorff provides of Törless's embodiedness: this conception does justice to the bodily dimension of the internalization of the norms and values of fascism and the method of critiquing such values through an embodied engagement with a countertype that illuminates one's larger social responsibilities.

Samples of Audiovisual Essays

Film Seminar, 381: *QUENTIN TARANTINO & THE CINEMA OF COOL*. Professor Lucia Ricciardelli, School of Film & Photography, Montana State University (Fall 2018)



FIGURE 1.1.1 A Hateful Love Letter to *The Thing*. Arlen Guest, Mentor Lucia Ricciardelli.



FIGURE 1.1.2 Tarantino's Most Chilling and Terrifying Movie Villain: Colonel Landa. Noah Correia, Mentor Lucia Ricciardelli.

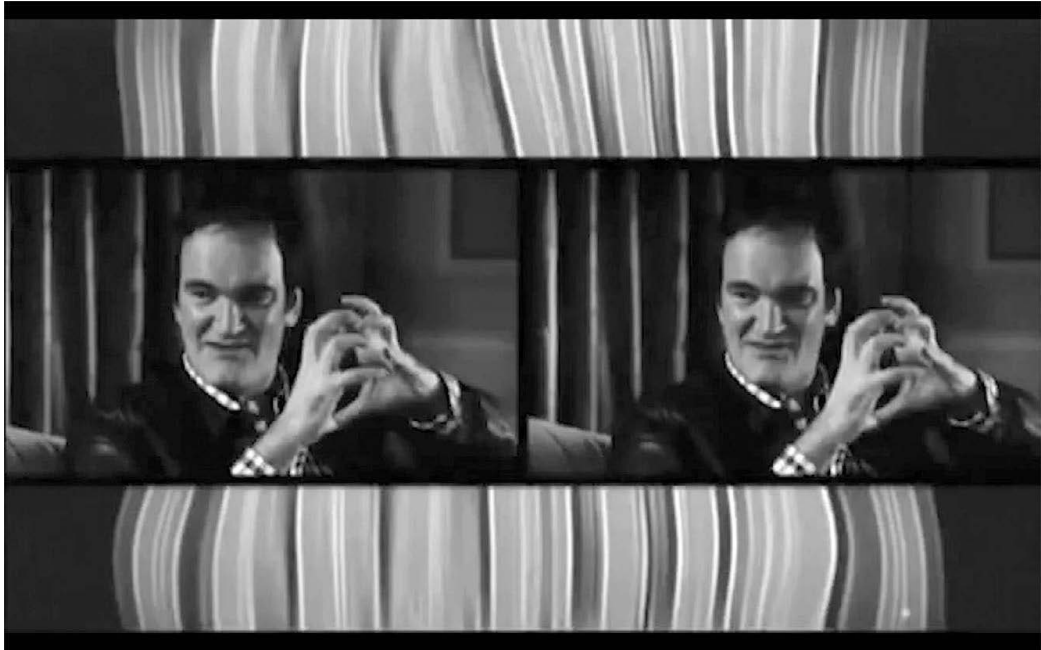


FIGURE 1.1.3 Quentin Tarantino & Music. Tapweski Sandaine, Mentor Lucia Ricciardelli.

Conclusion

Though many undergraduate students struggle to understand the relevance of reading film theory, it is undeniable that its study pervades their film productions in more ways than they realize. Becoming aware of how popular films have been informed by theoretical discussions of contemporary sociopolitical issues helps students realize that theory is not as irrelevant to filmmaking success as people working in the film industry might argue. Additionally, careful attention to the relationship between theory and practice in the film undergraduate curriculum helps establish academic rigor, lending credibility to the discipline of film within the university circuit.

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