RICHARD BARSAM   DAVE MONAHAN

LOOKING AT MOVIES

AN INTRODUCTION TO FILM

FIFTH EDITION

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5TH EDITION
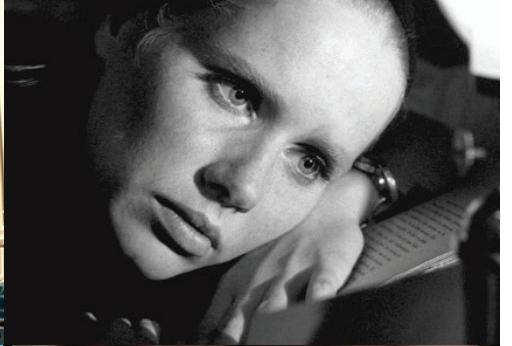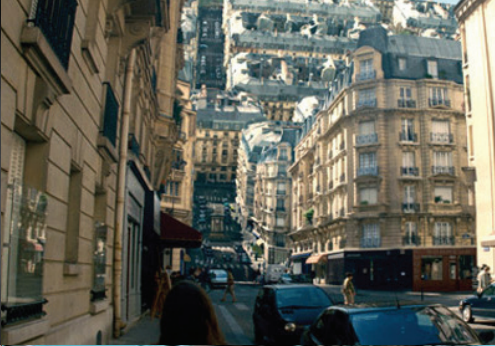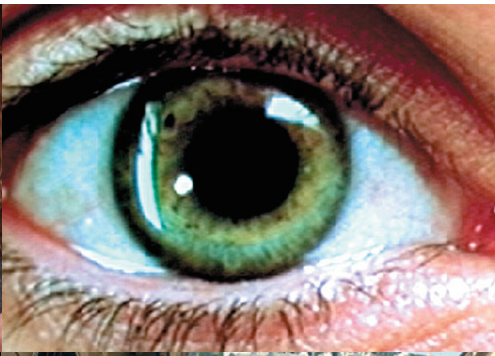
LOOKING AT MOVIES

AN INTRODUCTION TO FILM

RICHARD BARSAM & DAVE MONAHAN

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

RICHARD BARSAM

(Ph.D., University of Southern California) is Professor Emeritus of Film Studies at Hunter College, City University of New York. He is the author of *Nonfiction Film: A Critical History* (rev. and exp. ed., 1992), *The Vision of Robert Flaherty: The Artist as Myth and Filmmaker* (1988), *In the Dark: A Primer for the Movies* (1977), and *Filmguide to Triumph of the Will* (1975); editor of *Nonfiction Film: Theory and Criticism* (1976); and contributing author to Paul Monaco's *The Sixties: 1960–1969* (Vol. 8 in the History of the American Cinema series, 2001) and *Filming Robert Flaherty's Louisiana Story: The Helen van Dongen Diary* (ed. Eva Orbanz, 1998). His articles and book reviews have appeared in *Cinema Journal, Quarterly Review of Film Studies, Film Comment, Studies in Visual Communication*, and *Harper's*. He has been a member of the Executive Council of the Society for Cinema and Media Studies and the Editorial Board of *Cinema Journal*, and he cofounded the journal *Persistence of Vision*.

DAVE MONAHAN

(M.F.A., Columbia University) is an Associate Professor and Department Chair of Film Studies at the University of North Carolina, Wilmington. His work as a writer, director, and editor includes *Things Grow* (2010), *Ringo* (2005), *Monkey Junction* (2004), *Prime Time* (1996), and *Angels Watching Over Me* (1993). His work has been screened internationally in over fifty film festivals and has earned numerous awards, including the New Line Cinema Award for Most Original Film (*Prime Time*) and the Seattle International Film Festival Grand Jury Prize for Best Animated Short Film (*Ringo*).

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TO STUDENTS

The movies, born in 1891, have flourished for 124 years, yet there have always been those who believed that they were a passing fancy, or a poor cousin of the more traditional arts like literature, painting, architecture, dance, and music. In 1996, shortly after cinema's one hundredth birthday, cultural pundit Susan Sontag mused on the state of the art:

> Cinema's 100 years seem to have the shape of a life cycle: an inevitable birth, the steady accumulation of glories and the onset in the last decade of an ignominious, irreversible decline. . . . the commercial cinema has settled for a policy of bloated, derivative film-making, a brazen combinatory or recombinatory art, in the hope of reproducing past successes. Cinema, once heralded as the art of the 20th century, seems now, as the century closes numerically, to be a decadent art.[1]

Yet, 60 years before that, the art historian Erwin Panofsky had a very different insight into the movies as a form of popular art:

> If all the serious lyrical poets, composers, painters and sculptors were forced by law to stop their activities, a rather small fraction of the general public would become aware of the fact and a still smaller fraction would seriously regret it. If the same thing were to happen with the movies the social consequences would be catastrophic.[2]

Both, of course, were right. The commercial cinema, driven by the box office, has not fulfilled the promise of cinema's potential, yet today, we would hardly know what to do without movies. They are a major presence in our lives, and an influential beneficiary of our technological age. Since their invention more than a hundred years ago, movies have become one of the world's largest industries and the most powerful art form of our time.

With each new technological development—sound, color, widescreen projection, television, 3-D, computer-generated imagery, DVDs, internet streaming, and digitization of the filmmaking process—the movies have changed. Indeed, looking at movies (and the audience that looks at them) has changed as well. Traditionally, we saw movies in a theater, separated from the outside world—although it was a communal experience, sitting in the dark on seats fixed to the floor and a huge image screen. Today, we see movies wherever we happen to be; with whomever we want to be with (but usually alone); standing with a handheld device, curled up on a sofa, or sitting at a desk; and usually with the lights on. The image can be as large as a home theater or as small as a smartphone screen.

A source of entertainment that makes us see beyond the borders of our experiences, movies have always possessed the power to amaze, frighten, and enlighten us. They challenge our senses, emotions, and sometimes, our intellect; pushing us to say, often passionately, that we love (or hate) them. It's easy to get excited by movies because they arouse our most public and private feelings and can overwhelm us with their sights and sounds. The challenge is to combine that enthusiasm with understanding, to be able to say why we feel so strongly about particular movies while others are easily forgotten. That's one reason why this book encourages you to go beyond the stories, and to understand how these stories are told. After all, movies are not reality but only illusions of reality, and as with most works of art, their form and content work as an interrelated system, one that asks us to accept it as a given rather than as the product of a process. As you read this book devoted to looking at movies—that is, not passively watching them but actively considering the relation of their form and their content—remember that there is no one way to look at film, no one critical perspective that is inherently better than another, and no one meaning that you can insist on after a single viewing. Indeed, movies are so diverse in their nature that no single approach could ever do them justice.

[1.] Susan Sontag, "The Decay of Cinema," *The New York Times*, Feb. 25, 1996.

[2.] Erwin Panofsky, "Style and Medium in the Motion Pictures," in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, 5th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 280.

No other art form has had so many lives. The cinema is alive because it is constantly changing as it adapts to technological advances and audience expectations. Cinema evolves because everything we see on the movie screen—everything that engages our senses, emotions, and minds—results from hundreds of decisions affecting the interrelation of formal cinematic elements, such as narrative, composition, cinematography, editing, and sound, as well as the influence of film producers whose financial decisions determine which films are made and whose advertising decisions make audiences desire what's new. Audiences in turn encourage new trends with their ticket purchases and habits of consumption. This book encourages you to look at movies with an understanding and appreciation of how filmmakers make the decisions that help them tell a story and create the foundation for its meaning. After all, in the real life of the movies, it is not historians, theorists, or critics—important and invaluable as they are—but filmmakers who continually shape and revise our understanding and appreciation of the film art.

If Susan Sontag were alive today, she would probably still lament the decline of thoughtful content in movies. But in an industry driven by what the public wants, the movies are doing just fine, and their formal elements, history, business practices, and cultural impact remain fruitful fields for further study. So even as the technology for making movies continues to evolve, and the marketplace in which they are created grows and contracts and expands internationally, the principles of film art covered in this book remain essentially the same. The principles you learn and the analytic skills you hone as you read this book will help you look at motion pictures intelligently and perceptively throughout your life, no matter from which medium you view those pictures.

PREFACE

Students in an introductory film course who read *Looking at Movies* carefully and take full advantage of the materials surrounding the text will finish the course with a solid grounding in the major principles of film form as well as a more perceptive and analytic eye. A short description of the book's main features follows.

An Accessible and Comprehensive Overview of Film

Recognized from its first publication as an accessible introductory text, *Looking at Movies* covers key concepts in films studies as comprehensively as possible. In addition to its clear and inviting presentation of the fundamentals of film form, the text discusses film genres, film history, and the relationships between film and culture in an extensive but characteristically accessible way, thus providing students with a thorough introduction to the major subject areas in film studies.

Film Examples Chosen with Undergraduates in Mind

From its very first chapter, which features sustained analyses and examples from *The Hunger Games* and Jason Reitman's *Juno* (2009), *Looking at Movies* invites students into the serious study of cinema via films that are familiar to them and that they have a reasonable chance of having experienced outside the classroom prior to taking the course. Major film texts from the entire history of cinema are also generously represented, of course, but always with an eye to helping students see enjoyment and serious study as complementary experiences.

A Focus on Analytic Skills

A good introductory film book needs to help students make the transition from the natural enjoyment of mov-

ies to a critical understanding of the form, content, and meanings of movies. *Looking at Movies* accomplishes this task in several different ways:

Model Analyses

Hundreds of illustrative examples and analytic readings of films throughout the book provide students with concrete models for their own analytic work. The sustained analyses in Chapter 1 of *Juno* and *The Hunger Games*—films that most undergraduates will have seen and enjoyed but perhaps not viewed with a critical eye—discuss not only the formal structures and techniques of these films, but also their social and cultural meanings. These analyses offer students an accessible and jargon-free introduction to most of the major themes and goals of introductory film course, and show students that looking at movies analytically can start immediately, even before they learn the specialized vocabulary of film study.

Each chapter also concludes with an in-depth "Looking at Movies" analysis that offers a sustained look at an exemplar film through the lens of the chapter's focus. New analyses of *Donnie Darko*, *The Lego Movie*, and *Boyhood* join existing chapter summations on *Citizen Kane*, *Stagecoach*, and *City of God* to provide clear models for students' own analyses and interpretations of films.

Interactive Tutorials

New interactive tutorials created by the authors provide students with hands-on practice manipulating key concepts of filmmaking and formal analysis. Students can work at their own pace to see how elements such as lighting, sound, editing, composition, and color function within a film. Available in the ebook and on the *Looking at Movies* student website, both found at digital.wwnorton.com/movies5.

Video Tutorials

A series of video tutorials—written, directed, and hosted by the authors—complement and expand on the book's analyses. Ranging from 2 to 15 minutes in length, these

tutorials show students via moving-image media what the book describes and illustrates in still images. Helpful as a quick review of core concepts in the text, these tutorials also provide useful models for film analysis, thus helping students further develop their analytical skills. Available in the ebook and on the *Looking at Movies* student website, both found at digital.wwnorton.com/movies5.

"Screening Checklists"

Each chapter ends with an "Analyzing" section that includes a "Screening Checklist" feature. This series of leading questions prompts students to apply what they've learned in the chapter to their own critical viewing, in class or at home.

The Most Visually Dynamic Text Available

Looking at Movies was written with one goal in mind: to prepare students for a lifetime of intelligent and perceptive viewing of motion pictures. In recognition of the central role visuals play in the film-studies classroom, *Looking at Movies* includes an illustration program that is both visually appealing and pedagogically focused, as well as an accompanying moving-image media that are second to none.

Hundreds of In-Text Illustrations

The text is accompanied by over 750 illustrations in color and in black and white. Nearly all the still pictures were captured from digital or analog film sources, thus ensuring that the images directly reflect the textual discussions and the films from which they're taken. Unlike publicity stills, which are attractive as photographs but less useful as teaching aids, the captured stills throughout this book provide visual information that will help students learn as they read and—because they are reproduced in the aspect ratio of the original source—will serve as accurate reference points for students' analyses.

Five Hours of Moving-Image Media

The ebook and student website that accompany *Looking at Movies* offer five hours of two different types of video content:

- The twenty-seven video tutorials described above were specifically created to complement Looking

at Movies and are exclusive to this text. The tutorials guide students' eyes to see what the text describes, and because they are viewable in full-screen, they are suitable for presentation in class as "lecture launchers," as well as for students' self-study.

- A mini-anthology of thirteen complete short films, ranging from 5 to 30 minutes in length, provides a curated selection of accomplished and entertaining examples of short-form cinema, as well as useful material for short in-class activities or for students' analysis. Most of the films are also accompanied by optional audio commentary from the filmmakers. This commentary was recorded specifically for *Looking at Movies* and is exclusive to this text.

Accessible Presentation; Effective Pedagogy

Among the reasons that *Looking at Movies* is considered the most accessible introductory film text available is its clear and direct presentation of key concepts and unique pedagogical organization. The first three chapters of the book—Looking at Movies, Principles of Film Form, and Types of Movies—provide a comprehensive yet truly introductory overview of the major topics and themes of any film course, giving students a solid grounding in the basics before they move on to study those topics in greater depth in later chapters.

In addition, pedagogical features throughout provide a structure that clearly identifies the main ideas and primary goals of each chapter for students:

Learning Objectives

A checklist at the beginning of every chapter provides a brief summary of the core concepts to be covered in the chapter.

Extensive Captions

Each illustration is accompanied by a caption that elaborates on a key concept or that guides students to look at elements of the film more analytically. These captions expand on the in-text presentation and reinforce students' retention of key terms and ideas.

"Analyzing" Sections

At the end of each chapter is a section that ties the terms, concepts, and ideas of the chapter to the primary goal of the book: honing students' own analytical skills. This

short overview makes explicit how the knowledge students have gained in the chapter can move their own analytical work forward. A short "Screening Checklist" provides leading questions that students can ponder as they screen a film or scene.

"Questions for Review"

"Questions for Review" section at the end of each chapter tests students' knowledge of the concepts first mentioned in the "Learning Objectives" at the beginning of the chapter.

Enhanced Ebook

Looking at Movies is also available as an enhanced ebook free with every new copy of the print book. This ebook works on all computers and mobile devices, and embeds all the rich media—video tutorials, interactive tutorials, and more—into one seamless experience. Instructors can focus student reading by sharing notes in the ebook, as well as embed images and other videos. Reports on student and class-wide access and time on task also enable instructors to monitor student reading and engagement.

Writing About Movies

Written by Karen Gocsik (University of California, San Diego) and the authors of *Looking at Movies*, this book is a clear and practical overview of the process of writing papers for film-studies courses. In addition to providing helpful information about the writing process, the new *Writing About Movies*, Fourth Edition, offers a substantial introduction-in-brief to the major topics in film studies, including an overview of the major film theories and their potential application to student writing, practical advice about note-taking during screenings and private viewings, information about the study of genre and film history, and an illustrated glossary of essential film terms. This inexpensive but invaluable text is available separately or in a significantly discounted package with *Looking at Movies*.

Resources for Instructors

Clip Guide

An invaluable class-prep tool, the Clip Guide suggests a wide range of clips for illustrating film concepts covered in the text. Each entry in the Clip Guide offers a quick overview of the scene, the idea, and crucially, time-stamp information on exactly where to find each clip. The *Looking at Movies* Clip Guide includes suggestions from not just the authors but a wide range of teachers, offering a broad perspective of insightful teaching tips that can inspire and save valuable prep time.

Instructor's Guide

The Instructor's Guide to *Looking at Movies* offers a concise overview of each chapter's main points and key concepts, as well as suggested learning exercises and recommended tutorials from the book's extensive media ancillaries.

PowerPoints

Ready-made lecture PowerPoint presentations for each chapter as well as art and image slides are available for download at Norton's instructor resource page: wwnorton.com/instructors.

Test Bank

Completely revised for this edition, each chapter of the Test Bank includes a "concept map," and 60–65 multiple-choice and 10–15 essay questions (with sample answer guides). Questions are labeled by concept, question type, and difficulty.

Coursepacks for Learning Management Systems

Ready-to-use coursepacks for Blackboard and other learning management systems are available free of charge to instructors who adopt *Looking at Movies*. These coursepacks offer unique activities that reinforce key concepts, chapter overviews and learning objectives, quiz questions, links to the video tutorials, questions about those tutorials and the short films, and the complete Test Bank.

A Note about Textual Conventions

Boldface type is used to highlight terms that are defined in the glossary at the point where they are introduced in the text. *Italics* are used occasionally for emphasis. References to movies in the text include the year the movie was released and the director's name. Members of the crew who are particularly important to the main topic of the chapter are also identified. For example, in the chapter on cinematography, a reference to *The Matrix* might look like this: Andy and Lana Wachowski's *The Matrix* (1999; cinematographer Bill Pope). Other relevant information about the films can be found in the chapter itself.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Writing a book seems very much at times like the collaborative effort involved in making movies. In writing this Fifth Edition of *Looking at Movies*, we are grateful to our excellent partners at W. W. Norton & Company. Chief among them is our editor, Pete Simon, who has guided us and offered insightful ideas for every edition of this book. Other collaborators at Norton were Sujin Hong, project editor; Andy Ensor, production manager; Carly Fraser-Doria, media editor; Cara Folkman, associate media editor; Colleen Caffrey, media designer; Kimberly Bowers, marketing manager; and Emily Stuart and Gera Goff, editorial assistants. Thanks also to Spencer Richardson-Jones. It has been a pleasure to work with such a responsive, creative, and supportive team.

Richard Barsam thanks the friends and colleagues who have assisted and contributed suggestions over the course of five editions, including Kevin Harris Bahr, Luiz-Antonio Bocchi, Daniel Doron, Richard Koss, Emanuel Leonard, Vinny LoBrutto, Peter Maxwell, Gustavo Mercado, and Renato Tonelli. I am also grateful to Edgar Munhall for his continuing interest, patience, and companionship.

Dave Monahan would like to thank the faculty, staff, and students of the Film Studies Department at the University of North Carolina, Wilmington. My colleagues Mariana Johnson, Shannon Silva, Andre Silva, Tim Palmer, Todd Berliner, Carlos Kase, Nandana Bose, Chip Hackler, Lou Buttino, Glenn Pack, Terry Linehan, Ana Olenina, and Sue Richardson contributed expertise and advice. Film studies student Kevin Bahr excelled as my research assistant. My colleagues Nate Daniel, Glenn Pack, Aaron Cavazos, and Alex Markowski deserve special thanks for their production and postproduction help with the new video modules I directed for this edition. Nate was our camera operator, colorist, and postproduction supervisor; Glenn was our cinematographer, gaffer, and assistant director; Aaron did an amazing job on the animation and motion graphics for the new *The Hunger Games* tutorial; and Alex provided sound design and the sound module script. A number of talented UNCW students served on the crews that produced the

new modules. Sarah Flores was our producer; Richard Martin, Adam Getz, Kim Szany, Savvas Yiannoulou, Ryne Seals, Patrick Johnson, and Adam Fackelman were the camera and lighting team; and Rebecca Rathier, Christina Lamia, and Tara Lymon-Dobson made up the art department. Cast members include Sarah Flores, Moriah Thomason, Christina Lamia, Chris Keefe, Cheyenne Puga, Kenneth Freyer, Tomasina Hill, Mariah Jarvis, Mikaela Fleming, John T. McDevitt, Gabby Adeoti, Daniel Adkins, and Adam O'Neill.

I would also like to thank my wife, Julie, for her patience, support, and encouragement; and my daughters, Iris and Elsa, for looking at a lot of movies with me.

Reviewers

We would like to join the publisher in thanking all the professors and students who provided valuable guidance as we planned this revision. *Looking at Movies* is as much their book as ours, and we are grateful to both students and faculty who have cared enough about this text to offer a hand in making it better.

The thoughtful comments from the following colleagues and fellow instructors helped shape both the book and media for this Fifth edition: Sandra Annett (Wilfred Laurier University), Richard Blake (Boston College), Laura Bouza (Moorpark College), Aaron Braun (Hofstra University), Derek Burrill (University of California, Riverside), Emily Carman (Chapman University), Megan Condis (University of Illinois), Angela Dancy (University of Chicago), Dawn Marie Fratini (Chapman University), Isabelle Freda (Oklahoma State University), Paul Gaustad (Georgia Perimeter College, Dunwoody), Michael Green (Arizona State University), David Kreutzer (Cape Fear Community College), Andrew Kunka (University of South Carolina, Sumter), G. S. Larke-Walsh (University of North Texas), Nee Lam (Chapman University), Elizabeth Lathrop (Georgia Perimeter College, Clarkston), Melissa Lenos (Donnelly College), Albert Lopez (University of Texas, San Antonio), Yuri Makino

The Hunger Games: Mocking Jay, Part 1 (2014; director Francis Lawrence)

LOOKING AT MOVIES

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, you should be able to

✓ appreciate the difference between passively watching movies and actively looking at movies.
✓ understand the defining characteristics that distinguish movies from other forms of art.
✓ understand how and why most of the formal mechanisms of a movie remain invisible to casual viewers.
✓ understand the relationship between viewers' expectations and filmmakers' decisions about the form and style of their movies.
✓ explain how shared belief systems contribute to hidden movie meaning.
✓ explain the difference between implicit and explicit meaning, and understand how the different levels of movie meaning contribute to interpretive analysis.
✓ understand the differences between formal analysis and the types of analysis that explore the relationship between culture and the movies.
✓ begin looking at movies more analytically and perceptively.

Movies shape the way we see the world
No other movie featuring a homosexual relationship has earned the level of international critical acclaim and commercial success of *Brokeback Mountain* (2005). The Academy Award–winning independent film, made for a relatively paltry $14 million, grossed $178 million at the box office and eventually became the thirteenth highest-grossing romantic drama in Hollywood history. Academy Awards for Best Director (Ang Lee) and Best Adapted Screenplay (Diana Ossana and Larry McMurtry, from a short story by Annie Proulx) were among the many honors and accolades granted the independently produced movie. But even more important, by presenting a gay relationship in the context of the archetypal American West and casting popular leading men (Heath Ledger, Jake Gyllenhaal) in starring roles that embodied traditional notions of masculinity, *Brokeback Mountain* influenced the way many Americans perceived same-sex relationships and gay rights. Since the film's release, thirty-six states have lifted the ban on gay marriage, the U.S. Supreme Court made same-sex marriage a nationwide right, and LGBT characters and storylines have become increasingly commonplace in popular films and television. No movie can single-handedly change the world, but the accumulative influence of cinema is undeniable.

Looking at Movies

In just over a hundred years, movies have evolved into a complex form of artistic representation and communication: they are at once a hugely influential, wildly profitable global industry and a modern art—the most popular art form today. Popular may be an understatement. This art form has permeated our lives in ways that extend far beyond the multiplex. We watch movies on hundreds of cable and satellite channels. We buy movies online or from big-box retailers. We rent movies through the mail and from Redbox machines at the supermarket. We TiVo movies, stream movies, and download movies to watch on our televisions, our computers, our iPads, and our smart phones.

Unless you were raised by wolves—and possibly even if you were—you have likely devoted thousands of hours to absorbing the motion-picture medium. With so much experience, no one could blame you for wondering why you need a course or this book to tell you how to look at movies.

After all, you might say, "It's just a movie." For most of us most of the time, movies are a break from our daily obligations—a form of escape, entertainment, and pleasure. Motion pictures had been popular for fifty years before even most filmmakers, much less scholars, considered movies worthy of serious study. But motion pictures are much more than entertainment. The movies we see shape the way we view the world around us and our place in that world. Moreover, a close analysis of any particular movie can tell us a great deal about the artist, society, or industry that created it. Surely any art form with that kind of influence and insight is worth understanding on the deepest possible level.

Movies involve much more than meets the casual eye . . . or ear, for that matter. Cinema is a subtle—some might even say sneaky—medium. Because most movies seek to engage viewers' emotions and transport them inside the world presented onscreen, the visual vocabulary of film is designed to play upon those same instincts that we use to navigate and interpret the visual and aural

information of our "real life." This often imperceptible **cinematic language**, composed not of words but of myriad integrated techniques and concepts, connects us to the story while deliberately concealing the means by which it does so.

Yet behind this mask, all movies, even the most blatantly commercial ones, contain layers of complexity and meaning that can be studied, analyzed, and appreciated. This book is devoted to that task—to actively *looking at* movies rather than just passively watching them. It will teach you to recognize the many tools and principles that filmmakers employ to tell stories, convey information and meaning, and influence our emotions and ideas.

Once you learn to speak this cinematic language, you'll be equipped to understand the movies that pervade our world on multiple levels: as narrative, as artistic expression, and as a reflection of the cultures that produce and consume them.

What Is a Movie?

Now that we've established what we mean by looking at movies, the next step is to attempt to answer the deceptively simple question, What is a movie? As this book will repeatedly illustrate, when it comes to movies, nothing is as straightforward as it appears.

Let's start, for example, with the word *movies*. If the course that you are taking while reading this book is "Introduction to Film" or "Cinema Studies 101," does that mean that your course and this book focus on two different things? What's the difference between a movie and a *film*? And where does the word *cinema* fit in?

For whatever reason, the designation *film* is often applied to a motion picture that critics and scholars consider to be more serious or challenging than the *movies* that entertain the masses at the multiplex. The still loftier designation of *cinema* seems reserved for groups of films that are considered works of art (e.g., "French cinema"). The truth is, the three terms are essentially interchangeable. *Cinema*, from the Greek *kinesis* ("movement"), originates from the name that filmmaking pioneers Auguste and Louis Lumière coined for the hall where they exhibited their invention; *film* derives from the celluloid strip on which the images that make up motion pictures were originally captured, cut, and projected; and *movies* is simply short for motion pictures. Since we consider all cinema worthy of study, acknowl-

edge that films are increasingly shot on formats other than film stock, and believe motion to be the essence of the movie medium, this book favors the term used in our title. That said, we'll mix all three terms into these pages (as evidenced in the preceding sentence) for the sake of variety, if nothing else.

To most people, a movie is a popular entertainment, a product produced and marketed by a large commercial studio. Regardless of the subject matter, this movie is pretty to look at—every image is well polished by an army of skilled artists and technicians. The finished product, which is about two hours long, screens initially in movie theaters; is eventually released to DVD and Blu-ray, streaming, download, or pay-per-view; and ultimately winds up on television. This common expectation is certainly understandable; most movies that reach most English-speaking audiences have followed a good part of this model for three-quarters of a century.

And almost all of these ubiquitous commercial, feature-length movies share another basic characteristic: narrative. When it comes to categorizing movies, the narrative designation simply means that these movies tell fictional (or at least fictionalized) stories. Of course, if you think of narrative in its broadest sense, *every* movie that selects and arranges subject matter in a cause-and-effect sequence of events is employing a narrative structure. For all their creative flexibility, movies by their very nature must travel a straight line. A conventional motion picture is essentially one very long strip of images. This linear quality makes movies perfectly suited to develop subject matter in a sequential progression. When a medium so compatible with narrative is introduced to a culture with an already well-established storytelling tradition, it's easy to understand how popular cinema came to be dominated by those movies devoted to telling fictional stories. Because these fiction films are so central to most readers' experience and so vital to the development of cinema as an art form and cultural force, we've made narrative movies the focus of this introductory textbook.

But keep in mind that commercial, feature-length narrative films represent only a fraction of the expressive potential of this versatile medium. Cinema and narrative are both very flexible concepts. Documentary films strive for objective, observed veracity, of course, but that doesn't mean they don't tell stories. These movies often arrange and present factual information and images in the form of a narrative, whether it be a predator's attempts to track and kill its prey, an activist's quest

Narrative in documentary

Just because a film is constructed from footage documenting actual events doesn't mean it can't tell a story. *The Imposter* (2012; director Bart Layton) tells the story of Frédéric Bourdin, a French con man who convinces an American family that he is their long-lost son. The film's interviews, reenactments, and archival footage are structured like a procedural crime thriller: once the impersonation seemingly succeeds, the imposter finds himself in over his head as increasingly skeptical investigators chip away at his masquerade and uncover troubling details about his adopted family.

to free a wrongfully convicted innocent, or a rookie athlete's struggle to make the big leagues. While virtually every movie, regardless of category, employs narrative in some form, cultural differences often affect exactly how these stories are presented. Narrative films made in Africa, Asia, and Latin America reflect storytelling traditions very different from the story structure we expect from films produced in North America and Western Europe. The unscripted, minimalist films by Iranian director Abbas Kiarostami, for example, often intentionally lack dramatic resolution, inviting viewers to imagine their own ending.[1] Sanskrit dramatic traditions have inspired "Bollywood" Indian cinema to feature staging that breaks the illusion of reality favored by Hollywood movies, such as actors that consistently face, and even directly address, the audience.[2]

Compared to North American and Western European films, Latin American films of the 1960s, like *Land in Anguish* (Glauber Rocha, 1967, Brazil) or *Memories of Underdevelopment* (Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, 1968, Cuba), are less concerned with individual character psychology and motivation. Instead, they present characters as social types or props in a political allegory.[3] The growing influ-

ence of these and other even less familiar approaches, combined with emerging technologies that make filmmaking more accessible and affordable, have made possible an ever-expanding range of independent movies created by crews as small as a single filmmaker and shot on any one of a variety of film and digital formats. The Irish director John Carney shot his musical love story *Once* (2006) on the streets of Dublin with a cast of mostly nonactors and a small crew using consumer-grade video cameras. American Oren Peli's homemade horror movie *Paranormal Activity* (2007) was produced on a miniscule $15,000 budget and was shot entirely from the point of view of its characters' camcorder. *Once* received critical acclaim and an Academy Award for best original song; *Paranormal Activity* eventually earned almost $200 million at the box office, making it one of the most profitable movies in the history of cinema. Even further out on the fringes of popular culture, an expanding universe of alternative cinematic creativity continues to flourish. These noncommercial movies innovate styles and aesthetics, can be of any length, and exploit an array of exhibition options—from independent theaters to cable television to film festivals to Netflix streaming to YouTube.

No matter what you call it, no matter the approach, no matter the format, every movie is a motion picture: a series of still images that, when viewed in rapid succession (usually 24 images per second), the human eye and brain see as fluid movement. In other words, movies *move*. That essential quality is what separates movies from all other two-dimensional pictorial art forms. Each image in every motion picture draws upon basic compositional principles developed by these older cousins (photography, painting, drawing, etc.), including the arrangement of visual elements and the interaction of light and shadow. But unlike photography or painting, films are constructed from individual **shots**—an unbroken span of action captured by an uninterrupted run of a motion-picture camera—that allow visual elements to rearrange themselves and the viewer's perspective itself to shift within any composition.

And this movie movement extends beyond any single shot because movies are constructed of multiple individual shots joined to one another in an extended sequence.

1. Laura Mulvey, "Kiarostami's Uncertainty Principle," *Sight and Sound* 8, no. 6 (June 1998): 24–27.

2. Philip Lutgendorf, "Is There an Indian Way of Filmmaking?" *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 10, no. 3 (December 2006): 227–256.

3. Many thanks to Dr. Mariana Johnson of the University of North Carolina Wilmington for some of the ideas in this analysis.

Cultural narrative traditions

The influence of Sanskrit dramatic traditions on Indian cinema can be seen in the prominence of staging that breaks the illusion of reality favored by Hollywood movies, such as actors that consistently face, and even directly address, the audience. In this image from the opening minutes of Rohit Shetty's *Chennai Express* (2013), the lonely bachelor Rahul (Shah Rukh Knan) interrupts his own voice-over narration to complain to viewers about attractive female customers who consider him only a "brother."

With each transition from one shot to another, a movie is able to move the viewer through time and space. This joining together of discrete shots, or **editing**, gives movies the power to choose what the viewer sees and how that viewer sees it at any given moment.

   To understand better how movies control what audiences see, we can compare cinema to another, closely related medium: live theater. A stage play, which confines the viewer to a single wide-angle view of the action, might display a group of actors, one of whom holds a small object in her hand. The audience sees every cast member at once and continuously from the same angle and in the same relative size. The object in one performer's hand is too small to see clearly, even for those few viewers lucky enough to have front-row seats. The playwright, director, and actors have very few practical options to convey the object's physical properties, much less its narrative significance or its emotional meaning to the character. In contrast, a movie version of the same story can establish the dramatic situation and spatial relationships of its subjects from the same wide-angle viewpoint, then instantaneously jump to a composition isolating the actions of the character holding the object, then **cut** to a **close-up** view revealing the object to be a charm bracelet, move up to feature the character's face as she contemplates the bracelet, then leap thirty years into the past to a depiction of the character as a young girl receiving the jewelry as a gift. Editing's capacity to

isolate details and juxtapose images and sounds within and between shots gives movies an expressive agility impossible in any other dramatic art or visual medium.

The Movie Director

Throughout this book, we give primary credit to the movie's director; you'll see references, for example, to James Gunn's *Guardians of the Galaxy* (2014) or *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012; director Kathryn Bigelow). You may not know anything about the directorial style of Mr. Gunn or Ms. Bigelow, but if you enjoy these movies, you might seek out their work in the future.

   Still, all moviegoers know—if only from seeing the seemingly endless credits at the end of most movies—that today's movies represent not the work of a single artist, but a collaboration between a group of creative contributors. In this collaboration, the director's role is basically that of a coordinating lead artist. He or she is the vital link between creative, production, and technical teams. The bigger the movie, the larger the crew, and the more complex and challenging the collaboration. Though different directors bring varying levels of foresight, pre-planning, and control to a project, every director must have a vision for the story and style to inform initial instructions to collaborators and to apply to the continuous decision-making process necessary in every stage of production. In short, the director must be a strong leader with a passion for filmmaking and a gift for collaboration.

   The other primary collaborators on the creative team—screenwriter, actors, director of photography, production designer, editor, and sound designer—all work with the director to develop their contributions, and the director must approve their decisions as they progress. The director is at the top of the creative hierarchy, responsible for choosing (or at least approving) each of those primary collaborators. A possible exception is the screenwriter, though even then the director often contributes to revisions and assigns additional writers to provide revised or additional material.

   The director's primary responsibilities are performance and camera—and the coordination of the two. The director selects actors for each role, works with those actors to develop their character, leads rehearsals, blocks performances in relationship with the camera on set, and modulates those performances from take to take and shot to shot as necessary throughout the shoot. He

or she works with the director of photography to design an overall cinematic look for the movie and to visualize the framing and composition of each shot before and during shooting. Along the way, as inspiration or obstacles necessitate, changes are made to everything from the script to storyboards to blocking to edits. The director is the one making or approving each adjustment—sometimes after careful deliberation, sometimes on the fly.

On the set, the director does more than call "action" and "cut" and give direction to the actors and cinematographer. He or she must review the footage if necessary, decide when a shot or scene is satisfactory, and say that it's time to move on to the next task. In the editing room, the director sometimes works directly with the editor throughout the process but more often reviews successive "cuts" of scenes and provides the editor with feedback to use in revision.

In today's film industry, a director's qualifications may vary; she may have previous directorial credits on film or television, be a successful actor in her first position as a film director, or be a recent graduate of a film school. But the changing nature of film production (see Chapter 11, "How the Movies Are Made") and the increasing gender and ethnic diversity among directors makes defining the director's role a necessarily flexible thing.

Ways of Looking at Movies

Every movie is a complex synthesis—a combination of many separate, interrelated elements that form a coherent whole. A quick scan of this book's table of contents will give you an idea of just how many elements get mixed together to make a movie. Anyone attempting to comprehend a complex synthesis must rely on analysis—the act of taking apart something complicated to figure out what it is made of and how it all fits together.

A chemist breaks down a compound substance into its constituent parts to learn more than just a list of ingredients. The goal usually extends to determining how the identified individual components work together toward some sort of outcome: What is it about this particular mixture that makes it taste like strawberries, or grow hair, or kill cockroaches? Likewise, film analysis involves more than breaking down a sequence, a scene, or an entire movie to identify the tools and techniques that comprise it; the investigation is also concerned with

the function and potential effect of that combination: Why does it make you laugh, or prompt you to tell your friend to see it, or incite you to join the Peace Corps? The search for answers to these sorts of questions boils down to one essential inquiry: What does it mean? For the rest of the chapter, we'll explore film analysis by applying that question to some very different movies: first, and most extensively, the 2007 independent film *Juno*, and then the blockbuster Hunger Games film series.

Unfortunately, or perhaps intriguingly, not all movie meaning is easy to see. As we mentioned earlier, movies have a way of hiding their methods and meaning. So before we dive into specific approaches to analysis, let's wade a little deeper into this whole notion of hidden, or "invisible," meaning.

Invisibility and Cinematic Language

The moving aspect of moving pictures is one reason for this invisibility. Movies simply move too fast for even the most diligent viewers to consciously consider everything they've seen. When we read a book, we can pause to ponder the meaning or significance of any word, sentence, or passage. Our eyes often flit back to review something we've already read in order to further comprehend its meaning or to place a new passage in context. Similarly, we can stand and study a painting or sculpture or photograph for as long as we require to absorb whatever meaning we need or want from it. But until very recently, the moviegoer's relationship with every cinematic composition has been transitory. We experience a movie shot, which is capable of delivering multiple layers of visual and auditory information, for the briefest of moments before it is taken away and replaced with another moving image and another and another. If you're watching a movie the way it's designed to be experienced, there's little time to contemplate the various potential meanings of any single movie moment.

Recognizing a viewer's tendency (especially when sitting in a dark theater, staring at a large screen) to identify subconsciously with the camera's viewpoint, early filmmaking pioneers created a film grammar (or cinematic language) that draws upon the way we automatically interpret visual information in our real lives, thus allowing audiences to absorb movie meaning intuitively—and instantly.

The **fade-out/fade-in** is one of the most straightforward examples of this phenomenon. When such a

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The expressive agility of movies

Even the best seats in the house offer a viewer of a theatrical production like Stephen Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* only one unchanging view of the action. The stage provides the audience a single wide-angle view of the scene in which the title character is reintroduced to the set of razors he will use in his bloody quest for revenge [1]. In contrast, cinema's spatial dexterity allows viewers of Tim Burton's 2007 film adaptation to experience the same scene as a sequence of fifty-nine viewpoints. Each one isolates and emphasizes distinct meanings and perspectives, including Sweeney Todd's (Johnny Depp) point of view as he gets his first glimpse of his long-lost tools of the trade [2]; his emotional reaction as he contemplates righteous murder [3]; the razor replacing Mrs. Lovett (Helena Bonham Carter) as the focus of his attention [4]; and a dizzying simulated camera move that starts with the vengeful antihero [5], then pulls back to reveal the morally corrupt city he (and his razors) will soon terrorize [6].

Cinematic invisibility: low angle

When it views a subject from a low camera angle, cinematic language taps our instinctive association of figures who we must literally "look up to" with figurative or literal power. In this case, the penultimate scene in *Juno* emphasizes the newfound freedom and resultant empowerment the title character feels by presenting her from a low angle for the first time in the film.

transition is meant to convey a passage of time between scenes, the last shot of a scene grows gradually darker (fades out) until the screen is rendered black for a moment. The first shot of the subsequent scene then fades in out of the darkness. Viewers don't have to think about what this means; our daily experience of time's passage marked by the setting and rising of the sun lets us understand intuitively that significant story time has elapsed over that very brief moment of screen darkness.

A **low-angle shot** communicates in a similarly hidden fashion. When, near the end of *Juno* (2007; director Jason Reitman), we see the title character happily transformed back into a "normal" teenager, our sense of

her newfound empowerment is heightened by the low angle from which this (and the next) shot is captured. Viewers' shared experience of literally looking up at powerful figures—people on stages, at podiums, memorialized in statues, or simply bigger than them—sparks an automatic interpretation of movie subjects seen from this angle. Depending on context, we see these figures as strong, noble, or threatening.

This is all very well; the immediacy of cinematic language is what makes movies one of the most visceral experiences that art has to offer. The problem is that it also makes it all too easy to take movie meaning for granted.

The relatively seamless presentation of visual and narrative information found in most movies can also cloud our search for movie meaning. To exploit cinema's capacity for transporting audiences into the world of the story, the commercial filmmaking process stresses polished continuity of lighting, performance, costume, makeup, and movement to smooth transitions between shots and scenes, thus minimizing any distractions that might remind viewers that they're watching a highly manipulated, and manipulative, artificial reality.

Cutting on action is one of the most common editing techniques designed to hide the instantaneous and potentially jarring shift from one camera viewpoint to another. When connecting one shot to the next, a film editor often ends the first shot in the middle of a continuing action and starts the connecting shot at some point in the same action. As a result, the action flows so continuously over the cut between different moving images that most viewers fail to register the switch.

Invisible editing: cutting on action in *Juno*

Juno and Leah's playful wrestling continues over the cut between two shots, smoothing and hiding the instantaneous switch from one camera viewpoint to the next. Overlapping sound and the matching hairstyles, wardrobe, and lighting further obscure the audience's awareness that these two separate shots were filmed minutes or even hours apart and from different camera positions.
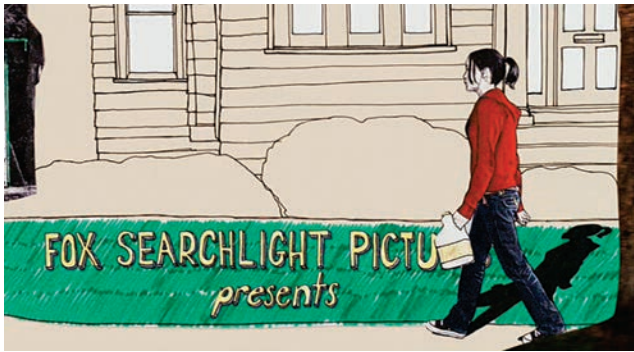
Invisible editing: continuity of screen direction

Juno's opening-credits sequence uses the title character's continuous walking movement to present the twenty-two different shots that comprise the scene as one continuous action. In every shot featuring lateral movement, Juno strolls consistently toward the left side of the screen, adding continuity of screen direction to the seamless presentation of the otherwise stylized animated sequence.

As with all things cinematic, invisibility has its exceptions. From the earliest days of moviemaking, innovative filmmakers have rebelled against the notion of hidden structures and meaning. The pioneering Soviet filmmaker and theorist Sergei Eisenstein believed that every edit, far from being invisible, should be very noticeable—a clash or collision of contiguous shots, rather than a seamless transition from one shot to the next. Filmmakers whose work is labeled "experimental"—inspired by Eisenstein and other predecessors—embrace self-reflexive styles that confront and confound conventional notions of continuity. Even some commercial films use techniques that undermine invisibility: in *The Limey* (1999), for example, Hollywood filmmaker Steven Soderbergh deliberately jumbles spatial and chronological continuity, forcing viewers to actively scrutinize the cinematic structures on-screen in order to assemble, and thus comprehend, the story. But most scenes in most films that most of us watch rely heavily on largely invisible techniques that convey meaning intuitively. It's

not that cinematic language is impossible to spot; you simply have to know what you're looking for. And soon, you will. The rest of this book is dedicated to helping you identify and appreciate each of the many different secret ingredients that movies blend to convey meaning.

Luckily for you, motion pictures have been liberated from the imposed impermanence that helped create all this cinematic invisibility in the first place. Thanks to DVDs, Blu-rays, DVRs, and streaming video, you can now watch a movie in much the same way you read a book: pausing to scrutinize, ponder, or review as necessary. This relatively new relationship between movies and viewers will surely spark new approaches to cinematic language and attitudes toward invisibility. That's for future filmmakers, maybe including you, to decide. For now, these viewing technologies allow students of film like yourself to study movies with a lucidity and precision that was impossible for your predecessors.

But not even repeated DVD viewings can reveal those movie messages hidden by our own preconceptions and