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Fourth Edition

# THE FILM EXPERIENCE

An Introduction

TIMOTHY CORRIGAN  
PATRICIA WHITE



# Go from movie fan to film scholar.



*The Film Experience* connects your experiences watching movies with better understanding and knowledge of the medium's full scope. You'll look at movies you already know with new eyes – and see a broader world of film in the future.



## LaunchPad Solo Brings *The Film Experience* to Life – through Video!

*The Film Experience* has been enhanced with LaunchPad Solo, a new online platform and home to many new movie clips and discussion questions – perfect for interactive learning. The Viewing Cue feature in the margins of each chapter now includes special video call-outs directing you to film clips online at the LaunchPad Solo for *The Film Experience*, which can be packaged for free with the book or purchased on its own. These clips from new and classic films, along with annotated videos based on the book's Film in Focus and Form in Action boxes, illustrate the concepts discussed in the chapter and are accompanied by thought-provoking questions – perfect for classroom discussion or homework assignments.



## Encountering Film From Preproduction to Exhibition

In 2012, Ben Wheatley directed his very different kind of film, *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Cowardly Kid of Coldwater*, a big-budget action film about comic-book superheroes, and *Mad Max: Fury Road*, a contemporary adaptation of Shakespeare's romantic comedy. The production, distribution, and exhibition of Ben Wheatley's films have been, even by the same director, can be shaped by remarkably different institutional histories.

With an estimated production budget of \$27.0 million, *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Cowardly Kid of Coldwater* is a young director making a rapid head-line from his previous indie work. The film was completed in 2010 and heavily distributed by TriStar Pictures for major markets around the world in April 2012. It was nominated for a range of awards and attached directorial debut of comic stars, set in both, and a massive youth audience.

Wheatley's directorial debut has both film elements and his production with complex characters in complex social environments. *Mad Max: Fury Road* is a very different road from production to exhibition. Besides a marketing strategy in his own name and a schedule that he had only three days, Ben Wheatley has an ensemble of actors who worked with Wheatley on his TV productions. The film's promotion focused on its connection to the director of the original with a strong emphasis on Shakespeare. As expected, the film appeared primarily in art house cinemas. Film on Ben Wheatley's, however, it may have to be in college film courses on Shakespeare and film.

As Ben Wheatley's films suggest, film production, distribution, and exhibition shape our encounter with movies, and these aspects of film are in fact shaped by how movies are received by audiences.

## The Strongest Art Program Available – Now Better Than Ever

With more than nine hundred images, *The Film Experience* visually reinforces all the major techniques, concepts, and film traditions discussed in the text with eye-catching examples. New part-opening and chapter-opening images cover both classic and contemporary cinema, exposing readers to a number of notable films from cinema's early years to today.

## New Examples Appeal to Movie Buffs of Today – and Tomorrow

Eye-catching new part and chapter openers spotlight recent movies like *Man of Steel*, *Fruitvale Station*, *The Avengers*, *The Great Gatsby*, *The Heat*, and *Inception* alongside classics like *The Wizard of Oz*, *Psycho*, and *City of God*, linking film's rich history to contemporary cinema.



### CONCEPTS AT WORK

This chapter has aimed to demystify the field of film theory, which is not to imply that readers will not have to struggle with theory or do some work to understand film on a more abstract plane. Because film theory is a notoriously difficult discourse, any summary gives it much more continuity than it actually warrants. The film journals in which filmmakers like Eisenstein or Louis Delluc debated the new medium are not unlike film blogs that today consider the future of cinema in an age of media convergence. In reading and picking apart theorists' work, it is important to recall that referring to "theory" in the abstract is misleading. In reviewing Stuart Hall's approach to reception theory or Fredric Jameson's definition of postmodernism, we look at concrete responses to intellectual challenges. The term "theory" is a useful, shorthand way to refer to a body of knowledge and a set of questions. We study this corpus to gain historical perspective—on how realist theory grew from the effects of World War II, for example; to acquire tools for decoding our experiences of particular films—like the close analysis of formalism; and above all to comprehend the hold that movies have on our imaginations and desires.

- Consider whether cinematic specificity is affected by watching films across platforms.
- Think of insights from other academic disciplines or artistic pursuits that seem to be missing from this account of film theory, and consider what we might learn from these new approaches.
- How might the formalist and realist film theorists debate the return of 3-D technology?

## Concepts at Work Feature Better Connects Ideas and Films

The chapter-ending Concept at Work feature clearly connects each key concept mentioned in the chapter to specific films – both those mentioned in the chapter and other notable examples.

## Proven Learning Tools That Foster Critical Viewing and Analysis

The *Film Experience's* learning tools have been updated for this edition, including new Viewing Cues in every chapter, in-depth Film in Focus essays on films like *Stories We Tell* and *Minority Report*, Form in Action boxes with analysis of multiple films, and the very best coverage of writing about film.

**FILM IN FOCUS**  
bedfordstarrs.com  
/filmexperience

To watch a video about narration in *Apocalypse Now*, see the Film Experience LaunchPad.

**Plot and Narration in *Apocalypse Now* (1979)**

See also: *The Deer Hunter* (1978); *Platoon* (1986); *Full Metal Jacket* (1987)

6.43 *Apocalypse Now* (1979). Toward the end of his journey and the film, one of many shots that approximate the point of view of Willard, the film's narrator.

The plot begins with Willard being given a mission by Kurtz, to "terminate" Kurtz. Kurtz is a former Marine who has gone insane and is now a warlord in the jungle. Willard's mission is to kill Kurtz. The film is a journey of self-discovery and a critique of war.

**FORM IN ACTION**

**Mise-en-Scène in *Fantastic Mr. Fox* (2009)**

2.39a

2.39b

2.39c

Wes Anderson's *Fantastic Mr. Fox* uses stop-motion animation to bring a much-loved Roald Dahl children's book to life. The tale pits three ruthless farmers against Mr. Fox's thrill-seeking thievery, pulling an array of animals into the fray in the process. Taking Anderson's predilection for telling stories through mise-en-scène to its extreme, the film sets its largely underground action within an elaborately detailed design. Since characters, props, and sets are all constructed, the film relies on the coordination of figure movement and lighting to direct the viewer's attention to narrative elements.

A scene depicting the displaced animals' new home in Badger's First Mine opens with Mole playing the piano in a relaxed manner reminiscent of 1950s Hollywood (Figure 2.39a). The space is large and tastefully lit by candles and a garland of what appears to be real and fake flowers entwined with twinkling lights. Even in this first image, however, the storage nooks in the background indicate that the gracious living of Badger's home is being challenged by an influx of refugees and the hoarding of stolen supplies.

The camera tracks right to a kitchen area (Figure 2.39b). Bright, cheery lighting highlights Rabbit chopping ingredients for a communal meal, and the cramped space and detailed abundance of food (like the roasting rack of stolen chickens) indicates both the large number and the camaraderie of the refugee animals.

The camera moves right again to Mr. Fox and Badger, strolling past the opening to a bedroom where the feet of an exhausted animal can be seen lying on a top bunk (Figure 2.39c) and discussing the sustainability of the group's current living arrangement.

The scene ends at a punch bowl (Figure 2.39d), beyond which the makeshift aspects of the living arrangements are evident: stolen cases of cider, bags of flour, and chicken carcasses are stored in the background. It is at this point in the shot that Ash, Mr. Fox's

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# THE FILM EXPERIENCE

## An Introduction

Timothy Corrigan  
University of Pennsylvania

Patricia White  
Swarthmore College

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This book is dedicated to Kathleen and Lawrence Corrigan and  
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# About the Authors



Timothy Corrigan is a professor of English and Cinema Studies at the University of Pennsylvania. His work in Cinema Studies has focused on modern American and contemporary international cinema. He received a B.A. from the University of Notre Dame and completed graduate work at the University of Leeds, Emory University, and the University of Paris III. His other books include *New German Film: The Displaced Image* (Indiana UP); *The Films of Werner Herzog: Between Mirage and History* (Routledge); *Writing about Film* (Longman/Pearson); *A Cinema without Walls: Movies and Culture after Vietnam* (Routledge/Rutgers UP); *Film and Literature: An Introduction and Reader* (Routledge); *Critical Visions in Film Theory* (Bedford/St. Martin's), also with Patricia White; *American Cinema of the 2000s* (Rutgers UP), and *The Essay Film: From Montaigne, After Marker* (Oxford UP), winner of the 2012 Katherine Singer Kovács Award for the outstanding book in film and media studies. He has published essays in *Film Quarterly*, *Discourse*, and *Cinema Journal*, among other collections, and is also an editor of the journal *Adaptation* and a former editorial board member of *Cinema Journal*. In 2014, he received the Society for Cinema and Media Studies Award for Outstanding Pedagogical Achievement.



Patricia White is a professor of Film and Media Studies at Swarthmore College. She is the author of *Women's Cinema/World Cinema: Projecting 21st Century Feminisms* (Duke University Press) and *Uninvited: Classical Hollywood Cinema and Lesbian Representability* (Indiana University Press), as well as numerous articles and book chapters on film theory and culture. She is coeditor with Timothy Corrigan and Meta Mazaj of *Critical Visions in Film Theory: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Bedford/St. Martin's). She served on the editorial collective of the feminist film journal *Camera Obscura* and the board of Women Make Movies and is currently on the advisory boards of *Camera Obscura* and *Film Quarterly*.

# Preface

“Experience is not what happens to you; it is what you do with what happens.”

—Aldous Huxley

In our culture, movies have become a near-universal experience, even as their delivery methods have expanded and changed. Whether watching filmed images unfold over a giant multiplex or local art-house screen, a state-of-the-art TV set or portable tablet, we have all experienced the pleasures that movies can bring: journeying to imaginary worlds, witnessing re-creations of history, observing stars in familiar and unfamiliar roles, and exploring the laughter, thrills, or emotions of different genres. Understanding the full depth and variety of the film experience starts with that enjoyment. But it also requires more than just initial impressions.

This book aims to help students learn the languages of film and synthesize those languages into a cohesive knowledge of the medium that will, in turn, enhance their movie watching. *The Film Experience: An Introduction* offers students a serious, comprehensive introduction to the art, industry, culture, and *experience* of movies—along with the interactive, digital tools and ready-made examples to bring that experience to life.

As movie fans ourselves, we believe that the complete film experience comes from an understanding of both the formal and the cultural aspects of cinema. Knowing how filmmakers use the familiarity of star personas, for example, can be as valuable and enriching as understanding how a particular editing rhythm creates a specific mood. *The Film Experience* builds on both formal knowledge and cultural contexts to ensure that students gain a well-rounded ability to engage in critical analysis. The new fourth edition is better equipped than ever to meet this challenge, with the best art program in this course, revised Concepts at Work boxes that prompt students to connect their own film experiences to each chapter’s concepts, and the addition of dozens of new video clips and accompanying questions, providing accessible visual examples. The learning tools we have created help students make the transition from movie fan to critical viewer, allowing them to use the knowledge they acquire in this course to enrich their movie-watching experiences throughout their lives.

## The Best Coverage of Film’s Formal Elements

We believe that comprehensive knowledge of film practices and techniques allows students a deeper and more nuanced understanding of film meaning. Thus *The Film Experience* provides strong and clear explanations of the major concepts and



practices in mise-en-scène, cinematography, editing, and sound, plus the best and most extensive coverage of the structure of narrative film, genre, documentaries, and experimental films. Going beyond mere descriptions of the nuts and bolts of film form, *The Film Experience* highlights how these formal elements can be analyzed and interpreted within the context of a film as a whole—formal studies made even more vivid by our suite of new online film clips.

In choosing our text and video examples, we draw from the widest variety of movies in any introductory text, demonstrating how individual formal elements can contribute to a film's larger meaning. We understand the importance of connecting with students through films they may already know, and we have added new examples referring to recent films like *Man of Steel*, *The Great Gatsby*, *Life of Pi*, *The Avengers*, *The Bling Ring*, and *Fruitvale Station*; we also feel that it is our responsibility to help students understand the rich variety of movies throughout history, utilizing classics like *The Jazz Singer*, *Citizen Kane*, *The African Queen*, *Bonnie and Clyde*, *The Godfather*, and *Chinatown*, as well as a wealth of experimental, independent, and international films.

## Fully Encapsulating the Culture of Film

In addition to a strong foundation in film form, we believe that knowledge of the nature and extent of film culture and its impact on our viewing experiences is necessary for a truly holistic understanding of cinema. As such, one of the core pillars of *The Film Experience* story has always been its focus on the relationship among viewers, movies, and the industry. Throughout, the book explores how these connections are shaped by the social, cultural, and economic contexts of films through incisive discussions of such topics as the influence of the star system, the marketing strategies of indies versus blockbusters, and the multitude of reasons why we are drawn to some films over others. In particular, the Introduction, “Studying Film: Culture and Experience,” explores the importance of the role of the viewer, recognizing that without avid movie fans there would be no film culture, and offers a powerful rationale for why we should study and think seriously about film. Chapter 1, “Encountering Film: From Preproduction to Exhibition,” details how each step of the filmmaking process—from script to release—informs, and is informed by, the where, when, and why of our movie-watching experiences.

## New to This Edition

Thanks to the valuable feedback from our colleagues and from our own students, in this new edition we have taken the opportunity to update and enhance *The Film Experience* for today's students. As ever, *The Film Experience* continues to be the best at representing today's film culture—with cutting-edge coverage of topics like 3-D technology, digital distribution, and social media marketing campaigns.

## LaunchPad Solo for *The Film Experience* Brings Film to Life—through Video

This edition takes advantage of the media with a new online platform, home to numerous movie clips, video essays, discussion questions, and more—perfect for interactive learning. Bringing print and digital together, the Viewing Cue feature in the margins of each chapter now includes special video call-outs directing students to a film clip online in LaunchPad Solo for *The Film Experience*. The video essays are based on the book's Film in Focus and Form in Action features and illustrate

the concepts discussed in the chapter. Each film clip or video is accompanied by thought-provoking discussion questions. The LaunchPad Solo platform makes it easy to assign the videos and questions, and, because students will all have access to the same group of clips and activities, classroom conversations can start from a common ground. Access to LaunchPad Solo for *The Film Experience* can be packaged free with the book or purchased on its own.

### **The Strongest Art Program Available—Now Better Than Ever**

With more than nine hundred images—the best and most extensive art program in any introductory film text—*The Film Experience* visually reinforces all the major techniques, concepts, and film traditions discussed in the text. New part-opening and chapter-opening images cover both classic and contemporary cinema, and examples throughout the text have been updated and enhanced. As always, the vast majority of the images are actual film frames from digital sources, rather than publicity or production stills. We have selected the best available source versions and preserved the aspect ratios of the original films whenever possible.

### **Concepts at Work Boxes Connect Concepts and Films**

The chapter-ending Concept at Work boxes have been strengthened to clearly connect each key concept mentioned in the chapter to specific films—both contemporary films students will recognize and memorable examples from the classics. This better connects the book's history, theories, and ideas with students' own film-watching experiences. The feature acts as an accessible walkthrough of the chapter, making connections to students' experiences while also reviewing the material they've learned. These connections are further enhanced by end-of-chapter activities that can work as in-class discussions or homework assignments.

### **New Examples from a Broad Range of Films Appeal to Movie Buffs of Today (and Tomorrow)**

Each generation of students that takes the introductory course (from eighteen-year-old first-year students to returning adults) is familiar with its own recent history of the movies; hence we have updated this edition with a number of new examples that reflect the diverse student body, from Hollywood blockbusters such as *The Hunger Games*, *Gravity*, and *Frozen* to independent fare like *Pariah*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, and *Stories We Tell*, as well as popular international films like *Persepolis*, *My Name Is Khan*, and *Oldboy*.

### **Proven Learning Tools That Foster Critical Viewing and Analysis**

*The Film Experience* transforms students from movie buffs to critical viewers by giving them the help they need to translate their movie experiences into theoretical knowledge and analytical insight. Our host of learning tools includes:

- **Compelling chapter-opening vignettes that immediately place students inside a film.** Each vignette, many of them new to this edition, draws from actual scenes in a real movie to connect what students know as movie fans to key ideas in the chapter's discussion. For example, Chapter 9 opens with a discussion of how the generic familiarity of the conventions and formulas in Edgar Wright's *Shaun of the Dead*, *Hot Fuzz*, and *The World's End* contributes to our enjoyment of these films.

- **Film in Focus essays in each chapter that provide close analyses of specific films**, demonstrating how particular techniques or concepts inform and enrich those films. For example, a detailed deconstruction in Chapter 4 of the editing patterns in *Bonnie and Clyde* shows how they create specific emotional and visceral effects.
- **Form in Action boxes with image-by-image analyses in each formal chapter (Chapters 1–9)**, giving students a close look at how the formal concepts they read about translate onscreen. With several new additions, including Chapter 5’s comparison of the ways popular music has been used throughout film history, each Form in Action essay brings key cinematic techniques alive and teaches students how to read and dissect a film formally.
- **Marginal Viewing Cues adjacent to key discussions in the chapter highlighting key concepts**, prompting students to consider these concepts while viewing films on their own or in class—and to visit our online clip library for some specific examples.
- **The best instruction on writing about film and the most student writing examples of any introductory text.** Praised by instructors and students as a key reason they love the book, Chapter 12, “Writing a Film Essay: Observations, Arguments, Research, and Analysis,” is a step-by-step guide to writing papers about film—from taking notes, choosing a topic, and developing an argument to incorporating film images and completing a polished essay. It includes several annotated student essays, including a new one on Steven Spielberg’s *Minority Report*.

## Resources for Students and Instructors

For more information on the student resources or to learn more about package options, please visit the online catalog at [bedfordstmartins.com/filmexperience/catalog](http://bedfordstmartins.com/filmexperience/catalog).

- For students and instructors: **LaunchPad Solo for *The Film Experience*** at [bedfordstmartins.com/filmexperience](http://bedfordstmartins.com/filmexperience).

Available packaged free with *The Film Experience* or purchased separately, LaunchPad Solo features a collection of short videos, including both film clips and unique annotated video essays designed to give students a deeper look at important film concepts covered in the text. The videos further the discussions in the book and bring them vividly to life. The videos are great as in-class lecture launchers or as motivators for students to explore key film concepts and film history further.

- For instructors: the **Online Instructor’s Resource Manual** by Amy Monaghan, Clemson University.

The downloadable Instructor’s Resource Manual recommends methods for teaching the course using the chapter-opening vignettes, the Viewing Cues, and the Film in Focus and Form in Action features. In addition, it offers such standard teaching aids as chapter overviews, questions to generate class discussion, ideas for encouraging critical and active viewing, sample test questions, and sample syllabi. Each chapter of the manual also features a complete, alphabetized list of films referenced in each chapter of the main text. Instructors who have adopted LaunchPad Solo for *The Film Experience* can find a full instructor section within LaunchPad Solo that includes the Instructor’s Resource Manual and PowerPoint presentations.

- **The Bedford/St. Martin’s Video Resource Library.** For qualified adopters, Bedford/St. Martin’s is proud to offer in DVD format a variety of short and

feature-length films discussed in *The Film Experience* for use in film courses, including films from the Criterion Collection. For more information, please contact your local sales representative.

## Print and Digital Formats

For more information on these formats and packaging information, please visit the online catalog at [bedfordstmartins.com/filmexperience/catalog](http://bedfordstmartins.com/filmexperience/catalog).

**LaunchPad Solo** is a dynamic new platform that dramatically enhances teaching and learning. LaunchPad Solo for *The Film Experience* collects videos, activities, quizzes, and instructor's resources on a single site. LaunchPad Solo offers a student-friendly approach, organized for easy assignability in a simple user interface. Instructors can create reading, video, or quiz assignments in seconds, as well as embed their own videos or custom content. A gradebook quickly and easily allows instructors to review the progress for a whole class, for individual students, and for individual assignments, while film clips and videos enhance every chapter of the book. LaunchPad Solo can be packaged for free with *The Film Experience* or purchased on its own. Learn more at [bedfordstmartins.com/LaunchPad](http://bedfordstmartins.com/LaunchPad).

*The Film Experience* is available as a print text. To get the most out of the book and gain access to the extensive video program, package LaunchPad Solo for free with the text.

The loose-leaf edition of *The Film Experience* features the same print text in a convenient, budget-priced format, designed to fit into any three-ring binder. Package LaunchPad Solo with the loose-leaf edition for free.

The Bedford e-Book to Go for *The Film Experience* includes the same content as the print book, and provides an affordable, tech-savvy PDF e-book option for students. Instructors can customize the e-book by adding their own content and deleting or rearranging chapters. Learn more about custom Bedford e-Books to Go at [bedfordstmartins.com/ebooks](http://bedfordstmartins.com/ebooks).

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*Timothy Corrigan*

*Patricia White*

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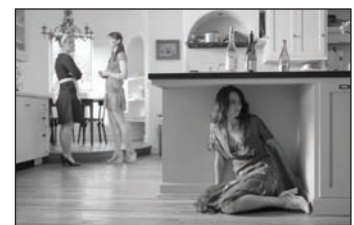
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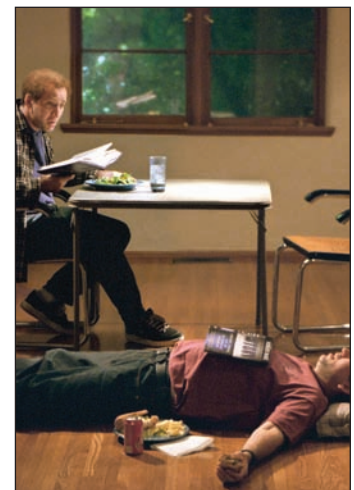
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# **THE FILM EXPERIENCE**

## PART 1

# CULTURAL CONTEXTS

## watching, studying, and making movies

In 2013, *Man of Steel* became the latest reincarnation of the Superman legend, telling the story of the famous comic-book hero, his mysterious arrival on a farm in Kansas, and his mission to fight for justice against extra-terrestrial evil. Featuring Hollywood stars Amy Adams, Henry Cavill, and Russell Crowe and replete with elaborate special effects, the film was budgeted at over \$200 million, and its blockbuster summer release followed an extensive advertising campaign. A very different tale of justice, Ryan Coogler's *Fruitvale Station* screened at the Cannes Film Festival only weeks before the release of *Man of Steel*. It recounted the true story of a twenty-two-year-old African American who struggles to right his life but who then becomes the tragic victim of urban violence when he is shot and killed by a transit police officer. When its wider theatrical release in July 2013 coincided with the acquittal of George Zimmerman for his "Stand Your Ground" shooting of a young, unarmed African American in Florida, *Fruitvale Station* became a social lightning rod.

Social and institutional forces shaped these very different films in very different ways – from their production through their promotion, distribution, and exhibition. Part 1 of this book identifies institutional, cultural, and industrial contexts that shape the film experience, showing us how to connect our personal movie preferences with larger critical perspectives on film. The Introduction examines how and why we study film, while Chapter 1 introduces the movie production process as well as the mechanisms and strategies of film distribution, promotion, and exhibition. Understanding these different contexts will help us to develop a broad and analytical perspective on the film experience.



Top: © Warner Bros. Pictures/courtesy Everett Collection. Bottom: © The Weinstein Company/courtesy Everett Collection

## INTRODUCTION

### Studying Film: Culture and Experience

- Identifying the dimensions and importance of film culture
- Appreciating, interpreting, and analyzing film
- Understanding the changing film experience

## CHAPTER 1

### Encountering Film: From Preproduction to Exhibition

- Stages of narrative filmmaking
- Mechanisms of film distribution
- Practices of promotion and exhibition



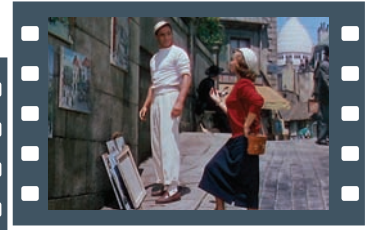
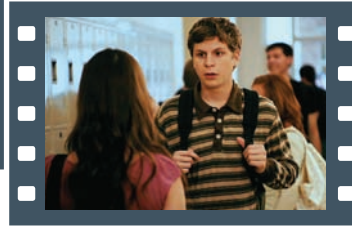


# Introduction

# Studying Film

## Culture and Experience

In Woody Allen's 1977 film *Annie Hall*, Alvy Singer and Annie Hall stand in line to see the 1972 French documentary *The Sorrow and the Pity*. Next to them in line is a professor who pontificates about movies and about the work of media theorist and counterculture critic Marshall McLuhan, author of *Understanding Media* and *The Gutenberg Galaxy*. Alvy grows more and more irritated by the conversation, and finally interrupts the professor to tell him he knows nothing about McLuhan's work, as Annie looks on, embarrassed. When the professor objects, Alvy counters by bringing McLuhan himself out from a corner of the lobby to confirm that the professor is all wrong about McLuhan's writings. While this encounter among moviegoers comically exaggerates a secret wish about how to end an argument about the interpretation of movies, it also dramatizes, with typical Allen humor, the many dimensions of film culture — from scholarship to courtship — that drive our pleasure in thinking and talking, both casually and seriously, about film. For Alvy and many of us, going to the movies is a golden opportunity to converse, think, and disagree about film as a central part of our everyday lives.



For more than a century, the movies have been an integral part of our cultural experience, and as such, most of us already know a great deal about them. We know which best-selling novel will be adapted for the big screen and what new releases can be anticipated in the summer; we can identify a front-runner for a major award and which movie franchise will inspire a Halloween costume. Our encounters with and responses to motion pictures are a product of the diverse attitudes, backgrounds, and interests that we, the viewers and the fans, bring to the movies. These factors all contribute to the film culture that helps frame our overall film experience.

Film culture is the social and historical environment that shapes our expectations, ideas, and understanding of movies. Our tastes, viewing habits, and venues all inform film culture; in turn, film culture transforms how we watch, understand, and enjoy movies in a variety of rapidly expanding ways. We can catch a showing of the epic *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) on cable, join lines of viewers at an old movie palace for the latest installment of the *Star Wars* franchise [Figure I.1], enjoy the anime fantasy *Ghost Hound* (2007) instantly on the Netflix Web site, attend a documentary festival at a local museum, or watch the short silent films of Charlie Chaplin on an iPad. Our encounters with and responses to these films—how and why we



**I.1 Star Wars fans in line.** Experiencing the premiere of a movie becomes a singular social event with friends and other fans. HECTOR MATA/AFP/Getty Images

## KEY OBJECTIVES

- Define film studies and film culture, and discuss the various factors that create and distinguish them.
- Describe the role and impact of film viewers, and note how our experience of movies and our taste for certain films have both personal and public dimensions.
- Discuss the ways in which film culture and practice discussed in this textbook contribute to the film experience.



select the ones we do, why we like or dislike them, and how we understand or are challenged by them—are all part of film culture and, by extension, film study.

## Why Film Studies Matters

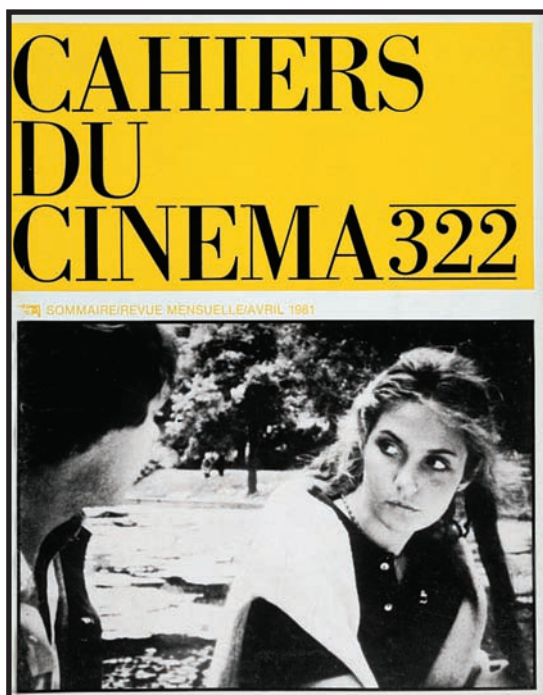
As students, you bring to the classroom a lifetime of exposure to the movies. For example, your opinions about casting certain actors in the film *Precious* (2009) may reflect your understanding of how common movie character types appear and function; your mesmerized attraction to the special effects of *Inception* (2010) may pique your curiosity about new cinematic technology; your expectations of genre formulas, such as those found in the classic horror movie *The Shining* (1980), may provoke an outburst when a character heads down a darkened corridor. Film studies—the discipline—takes your common knowledge about and appreciation for film and helps you think about it more analytically and more precisely.

Film studies is a critical discipline that promotes serious reflection on the movies and the place of film in culture. It is part of a rich and complex history that overlaps with critical work in many other fields, such as literary studies, philosophy, sociology, and art history. From the beginning, the movies have elicited widespread attention from scientists, politicians, and writers of many sorts—all of them attempting to make sense of the film experience [Figure I.2]. A film's efforts to describe the world, impose its artistic value, or shape society have long been the subject of both scholarly and popular debate. In the decades before the first public projection of films in 1895, scientists Étienne-Jules Marey and Eadweard Muybridge embarked on studies of human and animal motion that would lay the groundwork for the invention of cinema as we know it. In the early twentieth century, poet Vachel Lindsay and Harvard psychologist Hugo Münsterberg wrote essays and books on the power of movies to change social relationships and the way people perceive the world. By the 1930s, the Payne Fund Studies and later Margaret Farrand Thorp's *America at the Movies* (1939) offered sociological accounts of the impact of movies on young people and other social groups. Eventually courses about the art of the movies began to appear in universities, and elite cultural institutions such as the Museum of Modern Art in New York City began to take the new art form seriously.

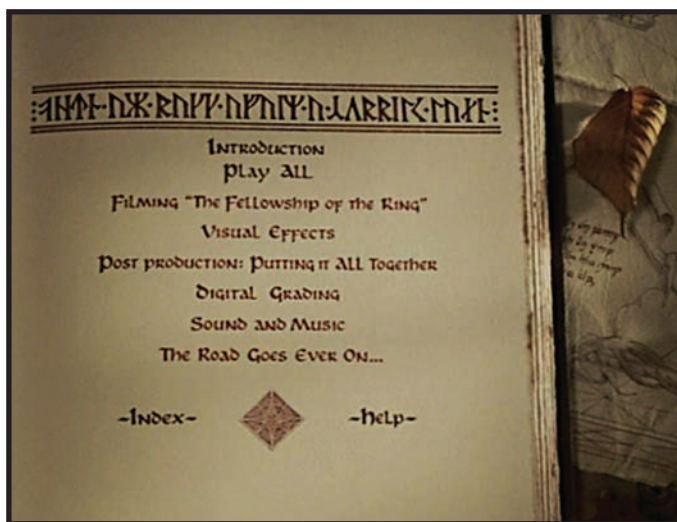


**I.2 Mon ciné.** Since the 1920s, *Mon ciné* and other movie magazines from around the world have promoted movies not just as entertainment, but also as objects of serious study with important sociological and aesthetic value. Mary Evans Picture Library/The Image Works





**I.3 Cahiers du cinéma.** Appearing first in 1951, *Cahiers du cinéma* remains one of the most influential journals of film criticism and theory. Rue des Archives/The Granger Collection, NY



**I.4 Lord of the Rings DVD supplement index.** Expanded DVD formats and extras about production, postproduction, special effects, and sound editing can now provide self-guided study tours of technical and even scholarly issues.

After World War II, new kinds of filmmaking emerged in Europe along with passionate, well-informed criticism about the history and art of the movies, including Hollywood genre films and the accomplishments of certain directors [Figure I.3]. Such criticism fueled film studies, which attained a firm foothold in North American universities by the 1970s. Today the study of film represents a wide spectrum of approaches and points of view, including studies of different historical periods or national cinemas, accounts of economic and technological developments, studies of how race and gender are depicted in movies and affect audiences' responses to them, and explications of particular aesthetic or formal features of films ranging from experimental to documentary to narrative cinema.

One sign of today's rich film culture is the popular demand for DVD supplements—"extras" that have been called "film studies on a disk" [Figure I.4]. Many of us now rent or purchase DVDs and Blu-rays not just for the movies themselves but also for the extra features; these may include a film expert's commentary, a director's discussion of some of the technical decisions she made during filming, or historical background on the story behind the film. Some DVD editions address issues that are central to film studies, such as preservation of original promotional or textual materials. Trailers and posters that provide a glimpse of film culture at the time of the film's release, as well as scholarly commentary, are now available to the everyday film viewer. For example, in the *Treasures from American Film Archives* series, early films, hard-to-find gems, restored classics, and film experiments have been preserved and contextualized with scholars' voiceovers, making accessible to consumers works that were previously only available to experts. With research on movies facilitated by the Internet, the complexities and range of films and film cultures may now be more available to viewers than ever before.

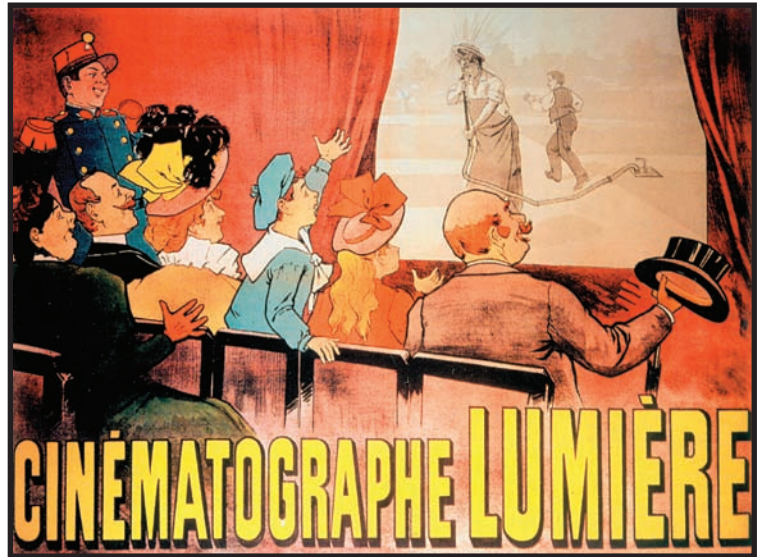
*The Film Experience* provides a holistic perspective on the formal and cultural dynamics of watching and thinking about movies. It does not privilege any one mode of film study over another, but rather provides critical tools and perspectives that will allow individuals to approach film study according to their different needs, aims, and interests. Additionally, it provides the vocabulary needed to understand, analyze, and discuss film as industry, film as art, and film as practice. *The Film Experience* raises theoretical questions that stretch common reactions.

These questions include psychological ones about perception, comprehension, and identification; philosophical ones about the nature of the image and the viewer's understanding of it; and social and historical ones about what meanings and messages are reinforced in and excluded by a culture's films. Far from destroying our pleasure in the movies, studying them increases the ways we can enjoy them thoughtfully.

## Film Spectators and Film Cultures

Movies are always both a private and a public affair. Since the beginning of film history, the power of the movies has derived in part from viewers' personal and sometimes idiosyncratic responses to a particular film and in part from the social and cultural contexts that surround their experience of that film. Early viewers of the Lumière brothers' *Train Arriving at a Station* (1894) were rumored to have fled their seats to avoid the train's oncoming rush; new interpretations of such first-encounter stories suggest that viewers attended the screening precisely for a visceral entertainment not found in their normal social lives [Figure I.5]. In a more contemporary example, some individuals reacted on a personal level to *Avatar* (2009), breathlessly absorbed in a love story that harks back to *Romeo and Juliet* and overwhelmed by breathtaking visual movements that re-create the experience of amusement park rides. Other viewers dismissed the film because it offered what they saw as a simplistic political parable about corporate greed, terror, and exploitation far out of line with contemporary realities, disguising its bland characters and predictable story with jazzy special effects [Figure I.6].

While certain approaches in film studies look first at a film's formal construction or at the historical background of its production, *The Film Experience* begins with an emphasis on movie spectators and how individuals respond to films. Our different viewing experiences determine how we understand the movies, and, ultimately, how we think about a particular movie—why it excites or disappoints us. The significance of movies, in short, may lie not primarily in how they are made but rather in how we, as viewers, engage with and respond to them. As movie spectators, we are not passive audiences who simply absorb what we see on the screen. We respond actively to films, often in terms of our different ages, backgrounds, educational levels, interests, and geographical locations. It is the richness and complexities of these factors that make film viewing and film study a profound cultural experience. In short, our engagement with a movie goes beyond determining whether we like or dislike it. As active viewers, we



**I.5** Poster for public screening of early films by the Lumière brothers. This poster shows the short comic sketch *L'Arroseur arrosé* (*The Waterer Watered*, 1895). In the advertisement, the audience's reaction shows the novelty of the experience, which is as important as the image onscreen. Courtesy Photofest



**I.6** *Avatar* (2009). Many viewers responded favorably to Sigourney Weaver's strong female character in the film; others joined an Internet campaign against the film's depiction of smoking.